Justifying the Epistemological Theory of Argumentation: On Harvey Siegel's Approach

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Abstract: This article discusses Harvey Siegel's general justification of the epistemological theory of argumentation in his seminal essay "Arguing with Arguments." On the one hand, the achievements of this essay are honoured—in particular, a thorough differentiation of the different meanings of 'argument' and 'argumentation,' the semantic justification of the fundamentality of arguments as sequences of propositions, and the detailed critiques of alternative theories of argumentation. On the other hand, suggestions for strengthening the theory are added to Siegel's expositions, which make different perspectives within the epistemological theory of argumentation recognisable.

Résumé: On discute de la justification générale par Harvey Siegel de la théorie épistémologique de l'argumentation dans son essai fondateur « Arguing with Arguments ». D'une part, les réalisations de cet essai sont honorées, en particulier une différenciation approfondie des différentes significations de « argument » et « argumentation », la justification sémantique de la fondamentalité des arguments en tant que séquences de propositions, et les critiques détaillées des solutions alternatives. D'autre part, des suggestions visant à renforcer la théorie sont ajoutées aux exposés de Siegel, qui en même temps font reconnaître différentes perspectives au sein de la théorie épistémologique de l'argumentation.

Keywords: cognising, epistemological argumentation theory, epistemological principles, good arguments, Harvey Siegel, instrumental justification, meanings of 'argument,' persuasion, semantic justification

1. The significance of Harvey Siegel's justification of the epistemological theory of argumentation

In his seminal essay, "Arguing with Arguments: Argument Quality, Argumentative Norms, and the Virtues of the Epistemic Theory" (Siegel 2023), Harvey Siegel has presented a new, semantic justification of the epistemic (Siegel's diction) or epistemological (my diction)[1] approach in argumentation theory. This justification is based on an analysis of the meanings of 'argument' and 'argumentation' (Siegel 2023, pp. 466-474). The fundamental, conceptually primary of these terms is that of 'argument1' (*ibid.,* p. 517): sequence of propositions representing a thesis and reasons for it, with the reasons performing the epistemic function of supporting the thesis. Because of this reference to reasons, this term is epistemic per se. Accordingly, what is designated by 'argument1' is the object of epistemological argumentation theory, which primarily explains the epistemic function and establishes normative criteria for epistemically good arguments. Because 'argument1' is the fundamental concept, these normative criteria are, in turn, the basis for the theories that deal with the objects designated by other argument and argumentation concepts. Accordingly, the epistemological theory of argumentation is also the fundamental theory. In addition to this semantic justification, Siegel also provides, less prominently, a fundamental instrumental justification of the epistemological argumentation theory (especially Siegel 2023, pp. 475-481), which explains the advantages of epistemologically conceived arguments: Epistemologically good arguments are vehicles for epistemic improvement; namely, they lead to more true beliefs than arguments conceived according to alternative theories of argumentation or cognitive practice without argumentation and to an improvement in the status of justification. (A justification of the epistemological theory of argumentation with this

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[1] The difference is that many argumentation theories claim to be epistemic. What is special about the epistemological argumentation theory is that it bases its criteria for good argumentation on epistemology in a broad sense, with the criteria for truth and justification developed in these theories. However, since Siegel, the other representatives of this school of thought and myself are concerned with the latter, 'epistemological' is the more accurate term, which is why it will also be used in this article.

instrumental tenor can also be found in other contributions by epistemological argumentation theorists [e.g. Lumer 2005, pp. 236-239; Lumer 1990, pp. 16-17; 283-284; (284-296)]. In detail, however, these two instrumental justifications differ. For example, Siegel rejects the notion that persuasion is a basic function of argumentation and places more emphasis on the objective side of reasons for theses.)

Based on this constructive double justification approach, Siegel then criticises other theories of argumentation—especially pragma-dialectics (Siegel 2023, pp. 474-486), the virtue-theoretical argumentation theory (*ibid.* 486-495) and Tindale's anthropological argumentation theory (*ibid.* 495-510). These theories are actually concerned with objects that are not argument1—which, however, are also referred to as 'argument' or 'argumentation'—and provide good services in their treatment. In this sense, these argumentation theories are not actually rivals, but partners of in the epistemological theory of argumentation (conciliation theory) (Siegel 2023, pp. 465; 466; 484-486; 470). In a false self-assessment, however, these theories exceed their competences, assuming that the social, communicative, rhetorical functions they examine are central to other types of arguments (*ibid.* 518), then falsely treating also arguments1 with this functional approach, and therefore arrive at false normative settings for arguments1 (*ibid.* 470-471; 502-503; 518).

Siegel's article is an important, fundamental contribution to epistemological argumentation theory if only because of the following achievements:

1. The differentiation of the various meanings of 'argument'—and thus also of the objects to be distinguished in argumentation theory and their treatment by the various argumentation theories—is very commendable and well substantiated. It is a significant contribution to the basic work in argumentation theory.

2. ByIn explaining the hierarchical structure of the concepts of 'argument,' Siegel explains well why the theory of argu-

ment1 is the fundamental theory of argumentation: *Arguments1* are sequences (i.e. ordered sets) of propositions—or more precisely, sequences of *judgements*, that is, propositions that are each combined with the assertoric mode—between which inferential relations exist (Siegel 2023, p. 468). The other types of arguments are ontologically and definitionally more complex, their terms are defined with the help of the term "argument1" (*ibid.* 516-517). *Arguments5*, that is, actions of argumentation, are complex speech acts that present arguments1 and that can present one and the same argument1 in very different ways (in different languages, with slightly varied expressions, completely or enthymematically) (Siegel 2023, p. 470-471). *Arguments2*, that is argumentative discussions, are discussions in which arguments1 are exchanged by means of arguments5 (*ibid.*, p. 468). Norms, criteria for good arguments1, therefore, also apply at the level of the more complex structures in which the arguments1 are contained (*ibid.* pp. 504).

3. The critiques of the other three argumentation theories (pragma-dialectics [Siegel 2023, pp. 474-486], virtue theory of argumentation [*ibid.* 486-495], Tindale's rhetorical/anthropological argumentation theory [*ibid.* 495-510]) are, also in my opinion, solid, convincing, and striking. In each case, they are limited to only a few, albeit central, critical points and demonstrate well the essential shortcomings of these theories from an epistemological point of view.

As I said, these are all important contributions to argumentation theory in general and to epistemological argumentation theory in particular. I will not hide the fact that I myself am a proponent of the epistemological argumentation theory and, as such, was asked by the editors of *Informal Logic* to comment on Harvey Siegel's article. As a proponent of this theory, I am very pleased with his strong contribution. What follows are, therefore, on the one hand additions, especially suggestions on how to make the theory even stronger and how to justify it more strongly. On the other hand,

they are critical contributions to a discussion among friends, which make different perspectives within the epistemological theory of argumentation recognisable.

2. Conciliationism—underrating the reach of epistemological argumentation theory

In his critiques of the three alternative argumentation-theoretical approaches, Siegel develops a conciliatory position towards all of them: They each deal with important dimensions of arguments and argumentation theory, albeit not for arguments in the propositional sense with the epistemic dimension, of which the epistemic argumentation theory is in charge. The author also praises the constructive contributions of these theories (Siegel 2023, pp. 494-495; 504; 518). Therefore, these alternative theories and the epistemic argumentation theory, according to Siegel, are partners and not rivals (*ibid.,* p. 465; 466; 484; 485). The idea is that each of the individual theories has its garden that it cultivates, and does well at that; but they should not go beyond their limits. The garden of the epistemic argumentation theory is arguments1 in the propositional sense; the garden of the rhetorical (with the aim of persuasion) and aretic argumentation theory is acts of argumentation (arguments5); and the garden of pragma-dialectics is argumentative discussions, arguments2 (with the aim of resolving a difference of opinion).

One could regard this position as mere strategic friendliness and therefore ignore it from a systematic point of view. However, it is probably meant to be systematically serious, is also supported by corresponding arguments, and must therefore be taken seriously here. Now, this assertion of a lack of rivalry is contradicted by the fact that epistemological argumentation theorists have developed normative theories of argumentative actions (arguments5) and argumentative discussions (arguments2) with epistemic goals, which of course differ from the previously mentioned theories: There are epistemological theories of argumentative acts with the goal of rational persuasion (Feldman 1994; Lumer 1990, pp. 43-51; 1991; 2005); and there are epistemological theories of argumentative discussions with the goal of cooperative truth-seeking (Lumer 1988; forthcoming; Goldman 1999, pp. 139-144). These

theories are, of course, rivals of the corresponding alternative theories; and from an epistemological point of view, they are superior to the alternative approaches in these areas as well. From an epistemological point of view, such epistemologically orientated theories of argumentation and argumentative discussions are also extremely useful: (1) Argumentation (arguments5): *Epistemological persuasion* consists in the fact that addressees are guided in recognising the thesis through the presentation of arguments1. The cognition process leads them to rationally justified cognition, which necessarily contains a belief in the thesis of the argument. By means of argumentation acts, cognitions as such (and not just mere information) can therefore be socially disseminated (Lumer 2005, pp. 221-224; 1990, pp. 43-51.) (2) And *epistemically oriented argumentative discussions* (arguments2) with the aim of a cooperative search for truth consist of presenting arguments to the dialogue partner, who examines them for errors and unconsidered information. In this way, the dialogue partners can improve the epistemic quality of the argumentation until they have reached consensual acceptance of the argument for a particular thesis. (Lumer 1988; forthcoming.)

Siegel has criticised the expansion of the epistemological argumentation theory into a theory of persuasion and dialogue as follows. *Persuasion:* "The quality of an argument cannot be a matter of its persuasive effect" (Siegel 2023, p. 493). This is true in the sense that if an argument1 is convincing in an individual case, this is not proof of its epistemic quality and vice versa. However, it is not true in the sense that the quality of an argument has nothing to do with its persuasive effect. For one thing, a distinction must be made between arguments1 and their use in argumentation acts (arguments5) for persuasive purposes, whereby an epistemically good persuasion presupposes argumentatively valid [2] rgu-

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[2] *Argumentative validity* (of arguments₁) is different from (logical) validity. Argumentative validity is a property of arguments₁ as such; i.e. 'argumentatively valid' is a one-place predicate. That an argument is argumentatively valid includes inferential validity, the truth of the premises, non-circularity, comprehensibility of the inferential steps, etc. (Lumer 2005, p. 235.) Another criterion for good arguments is their *adequacy*. However, adequacy is a four-place predicate: 'the argument x is adequate at time t for the function f with respect to

ments1, but also even more. Conversely, an epistemically bad persuasion, which hence does not generate cognition, is precisely not dependent on argumentatively valid arguments. For another thing, however, argumentatively valid arguments are also designed with the persuasive function in mind. The following points apply: 1. Arguments1 must be designed in such a way—that is they are only argumentatively valid—if they can convince at least one person in principle. Circular arguments cannot do this; therefore, they are not argumentatively valid (Lumer 2000, p. 417). 2. Arguments are developed in such a way that they are suitable for persuasion. Arguments list the conditions that must be fulfilled for the thesis to be acceptable and assert that they are fulfilled; by verifying the fulfilment of these conditions, the addressee of the argument recognises the acceptability of the thesis. Thus, arguments1 are also instruments of persuasion. 3. There are adequacy conditions for the persuasive use of these instruments. If these adequacy conditions are met, the arguments should also be convincing in most cases. Otherwise, the arguments themselves are not good, that is, they are not well constructed (designed) for the persuasive function. Good arguments must be able to convince ourselves and others of the truth or acceptability of the thesis. 4. The conditions for good arguments also contain various pragmatic elements that go beyond the mere guarantee of truth and acceptability and aim at argumentative "persuasion" (Lumer 2005, p. 235, condition A3): (i) the exclusion of circular arguments and all arguments that cannot be used to gain new insights, (ii) the exclusion of arguments that are generally epistemically inaccessible to people—for example, deductive arguments in which the derivation path is too fast, (iii) a certain order exists within the argument (no chaotic, disordered arguments), (iv) only necessary elements are included (superfluous elements are irritating), (v) enthymematic abbreviations are permitted (for emphasising what is essential and preventing fatigue by anticipating what the addressees can quickly

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the subject s', especially then: 'the argument x is adequate at time t for the rational persuasion of the subject s'. One condition for the adequacy for rational persuasion is the addressee's epistemic access to the premises, i.e. that the addressee has already recognised the premises as true or can recognise them as true ad hoc. (Ibid. 235-236.)

recognise without further instruction). The persuasive function is also not in contrast to the epistemological approach because persuasion consists, as already mentioned, in the fact that the respective addressee, guided by the argument, *recognises* the truth or acceptability of the thesis.

Argumentative dialogues: The following argument put forth by Siegel can also be read as an argument against an epistemological theory of argumentative discussions: Epistemic quality is not a function of dialogical or dialectical rules. More precisely, the justification status of a proposition p and the doxastic justification status of a subject s's belief in p are not functions of the dialectical properties of a discussion or of convincing or being convinced of p in a discussion that follows dialectical rules, or of the fact that s and the discussion partner reach a consensus about p by following the rules. Rather, it is a question of whether p receives objective support from the reasons and evidence that provide such support (Siegel 2023, p. 485). This formulation is only correct when it speaks of the quality of arguments1. But of course, this does not exclude the possibility that there are argumentative discussions whose rules are designed in such a way that following them leads to an "improvement in epistemic quality" or more precisely, that epistemic cooperation leads to more true and better substantiated as well as more certain beliefs, and that this is precisely the task of the epistemological discourse theory. Such rules of discourse must of course refer to epistemic rules of argumentation and cognition (Lumer 1988; forthcoming; Goldman 1999, pp. 139-144).

Epistemically oriented rules for acts of argumentation (arguments5) and for argumentative discussions (arguments2) do not in fact say anything about the argumentative validity of an argument1; rather, they presuppose criteria for epistemically good arguments1. However, argumentative validity is not the only epistemically interesting function of arguments. Acts of argumentation can have the additional function of guiding cognition; argumentative discussions can have the additional functions of filtering out false arguments through mutual criticism and information, of finding new valid arguments, or of making their justifications stronger.

In a footnote, Harvey Siegel has responded to the criticism just outlined, of which he had already been informed in advance. He gladly recognises that there can also be an epistemological theory of persuasion and an epistemological theory of argumentative discourse.

> My conciliatory attitude is meant only to acknowledge the obvious point that arguments (in the speech act and social communicative senses) can be studied and evaluated independently of their epistemic strengths/weaknesses; for example, they can be evaluated in terms of their abilities to foster agreement/consensus and to persuade independently of their specifically epistemic qualities. As Lumer insists and as argued above and below, insofar as such approaches ignore the epistemic, they do not, strictly speaking, address *arguments* since arguments fundamentally involve case-making and are thus, first and foremost, epistemic objects (Siegel 2023, p. 510, fn 44).

In other words, insofar as these other theories (pragma-dialectics, rhetoric, the virtue theory of argumentation) pursue non-argumentative projects and develop instruments for non-argumentative purposes—although they falsely call these instruments 'arguments'—they are not in competition. I can only agree with this qualification of concilience. Unfortunately, however, this concession did not make it into the main text; there, all the statements about non-rivalry etc. between the other theories and the epistemological theory of argumentation to which my original criticism referred are included unchanged. The following is an example from the position on pragma-dialectics:

> What is needed, on the PD view, is an account of argument quality "that does justice to dialectical considerations" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 50). The epistemic theory, by contrast, is interested in the epistemic, justificatory-force-enhancing quality of the actual arguments (in the abstract propositional sense) embedded in dialectical exchanges, as well as arguments occurring in non-dialectical contexts. PD aims to guide such exchanges; the epistemic theory aims to determine the specifically epistemic improvements those exchanges might bring. Biro and I (2006b) have argued that both are important dimensions of argumentation theo-

ry and that the two theories should be seen as partners rather than rivals (Siegel 2023, p. 484).

And here are two examples of summarising statements on all ve theories considered:

> All the sorts of norms considered thus far—epistemic, dialectical, rhetorical, virtue-theoretic, etc. norms—are compatible. All can be utilized and appealed to depending on the type of evaluation in play. We can ask, of a given argument:
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>> Is the abstract propositional structure logically valid? Epistemically strong?
>> Do its premises/reasons provide probative support to its conclusion?
>> Is the argumentation dialectically kosher?
>> Is the argumentation rhetorically effective?
>> Is the argumentation virtuous?
>> […]
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> All of these are legitimate avenues of argument evaluation. (Siegel 2023, p 516). The three just mentioned theories treat argumentative practices and their normative evaluations insightrully and well (*ibid.*, p. 516).

In fact, however, these norms are not compatible. One of the dialogue norms of pragma-dialectics, for example, is that the dialogue partners are free to agree on the rules for the argumentative defence of theses (Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 143, Rule 5). From an epistemological point of view, this is of course not permissible: Arguments must adhere to criteria for epistemologically good arguments.

As a matter of fact, Siegel's acknowledgement in footnote 44 changes the original thesis. To continue with the guiding metaphor: The gardens are now defined differently. Originally, the gardens were, as stated, 1. arguments1 are the legitimate subject of the epistemological argumentation theory. 2. Argumentative acts (arguments5) are the legitimate subject of rhetorical argumentation theories, especially Tindale's theory. 3. Argumentative discussions (arguments2) are the legitimate topic of pragma-dialectics and the

virtue theory of argumentation. The new gardens after the reinter-preted conciliation, on the other hand, are 1*. The topics of epistemological argumentation theory are the argumentative validity of arguments, the epistemically successful persuasion through acts of argumentation (arguments5), and the epistemically purposeful, cooperatively reinforced search for truth through argumentative dialogues (arguments2). 2*. The subject of rhetorical theories, on the other hand, is the rhetorically, persuasively successful use of linguistic means. 3*. The subject of pragma-dialectics is dialogue for the resolution of differences of opinion. Please note: In the last two topic descriptions, there is no longer any mention of arguments (1, 5 or 2).

By the way, it should be noted that the alternative "argumentation theories" do not fulfil the tasks implicitly ascribed to them in the topic descriptions 2* and 3*, namely to develop instruments of (predominantly non-epistemic) persuasion or for the (predominantly non-argumentative) resolution of differences of opinion, precisely because they remain attached to argumentation and want to integrate epistemic concerns or at least want to come close to epistemically conceived argumentation,—that is, they pursue ambivalent goals. Thus, among the argumentation theories (which call themselves such), there is no real theory of (predominantly non-epistemic) persuasion that empirically investigates the mechanisms of opinion change and uses them instrumentally, but in communication psychology, there are theories which come close to that (e.g., Berger 2020). Tindale's (2021) theory of understanding and *rapprochement* does not provide any corresponding instruments either but rather advertises this idea. Pragma-dialectics does not provide an effective theory of argumentative dialogues for the *epistemic resolution* of differences of opinion—it already lacks appropriate rules of succession of moves which go beyond mere permissions (Lumer forthcoming: sect. 3.1). Instead, a *non-epistemic* theory of the resolution of disagreements could be understood, for example, as a diplomatic tool: The disputing parties develop a compromise or joint communiqué over factual differences. One means of reaching a compromise would then be negotiations according to the rules of co-operative game theory; and in the communiqué each side then emphasises what is important to it

about this compromise, without the other side objecting. As is well known, pragma-dialectics does not develop anything in this direction. van Eemeren and Grootendorst, on the other hand, have modelled the rules closely on the rules of argumentative discourse, with features such as justification and the citing of evidence. Finally, virtue theorists have collected the virtues they propose from the literature. So far, however, there has been no organic theory that would even formulate a functional goal of virtue-theoretical argumentation theory.

Following Siegel's acknowledgements regarding conciliationism (2023, pp. 510, fn 43), I understand the explanations I have just given as further developments of those ideas he himself revised but that have not yet been implemented in the article "Arguing with arguments." I am curious to see whether he sees it the same way.

3. The primacy of the epistemological argumentation theory— semantic or instrumental justification?

Siegel's semantic justification of the primacy of epistemic norms for argumentation and of the epistemological argumentation theory (which examines and justifies precisely these norms) over alternative argumentation theories takes place in two steps: 1. "Epistemic norms are of highest priority. This is because *arguments are what arguers traffic in when arguing.* The other senses of 'argument' are derivative of this one" (Siegel 2023, p. 516). "The most fundamental sense of 'argument' is the abstract propositional one" (*ibid.*, 517). In my opinion, the sentence "arguments are what arguers traffic in when arguing" can also be expressed in this way: In argumentation acts (arguments5) arguments1 are put forward; the former therefore contain arguments1. One can then add: Argumentative discussions (arguments2) in turn consist largely and essentially of argumentation acts (arguments5), that is, they contain them. Arguments5 and arguments2 are thus ontologically and definitionally more complex; arguments1 are ontologically and definitionally, conceptually the simplest and most fundamental of these three types of objects. And if arguments1 are present in

the other types of objects, then the norms for arguments1 also apply to the latter (arguments5 and arguments2). Because arguments1 also occur independently of argumentative acts and argumentative discussions, conversely the norms of arguments5 and arguments2 do not apply to arguments1. In my opinion, this argument is argumentatively valid. It justifies the ontological, definitional primacy of arguments1 and also the primacy of the norms for arguments1. The second part of the argument in favour of the primacy of epistemic norms and the epistemological argumentation theory must then show that arguments1 are epistemic instruments.

2. The second step of Siegel's argument is:

> The basic phenomena of arguments and arguing involve *making cases* for/against particular claims or propositions. And this is fundamentally an epistemic matter: If the case is well made, we have good reason, *ceteris paribus*, to embrace the claim, proposition, or attitude in question; if not, we do not. […] So […]the most fundamental sort of argument evaluation is epistemic (Siegel 2023, p. 517).

I fear that this argument in favour of the primacy of the epistemic conception of arguments1 is begging the question.[3] This is because of the following.(i) The rhetorician might reply: the presentation of reasons is a (not necessarily epistemic) persuasive matter: if we have presented good arguments, the addressee is convinced; a good argument is one that convinces or persuades. (ii) The consensualist might reply: the advancement of reasons is an attempt to generate consensus: if we have presented good reasons, this leads to consensus; a good reason is one that leads to consensus. (iii) The pragma-dialectician can say: a good reason is

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[3] McKeon accuses Siegel and Biro of begging the question in their criticisms of competing theories of argumentation because they simply presuppose the correctness of the epistemic approach (McKeon, forthcoming: 5). I am on the side of Siegel and Biro with regard to the correctness of the epistemological approach and consider McKeon's idea of a plurality of standards of argumentative rationality to be wrong. But I think it is necessary that the epistemological theory of argumentation needs a stronger justification in order to be able to counter such objections of begging the question.

one that forces an act of agreement according to the previously agreed upon rules of discussion. The reasons are interpreted differently, not epistemically, by these theories. According to these alternative theories, good reasons are, once again somewhat more precisely, (i) the beliefs (accepted by the addressee) whose realisation leads to the acceptance of the thesis (rhetoric), or (ii) the beliefs that lead to the acceptance of a thesis accepted by all parties (consensualisms), or (iii) they are the moves put forward in support of a thesis that lead the opponent to the move 'agree with the proponent's thesis'.

   The analysed *semantic justification* thus only proves that arguments1 are more fundamental than arguments5 and arguments2, and perhaps also that "reasons" for the thesis are presented in arguments1. But it does not establish that arguments1 have an epistemic function, that the epistemic norms for arguments1 have primacy over other standards, and that, accordingly (I1), the epistemological argumentation theory has primacy over the rhetorical, the virtue-theoretical argumentation theory, and pragma-dialectics. Other kinds of justifications are required and can be provided to substantiate these theses. First, however, it should be recognised that (I2), a non-epistemic rhetorical theory of argumentation (in the usual and Tindalean sense) and (I3), a theory as well as a tool for overcoming disagreements (even non-epistemic ones), are socially useful and morally legitimate projects for the following reasons:[4] (I2) There are situations in which it makes sense to persuade addressees to accept a belief by non-epistemic means, namely when the epistemic path is not feasible or is too costly, and the addressee's belief in the thesis in question is very important for the addressee himself or for the community; examples of such situations are blackmail (ticking bomb...), terrorist actions, torture and when suicide is irrationally threatened. (I3) As mentioned in section 2, a theory and instruments of non-epistemic resolution of disagreements can be good diplomatic tools for compromise building or for formulating joint communiqués in relatively discordant groups. Having conceded this, then, it must be shown that *T1:*

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[4] I cannot affirm this instrumental sense of a virtue theory of argumentation because I have not yet understood this functional sense.

'Argument(1, 2, 5)' has an epistemic meaning---and not a rhetorical or consensualist one. *T2:* The epistemically conceived arguments1, 2, 5 (I1) and their norms have primacy over the instruments and standards or norms of rhetoric (I2) and non-epistemic consensus building (I3).

Re T1: The *Oxford English Dictionary* does not make a clear distinction between *argument1* and *argument5* and specifies the meaning of 'argument' as: "4. A connected series of statements or reasons intended to establish a position (and, *hence*, to refute the opposite); a process of reasoning; argumentation." (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.) The corresponding definition of '*argument2*' is: "5.a. Statement of the reasons for and against a proposition; discussion of a question; debate" (*ibid.*). Even in this definition, no clear distinction is made between a monological consideration of various reasons for and against a proposition—which could be an extended form of argument1—and argument2, that is, intersubjective debate. *Merriam-Webster* is more precise, defining *argument1* as "1.b: a coherent series of reasons, statements, or facts intended to support or establish a point of view" and *argument5* as "1.a: the act or process of arguing, reasoning, or discussing: ARGUMENTATION." *Merriam-Webster* does not list the meaning of 'argument2' but only that of *argument3*, the degenerated form of argument2 which is defined as "1.c: an angry quarrel or disagreement" (Merriam-Webster 2023). Both definitions of 'argument1' clearly go in an epistemological direction, with the phrasing "intended to establish a position" or "intended to support or establish a point of view"—this probably means objective support. In any case, the definitions do not say that an argument1 is about creating a belief—by whatever linguistic means. – *Etymologically*, the epistemic meaning is also clear. English 'argument' actually derives from the Latin '*argumentum*,' but in a special development of English (which does not exist in the other languages that have adopted the Latin words—Italian, French, Spanish, German, etc.) it has taken on the meaning of Latin '*argumentatio*' = *argument5*: "**argumentatio** [...], *the execution, presentation of the proof from facts, the conduct of the proof*, argumentatio est explicatio argumenti" (Georges and Georges 1913, col. 564; my translation). From this, the more abstract meaning of argument1 developed, that of the

content of an argument5. Further evidence for the epistemological meaning of 'argument1, 2, 5' can be found in the history of concepts. Socrates' and Plato's central criticism of rhetoric was that rhetoric aimed only at persuading, cajoling the addressee, and not at knowledge (e.g., Plato, Gorgias 452e-454e; 454e-455d; Phaedrus 259e-260d; discussion in Lumer 2007, pp. 8-15). In the philosophical tradition, these two means of generating new beliefs in an addressee were called (non-epistemic) 'rhetoric' versus (epistemically orientated) 'argument1, 5.' The correspondence of these three types of evidence (OED, Merriam-Webster, and Georges) is a rather strong proof of the epistemic meaning of 'argument1, 2, 5.'

Re T2: The semantic argument just presented has not yet shown what is actually important, namely the primacy of arguments1, 2, 5—that is, the primacy of the epistemic instruments I1, and their norms over those of rhetoric (I2) and non-epistemic consensus-building (I3). This primacy, the overriding importance, cannot be justified semantically from the meaning of the expressions if only for the simple reason that this meaning can also be changed. Rather, importance is a practical question of value, which is answered by value judgements, primarily prudential value judgements and only secondarily moral value judgements. Prudential value judgements are in turn practically justified; the justifications essentially consist of pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of the valuation objects. Arguments1, 2, 5—as well as the other instruments I2 and I3—have no intrinsic value; therefore, the positive or negative consequences (or implications) of these objects remain as evaluation aspects. The justification sought thus becomes an instrumental justification, in which it is shown that arguments1, 2, 5 (I1) are more valuable instruments than the rhetorical (I2) or disagreement-resolving (I3) ones.

An outline of this type of justification is as follows:[5] To orientate ourselves in the world and to plan our actions successfully, we all need substantial and true beliefs that correctly represent the world and provide information about many facts that are of interest to us. Arguments1, 2, 5 are important tools for the acquisition

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[5] Detailed development of the following justification: Lumer 2005, pp. 219-231; 236-239 (Sections 4-6; 9); Lumer 1990, pp. 30-51 (Sections 2.2-2.3). Proof that this type of reasoning is not circular: Lumer 1990, pp. 434-447.

of such beliefs. The primary way to acquire such beliefs is to recognise them oneself, that is, to check sufficient truth or (alternatively, in the case of weaker cognition methods) acceptability conditions for the truth of the believed propositions. These truth or acceptability conditions can be formulated in general terms in *epistemological principles* such as the *deductive epistemological principle*: 'A proposition is true if it is logically implied by true propositions' (Lumer 1990, pp. 46; 2005, p. 222). When someone recognises the truth or acceptability of a certain proposition she then checks whether these general conditions are fulfilled for this proposition and comes to a positive result. *Epistemologically conceived arguments1* now precisely reflect the results of this cognition process: The reasons/premises formulate the individual truth or acceptability conditions of the proposition that have been verified as fulfilled with a positive result. Because the subject knows the general conditions of truth or acceptability, she then also know that, because these conditions are fulfilled, the thesis must be true or at least acceptable. Arguments1 are therefore the ideal form in which the result of the verification process can be stored in memory; they are the ideal form of our subjective justifications, because of which we continue to believe in the thesis. (This storage of the subjective justification, i.e. the essential steps of our cognitive process, and not just the final result, i.e. the actual thesis, is important because of the existence of uncertain justifications. In this way, we can later recognise false justifications as false and abandon or revise them; we can recognise correct weak justifications, which have led to false results, as weaker than this evidence in the case of contradictory evidence, etc.). Argumentation acts, *epistemically conceived arguments5*, which have arguments1 as their content, can in turn be used to guide others in recognising the truth/acceptability of the thesis: The addressee is informed which truth or acceptability conditions for the thesis are fulfilled; and the addressee can, if the argument5 is used adequately—namely in such a way that the premises are epistemically accessible to him, that is, he already believes in the premises or can straight away recognise their truth—immediately check that the truth or acceptability criteria for the thesis are fulfilled and, if the result of this check is positive, accept the thesis and believe in

it. In this way, arguments5 serve to guide cognising and the transfer of knowledge as such from the arguer to the addressee. In this way, knowledge acquired culturally over the course of a long history can be transmitted economically without the addressees having to recognise all these theses anew and without help. Finally, *epistemically orientated arguments2* help to reduce the errors in cognising once again, that is, help to increase the proportion of true opinions and they help to introduce additional relevant information that can strengthen the justifications. Arguments1, arguments2, and arguments5 are therefore all instruments with which the number of cognitions of an individual can be considerably increased and the proportion of true (or even just acceptable) cognitions in the total number of beliefs of a subject can be massively increased. The core of all these processes is the epistemologically constructed structure of arguments1, which are orientated towards general epistemological principles developed in epistemology and specify for the respective thesis how these conditions for the thesis are fulfilled (see Lumer 2005, p. 235, condition A2). They reflect the basic structure of propositional cognition.

The rhetorical or virtuous arguments1 and arguments5 conceived in the rhetorical theory of argumentation and the virtue theory of argumentation, as well as the arguments5 and arguments2 conceived in pragma-dialectics, now mix certain epistemic ideas with other goals—the non-epistemic creation of a new belief or the resolution of a difference of opinion by following agreed upon rules. They therefore conceive arguments1 and arguments5 in a form that is not orientated towards epistemological principles and hence cannot systematically guide cognition like the epistemologically conceived arguments1 and arguments5. Their application must therefore lead to fewer true and a higher proportion of false opinions. They are thus clearly inferior epistemic instruments as compared to the epistemologically conceived arguments1, 2, 5 and are not orientated in principle towards what is necessary for a process of cognition. The more neatly conceived rhetorical instruments for the (predominantly non-epistemic) generation of—for the *arguer*—desirable beliefs in an addressee (I2), and the diplomatic instruments for the formation of compromises or the generation of joint communiqués (I3), on the other hand, are not con-

ceived to generate knowledge or at least true beliefs, and are therefore not in competition with epistemically conceived arguments1, 2, or 5. They are useful instruments for other purposes, but clearly less important purposes. Even in purely quantitative terms, the situations in which they can be usefully applied are much rarer than the situations in which we are interested in acquiring knowledge; the latter are ubiquitous. The instruments I2 and I3 are also not fundamental insofar as our life nonetheless could function without them, even if in some places much less well, while the epistemically orientated argumentative means (I1) are fundamental in the sense that without the intersubjective transfer of knowledge made possible by them, life in a high culture would not be possible. The fundamentality of epistemic arguments1, 2, 5 is also reflected in the fact that non-epistemically orientated persuasive rhetoric gives the appearance of good argumentation because the addressees are interested in the truth of their opinions, which they hope to attain, at least intuitively, through epistemically orientated arguments1 and arguments5.

This justification of the primacy of the epistemically conceived arguments1, 2, 5 over the alternative conceptions is instrumental, and is therefore of a (practical) type that we understand well.[6] And it is not begging the question.

Siegel's essay also contains elements of an instrumental justification of the primacy of epistemically conceived arguments1 over rhetorically, virtue-theoretically, or pragma-dialectically conceived arguments: They lead to gains in knowledge and thus to true opinions (Siegel 2023, pp. 476-482). But this instrumental justification is only hinted at, is very thin, and for him, is rather a by-product; he is very sceptical about it.[7] For him, the actual value of epistemically conceived arguments1 is a different one, that is, not the instrumental value of leading to more true opinions, but epistemic improvement, the improvement of the justificatory status of the standpoint:

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[6] As I have shown elsewhere, most well-founded philosophical theories are instrumentally practically justified (Lumer 2020, pp. 18-23; 25-26).

[7] On Siegel's general scepticism about the scope of instrumental justifications in epistemology, philosophy of science and argumentation theory (Siegel 1996; 2019).

> The epistemic theory takes good arguments to be vehicles for ep-
> istemic improvement, and such improvements sometimes involve
> gains in true beliefs. Epistemic improvement includes as well—
> indeed primarily—gains in justificatory status, which is what a
> good argument delivers to its conclusion/standpoint. For this rea-
> son, van Eemeren's focus on truth is misplaced. It is not truth, but
> rather the *justificatory support* offered to candidate be-
> liefs/standpoints/conclusions by premises, reasons, or evidence
> that renders such standpoints *worthy* of belief that is the chief pre-
> occupation of the epistemic theory (*ibid.*, 476-477).

Siegel is aiming at an epistemic rationality that already precedes
the instrumental one and is already utilised by the instrumental
one. Does this kind of rationality exist? What does it consist of?
Can it better justify the primacy of the epistemic approach?

4. Function and way of functioning of epistemically conceived arguments

What is the function of epistemically good arguments? Siegel
gives several similar answers to this question.

1. The starting point is: "The epistemic theory emphasizes the
relationships existing (or not) between premises, reasons, and
evidence and the conclusions/targets they putatively support, and it
conceives of arguments as primarily reason-conclusion complex-
es" (Siegel 2023, p. 519). The relata of this *inferential* characteri-
sation are the abstracts, premises, or reasons on the one hand, and
conclusions on the other; the relation is explicitly and metaphori-
cally described as '*support*'—which is by no means clear and is not
further clarified. However, the expressions 'premise,' 'reason' and
'conclusion' indicate another relation: the (deductive, inductive ...)
implication. The latter description could be the basis for the fol-
lowing characterisations. The basis for the other functions is ac-
cordingly inferential relations, which we understand quite well in
the case of deductive arguments but less well in the case of non-
deductive arguments. And this basis can be understood in terms of
the deductive epistemological principle: 'A proposition is true if it

is logically implied by true propositions.' The inferential relation thus becomes a relation on the *alethic* level.

2. The further descriptions of the function are at least *partially epistemic*, they speak of doxastic states: "[T]he most important strength of the epistemic theory is that it captures and explains the most fundamental sense of 'argument': that an argument, in the hands of an arguer, attempts and purports to offer justificatory support to a conclusion" (Siegel 2023, p. 519). Although this description also only mentions abstracts as relata—'argument' and 'conclusion'—the addition of "in the hands of an arguer" suggests that what is actually meant are doxastic states, that is, the acceptance of the argument as good and the belief in the conclusion. The relationship between the two is that of '*justificatory support.*' Taken on its own, this formulation is quite incomprehensible. What does 'justificatory support' mean? Siegel does not explain this further. A satisfactory explanation could be the one given above (sect. 3): If the subject (justifiedly) considers the premises of the argument to be true and has also accepted the logical implication between the premises and the conclusion, then she has recognised everything, recognised all conditions as fulfilled, the fulfilment of which, according to the deductive epistemological principle, implies the truth of the conclusion. If the subject also— as can be assumed—at least implicitly knows the deductive epistemological principle, then on this basis, she will come to believe in the conclusion (or find this belief reinforced).

3. A series of determinations of the function follows, which are *explicitly epistemic*: "If I'm (sincerely) arguing with you [...] I'm giving you *reasons* that I believe, hope, and intend will make the case for my preferred attitude [...] toward that proposition or viewpoint" (Siegel 2023, pp. 471). One relatum here is a doxastic attitude, the other remains open, presumably it is also doxastic. The relations are "*to give reasons*" and "*make the case for*." Taken on its own, this is just as unclear as 'justificatory support'; and Siegel does not explain this either. However, it could be explained in the same way as in (2). Related to this is the characterisation: "An argument is good, epistemically, to the extent its premises/reasons warrant belief in its conclusion/standpoint, that is, to the extent it *renders belief rational*" (*ibid.* p. 472). Both relata are

clearly named here but are asymmetrical, namely, on the one hand, 'premises/reasons,' that is, abstracts, and, on the other hand, a doxastic state: 'belief in the argument's conclusion.' It would be more appropriate to interpret the first relatum doxastically as well. The relations mentioned are '*to warrant*' and '*render rational*.' Again, this remains unclear, is not explained by Siegel, but can be meaningfully explained, as already done above.

4. A further characterisation is:

> good arguments, according to [the epistemic] view, afford epistemic *improvement* and thus the opportunity for gains in knowledge or justified belief, and since truth is a condition of knowledge (insofar as one cannot know something that is false), a good argument may afford its recipient gains in knowledge, which entails gains in true beliefs (Siegel 2023, p. 476).

The relata are 'argument', that is, a complex abstract, on the one hand, and 'knowledge'/'justified belief,' an epistemic state, on the other. The relations are '*afford epistemic improvement*' and '*afford gains in knowledge*'. This characterisation is even more unclear because this time a complex abstract, which contains the conclusion, is related to an epistemic state. And Siegel does not explain it further either. Ultimately, however, this characterisation can also be explained by the relationship already described. But before that, a few things need to be added: The first relatum is not the abstract argument, but the epistemic fact that the subject accepts this argument, that is, justifiably believe in the premises and the inferential relation and therefore also believe in the conclusion. The further explanatory steps are again those that were already described under 2. The 'epistemic improvement' or the 'gain in knowledge' then consists in the fact that a previously believed proposition is now justifiably believed or that a new justified opinion is added to the subject's previous epistemic stock. However, this reconstruction collides with Siegel's explanation indicated in the quotation, namely that the subject gains new knowledge and that this then also implies the truth of the belief in the thesis. In fact, of course, the path is the other way round, because 'knowledge' is first defined as a true, securely justified belief: If the justification is secure—that is, a deductive justification on the basis of known

premises—then the believed thesis is true; that it is true and that the justification is secure then implies that the subject knows the thesis. Siegel's explanation, by contrast, suggests that one can arrive at an 'epistemic improvement' directly through argumentation, from which the truth of the belief can then in turn be derived. This sounds like magic.

5. This reversal of the justificatory relationship is even more prominent in the following description of the aims of the epistemological argumentation theory, which is also directed against the instrumental justification of this theory:

> The epistemic theory takes good arguments to be vehicles for epistemic improvement, and such improvements sometimes involve gains in true beliefs. Epistemic improvement includes as well—indeed primarily—gains in justificatory status, which is what a good argument delivers to its conclusion/standpoint. For this reason, van Eemeren's focus on truth is misplaced. It is not truth, but rather the *justificatory support* offered to candidate beliefs/standpoints/conclusions by premises, reasons, or evidence that renders such standpoints *worthy* of belief that is the chief preoccupation of the epistemic theory (Siegel 2023, p. 476-477).

I think the direction of justification is the other way round: We are primarily interested in more interesting truths (more precisely, certainly true beliefs) or, if these are not attainable despite great interest, in acceptable beliefs (which are at least often true or truth-like). The outstanding means to this end is cognising, which leads to a well-founded belief. Cognising is such a means because it consists in verifying fulfilment of the conditions for the truth or acceptability of the thesis. It is not clear to me how a justificatory relation can be conceived—through 'epistemic rationality'—that then also (accidentally?) leads to true belief if it has not been conceived in the first place precisely with the aim and interest of true belief in mind.

One could continue analysing Siegel's descriptions of the function of argumentation for a while. But the central problem has, I think, already become clear enough: Siegel describes this function with ever new formulations: The premises "support" the conclusion; provide "justificatory support"; "give reasons"; "make the

case for"; "render belief rational"; "warrant"; "afford epistemic improvement"; "afford gains in knowledge." All this is correct. But the content and the way justifications and argumentations work remain completely unclear. In particular, they remain so unclear that these unspecified descriptions cannot be used to judge whether a given argument fulfils this function. No operationalisable, directly applicable criteria for good arguments can be obtained from the unspecified descriptions, that is criteria that can be used to determine whether the epistemic relations described are fulfilled in an argument (presented in a particular situation).

This is not so noticeable in the case of the core conditions for the argumentative validity of deductive arguments because there is agreement on their alethical part: truth of the premises and logical implication of the conclusion. But all other criteria for epistemically good deductive arguments, in particular the epistemic accessibility of a good argument, are not so easy to determine and are quite controversial. This deficit becomes even clearer if one also considers non-deductive argumentations or if one considers reasons for objects that are not theses—Siegel claims that the epistemic argumentation theory can be used to treat all areas in which reasons are offered, including ethical and aesthetic ones; however, we can also offer reasons for actions, policies, etc. (Siegel 2023, p. 11).

One can fill all these gaps in the way I have already indicated here (in this section in no. 2, but especially in section 3), namely on the basis of an analysis of the functioning of arguments as a guide to recognising the thesis in the form of a verification of the fulfilment of the conditions of an epistemological principle (Lumer 2005, pp. 219-231; 1990, pp. 30-51). This description (verification of the fulfilment of the conditions of an epistemological principle) is precise, clearly understandable, and so general that it can itself be used to explain what it means to "infer" a conclusion from premises. This generality also makes it possible to reconstruct arguments that are completely different from deductive arguments. On the basis of this analysis, one can also meaningfully explain Siegel's characterisations of the function of arguments and thus supplement his theory. I do not see any other kind of meaningful explanation. In this respect, the explanation proposed

here would be a further development of Siegel's theory—albeit in a particular direction that uses an instrumentalist approach to reasoning. Whether Harvey agrees with this kind of elaboration, which I hope he does, is, of course, another matter.

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