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Commentary on Godden

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In Response to: David Godden's *On the Relation of Argumentation and Inference*

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1.0 Overview

What Godden is attempting to do in his paper is potentially quite exciting. He brings to bear on each other elements from a variety of different views, in the expectation that the interaction between them will shed important new light on central issues in the study of argumentation. Moreover, he hopes to show that when those issues are viewed in this new light, the very shape of argumentation studies will look quite different.

His paper is a first attempt at a very ambitious undertaking, and like almost all such first attempts it has trouble bringing some things into clear focus. Thus, with some embarrassment, I must admit that I don't see at all clearly why the "Connection Question" poses a problem, or why the upshot of the paper should lead one to "question the relationship between the subject matter of the Theory of Analysis and the Theory of Appraisal."¹

But leaving the "Connection Question" aside, I think we can see the general thrust of what Godden is up to. He sets out his idea of a "traditional picture" of argument, which he associates with an "inferentialist model" of argument" (sections 3-6). Two themes emerge from his exposition in these sections. The first is that many (perhaps most) writers see *some* sort of important connection between argument and inference.² The second is that inference is thought to have a "dual nature" – that inferences spring from reasons which (i) *cause* the acceptance of conclusions and (ii) justify the acceptance of those conclusions. Inferences, in other words, are thought to have both a psychological and an epistemological dimension.

On the basis of this, Godden observes at the end of section 6 that

... whatever model Informalists like Johnson and Pinto wish to advance, some of the features of the traditional picture I have described (above) remain. One of these remaining features, I claim, is a picture of rationality whereby we find claims acceptable on the basis of reasons – that is, on the basis of relations between claims that are not merely psychological but also evidentiary. The reasons supplied in an argument are the reasons on the basis of which we not only come to accept a conclusion, revise a belief, or come to a reasoned change in view, but also on the basis of which we justify that change in view.

He tells us that in the remainder of his paper he will challenge that feature or element of the traditional picture by calling into question two of its consequences.

¹ The quoted words are from the last paragraph of section 6 of Godden's paper.

² Godden realizes that among those whom he cites, there are actually a number of different and incompatible views about the relationship of inference to argument. He even includes Ralph Johnson among those who claim such a connection, despite the repeated protestations in Johnson 2000 that arguments aren't inferences and don't contain inferences – though perhaps Godden is justified in doing so, if I am right in thinking that Johnson's conception of the relation of argument to inference is actually the same as mine (see point 3 in Appendix A to this commentary).

In what follows, I want (1) to highlight exactly what the challenged feature of the “traditional picture” is intended to be and (2) to zero in on exactly how the views of Russell and of Harman are supposed to call the consequences of that feature into question.³

2.0 Clarifying the issue

What *exactly* is the feature of “the traditional picture” that Godden wants to challenge?

2.1 Argument, change of view and justification

Consider the second of the two sentences in which Godden formulates this feature:

The reasons supplied in an argument are the reasons on the basis of which we not only come to accept a conclusion, revise a belief, or come to a reasoned change in view, but also on the basis of which we justify that change in view.

There are at least two respects in which this formulation may fail to capture Godden’s intent.

First, among argumentation theorists, ‘argument’ or “argumentation” usually means reasons offered by one person to another in order to persuade that other to adopt a thesis (for example, Johnson 2000, pp. 167-68; van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, p. 43; Pinto 1995a, 271) – or more generally reasons offered in order to modify a conscious attitude toward some object (Pinto 1992). Inference, or change in view, is *sometimes* prompted by argument, but often (perhaps even most of the time) it is not. For example, Harman’s (1986) extensive discussion of change in view makes no mention of argument in this sense of the word. Since the theme of sections 3 and 4 of Godden’s paper is inference, and in those sections the contrast between causes of belief and evidence for belief is developed in connection with inference, Godden probably doesn’t wish to limit his consideration to the cases in which change in view is prompted by argument.

Second, Godden refers to the reasons “on the basis of which we justify that change in view.” Now a distinction must be made between (a) what *renders* something justified or epistemically OK and (b) what we do when we want to *show* that something is justified. In most contexts, the phrase ‘the reasons on the basis of which we justify X’ would refer to the reasons that we give when our action is challenged and we want to show or prove that what we did was right. There is some evidence that Godden has a tendency to equate these two sorts of justification⁴ - a tendency that should be resisted, since the reasons I *cite* in order to justify something may not coincide with what in fact *makes* that thing right.⁵ A charitable interpretation of Godden should assume that he intends to refer, not to the reasons “on the basis of which I justify...a change in view,” but rather to what renders that change in view right or correct.

³ In the body of this commentary I won’t discuss Godden’s characterization of my views. In Appendix A, however, I express some hesitations about several of his characterizations of them.

⁴ As for example when he erroneously attribute to me the view that “whatever inferential principle or rule we follow must be one that we later cite or invoke as a warrant.” See Appendix A for more on this particular point.

⁵ In my view, which reasons it is appropriate to *cite* when justifying something depends in part on the context in which the justifying is taking place. But see Biro and Siegal (1992, note 26 on p. 101) who say that “the question of whether *being* justified in one’s belief requires *showing* that one is” is the subject of “intense epistemological debate.”

Third, I take it to be uncontroversial that if the reasons that lead to a change in view are *bad* reasons, they do not justify that change in view.

With these three points in mind, I think that the feature of the “traditional picture of rationality” that Godden wants to challenge is this:

(TP1) The reasons which cause us to adopt a conclusion (or which cause a change in view) *sometimes* (perhaps often) justify us in adopting that conclusion (or in modifying our view in the way that we do).

2.2 “What justifies a change in view” versus “what justifies a belief”

To simplify discussion, let us limit our attention to those changes in view in which we come to believe something we didn’t previously believe.⁶ Suppose that at a given time t I acquire the belief that p as a result of an inference, and that the reasons prompting that inference are “good.” Then on the feature of the traditional view Godden thinks he has identified, those reasons justify something that I did at time t – namely, adding the belief that p to my stock of beliefs.

Now it is typically the case that when one adds a belief at a time t , one retains that belief for a considerable length of time, so that we can explain why someone believes p at some later time t_1 by citing the fact that she added it to her stock of beliefs at time t . But the question of whether someone is justified in believing p at time t_1 is a *different* question from the question of whether that person was justified in acquiring that belief at an earlier time t . Consequently, one can consistently assert that reasons which justify someone in acquiring a belief at time t do not justify that person in holding that belief at time t_1 .

As a matter of fact, there are a variety of views about the relationship between factors responsible for the *acquisition* of a belief and the factors which justify *holding that belief at some later time*. Some philosophers (like Alvin Goldman) hold causal or reliabilist theories of justification in which the factors that justify a belief must be causally responsible for the acquisition of that belief and can be factors that occurred in the past (see for instance Goldman 1988b, esp. pp. 98-107).⁷ Others “make the justificational status of a belief wholly a function of what is true of the cognizer *at the time* of belief.” See Goldman’s discussion of “Historical or Genetic” versus “Current Time Slice” theories of justification (1988b, p. 104).⁸

⁶ It would be easy to extend the considerations in section 2.2 to cases in which inference leads us to give up a belief or to cases in which inference leads to an altered degree of confidence in something we already believe.

⁷ Goldman recognizes the legitimacy of another concept of justified belief in which “ s is justified in believing p ” does *not* entail or require that s believes p – and therefore does not require that *anything* has caused s to believe p . See Goldman 1988b, p. 110, where Goldman distinguishes *ex post* and an *ex ante* senses of “justified.” Derek Allen (1999) calls attention to a passage in Audi (1988, 2) which defends the claim that ‘ s is justified in believing that p ’ does not entail ‘ s believes that p .’ See also the distinction made by Biro and Siegal (1992, note 26 on p. 101 between “propositional justification” and “doxastic justification.” Biro and Siegal observe that “[t]he nature of the basing relation – in particular, whether it is an epistemic or a causal relation- and the further question of whether *being* justified in one’s belief requires *showing* that one is, are subjects of intense epistemological debate.”

⁸ Goldman says that the most obvious examples of Current Time Slice theories are “Cartesian Foundationalist Theories.” Among those whom Goldman lists as holding Historical theories of justified belief are Popper, Quine, Plato and perhaps Hegel and Dewey. It may be worth noting that in his most famous paper G.E. Moore (1962, p. 43) maintains that he knows with certainty a whole host of propositions “because, in the past, I have known to be true other propositions which were evidence for them.” But, he goes on to say (p. 44), “And I certainly do not know exactly what the evidence was. Yet all this seems to me to be no good reason for doubting that I know it. We are all,

It is important to note that the feature (TP1) which Godden wants to challenge does *not* concern the factors or reasons which justify *holding* a belief, but concerns only factors alleged to justify *adding* a belief. This is as it should be, since

- i) nothing in the review of the literature in sections 3-5 of his paper deals explicitly with questions about what makes *holding* a belief justified, and
- ii) even if one were to agree with Biro and Siegal (1992, p. 98) that “informal logic, no less than argumentation theory, rests on an epistemological account of the goodness of reasons,” there is no reason to suppose that informal logic or argumentations theory is committed to or requires any *particular* view about the relationship between factors which warrant acquiring a belief and factors which warrant holding that belief at some later time.

3.0 Godden’s attempts to call this feature of the “traditional picture” into question.

3.1 Russell

Godden claims it is a consequence of “the traditional picture” that

some good arguments are deductive ones, supplying reasons *on the basis of which* their conclusions are accepted and acceptable.

Call that alleged consequence C1. While it is clear that C1 is a very widely held view, and might well be considered a part of a “traditional picture,” I personally don’t see how C1 can be construed as a consequence of the *particular* feature of “the traditional picture” that Godden wants to challenge.⁹ Let that pass for now. But notice what you’d have to do to call C1 into question. You would have to make a case for believing that *no* deductive arguments supply reasons on the basis of which their conclusions are both accepted and acceptable.

The point from Russell with which Godden wants to challenge C1 is this: derivations of middle level mathematical truths like $2 + 2 = 4$ from the rather abstruse and obscure “logical premisses” which form that axioms of systems like his and Frege’s are not what lead people to accept those middle level mathematical truths. Russell gives two reasons for saying this. This first is that the “logical premisses” are less certain than the middle level truths derived from them, and therefore it would be “apparently absurd” to attempt to prove the middle level truths by deriving them from the “logical premisses”; the second is that the so-called “logical premisses” are actually accepted on the basis of inductive reasoning which takes those middle level arithmetic truths as premisses, and not vice versa.

What follows if Russell is right about this – as I suspect he is? What follows is that *some* items which have been thought (e.g., by Frege) to be good deductive inferences do *not* supply reasons on which their conclusions are in fact *accepted*. But from the fact that *some* deductive arguments don’t supply such reasons, it simply doesn’t follow that there are *no* good deductive arguments that supply such reasons.

I think, in this strange position that we do *know* many things, and yet we do not know *how* we know them, i.e. we do not know what the evidence was.” These remarks would seem to qualify Moore as holding an Historical theory rather than a Current Time Slice theory.

⁹ I don’t see how it follows from TP1 that some good arguments are *deductive* ones.

Moreover, as Godden himself recognizes, it is Russell's view that in mathematics there *are* cases where people are led to accept conclusions via inferences that are deductively valid – as happens when we derive further consequences *from* those middle level mathematical truths. And since Russell seems to think that it is *right* for us to do that, rather than contradicting C1, Russell's views about mathematics appear to *entail* C1.

Could we say that Russell's account at least shows that in certain cases the reasons needed to *justify* a belief differ from the reasons that *cause* people to accept a belief? One could say this only if one took derivations from logical premisses as necessary to justify those middle level mathematical propositions – which is something Godden may be intimating when (without precedent in Russell) he calls such derivations “logical justifications.” But if Russell's account of these matters is correct, such a view is not defensible.¹⁰

Thus Godden has simply not shown that Russell's views about the foundations of mathematics have any negative relevance to C1, and he certainly hasn't shown that they have any bearing at all on the *particular feature* of the “traditional view” he's trying to challenge. If he wants to bring Russell's views on the foundations of mathematics into his discussion, he's got to find a different strategy for making them relevant.

3.2 Harman

In order to challenge TP1, Godden appeals to a criticism Harman makes of what he (Harman 1986, p. 29) calls the foundations theory of reasoned belief revision and which he pictures as in competition with a coherence theory of reasoned belief revision. The key difference between these two theories is said (p. 29) to be:

...whether one needs to keep track of one's original justifications for beliefs. What I am calling the foundations theory says yes; what I am calling the coherence theory says no.¹¹

According the coherence theory (p. 29),

...ongoing beliefs do not usually require any justification. Justification is taken to be required only if one has a special reason to doubt a particular belief.

Harman also puts this last point another way when he maintains (p. 32) that

¹⁰ Russell (1973) says that “the usual mathematical method” does not “give the order of knowledge” (p. 282). In other presentations of the same view of mathematical knowledge – Russell 1985, pp. 159-160 and Russell 1962, 13-14 – he distinguishes between the “logical order” of and the “epistemological order” our beliefs. He says, “In pure mathematics, after the elements, logical order and order of knowledge are identical...But this is not true at the beginning of mathematics...The fact that mathematics can be deduced from *these* premisses [the “logical” premisses] is emphatically not the reason for our belief in the truth of mathematics” (1962, pp. 13-14). But he goes on to make it clear that “[w]hat epistemology requires of mathematics, though it is not the logical order, is also not the psychological cause of our beliefsThe problem for epistemology is not ‘why *do* I believe this or that?’ but ‘why *should* I believe this or that?’” (p. 14). It should be clear, then, Russell does *not* think that derivation from “logical premisses” displays the reason why we *ought* to believe the middle level truths of mathematics. Derivation from logical premisses supplies *neither* the cause *nor* the justification of our belief that $2 + 2 = 4$.

¹¹ In the argument developed in Chapter 4 of Harman, the issue comes to turn on the issue of when a person must *stop* believing something already believed. Harman (p. 39) says that a foundations theory is committed to the “Principle of Negative Undermining” (= stop believing *P* whenever one does not associate one's belief that *P* with an adequate justification). In contrast, a coherence theory subscribes instead to the “Principle of Positive Undermining” (= stop believing *P* whenever one positively believes that one's reasons for believing *P* are no good).

...the coherence theory says one is justified in continuing to believe something so long as one has no special reason to stop believing it.

The problem with appealing to Harman's coherence theory of belief revision to challenge TP1 is that Harman's theory is quite consistent with TP1. To see that this is so, consider the following important qualification that Harman makes (p.39):

... the coherence theory can appeal to a nonholistic *causal* notion of local justification by means of a limited number of one's prior beliefs, namely, those prior beliefs that are most crucial to one's justification for adding the new belief. The coherence theory does not suppose there are *continuing* links of justification dependency that can be consulted when revising one's beliefs. But the theory can admit that Karen's coming to believe certain things depended on certain of her prior beliefs in a way that it did not depend on others, where this dependence represents a kind of local justification, even though in another respect whether Karen was justified in coming to believe those things depended on everything she then believed.

Note a couple of things Harman says about such "local justifications" (which appear to be the same as the "original justifications" Harman mentions on p. 29 and p. 30):

- i) they involve both causality *and* justification
- ii) *what* they justify is "adding the new belief"
- iii) there are no "*continuing* links of justification dependency" between the reasons that comprise "local justifications" and on-going beliefs.

It is of course point (iii) that marks Harman's break with foundations theories of belief revision and it is *that* point which Godden is attempting to deploy against the "traditional picture" of argument. However, it should be clear in light of points (i) and (ii) that Harman's view is not only *consistent* with TP1, but it virtually *entails* TP1. Moreover, on Harman's view such "original" or "local" justifications for on-going beliefs are not just *possible*; Harman claims in effect that anyone holding a belief must suppose that he has or had such an original justification for it (p. 52):

in fully believing *P* one is committed to the claim that one has or had sufficient reasons for believing *P* that did not rely on any false assumption.¹²

Of course Harman's account of what is involved in those "original justifications" and reasoned changes in view and his account of what makes them good or bad (see, for starters, Harman pp. 43-44) are different from more traditional accounts of arguments and inferences. I think, therefore, that the details of Harman's views about local justifications are quite relevant to the assessment of many of the details of more traditional theories of argument and of inference.¹³

¹² Hence Godden's intimation, in the last sentence of his paper, that on Harman's view we don't "come to reasoned change in view" on the basis of "empirical premisses" is simply wrong.

¹³ As a matter of fact, I think there are a host of things in *Change in View* that run counter to traditional accounts of inference – the recognition that *both* holistic and "local" justifications are pertinent when we add a belief, the central role afforded to considerations of coherence in our inferences (a theme throughout Chapters 4 and 6), the role that considerations of reliability should play in our inferences (p. 44), the limitations on the role of logic in the appraisal of reasoning (Chapter 2), the limitations (Chapter 3) and the importance (pp. 45-46) of probability in such reasonings, the implications of the distinction between full and tentative acceptance (pp. 46-49) of propositions for their use as premisses, and perhaps most importantly the central role accorded to "inference to the best

But in this paper Godden appeals *only* to Harman's reasons for rejecting foundations theories of belief revision. Those considerations don't seem to me to have much bearing on anything that could be considered an essential element of "the traditional pictures" of argument or of inference.¹⁴ And those considerations certainly don't have *any* negative bearing on TP1.

Appendix A – Godden's characterization of my views

A number of Godden's characterizations of my views seem to me to have the potential to mislead some readers about what those views are. Lest someone take my silence as a public endorsement of such characterizations, I want to go on record about a number matters. Three of the following points are explicitly labeled as quite minor, and perhaps don't need to be mentioned. The others might lead someone not familiar with my papers to a mistaken view about what is in them.

- 1) At the very beginning of Section 3, Godden says that "[s]ome theorists have defined inference more or less closely to argumentation," and cites me as an example. It's unclear why or in what sense he thinks my definition of inference links it with argument or is "close to" my definition of argument. But lest anyone think that I define inference with reference to argument, or define argument with reference to inference, they should be made aware that I don't do either of those things. My definitions of inference, argument and argumentation occur in the opening paragraph of Pinto 1995a (p. 271). My definition of inference does not mention either argument or argumentation
- 2) Godden says that in Pinto 1995a I *define* argument as an invitation to inference (twice in section 3 of his paper). That is incorrect. My initial definition of argument occurs at the beginning of 1995a (p. 271), where I define it as "a set of statements or propositions that one person offers to another in the attempt to induce that other person to accept some conclusion." Later on, I add something that may be construed as enhancing that original definition when I say "The word 'argument' ... is appropriately applied to sequences of propositions only when they serve as instruments of persuasion" (p. 276). Godden quotes this latter point correctly in footnote 4 of his paper, though he tries in that note to include a separate point I make about persuasion as part of a definition of argument – which it is not.

I do hold that arguments are *in fact* invitations to inference, but for me that is not a matter of definition. It is rather a *conclusion* I draw based on the definition offered in the opening paragraph of my paper *and* on an analysis of what it is to be induced by an argument to accept a conclusion. My view is that arguments do

explanation" (pp. 67-70). Careful consideration of *these* themes in Harman might well result in a very different picture of the nature and norms of inference than is now current in the argumentation literature. And that might in turn lead to a rather different conception of what is required of argument

¹⁴ Godden does make a rather brief attempt in section 7 to associate "informalists" – and in particular Johnson and myself – with a foundations theory of belief revision. For an indication of why I think those attempts don't work, see Appendix B of this commentary.

not “contain” inferences, and that arguers don’t as such make any inferences. But I argue that, since *being persuaded* involves drawing an inference, arguers are trying to get those to whom an argument is addressed to make an inference in which the reasons stated in the argument become the reasons on which the addressee concludes that the thesis being defended is true. One could concede my definitions of argument and of inference, but still dissent from “arguments invite inferences” if he objected to my claim that being persuaded by an argument requires drawing an inference.

- 3) Godden attempts to contrast my definition with Johnson’s rejection of “this traditional picture of argument as a series of premises linked by an inference...to a conclusion.” Perhaps because he’s got my definition of argument wrong, Godden doesn’t see that my definition of argument is *very* similar to Johnson’s “official” definition in Johnson 2000, p 167-168 – at the core of both definitions is the idea of offering reasons for the purpose of persuasion. Of course my definition doesn’t mention the need for a dialectical tier, nor limit arguments to texts, as Johnson’s does. (And, as a matter of fact, in my broader view, arguments that aim to get someone to accept a thesis constitute only *one* class of arguments – see Pinto 1992 – and this would constitute a further difference between my view of arguments and Johnson’s.)

My view – like Johnson’s - is that an arguer is trying to get another to accept a thesis on the basis of the reasons the arguer sets forth. I point out that if the arguer succeeds, the other person makes an inference – i.e., comes to accept the thesis on the basis of reasons set out in the argument. This does not commit me to “an argument is a set of premisses plus an inference,” or “an argument contains an inference.” Moreover, as I’ve just said, on my view the arguer does not as such make an inference. Far from being at odds with Johnson’s view, my view pretty much *is* Johnson’s view. Johnson’s failure to see that this is his view is due, I suspect, to his *very* curious ideas about inference (according to which the only thing that counts as an inference is inductive or probabilistic reasoning – see Johnson 2000, pp. 92-95).

- 4) In footnote 5 to section 3 of his paper, Godden attempts to summarize the six objections I make to the causal theory of inference. His account of two of those objections – the first and the last – doesn’t have them quite right. He mischaracterizes the first objection by suggesting that it consists in the fact that an inference might result in surrendering a belief. My first objection (p. 280) was, rather, that “[t]he upshot of inference can be, not the acquisition of new belief, but the anchoring of pre-existing belief (as when I find additional evidence or additional reasons for what I already believe).” He mischaracterizes the sixth objection; the objection was not that one who infers “must be able to cite the rule of inference in her account of her belief.” The objection was rather (pp. 281-82) that one whose habits of thought were impervious to criticism should not be considered to be drawing inferences - from which I tentatively concluded that “if a doxastic transition is to count as inference (or a part of reasoning), it must occur in the context of a cognitive economy that meets certain minimum standards of self-consciousness and of rationality.” That last objection

was the most important, because it motivated the reconceptualization of inference in the next few paragraphs of my paper – a reconceptualization according to which an inference is “a belief transition open to the influence of critical reflection” (Pinto 1995a, p. 283).

- 5) In mischaracterizing my sixth objection, Godden ascribes to me the view that “whatever inferential principle or rule we follow must be one that we later cite or invoke as a warrant.” There’s no textual basis for this ascription, and it is decidedly *not* my view (or Peirce’s, for that matter) that one who consciously follows a “guiding principle” must *later* cite or invoke it as a warrant. (See also note 5 of this commentary..)
- 6) At the end of section 3, Godden complains that I “[do] not seem to object to the view that the principles of inference, functioning as principles of evidence and justification, remain (ultimately grounded in) ‘habits of mind.’” This characterization misses the point of my reconceptualization of inference (Pinto 1995a, pp. 282-83). That reconceptualization portrays the notion of “habits of mind” as belonging to an early stage in the evolution of the concept of inference, which is superseded by a more sophisticated version of the concept of inference in which “[w]e move ... to a broadened conception of criticism, one not tied quite so closely to logical rules or material principles of inference, but modelled in part on the discussions of the probative value of evidence that occur in contexts where articulable rules are not available” (p. 282). My view is that principles of inference are “grounded in” (i.e., get their normative force from), not “habits of mind,” but in the discussions about norms that constitute a part of our critical practice. (The idea that our norms are grounded in our critical practice is not formulated very explicitly in my 1995a. It is quite explicit in my 1999 OSA paper and is developed further in Pinto 2001, especially Chapter 13 – texts not available to Godden when he wrote his paper).
- 7) In section 4, Godden says that I “recommend[] modifying our earlier picture of inference to include the view that ‘inferences are good or bad depending [in part] on whether the patterns are truth-preserving.’” This is not exactly a “recommendation” I make; rather, it comes from my description of a stage in the evolution of our concept of inference, a stage that is left behind with the realization that not all inferences can be fit into the requisite sorts of pattern (see Pinto 1995a, 282). It should be pointed out that the core idea invoked at that stage is drawn from Peirce – see the second quotation from Peirce on p. 280 of Pinto 1995a.
- 8) Another minor point. After correctly quoting me as saying that entailment is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for suitability of inferential link, Godden says “On the grounds of these kinds of objections, formalism was abandoned as a Theory of Argument Appraisal” (section 4 of Godden). Though what Godden says is basically correct, it might give rise to an erroneous idea of what I think is required to make a case against formalism. As I see it, the case against formalism must be much broader than the case against deductivism. I developed that theme in my 1999 OSA paper. But even in Pinto 1995a, I say that “what prevents classical logic from being a general theory of inference or

reasoning may not lie simply in the fact that the only premiss-conclusion link that it considers is entailment” (p. 278). I then go on to develop reasons against formalism that are quite different from the sorts of reasons Godden has mentioned.

- 9) In section 5, Godden appears to lump me in with those who take “Relevance, Sufficiency and Acceptability” to be the criteria for evaluating arguments – since he attributes that view to “informalists” and later in that section identifies me as an informalist. I have never endorsed the RSA account of argument criteria, and in fact don’t subscribe to it – partly for the reasons mentioned in Biro and Siegal 1992, pp. 97-98.
- 10) In section 5, Godden says that I seem to agree with Johnson that truth is a criterion (of premiss adequacy). My stated view (in Pinto 1995b, which Godden cites on another matter) is that truth is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition of premiss adequacy, and Johnson (2000, p. 276-280) quite correctly takes me as someone who is opposed to his view on this issue.
- 11) In section 7, Godden includes me among those who hold that “a claim is only acceptable ‘on the basis’ of the reasons supplied in argument.” See Appendix B of this commentary on why this is contradicted by my published views.

Appendix B – Foundationalism and the “inferentialist picture”

Godden attempts to tie the “inferentialist picture” to a foundations theory of justification in the first paragraph of section 7. But his attempt depends on the assumption that anyone who subscribes to the Relevance, Sufficiency and Acceptability of *premisses* as the proper criteria for evaluating *arguments* would also “want” to maintain that “*some* set of good reasons is necessary for the acceptability of a claim.” To achieve his purposes Godden must mean by this not just claims that somebody is currently using as premisses in arguments, or claims which someone is currently using as premisses in an inference, or even claims that somebody is currently trying to argue *for*. He must have in mind any claim at all – except perhaps for “self-evident” or “basic” claims. But the supposition that anybody subscribing to RSA as criteria for argument would want to maintain this is quite gratuitous. For one thing, Godden cites no evidence that any argumentation theorist has ever maintained such a thing.¹⁵ For another, it is very hard to see why someone investigating argument or – what is something else – inference would have any need to commit himself to a speculation of this sort.¹⁶

¹⁵ At one point, in the next to last paragraph of his paper, Godden makes an unexplained reference to Johnson’s “definition of rational persuasion” – by which he seems to be referring to the passage in which Johnson (2000, p. 150) says, “From the pragmatic point of view, then, an argument is a discourse directed toward rational persuasion. By rational persuasion, I mean that the arguer wishes to persuade the Other to accept the conclusion on the basis of the reasons and considerations cited and those alone.” This passage has to do with what is going on when an argument is offered. It says nothing whatsoever about the general conditions under which a claim is acceptable.

¹⁶ Interestingly enough, Alvin Goldman - one of the philosophers who seems to hold that *past* inferences justify *present* beliefs – arrives at the same conclusion that Harman does regarding the need to keep track of justifications, and endorses something like Harman’s Principle of Positive Undermining, rejecting anything like the Principle of Negative Undermining. See his discussion of belief perseverance (1986a, pp. 214-221 – esp. his

Near the end of section 7 of his paper, Godden claims that elements of the “inferentialist picture” which he says Johnson and I “retain” require that a proposition “is *only* acceptable ‘on the basis’ of the reasons supplied in argument” and we are therefore committed to the kind of foundationalism Harman is criticizing. But (a) it is an entirely gratuitous claim that such a thing is required by elements of any widely held the “inferentialist picture”¹⁷ and (b) if there *were* such elements of the inferentialist picture, then Johnson and I do not retain them. Neither Johnson nor I is trying to formulate a general epistemology that would lay down the conditions under which beliefs in general are acceptable. Both Johnson and I do talk about the acceptability of the *premisses* that occur in arguments and inferences (though what Johnson means by ‘acceptable’ is not what I mean by that term¹⁸).

For Johnson, it is *essential* that some premisses in an argument are acceptable even though they are *not* supported by a further argument (Johnson 2000, p 194-195; Johnson and Blair 1977, 22-29), and with Blair he has identified at least five conditions under which there is no obligation to defend a premiss (of which the first three are relevant to the issues raised here; see Blair and Johnson 1977, pp. 24-26). Indeed, the cash value of ‘p is acceptable’ for Johnson is usually ‘p does not need to be supported by a subargument’ – which makes Johnson’s view on acceptability almost the exact opposite of the view Godden is attributing to him.

In Pinto 1995b (a paper that Godden cites), I say that a premiss in an inference must be reasonable to believe or accept, but I explicitly *decline* to specify what renders a premiss reasonable to accept (Pinto 1995b, p. 188).¹⁹ It is worth noting, moreover, that if *I* were to agree

conclusion on 220-221 and his remarks about Harman’s Principle of Positive Undermining in footnote 35. The existence of a position like Goldman’s (or of Moore’s view quoted in note 7 above) may suggest that one can coherently reject the sort of foundations theory Harman argues against without adopting the sort of coherence theory that Harman subscribes to.

¹⁷ My reasons for calling this claim gratuitous can be found at the end of section 2.2 of this comment.

¹⁸ When Johnson talks about acceptability of a premiss, he has in mind the question of whether someone offering an argument is entitled to use it as a premiss in an argument being offered to another person – the issue is usually whether the arguer is obliged to defend the premiss (where the premiss is acceptable, there is no obligation to defend it). When I talk about the acceptability of a premiss, I am talking about whether someone is entitled to rely upon that premiss in drawing an inference (in abstraction from any context of argument). These are quite distinct issues, and they arise in quite distinct contexts.

¹⁹ In works that Godden is probably unfamiliar with (Pinto and Blair 1993; Pinto, Blair and Parr, 1993), my co-authors and I did take a stab at formulating a (nonexhaustive) list of conditions under which the premisses of an inference are acceptable or reasonable to believe. The first condition occurs when the premiss came from a credible source (including the case in which the reasoner herself is that source); the second condition occurs when the premiss is a conclusion from a previously drawn good inference (Pinto, Blair and Parr 1993, p. 123). It is worth noting that according to Harman (1986, p.30), in a foundations theory “one’s justification for something cannot be that one already believes it and that one’s beliefs in this area are reliable.” In other words, our first criterion comes very close to being one that is not permitted in a foundations theory.

It is also worth noting that we did not require that a reasoner always be aware that such conditions obtain, or even they she check to see whether a premiss she is using fits one of them. To the contrary, we talked about circumstances “in which it is wise to investigate premiss acceptability” (p. 124) and identified three such circumstances (pp. 124-125). Like Harman, we said (1) that a premiss needs to be considered carefully “when there is some *particular reason for doubting* or questioning it.” But we also recommended special attention when (2) “the premiss concerns *unfamiliar or obscure information*” or when (3) “*a lot depends on whether your conclusion is correct...*” I would submit that the advice we gave on pp. 124-25 is in the general spirit of the advice that Harman gives, but that it is better advice than the advice Harman gives.

with Harman's view about the justification of on-going beliefs (i.e., that they are justified unless there is some special reason to doubt them), only the slightest addition to the view I defend in print would be required to accommodate that point of Harman's— I would simply have to state that 's believes p and s has no special reason for doubting p' is *one* sufficient condition for 'it is reasonable for s to accept p as the premiss in an inference.'²⁰

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²⁰ The situation is considerably more complicated when it comes to Johnson's view. Johnson is concerned with propounding arguments to convince others. This means that the arguer must make provision for the possibility that the Other will challenge or resist the premiss that the arguer is using. That a premiss is controversial or is unknown known to some portion of an audience will usually mean that it needs to be defended, even if the arguer and a large part of his audience believes it – and the wider the audience, the more likely there will be a need to defend it. I suggest therefore that there's no *simple* way to describe the bearing of Harman's point on Johnson's project or on Johnson's views.

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