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Commentary on: Robert Pinto's "Truth and the virtue of arguments"

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Professor Pinto's essay is a case (or better, a *continued case*) for what may be called an *ecumenical epistemic theory of argument*. In this commentary, I'll be critical of the ecumenicality of Professor Pinto's view, as I believe the epistemicality of the view is just about right.

Pinto's view is ecumenical on two fronts. First, Pinto recuses himself on the meta-epistemological issues regarding the analysis of justification, so he does not appeal to the heavy term 'justification', and instead prefers the term 'reasonable'. The view is epistemically ecumenical, as in taking on this terminological turn, the contentious issue of the nature of epistemic justification needn't be inherited by his epistemic theory of argument. And so, from Pinto's view, we may integrate the Brandomian idiom of viewing good argument as 'entitlement preserving' with the Goldmanian notion that arguments '*transmit* justification' with Feldmanian 'rational belief'.

Second, Pinto is ecumenical with the other theories of argument. Given that argument may have a variety of goals and our evaluation of it may take on the breadth of that variety, epistemic objectives with argument are the ones Pinto holds are "most interesting," but are nevertheless among other objectives (one of the others being, it seems, obtaining cooperation with others).

So Pinto's ecumenical epistemic theory is so with regard to both the epistemic norms (call this epistemic ecumenicalism) and other normative takes on argument (call this axiological ecumenicalism). In this comment, I will take issue with Pinto's arguments for both forms of ecumenical epistemicism.

In favor of epistemic ecumenicalism, Pinto argues that it is best not to become embroiled in the debates regarding the analysis of justification. And so he prefers 'reasonableness,' as the preferred notion. Pinto's background assumption here, I take it, is that to employ the concept of 'justification' one must be committed to one of the controversial meta-epistemic theories. This controversy, then, presumably would infect one's application to the cases. One then foregoes using the concept in order to avoid the complications.

To this, I have two concerns. First, it seems that if we were to have a theory of what Pinto calls "an argument's *justificatory potential*" whether we consider it a matter of reasonableness or not, there seems an intrinsic question of whether reasonableness or justification (or warranted assertability or entitlement or evidential support) is going to be internal or external, that is, whether the

reasonableness of the argument must be accessible and appreciable by the subject in question or not. A simple version could be that were S to give an argument (A) that is sound, but S has no awareness (even but dimly) of its soundness, there is a question as to whether A increases its conclusion's reasonableness for S. An externalist, perhaps, might say that if the premises are provided by reliable belief-producing sources and the inference modes are all reliable, then S needn't be aware of those facts for the argument to be good for S. The internalist would hold that S must be aware of the reliability of the premise inputs and of the support the premises supply the conclusion. Surely the details of the analysis of the demands of justification matter to argument evaluation. (My own view, by the way, is internalist on the matter, especially since the objective with argument is to communicate, understand, and endorse the reasons that resolve our disagreements.) So I don't think it's a virtue of an epistemic view of argument to avoid the messy details of meta-epistemology. Epistemically ecumenical views without epistemic commitments aren't very contentful.

My second concern is a version of Lumer's earlier challenge to Pinto, that reasonableness is "very, very vague." In short, my concern is that I don't see how 'reasonableness' is able to evade any of the difficulties of the larger epistemological terrain. That is, even were it a good idea to not take a substantive stand on the analysis of justification, I don't see how 'reasonable' successfully does that. The trouble I see with Pinto's broader axiological ecumenicalism is that I'm not convinced by his case against the centrality of the epistemological theory. It's specifically with his reply to Biro and Siegel that I have concern. Biro and Siegel's case is a comparative argument, in essence that the epistemological theory of argument provides the most complete and comprehensive fallacy theory. Pinto's reply is that he "do(es) not take fallacy theory to be as central to the study of argument". Pinto, here, leaves the issue at that and references his 2001 *Argument, Inference, and Dialectic.* Everything here hangs on the acceptability (or reasonableness) of this commitment, and so we must go to an argument not given here, but given a while back.

Pinto's case against the centrality of fallacy theory proceeds along three lines. First, that inferences and their evaluation are matters not only of doxastic readjustment in terms of local matters of experience and argument, but also in terms of global coherence. Consequently, no set of rules for distinguishing good from bad reasoning is forthcoming (pp. 62-63). Second, that because reasoning and argument take place against a backdrop of practical concerns, inference quality will also be a matter of practical consideration (p. 63). Third, and finally, because fallacy definition is comprised primarily of exemplary cases of clearly bad reasoning, fallacy-charges and analysis is in terms of whether an analogy holds between the exemplars and those arguments charged with fallacy.

In many respects, I'm in agreement with Professor Pinto's arguments. But I do not think the broader conclusions follow (a) that fallacy theory is not central to a theory of argument, and (b) that the epistemic theory isn't well-poised to accommodate all the lines of thought Pinto has posed.

Here is my rebuttal. First, Argumentation theory, insofar as it is a normative discipline must have normative import, that is, good/bad right/wrong criteria and

explanation are primary desiderata. Fallacy theory is that of (i) demarcating the bad from the good and (ii) explaining what makes the bad the bad and how we might confuse it with the good. Consequently, I see it as certainly *a* (if not *the*) central feature of the discipline.

Second, the epistemicist can concede Pinto's argument that reasoning has practical desiderata, too. Contemporary internalist pragmatist theories (e.g., Stanley, Fantl and McGrath, and Aikin) of justification can index attribution of justification to error cost and urgency of decision. So, from my view, were Pinto not so ecumenical about his epistemology, he wouldn't have to be so ecumenical about his axiology.

REFERENCES

Pinto, R. C. (2001). *Argument, Inference, and Dialectic.* Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.