DEDUCTIVISM AS AN INTERPRETIVE STRATEGY: A REPLY TO GROARKE'S RECENT DEFENSE OF RECONSTRUCTIVE DEDUCTIVISM

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1–INTRODUCTION

Debates concerning deductivism seem to be a hallmark of the informal logic tradition. The very first issues of the *Informal Logic Newsletter*, published in the late 1970s, were the site of a sustained debate concerning whether inductive arguments could be distinguished categorically from deductive arguments and, if so, how (Fohr, 1980a, 1980b; Govier, 1980a; Hitchcock, 1980; Johnson, 1980; Weddle, 1979, 1980). At the time, the prevailing view was that deductive and inductive marked kinds of arguments. This prevailing opinion was challenged by Hitchcock (1980) who, following Skyrms (1986, pp. 6–13), proposed that “we regard the distinction between deductive and inductive as a broad and exhaustive distinction between types of validity” (p. 9). This proposal that inductive and deductive are “standard[s] for appraising arguments” (Govier, 1980b, p. 4) has been adopted subsequently by many theorists. For instance, Machina (1985) has argued that “inductive logic [like deductive logic] will be defined by reference to its central concepts and rules” and not in relation to a special set of arguments (p. 578). (Johnson [2000, ch. 3], on the other hand, seems content to continue to use the categories inductive and deductive to mark kinds of arguments.) It also has been argued that additional evaluative standards of argument, e.g., conductive and analogical (Govier, 1980b, p. 3), must be included in any comprehensive theory of argument evaluation.

In the context of this discussion, many questions regarding the role that deduction should play in our theories of argument remain unanswered. Among these is the question whether and how deduction can provide a basis for the interpretation of argument. This essay considers attempts to defend deductivism as a reconstructive thesis as they have appeared in recent informal logic and argumentation theory literatures. These attempts are primarily Groarke’s (1992, 1995, 1999, 2002), and I consider them to be representative of the kinds of arguments that could be offered in defense of reconstructive deductivism. The essay begins with the observation that deductivism can be formulated as an evaluative and as a reconstructive (or interpretive) thesis, and some initial observations concerning the relationship between these two theses. I note that one way of defending deductivism as an interpretive thesis is to assert the correctness of deductivism as an evaluative thesis (section 2). Against this, I argue that there are pluralities of nonequivalent standards of evidence against which arguments can be eval-
uated, and that not all of these are reducible to the standard of deductive validity (sections 3–5). Therefore, the correctness of deductivism as an evaluative thesis cannot justify deductivism as an interpretive thesis. I then consider and reject alternative attempts to defend reconstructive deductivism by recourse to theories about the proper semantics of indicator words and the commitments of arguers (section 6). In place of these approaches, I argue that the interpretation of arguments as deductive must be justified on grounds that involve considerations that are not exclusively evaluative, including contextual and situational features of arguments as well as psychological facts about arguers. In particular I argue that, to interpret an argument correctly as deductive, it must be established that the arguer is, or ought to be, aiming at the deductive standard of evidence. I conclude (in section 7) that deductivism as an evaluative thesis can and should be justified independently of deductivism as an interpretive thesis.

2–DEDUCTIVISM

There is some question how the thesis of deductivism should be understood. On one hand, sometimes deductivism is presented as an evaluative thesis, i.e., that [D1] “all good arguments are deductively valid” (Groarke, 1992, p. 113). This is a thesis about the proper standards of evidence by which arguments should be evaluated. Presumably it means that the only acceptable link between an argument’s premises and its conclusion is that in which it is not logically possible for the conclusion to be false given the truth of the premises. The only good arguments are those for which no counterexample can be found, irrespective of the plausibility of that counterexample. Defenders of deductivism are quick to add that deductivism includes not only formal but material validity. Formal validity is explained in terms of the form or structure of the argument such that any substitution instance of a valid argument form will be a valid argument. Material validity is explained in terms of the meanings of the nonlogical terms of the argument.

The word deductivism, though, is not always used to mark this thesis about the standards by which arguments should be evaluated. Sometimes deductivism is construed as the interpretive thesis that [D2] “natural lan-

\[2\] Stove (1970) characterizes deductivism as the evaluative thesis: “All invalid arguments are absolutely irrational” (p. 87). This is roughly the contrapositive of Groarke’s thesis [D1] which Stove attributes to Hume (pp. 81–87). Stove contrasts this thesis with the view (attributed to Keynes) that “some invalid arguments are more conclusive or reasonable than others; or, that there are different degrees of conclusiveness among invalid arguments” (p. 77).

Govier (1992) also believes deductivism to be an evaluative thesis. Yet, D1 is weaker than the theses of classical and methodological deductivism that she discusses. According to Govier, deductivism asserts that soundness—not validity—is both necessary and sufficient for the cogency of an argument (p. 393). D1 asserts only that validity is a necessary condition for argument cogency.

\[3\] In this respect, formal and material validity are explained similarly. In both cases arguments are valid on the basis of the meanings of the terms used in them. Formal validity is explained by the semantics of the logical operators (truth-functional operators, quantifiers, and the like), while material validity is explained by the semantics of the nonlogical terms.

I specifically want to leave open the question whether truth-functional operators (e.g., “→” or “∨”) supply a proper interpretation of the natural-language expressions (e.g., “if ... then .”) that they are meant to represent or translate. Also, I want to leave open the question whether the meaning of these operators is to be given semantically (in terms of truth tables and valuation rules) or pragmatically (in proof-theoretic terms of introduction and elimination rules for the use of the expressions). I take it, though, that any theory of meaning employed will apply to both classes of expression (syntactically and semantically).
guage arguments should be understood as attempts to formulate deductive arguments” (Groarke, 1999, p. 2). This is a thesis about how natural language arguments should be understood, interpreted, or modelled. Indeed, it sometimes is stated explicitly as such: “I understand deductivism as the view that ordinary arguments are best analyzed as deductive inferences” (Groarke, 1995, p. 139).

I am concerned primarily with deductivism as an interpretive thesis [D2] (although, as I will note momentarily, the two theses are related). Before proceeding to my own consideration of deductivism, I would like to recognize those objections that typically are raised against it. The standard objections to deductivism (as identified by Groarke [1992] and Gerritsen [1994] and attributed to authors like Govier [1987]) are three: (i) deductivism does not permit differing degrees of evidential support between premises and conclusions; (ii) deductivism either fails to provide an account of fallacies, or provides an incorrect account of fallacies; and finally (iii) deductivism does not provide a defensible interpretive strategy for describing the structure of natural language arguments.

Given my concern with deductivism as an interpretive strategy [D2], I am interested primarily in the third objection. However, in the sections that follow I deal directly with the first objection, which challenges deductivism as an evaluative thesis [D1]. The reason for this is that the correctness of deductivism as an evaluative thesis can be invoked as a reason for its acceptability as an interpretive strategy. Clearly, if [D1] were true—that is, if the only acceptable standard of evidence was embodied in the rules of deduction—then [D2] would follow as a consequence. So, any discussion of deductivism as an interpretive thesis must consider deductivism as an evaluative thesis.

This essay does not address the second objection.

3—DEDUCTIVISM AS AN EVALUATIVE THESIS

One way, then, to justify deductivism as an interpretive thesis is to assert deductivism as an evaluative thesis. Govier (1987) observes: “The crucial point of deductivism is that anything less than a relation of entailment between premises and conclusion is unsatisfactory. On this theory there are absolutely no degrees or kinds of logical support” (p. 23). In this respect, deductivism asks of any argument two questions: (i) are the premises of the argument true (or, perhaps, acceptable)? and (ii) does the conclusion follow from the premises? (Govier, 1987, p. 23)

Another way of asking this second question is: Do the premises give us (as epistemic agents) rational grounds for asserting or adopting the conclusion? Asking the question this way highlights two features of the rational structure of arguments. First, reasons are understood in a practical sense as reasons for either asserting or assenting to some claim or belief. To assert a claim is to put it forth as having met some relevant epistemic standard (e.g., truth or acceptability). To adopt a claim is to accept it as having met some similar standard. Second, our notion of a reason is explained in terms of evidence. The standards with which we evaluate arguments are standards of evidence. Taken together, these standards constitute and exemplify our concept of evidence, and when they change, so can our concept of evidence.

Deductivism upholds the standard of validity. Informally, an argument is valid if and

5 Formulation of deductivism in terms of the kinds of evidential support that can obtain between premises and conclusions is preferable to Johnson’s (2000) formulation in terms of argument types: “There is only one type of argument—a deductive argument. All other types of argument are either not really arguments or are reducible to deductive arguments” (p. 60; cf. pp. 42–46). Clearly, one reason to hold that there is only one type of argument would be that only one kind of evidentiary connection can obtain between premises and conclusions.
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only if it is not logically possible for the conclusion to be false given the truth of the premises (Groarke, 1992, p. 113). That is, the assumption that all of the premises of an argument are true is inconsistent with the assumption that its conclusion is false; it results in a (formal or material) contradiction. Groarke rightly points out that this standard should not be equated with formal validity; material validity will do just as nicely. Groarke (1999) also rebuts accounts of deductivism that “confuse this notion of necessity [i.e., necessary entailment] with the notion that the conclusion of a deductive argument is necessarily true if the premises are true” (p. 3; cf. 1995, pp. 139–140). The concept of necessity embodied in deductivism does not imply that the conclusion is necessarily true; rather “it implies that the conclusion of a deductive argument must be as certain as its premises. A deductive argument should therefore be described as ‘certainty preserving’ rather than ‘certainty establishing’” (Groarke, 1999, p. 3).

4–STANDARDS OF EVIDENCE

Groarke’s point, above, is well-taken, but his correction of these “widespread misconceptions” does not achieve his theoretical goals. Groarke (1999) goes on to infer that a purely deductive account of the link between premise and conclusion can be used to represent and preserve relations other than truth or certainty (pp. 4–5). To see his mistake, we first must acknowledge that there are a variety of nonequivalent standards of evidence. Rhetorically, arguments can be evaluated purely with respect to their effectiveness in eliciting assent to, or acceptance of, a conclusion. In a criminal trial, guilt must be established beyond a reasonable doubt. On the other hand, in certain civil trials, responsibility or culpability need only be established on the balance of probabilities. These are different standards of proof, and an argument which meets a weaker standard might fail to meet a stronger one.

Indeed, one might employ any number of standards of evidence. One way of characterizing the standard embodied in deductivism is to say that, accepting the premises of the argument, we should accept its conclusion if the argument has no counterexample. Yet, any number of other standards might be articulated in just this way. Consider the following list: Accepting the premises of the argument, we should accept its conclusion if (i) the only counterexamples are highly improbable; or (ii) the only counterexamples are less probable than the premises; or (iii) no counterexample has been found yet (the conclusion has not been falsified); or (iv) no counterexample is found already amongst our beliefs (coherence). These standards are given in descending order, so that arguments meeting a higher standard also will meet the lower one(s), while arguments that fail to meet a higher standard might well meet a lower one.

The fact is, then, that there is a plurality of nonequivalent standards of evidence. Therefore, deductivism as an evaluative thesis can-

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6 As such, Johnson’s (2000, pp. 57–59) characterization of deductivism as formal deductive logic (FDL) whereby the analysis and appraisal of arguments is based upon logical form (plus the truth of its premises) is not precisely accurate.

7 In this context, certainty must be viewed as an epistemic rather than a psychological property of a proposition. Obviously, without some considerable and perhaps contentious assumptions about the rationality of human reasoners, valid deductive arguments do not preserve certainty understood as a doxastic attitude that a reasoner might take toward a proposition. Valid deductive arguments might neither establish nor preserve an agent’s doxastic attitude toward a proposition. For example, I might reasonably admit that I am not certain of many of the logical consequences of many of the beliefs of which I am certain, simply because I have never even contemplated these consequences. In this context, then, certainty can be thought of as something like a proposition’s degree of justification.

8 Govier (1992, p. 403) offers a similar list of the types of inferential strength that premises can offer a conclusion. Although her list is stated in terms of the variety of ways in which the associated conditional of an argument (see below) could be formulated, I take her overall point to be very similar.
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not be accepted on the grounds that there are no other standards of evidence. As a result, deductivism as an interpretive thesis cannot be accepted a priori for purely evaluative reasons since arguers might be attempting to meet some lesser standard of evidence. For example, it would be wrong to invoke the Principle of Charity to justify interpreting a situated argument as deductive without some additional evidence that the arguers indeed are trying to meet the deductive standard of evidence. Since the arguers might be aiming at some lesser standard of evidence, to apply the deductive standard easily might attribute to those arguers a stronger position than that for which they are arguing. This would constitute a fallacious misrepresentation of their position.

Deductivism as an interpretive strategy, then, cannot be justified on the grounds that it is the only standard of evidence. Instead, the success of deductivism as an evaluative thesis depends on one or more of the following issues: (i) whether deductivism represents a standard of evidence to which all other standards of evidence are reducible; (ii) whether arguers in fact are attempting to meet the standard of evidence embodied in the rules of deduction (or that they ought to be); or finally (iii) whether deductivism represents a standard of evidence in which theorists ought to take a particular interest. In the remainder of this essay, I consider each of these options in turn.

Johnson (2000, p. 79) appears to make a similar criticism of deductivism, claiming that deductivism fails to meet his fourth adequacy condition for a theory of argument. This condition states roughly that the theory of appraisal must be "multivalent" (pp. 42–46) at least in the sense that it allows for "degrees of logical virtue" and "arguments exist in a continuum from strong to weak, with various points in between" (p. 54). But to state this simply as an adequacy condition, without first demonstrating that an argument in fact can possess one of several nonequivalent, nonreducible epistemic virtues (i.e., standards of evidence that an argument can meet) is to beg the question against deductivism understood as an evaluative thesis (cf. note 5 above).

5—THE REDUCIBILITY OF OTHER STANDARDS OF EVIDENCE TO DEDUCTIVISM

Some arguments for deductivism as an interpretive thesis can be read as claiming that all standards of evidence reduce to the deductive standard. While there are other standards of evidence, they can be represented on a deductive model, and as such effectively are reducible to the deductive standard. This argument is a modified version of the argument that, since deductivism is correct as an evaluative thesis, it also is correct as an interpretive thesis.

Deductivism [D1] claims that only one type of evidential connection obtains between premises and conclusions in good arguments: deductive validity. The reducibility of other evidential standards to the deductive one is explained in the following way. The "varying degrees of logical support" (i.e., our different standards of evidence) are not to be explained by "postulating nondeductive relationships between an argument's premises and conclusion" (Groarke, 1992, p. 115). Rather, weaker connections between premises and conclusions can be represented by qualifying either the conclusion or one or more of the premises (or perhaps also by adding a qualified premise). "The relative strength of ... two [different] arguments can thus be explained in terms of the relative strength of their (implicit) premises and does not require the claim that they assume different relationships between their premises and conclusion" (Groarke, 1992, p. 116). From this, Groarke (1992) concludes that "deductivism can distinguish different degrees of logical support, and more or less conclusive reasoning" (p. 116), and as such "deductivism cannot be dismissed on the grounds that it leaves no room for probable conclusions" (Groarke, 1995, p. 140). That is, Groarke feels that, while premises can offer differing degrees of logical support for their conclu-
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sions, these relationships can be represented in a model which holds that the only relationship between premises and conclusion is a deductive one.

5.1—Deductivism, Truth and Certainty

Against this, I argue that a reduction of this sort fails to recognize those properties that actually are preserved in deduction. As Groarke says, the deductive standard of validity preserves truth and certainty—it does not establish it. But, it only preserves truth and certainty; it is not designed to do otherwise. To see this, consider the following two examples.

First, consider a version of Kyburg’s (1961) paradox in which, among 1,000 tickets in a lottery, 1 ticket is guaranteed to win. Since we can say of each individual ticket that it is highly probable (99.9%) that it will not win, we could deduce (using the usual rules for conjunction and quantification) that it is highly probable that no ticket will win. But we know that this is false. Indeed, it is certain that one ticket will win; hence the paradox. Notice, though, that the lottery paradox cannot be articulated consistently when the expression true or certain is substituted for highly probable in the example. If it is true that each individual ticket will not win, then it cannot be true that one ticket is guaranteed to win.

Consider a second example: It is more likely than not that a person born in Scotland will have red hair; it is more likely than not that a person born with red hair will have green eyes; so, it is more likely than not that a person born in Scotland will have green eyes. This argument is clearly invalid. Further, it remains invalid when we substitute qualifiers like probable, plausible, or likely for more likely than not. Yet, as with the first example, if we replace the probabilistic qualifiers with truth or certainty, the argument becomes valid.

Deductive standards preserve truth and certainty; they do not preserve plausibility, probability, or likelihood. The deductive architecture fails to preserve the probability of premises even when these are expressed in unquantified terms, i.e., not as statistical percentages but as qualified terms. As such, qualifying premises will not help deduction to represent probabilistic arguments in any systematic fashion. Rather to regain this systematicity—indeed, to determine how, in a deductive architecture, properly to qualify argumentative claims that are less than true or certain—we need independent theories of plausibility and probability, whether an inductive logic, a theory of statistics, or something else. But a modified or qualified deductivism is not up to this task—at least not in any systematic way. Within a deductive architecture only ad hoc rules will provide the real standards by which probabilistic and plausibilistic evidential relationships are evaluated.

The point is this. The deductive standard of validity systematically preserves truth and certainty. But when this standard of evidence is used to represent properties other than truth or certainty, these properties fail to be preserved. Indeed, any property that is preserved by the deductive standard of validity

10 Kyburg (1970) suggests that the lottery paradox demonstrates that the classical (i.e., deductive) account of conjunction or quantification must be revised.
would be coextensive with truth and certainty. Any epistemic properties, or degrees of justification, that are not coextensive with truth are not preserved by deduction.

This is not to say that no reasoning or argument that begins from probabilistic premises and ends in a probabilistic conclusion can be deductively valid. Rather, the claim is that probability is not preserved in valid deduction. Instead, a series of ad hoc rules must be applied (in the form of qualifications to premises and conclusions) in order to allow the deductive system to represent non-deductive standards of evidence. Deductivism no longer can provide a systematic theory of argument evaluation. This loss of systematicity is explained by the fact that the deductive architecture does not preserve properties like probability. This can be seen by the fact that, when application of the deductive standard of evidence is restricted to arguments where truth or certainty is to be preserved, the systematicity of deduction is retained.

This loss of systematicity is not a mere theoretical inconvenience. Rather, it indicates that deductivism [D1] is not performing its job as advertised. That is, it does not provide a set of standards by which the inferential strength of all arguments can be evaluated properly. Instead, it provides standards by which arguments whose aim is to preserve truth or certainty are evaluated properly. When applied to arguments aimed at a lower standard of evidence, deductivism must be augmented by adjunct guidelines for qualifying premises and conclusions. In these cases, these guidelines—not the rules of deduction—provide the evaluative standards properly applicable to such arguments. Probabilistic and plausibilistic relationships between premises and conclusions are not properly reducible to deductive relationships between premises and conclusions because plausibility and probability neither reduce to, nor result in, truth or certainty.

### 5.2–Deductivism, Premises and Warrants

Reconstructive deductivism not only fails to recognize the properties that are preserved in deduction, but also fails properly to represent the nature of inference warrants as distinct from premises.

One of the deductivist's reconstructive strategies is to supply an argument with missing premises in such a way that the reconstructed argument is deductively valid. As Govier (1987) has observed, "[a]ny argument can be supplemented with extra premises in such a way as to make it deductively valid" (p. 25; cf. Groarke, 1999, p. 6). Indeed, there is a mechanical method for constructing such a premise, which I will call the associated conditional of the argument. To construct the associated conditional, simply take the conjunction of all of the premises of the argument as the antecedent of a material conditional whose consequent is the conclusion of that argument. Adding the associated conditional to the original premises of the argument results in a valid argument. That this can be done is cited by deductivists as evidence that any argument can be reconstructed as a deductive argument, and hence that non-deductive standards of evidence can be reduced to deductive ones (Groarke, 1999, pp. 6, 8).

A preliminary objection to this strategy is that it is not remarkably useful. Above I observed that deductivism evaluates arguments by considering the truth (or acceptability) of premises and the logical or evidentiary link between premises and conclusions. But if any argument can be rendered as deductively valid, then all argument assessment becomes a matter of determining premise acceptability. As Copi (1982, p. 62) has observed, in general the assessment of premises is a task for science, not logic. One

13 In some cases, supplying the associated conditional of an argument is not the only way to render it valid. Sometimes a more specific premise will do so better (see, e.g., Groarke, 1999, pp. 7–8).
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might qualify this claim to say that logic only helps to determine premises (or sets of premises) that are logically true or false, and does not assist in the assessment of contingent, mutually consistent premises. Thus, it is not clear that deductivism has any theoretical resources to offer when determining whether any valid argument should be accepted. Yet, in many cases where the inferential link between premises and conclusion is not overtly deductive, deductivism represents this problematic link as a premise (e.g., the associated conditional). Using this strategy, the very same arguments that are flawed because of a questionable inferential link will turn out to be flawed because of a problematic premise (e.g., the associated conditional). Thus, it is not at all clear what has been gained by rendering the argument as deductively valid.

Perhaps a more serious failure of this strategy is that it misrepresents the nature of warrants. According to Toulmin's (1958) model, data in an argument are "the facts we appeal to as a foundation for the claim," which, in turn, is the argument's conclusion (p. 97). By contrast, the warrant of an argument does not give additional information in support of a claim, but rather supplies a rule, principle or inference-license that legitimates the inferential leap from data to claim (Toulmin, 1958, p. 98). Toulmin (1958) claims that warrants can be expressed as "general, hypothetical statements, which can act as bridges, and authorise the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us" and have the general form "If D, then C" (p. 98). Regrettably, expressing a warrant as a conditional statement in this manner gives it the deceptive appearance of an additional premise offered in support of a claim. But, as we have just seen, warrants are categorically different from data. Only data, not the warrant, properly comprise the premises of an argument (Hitchcock, 2003, pp. 71–74).

As Govier (1992, p. 405) has observed, whenever the validity of an argument is achieved by supplying the associated conditional, we stand in danger of representing the arguer's warrant—the inference licence that is drawn upon in moving from premises to conclusion—as a premise in the argument. Observing that this move leads to an infinite regress, Lewis Carroll (1895) illustrated how this strategy fails to capture the difference between the role played by the premises and that played by the inferential link in an argument (cf. Johnson, 2000, pp. 73–75). It is one thing to make explicit the inferential link that is being employed in an argument. This link might be expressed as an inference-license or a Toulmin warrant. But it is a mistake to render this warrant as a premise in the argument.

6—DEDUCTIVISM AS A RECONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGY

So far, I have sought to establish that deductivism as an interpretive thesis cannot be supported on the grounds that it is universally applicable as an evaluative thesis. There are other standards of evidence that are neither equivalent nor reducible to the deductive standard. Moreover, the attempt to represent these standards in a deductive model has both practical and theoretical problems. Practically it does not contribute significantly to the assessment of the argument, and theoretically it risks misconstruing the nature of the warrants built on these differing standards of evidence.

6.1—Reconstructive Deductivism: An Issue of Semantics?

The question now becomes, what sources of available information might help settle the question whether an argument is properly reconstructed as aiming at a deductive stan-
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Standard of evidence? One type of information that we might be able to take directly from the argument itself comes from its indicator words. Groarke has suggested that the acceptability of deductivism as a reconstructive theory can be settled by asking whether it properly captures the semantics of the terms we usually employ and understand to indicate premises and conclusions. He claims: "The basis of my deductivism is an account of premise and conclusion indicators like 'therefore', 'so', 'hence', 'because', etc. According to deductivism, we should interpret such words as an announcement of a deductively valid inference" (1992, p. 114). In other words, Groarke (1992) says, "[o]ne might construe this difference between deductivism and nondeductivism as a difference between two competing accounts of the meaning of premise and conclusion indicators in ordinary language" (p. 114).

An initial problem with this strategy is that indicator words are not present in all arguments. So we would still require an interpretive strategy for arguments in which indicator words are not employed. A second, related problem is that this strategy seems to misconstrue the linguistic function of indicator words. We use the indicator words because our arguments have a certain structure; we do not say that arguments have a certain structure because certain indicator words occur in them (Godden, 1998). Put another way, the criteria for the proper employment of indicator words is given by the structure of our arguments, so we cannot say that the criteria for determining the structure of an argument can be given solely in terms of the occurrence of indicator words. There are two points here. First, there must be an independent set of criteria for determining the structure of an argument, since these criteria will be relied upon in determining how indicator words are used properly in an argument. As such, these are the criteria that should be primarily relied upon when trying to determine the structure of an argument being reconstructed. Second, any recourse to indicator words must consider not only their occurrence but the reasons for their use on that occasion (Godden, 1998). Arguers who do not use indicator words correctly can give misleading indications of the real or intended structure of their arguments.¹⁵

Beyond these initial problems lurks a larger problem. Despite his claim that the semantics of indicator words should be given by an account of ordinary language use, Groarke's final account seems to provide a stipulative rather than a reportive account of our use of indicator words. He limits the testimony of ordinary language users on this matter in two crucial ways. First, he claims that "it cannot be assumed that ordinary language is clearly committed to one or the other possibility [i.e., a deductive or nondeductive account]" (Groarke, 1992, p. 114). Second, he claims that ordinary linguistic practice is not a sacred cow that cannot be questioned. On the contrary, it is open to the logician to propose alternative accounts of the terms he or she uses if this better suits his or her purposes. (Groarke, 1992, p. 114)

Yet, these qualifications beg the question. Should we understand the proper use of indicator words as announcing the presence of an argument (i.e., the linguistic act of giving reasons), or should we understand them as announcing that arguers are aiming at a particular standard of evidence (i.e., the deductive standard)? The success of Groarke's interpretive thesis requires the latter, yet his semantic thesis does not justify this choice. Indeed, as Groarke himself admits, a reportive account of the ordinary use of indicator words might be used incorrectly not because an arguer misapplies it but because she misunderstands the structure of her argument. Insofar as its goal is to provide a representation that is attributable to some arguer, reconstruction should be concerned with the intended argument, including its misunderstood structure. That an arguer has misunderstood the evidential structure of her argument might be an interesting point to raise in one's commentary on, or evaluation of, the argument.

¹⁵ An indicator word might be used incorrectly not because an arguer misapplies it but because she misunderstands the structure of her argument. Insofar as its goal is to provide a representation that is attributable to some arguer, reconstruction should be concerned with the intended argument, including its misunderstood structure. That an arguer has misunderstood the evidential structure of her argument might be an interesting point to raise in one's commentary on, or evaluation of, the argument.
words seems to show that they are vague concerning any particular standard of evidence.

Finally, suppose that we accept Groarke's (1992) stipulative semantic thesis that deductivism properly gives our indicator words their "precise meaning which is retained in every context" (p. 114). Even so, the initial hermeneutical problem remains: how should we interpret those cases in which indicator words occur in an argument that is not "transparently deductive" (Groarke, 1999, p. 6) in structure? On a point similar to Quine's (1960, ch. 2), much of the linguistic and behavioural evidence that might be cited to demonstrate that arguers are constructing bad or incomplete deductive arguments could count equally toward the conclusion that arguers are misusing the indicator words, i.e., that they are not employing the indicator words properly as markers of deductive arguments. Thus, the interpretive question remains: Should our interpretive strategy be to attempt repair of a bad deductive argument, or should we instead ask, at what other standards of evidence the arguers might be aiming?

6.2-From Arguments to Arguers

So far, we have considered epistemological and semantic attempts to substantiate deductivism as an interpretive thesis. I have argued that each fails to establish deductivism as an interpretive thesis. Each failure points us toward the arguers as the source of the information that could authorize our interpretations of situated arguments. Indeed, Vorobej (1992) observes that omission of this source is very curious:

It is more or less standard practice to assume that the author of an argument is the best authority when it comes to identifying the premises and conclusion of his argument. Yet curiously, time and time again, accounts of critical thinking ... fail to address the third question of the strength of the logical link between the premises and the conclusion from the author's perspective. (p. 106)

How might facts about arguers contribute to the determination of the structure and content of their arguments? Gilbert (1995, 1997) insists that theorists who strive to reconstruct argumentative discourse accurately must consider the arguer's goals. Knowing about the arguer's goals enables us to learn about the standards of evidence at which they aim and to which they see themselves as committed. Similarly, Vorobej (1992) argues that "the classification of an argument as being deductive ought to rest exclusively upon psychological considerations" (p. 105). Specifically, he suggests that "[a]n argument is deductive if, and only if, the author of the argument believes that the truth of the premises necessitates (guarantees) the truth of the conclusion" (Vorobej, 1992, p. 105). Finally, Berg (1987) proposes that we consider the author's intentions: "the structure of an argument (as well as the content) is largely determined by the arguer's intentions. Consequently, extracting arguments from their textual surroundings is a matter of discerning intentions" (p. 14).

6.3-Intentions Versus Commitments

Deductivism strongly resists moves of this sort. Deductivists frequently claim that the theorist is not obliged to inquire after arguers' intentions (or any other psychological data about the arguer) because it is sufficient to study the arguer's commitments.

6.3.1-Commitment to the associated conditional. Indeed, it is by invoking the notion of commitment that deductivists defend the attribution of the associated conditional to an arguer. Groarke (1999), for instance, writes:

We can see that it is always possible to deductively reconstruct an argument which is not transparently deductive by noting that any arguer is committed to the statement that 'If the premises of my argument are true, then the conclusion is true.' This follows directly from the implications of the speech acts 'argument' and 'assertion,' for an arguer who argues for some conclusion C on the basis of some set of pre-
mises purports to believe both that C is true and that her proposed premises justify this belief. (p. 6)\(^\text{16}\)

Indeed, Groarke (1995) has gone so far as to say that putting forward an argument without being committed to the truth of the associated conditional of that argument “would imply a speech act which is insincere, futile and possibly even incomprehensible” (p. 141). This is the reasoning behind the deductivist’s claim that the missing premises supplied in a deductive reconstruction “are the implicit basis of . . . [the arguer’s] inferences” (Groarke, 1995, p. 144). Some have sought to defend the pragma-dialectical approach to argument reconstruction on the same grounds. For instance, Gerritsen (1994) writes that “[t]he pragma-dialectical analysis of unexpressed premisses is aimed at determining the speaker’s commitments [sic], not at reconstructing the speaker’s actual intentions” (p. 41).

Typically, attributing the associated conditional to an arguer is justified on the grounds that it is a uniquely minimal commitment. Indeed, the associated conditional is the weakest additional premise capable of rendering the argument deductively valid. Therefore, commitment to the associated conditional is construed as especially minimal and attribution of the associated conditional to an arguer is seen as charitable.

Sometimes, attributing the associated conditional even is construed as merely avoiding the attribution of any contradictory beliefs to an arguer. Now, it must be conceded that if an arguer, A, accepts that the premise(s), P, of an argument is (are) true and that its conclusion, C, is a consequence of its premise(s), then A could not consistently believe the negation of the conclusion, ~C. For the same reason, A could not consistently believe ~(P ⊃ C) because the content of this belief is logically equivalent to (P & ~C). So, to attribute to an arguer belief in the negation of the associated conditional is tantamount to attributing belief in the negation of the conclusion, and this is to attribute belief in a flat contradiction. Admittedly, to do this would be especially uncharitable. But does this mean that the principle of charity alone authorizes either placing the associated conditional among the commitments of an arguer, or directly attributing the associated conditional to an arguer by adding it to his or her avowed beliefs?

I argue that consistency does not commit an arguer to acceptance of the associated conditional, and the principle of charity does not license the attribution of the associated conditional to an arguer. While an arguer might not believe its negation, neither might he or she believe the conditional. The arguer might be agnostic with respect to the associated conditional, or might not have considered it at all. For instance, an arguer might believe that it is possible but very unlikely that the premises are true and the conclusion false. In this case, the arguer might believe that the negation of the conclusion is possible, but that the only state of affairs that could bring about the negation of the conditional is so improbable as to be unlikely ever to occur, and that no reasonable person would think that it would, even though there is no contradiction in supposing it. In this case, the person believes in neither the conditional nor its negation.

A larger point is hidden beneath the possibility of an arguer’s consistent agnosticism regarding the associated conditional. Arguers are committed to accepting the associated conditional only if they already are committed to the deductive standard of evidence—that is, if they are committed to the view that the truth of their conclusion is a consequence of the truth of their premises. Recall that the associated conditional is the weakest additional premise capable of rendering the original argument deductively valid.

Yet, given that arguers can aim at a variety of standards of evidence, a variety of conditional relationships can obtain between the premises and conclusions of their arguments (Govier, 1992, p. 403). "If we want to interpret the associated conditional as a material conditional, we can, but then on this interpretation, there isn’t such a conditional associated with every argument" (Govier, 1992, p. 404). Consequently, not all arguers are committed to the associated conditional, and not every argument can be reconstructed properly as deductively valid. Arguers engaged merely in giving reasons need not aim at the deductive standard of evidence, and hence they need not be bound by the commitments put upon an arguer who does so.

6.3.2—An arguer’s commitments. How ought the theorist to characterize and determine an arguer’s commitments? It should be admitted that coherent participation in the activity of arguing does commit arguers to the view that their premises justify (i.e., are good reasons for) their conclusions. But it does not follow that arguers are committed to the claim that their premises entail or imply (in a strict, logical sense) their conclusions. On the contrary, arguers are better said to be committed to claims like “my premises are good grounds for my conclusion”; “these reasons are good ones”; “my argument meets a certain standard of evidence”; or even “if you accept my reasons, you ought to accept my conclusion.” Perhaps the weakest standard of evidence is that employed in Vorobej’s (1992) “embryonic” argument, in which “the premises provide some rational support for the conclusion” (p. 112). The point is that the commitments of arguers ought to be determined in relation to the standard of evidence at which they are (or ought to be) aiming.

Indeed, recall Vorobej’s (1992) characterization of a deductive argument: “An argument is deductive if, and only if, the author of the argument believes that [D'] the truth of the premises necessitates (guarantees) the truth of the conclusion” (p. 105). Compare this with Groarke’s (1999) claim that “any arguer is committed to the statement that [D'] ‘If the premises of my argument are true, then the conclusion is true’” (p. 6). Notice that an arguer’s commitment [D'] on Groarke’s theory has the same content as the content [D'] of the belief that Vorobej uses as the criterion to determine whether or not an argument is deductive. Yet, Vorobej insists that this belief be attributed to an arguer solely on the basis of psychological data about the arguer. Groarke, on the other hand, suggests that we simply attribute this claim to the arguer with no additional inquiry. Such a move is justified only on the assumption that the arguer already is trying to meet the deductive standard of evidence. Yet, this is precisely what is at issue. To say that these deductivist commitments are a consequence of the speech acts we call arguing and asserting is to beg the question. Just as must be done with indicator words, theorists must determine whether words like argument are used to indicate the linguistic act of giving reasons, or whether they are tied to some particular standard of evidence, e.g., the deductive standard.

I claim that arguers do not have to aim at the deductive standard of evidence. Thus, arguers are not required to believe that it is not logically possible for their conclusion to be false given the truth of their premises. Rather, arguers must believe only that their arguments offer sufficient support for their respective conclusions when evaluated against the relevant required standard of evidence. The fault with the deductivist’s move to consider commitments rather than intentions is not intrinsic, but lies in the content of the commitments attributed to arguers. Arguers are bound by their commitments and their commitments are properly attributable to them. As such, commitments have an important role in the reconstruction, evaluation and criticism of arguments. The question is not whether commitments should have this kind of role in the theory of argument, but
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rather how an arguer’s commitments are to be determined. Deductivists assume a certain standard of evidence as being the only relevant one and attribute commitments on the basis of that assumption. But it is not justifiable to impute, categorically and a priori, the goal of meeting this standard of evidence to all arguers.

6.4—The Limitations of Intentions

Determining the commitments of arguers, and the structure and contents of the arguments they transact, must be achieved by turning to data about the arguers themselves. Admittedly, resorting to psychological considerations when trying to determine the content and structure of arguments poses several problems.

First, many arguers may not specifically intend their arguments as either inductive or deductive (Groarke, 1995, p. 144), or even as meeting any other well-defined standard of evidence. Yet, the problem with deductivism in this respect is not that it cannot produce this information; the problem is that deductivism never asks for this information in the first place. Deductivism fails to recognize the importance of Vorobej’s (1992) point: “If an author has a certain belief about the strength of the logical link within his argument, that matters” (p. 107). Indeed, as Vorobej (1992) continues:

The difficulty in making ... judgments about an author’s epistemic state is not in itself a good reason for saying we ought not to bother attempting to make them, given the important role they play within the enterprise of critical thinking. (p. 111)

Also, intentions are not the only relevant pieces of psychological data involved in the interpretation of argument. Like other transacted things, arguments have producers and consumers. The argument that is understood might be different from the argument that is intended. Wherever these are different, the hermeneutical problems associated with argument interpretation cannot be limited to the arguer’s intentions. Equally if not more significant is the matter of how the consumer understands the argument. Further, factors other than psychological facts about the arguer might be taken to indicate the relevant standard of evidence. These include “the context in which the argumentative passage appears, the actual logical relationship obtaining between the premises and the conclusion, [and] the logical form of the argument” (Vorobej, 1992, pp. 108–109). To this list, one might add facts about the situation or social context. For instance, in a court of law the standards of evidence are clear and are procedurally institutionalized. In this respect, we may justifiably assume that the goal of the arguer is to meet those standards. Yet, even considering such situationally imposed normative constraints, there remains an inference that the arguer is genuinely trying to meet the standard, rather than merely appearing to meet it. Therefore, facts about the intentions of the arguer are not only relevant but necessary to determine whether an argument aims at a deductive or some other standard, and thus how it ought to be analysed and reconstructed.

Finally, even acknowledging their importance, under certain circumstances we might want to give up on intentions and other psychological criteria. In many situations, the data that would settle the interpretive issue are perennially beyond our grasp or may not be forthcoming at all. For example, consider Descartes’s ‘argument’ in the cogito passage of the Meditations on First Philosophy. Different (yet inconsistent) interpretations are plausibly suggested by the text. Consulting Descartes is impossible and even if it were not, I suspect that Berg does not consider this scenario because his interpretive model has a rather particular argumentative situation in mind: viz. reading an argument in a text with the aim of evaluating it. Here audience and evaluator are one and the same, so the hermeneutical issue of what argument is understood disappears.
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Descartes might not have understood the issue as we frame it, and might not have intended one reading over another. In such situations, we might forego attempts to attribute an argument to the arguer and content ourselves with assessment of the argument as it circulates among us today.

This does not relieve us of the task of trying to interpret according to our best lights and using every possible resource in justifying the accuracy of our interpretation. But it does significantly change the goals of the overall projects of analysis and assessment. The goal of attributing an argument to an individual arguer (e.g., Descartes) would be abandoned. Instead of inquiring after Descartes's argument, we would attempt to determine the rational acceptability of a Cartesian position. We would not ask whether an arguer is justified in adopting or asserting a view, but rather ask whether that view is justifiable, that is, whether from a given set of propositions certain epistemic properties obtain between them.

7-Deductivism, Truth and Certainty Revisited

This brings me to the final reason for reconstructing an argument as deductive. One might want to interpret an argument as deductive because one has a particular theoretical interest in those properties that are preserved in deductive standards of evidence: truth and certainty. In this context, it is appropriate to ask whether an argument can be given an interpretation according to which it meets a certain standard of evidence.

Moreover, the significance of such inquiry is not entirely a function of the descriptive accuracy of its analytical model. For example, if a particular argument is incapable of establishing the truth of its conclusion, then this normative, epistemic fact might be theoretically interesting whether or not the standard of truth matters to the argument's producers and consumers. As Berg (1987) notes:

[If our aim is to find out whether the conclusion is true, the author's intentions do not matter at all; in such circumstances we should consider whatever plausible arguments we can think of for or against the conclusion, including those not even suggested by the text. (p. 18)]

In contrast, the mere fact that an argument can be evaluated according to a particular standard does not by itself make such an evaluation relevant. It is one task to evaluate an argument's epistemic merits, and an entirely separate task to establish the relevance of this evaluation to any instance of actual argumentation. To establish relevance, the theorist must establish that the evaluated argument can be attributed legitimately to an arguer. A theorist is not justified in attributing to an arguer an argument whose reconstruction has been guided by the theorist's interest in a particular standard of evidence, absent additional evidence of a psychological, contextual or situational nature.

So, when evaluating an argument, theorists may adopt any standard in which they have an interest. The merits of any evaluation will rest, in part, on the nature of those standards. But they also will rest on the relevance of those standards to the goals of other theorists and the arguers themselves.

7.1-Deductivism: Splitting the Defense

Its defenders have claimed that deductivism "can provide a basis for a fruitful approach to understanding and assessing natural language arguments" (Groarke, 1992, p. 113). My advice to the defense is that the defendants should be split, and that each should receive separate counsel.

Groarke (1992) claims that the plausibility of deductivism as a normative thesis is tied to its plausibility as a descriptive or interpretive thesis: "the plausibility of deductivism depends on, among other things, the plausibility of the 'reconstructive' strategy this [i.e., deductivism] implies" (p. 114). Here, Groarke makes a tactical error and demands too
much of his own position. It is certainly true that when arguers aim at the deductive standard of evidence, deductivism provides the relevant norms for evaluating their arguments. But deductivism might remain a good evaluative thesis even in cases where it is a bad interpretive one. Whether deductivism is a good (or appropriate) strategy at the descriptive and evaluative levels should be treated as separate issues.

Whether deductivism is a good evaluative thesis depends solely on the standards of evidence we want to uphold and bring to the evaluation of argument. In this respect, our attitude toward deductivism as an evaluative thesis should be governed only by considerations such as (i) our interest in this standard, and (ii) the ability of deductivism to uphold this standard. On the other hand, the viability of deductivism as an interpretive thesis depends on whether people actually argue deductively or whether they appeal to other standards of justification. It depends on whether people actually change their views on the basis of other considerations. As a descriptive thesis, deductivism depends solely on its accuracy in representing its subject matter, which cannot be determined without information about the arguers as well as about their arguments.

7.2—Implications

Since arguers can seek to meet a variety of standards of evidence, our interpretations and reconstructions of their argumentative acts cannot presuppose that they are trying to meet any one standard. This has general consequences for argumentation theory as a whole, as well as specific consequences for the tasks of argument interpretation and evaluation. A general consequence is that argumentation itself cannot be defined in relation to any one standard of evidence. Rather, argumentation must permit a plurality of standards of evidence against which individual arguments can be evaluated.

With regard to argument interpretation and evaluation, theorists must consider the relevance of the standard of evidence to the instance of argumentation under examination. The relevance of any standard of evidence can be established in at least two ways. First, a standard of evidence is descriptively relevant if it is the standard at which an arguer is, or ought to be, aiming. The determination of descriptive relevance must be based on contextual, situational evidence that normally will involve facts about the arguers themselves. Alternately, a standard of evidence can be theoretically relevant if a theorist has some particular interest in it.

Selection of an appropriate standard of evidence will guide the reconstructive process. For example, because an arguer’s tacit (or implicit) commitments often will be a function of the standards of evidence to which they are to be held rationally accountable, determination of the appropriate standard of evidence will be a crucial step in the reconstructive process. Similarly, the interpretive principle of charity can be applied only relative to this appropriate standard of evidence. While reconstruction need not employ a descriptively relevant standard of evidence, failure to do so will jeopardize its accuracy. To evaluate an argument against a standard of evidence that is not descriptively accurate is, in a sense, to evaluate it out of context. It would seem, then, that theorists interested in the analysis and evaluation of particular, situated instances of argumentation must take a special interest in descriptively relevant standards of evidence.

References

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