

In contrast to historical considerations of argument by such philosophers as Plato and Descartes who believe an argument must be conclusive to be good, in contrast to formal logicians whom believe that a good argument is sound and its premises should be true and its conclusion follow from its premises, and lastly in contrast to informal logicians that base good arguments on their avoidance of fallacies (180), Johnson proposes a new theory for the evaluation of the “goodness” of arguments based on the following criteria: acceptability, truth, relevance, sufficiency.

key definitions within Johnson’s work are what is a **good argument** and what is the **purpose of argument**. He answers both questions with the same answer when he writes, “rational persuasion”. For Johnson, “goodness” lays in “those qualities that are necessary for the argument to achieve the goal of rational persuasion”(189), and the purpose itself is rational persuasion.

Johnson’s model has two levels.

- 1) The illative core (structural level): the reasons given for the conclusion.
- 2) The dialectical tier: dialectical obligations.

Johnson’s illative core is built upon the Pragmatic Approach as it looks at argument “in terms of its purpose”(190). His purpose as aforementioned is rational persuasion, therefore one must now look in depth at the criteria that the structural level must adhere to in order to successfully fulfill its purpose.

Acceptability as a criterion is stronger than acceptance and explained by Johnson as so, for when the addressee accepts the premise they do so for good reason, maintaining the integrity of the rational component of said persuasion. Acceptance without reason is neither ground for good, nor rational, nor persuasive argumentation. With this model the burden of proof lies with the arguer.

Truth as a criterion is in opposition to Hamblin. Here Johnson claims that truth in premises is an implicit evaluator found in fallacy theory(198), and as such infers that premises are evaluated upon notions of truth. Johnson does not define to what degree of truth his premises must adhere, but acknowledges that it must be done.

Relevance as a criterion is explained with a definition by Grice when Johnson writes, “interventions are expected to be relevant” and in a metaphor by Johnson, “one unit paves the way for the next one”, by these definitions relevance suggests a logical progression whereby someone present for the whole of the argument would not wonder why something has been brought up, or to what it adheres to. Relevance is further clarified when Johnson explains that relevance is pragmatic and is tied to each premise’s individual context.

Sufficiency as a criterion requires that premises have enough evidence and that each piece of evidence in and of itself is adequate/sufficient. Like the other criterions degrees of sufficiency relative to their contexts still need to be made into something quantifiable/measurable.

It is interesting to note that in chapter seven’s thesis area, or where Johnson introduces his criteria for evaluation, he lists them as follows: relevance, sufficiency, acceptability, and truth. However, in the body of his essay he addresses them in the order: acceptability, truth, relevance, sufficiency. It is highly unorthodox to change the order of one’s arguments once already delivered. Are arguments not normally listed in order of their strength? If so, why does Johnson explain his least developed argument criterion last. Johnson writes, “Suffice to say, a great deal more work needs to be done on

sufficiency as a criterion of argument...”(205). His original order ending with the truth criterion, rhetorically, appeared to better suit the paper. Does the order matter to the evaluation process, meaning would the evaluator move through Johnson’s criteria in a logical order, or does each requirement stand alone, waited with the exact same strength of importance to the overall rational persuasiveness of an argument?