

Arguments for Rhetorical Arguments: A Response to Aikin

Argumentos para los argumentos retóricos: Una respuesta a Aikin

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Abstract: In two well-argued papers, Scott Aikin recently challenged the rhetorical theory of argument (RTA) by claiming that it is self-refuting. This paper deals with the arguments presented by showing that these objections can be rejected by taking into account normative and cognitive specification within RTA. After having interpreted Aikin's arguments, we show that one cause for his belief that RTA is self-refuting is the belief that an argument should guarantee its conclusion's truth as far as possible. However, neither RTA nor many other theories of argumentation see the guarantee of truth as a condition for being a good argument. We will identify contextual doubt as the main problem for RTA: because RTA openly states that arguments are devised for eliciting assent, audiences might fear deception by the arguer. In order to show that there is no reason for greater contextual doubt about arguments that are presented under RTA than under any other theory of argument, the idea of 'reasonable adherence' as the real goal of rhetorical argumentation is introduced. For achieving reasonable adherence, an arguer has to fulfill certain normative and cognitive standards that justify trusting the arguments presented. Therefore, RTA is not self-refuting.

Keywords: Aikin, audience, cognitive environment, rhetorical theory of argument, self-refutation.

Resumen: En dos muy bien argumentados trabajos, Scott Aikin desafió la teoría retórica del argumento (RTA), manteniendo que se auto-refuta. Este trabajo trata los

argumentos presentados mostrando que estas objeciones pueden ser rechazadas considerando una explicación normativa y una especificación cognitiva dentro de RTA. Luego de haber interpretado los argumentos de Aikin, mostramos que una causa para su creencia de que RTA se auto-refuta es la creencia de que un argumento debería garantizar la verdad de su conclusión tan lejos como sea posible. Sin embargo, ni la RTA ni muchas otras teorías de la argumentación ven la garantía de verdad como una condición para un buen argumento. Identificaremos las dudas contextuales como el principal problema para RTA: porque la RTA abiertamente mantiene que los argumentos son expresados para elicitare pretensiones, las audiencias podrían temer el engaño por parte del argumentador. Para mostrar que no hay ninguna razón para pensar que la idea de duda contextual presentada por la RTA es más grande que otra teoría del argumento, se introduce la idea de ‘adherencia razonable’ como la meta real de la argumentación retórica. Para alcanzar la adherencia razonable, un argumentador tiene que satisfacer ciertos estándares normativos y cognitivos que justifiquen la confianza en los argumentos presentados. Así respaldada, la RTA no se auto-refuta.

Palabras clave: Aikin, ambiente cognitivo, audiencia, auto-refutación, teoría retórica del argumento.

1. Introduction

Since Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca published their *La Nouvelle Rhétorique* in 1958,¹ interest in argument and rhetoric has developed into an influential branch of argumentation theory. Traced back to Aristotle’s triad of logic, dialectic and rhetoric by a number of its adherents, the rhetorical theory of argumentation has received serious attention and development in recent decades. But from its beginning, it has had to deal with a number of objections that are based on an older conception of rhetoric according to which the rhetorician is a deceptive puppet player who uses the mastery of language to exploit an audience’s biases or a flowery decorator who dresses truth discovered with other means in pretty clothes. And more recent scrutiny has questioned the role the rhetorical perspective should play in relation to the logical or dialectical (see van Eemeren, 2010), or even whether a distinction of perspectives based on the Aristotelian triad is viable (Blair, 2012; Johnson, 2009). The strongest arguments against the very idea of a rhetorical theory of argument, however, come from Scott Aikin in two recent papers (Aikin, 2008, 2011). According to him, the rhetorical theory

¹ All citations in this paper are to the English translation (1969).

of argument (RTA) is self-refuting (as we will see this objection is linked to both the idea of the rhetor as a puppet player and the idea that rhetoric cannot discover truths).

Aikin has the following conception of RTA: To agents of RTA, rhetoric is more than an important *part* of argumentation theory - instead "*all argumentative standards, even logical standards, are audience dependent*" (Aikin, 2011, p. 81). Aikin ascribes this view to Perelman, Crosswhite, Tindale and others and identifies two connected commitments that he determines as being the core of RTA:

R1: Arguments are speech acts performed for the sake of eliciting assent or increasing commitment in an addressed audience.

R2: Arguments are to be assessed according to their effectiveness in eliciting the assent or increasing the commitment sought in their addressed audience. (Aikin, 2011, p. 81)

Aikin evaluates this theory and especially those two commitments *as a conclusion that is being argued for*. He claims that the theory, seen from this perspective, is self-refuting.

R1 and R2 play a double role in his arguments: First, they are the conclusion that the agents of the RTA have to argue for. Second, as the agents of RTA are committed to their theory, they also provide the standards by which the arguments presented have to be evaluated. Aikin bases his arguments on an interesting consequence of this double role: The arguments the agents of RTA provide for their claim that good arguments have to elicit assent and increase commitment in their audience have to meet these standards themselves. They, too, have to *elicit assent and increase commitment in their audience*.

Aikin tries to show that this leads to self-defeat by presenting two interconnected arguments:

- 1) He, as a member of the target audience of the arguments the agents of RTA provide, is not convinced. The arguments for RTA therefore must be bad according to its own standards. (Aikin, 2011)
- 2) No-one committed to R1 and R2 can be convinced by arguments for R1 and R2: If he was convinced by R1 and R2, he would have to endorse the statement that these arguments are devised only

to elicit his assent to R1 and R2. They might therefore be based on his subjective beliefs and prejudices rather than on objective facts. Knowing this, he would not be able to fully commit himself to the truth of R1 and R2. Having failed to elicit his commitment to the truth of R1 and R2, the arguments for RTA must be bad arguments. Endorsement of R1 and R2 leads to rejection of R1 and R2. (Aikin, 2008, 2011)

In his 2008 paper, Aikin goes on to evaluate strategies agents for RTA have for strengthening RTA by modifying the kind of acceptance that is demanded for good arguments: A good argument generates *reasonable acceptance*. He identifies two conditions that have to be met by the arguments in order to elicit reasonable acceptance: They have to (a) meet certain ethical standards and (b) they have to convince a reasonable audience by using audience-relevant premises that are manifest in the audience's cognitive environment.

However, Aikin claims that there is “no obvious connection” between the quality of an argument and the ethical standards the arguer adhered to while creating the argument. He then goes on to evaluate the role of the cognitive environment and claims that it might solve the self-refutation problem of RTA, but it does so only by introducing audience-independent standards into RTA (Aikin, 2008).

In the following, we will look more closely at Aikin's arguments. We will deal with the first argument he provides by specifying the nature of the audience of arguments for RTA and by suggesting what happens when a member of the audience declares he is not convinced.

The core of the second argument Aikin presents seems to be his belief that only arguments aiming at and more or less guaranteeing truth can generate unqualified (or only moderately qualified) assent. We will challenge this view and argue that the special relationship between arguer and audience in a case of philosophical argumentation can generate a certain kind of trust that is sufficient for generating (almost) unqualified assent.

By answering Aikin's critique, we will make use of the two strategies Aikin describes in his 2008 paper. However, we hope that it will become clear that the ethical condition is much more important than Aikin wants to acknowledge. Furthermore, we do not share Aikin's belief that the use of

the cognitive environment to determine what reasonable argumentation is introduces audience-independent standards into RTA.

2. I am not convinced

“The quick and dirty way is as follows. I’ve been exposed to the arguments for the rhetorical theory, and they did not convince me. So, by R2, they must not be very good arguments.” (Aikin, 2011, p. 83). To be exact, one would have to point out that this is *not* an argument for the claim that RTA is self-defeating. Rather, it is a demonstration of how easy it is (would be) to defeat RTA, and therefore an argument for the extreme vulnerability of RTA.

But is RTA really this vulnerable? Aikin himself considers one possible way of immunizing RTA against being refuted by the simple claim that one is not convinced: By excluding Naysayers from the target audience of the arguments for RTA. He points out, however, that judged by the characteristics he possesses, he should in fact belong to the target audience.²

Immunizing RTA this way is dangerous. The move Aikin deals with here is made possible by an aspect of how the audience is characterized by prominent RTA theorists: Arguments usually are not made to convince every being capable of reasoning in time and space, but a target audience. This audience is a construction of the arguer. We can find this idea in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 19), Tindale (1999, p. 85), and Crosswhite (1996, p. 137).

If the way the arguer constructs his audience was not restricted by other determinations of target audiences, then this characteristic would provide the arguer with an *ad hoc* argument that is always available for defending the worth of his reasoning: *You would be convinced if I had wanted to convince you.*

Such *ad hoc* defenses, if used too often, have a way of disqualifying the theory they are meant to protect, and this would be the case here, too. For if RTA allowed this way of defending arguments without limitation then it

² He is a member of the group Crosswhite explicitly addresses in his writings and he considers himself reasonable enough to be a member of the universal audience.

would lose its power of distinguishing better from worse arguments. That would devalue it as a theory of argumentation.

However, agents of RTA give restrictions for the construction of the target audience. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, just after stating that the audience is a construction of the arguer, add that this construction has to be “adequate to the occasion” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 19). Crosswhite claims that the value of an argument is dependent on the audience it would convince and that an argument is successful if the real audience actually does fulfill the role of the implied audience (Crosswhite, 1996, p. 139). These claims are both rather vague, and that is no surprise: They are meant to be adequate for *every* case of argumentation – and argumentation can be aimed at very specific audiences. The evaluation of an arguer’s conceptualization of his audience has to be just as adequate to the occasion as the construction itself.

In his paper, Aikin demonstrates that he is in fact part of the target audience of one of the agents of RTA, insofar as he is identified as belonging to Crosswhite’s specific audience. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, he claims (and rightly so) that he is a reasonable person and therefore a representative of the main audience for the arguments for RTA: the universal audience.

In this observation, Aikin invokes a key tool of rhetorical argumentation, but one that has never escaped the vagueness with which Perelman cloaked it. The concept of the universal audience continues to be a complicated and controversial as it is important. Suffice it to say that we cannot resolve here all the problems associated with this notion. What we will do is explain our own understanding of how it operates, both in Perelman’s philosophy and in rhetorical argumentation generally, and then later explain how it can be used to address the criticisms of Aikin’s paper. In the course of this we will draw on Aikin’s own reading of the universal audience (Aikin, 2008a), since it contributes to his understanding of the merits of rhetorical argumentation and his reasons for rejecting it.

The universal audience, like any other audience, is a construction of the arguer (e.g. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 28-30). Importantly, it is not a completely abstract notion, but instead gets constructed based on the knowledge about actual, specific audiences by aiming for the extraction of their universalizable characteristics (Tindale, 2004, p. 128). It

is the ‘universal’ of the universal audience that provides most of the distraction, conjuring up ideas of independent standards of acceptance. There is no obvious substitute for ‘universal’, but Perelman has led the response in explaining that this is not the atemporal, objective standard of traditional philosophy (Perelman, 1989, p. 269). This is because universal audiences are inseparable from the particular audiences in which they operate and that express them. The universal audience is the standard of reasonableness at work within particular audiences that acts as a check against the biases and inclinations of those audiences. Thus, when Perelman invokes argumentation as aiming at the adherence of audiences, he understands adherence in a highly complex way (Tindale, 2010). Certainly, adherence involves more than just the effectiveness of argumentation, as some critics have maintained. Aikin understands this, interpreting two aspects of the universal audience, one that is pragmatic and the other epistemic (Aikin, 2008a, p. 242). In this way he (perhaps unintentionally) stays true to a key insight of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, when they ask: “Is a strong argument an *effective* argument which gains the adherence of the audience, or is it a *valid* argument, which ought to gain it?” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 463). This dual standard does indeed suggest objectivity in its reference to validity, and this would be consistent with how Aikin reads the need for validity in his epistemic version of the universal audience. But as we will see later when exploring the related concept of the cognitive environment, ideas like the dual standard of Perelman do not necessarily require independence, as Aikin suggests when he writes that the epistemic universal audience “serves the *purpose* of defining validity, and in turn, it defines *facts, truths, and universal values* that may obtain independent of universal adherence” (2008a, p. 242).³ The validity requirement of a strong argument brings back the universal audience as an element in the evaluation of argumentation, and not just its construction. But audiences operate within cognitive environments, and it is within those environments that the nature of facts and “truths” are determined through the operations of the changing face of reason. We will return to this idea.

³ Aikin is supported in this reading by the interpretation of Alan Gross, who agrees that facts “*are true assertions about the world*” (Gross, 1999, p. 205).

As Aikin can claim to belong to a universal audience (as well as to the more specific audience the arguments for RTA are presented to), it is the goal of the agents of RTA to convince a person like Aikin with their arguments. However, the argumentation presented for RTA targets a very heterogeneous audience – the audience of philosophic journals, books etc. in particular and the associated general universal audiences –that means everyone who can call themselves reasonable. This means the arguer cannot concentrate on every subjective feature that might stand in the way of convincing every single specific part of the audience. Concentrating on these features might not even be a good move: “It is extremely easy for the opponent of an incautious speaker to turn against him all the arguments he directed to the different parts of the audience, either by setting the arguments against each other so as to show their incompatibility or presenting them to those they were not meant for” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 31). And even if such arguments are not incompatible (as they should not be if the argumentation is also aimed at the related universal audience), dealing with every possible problem found in the subjectivity of every part of the audience might lead to argumentation that is unnecessarily long and complicated. These problems are one of the reasons why an arguer might turn to the universal audience, in search of arguments he can use to convince an ideal audience, free from prejudices and with a more or less predictable set of premises it will accept (see Crosswhite, 1996, p. 148). Convincing a specific audience is a very complex matter that is reliant on close interaction with that audience. The author has to adapt the argumentation to this specific audience’s characteristics and understand their specific cognitive environment, as well as knowing their specific prejudices, cognitive capacities etc., in order to be able to work with them.

Rhetorical argumentation is essentially dialogical; every argument is composed with the audience in mind and directed at its possible replies. (Tindale, 2004, p. 98 ff; we will return to this topic below). However, if an audience is as heterogeneous as that of the arguments for RTA, not every possible reply can be anticipated in the first formulations of the arguments and therefore conviction of every single member of the target audience cannot be expected. Because of this situation, the arguments for RTA have to aim at eliciting assent and creating a positive stance to RTA in as many audience members as possible rather than gaining the assent of every single au-

dience member. Aikin cites a number of statements made by agents of RTA that define the goal of argumentation. None of these statements actually implies that a good argument must gain the assent of every single member of the audience. Instead, it has to “create or increase adherence” (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 45), and it is judged “strong or weak according to the degrees to which this is accomplished” (Tindale, 1999, pp. 85-86).

However, insofar as the objections a specific audience puts forward are of interest to the more general audience of certain arguments, they should be dealt with. Aikin puts forth such an argument with his second claim, that RTA is self-refuting. As this argument is reasonable and well supported, it is of interest not only to Aikin as a very specific audience, but also to the broader audience of the philosophic community, and therefore to every reasonable person. While the fact that Aikin as a single person is not convinced does not make the argument for RTA bad by itself, his not being convinced as a member of these more general audiences poses a problem. In his papers, he represents these general audiences with his objections to RTA, especially his self-refutation claim. We will therefore have to answer his objections to protect the arguments for RTA.

3. A first attempt at understanding Aikin’s self-defeat argument

At the base of Aikin’s second argument against RTA is his distinction between unqualified and qualified assent. A person gives her unqualified assent to a claim, proposition or belief if she does not only find herself convinced of the claim, proposition or belief, but also fully asserts its *truth*. Qualified assent, in contrast, is given when a person recognizes herself being convinced by the claim, proposition or belief, but is not able to fully assert the truth of the claim, proposition or belief (Aikin, 2011, pp. 7-8). Giving one’s assent in an unqualified way takes the form of a simple claim: “When we are convinced of our beliefs’ truth, we just assert them unvarnished: we just say “p”” (Aikin, 2011, p. 85). However, there are a number of ways to qualify one’s belief. Here are a few examples Aikin gives:

(1) *I believe that p.*

(4) *I was convinced by A to accept p, but A is a bad argument for p.*

(5) *I hold that p is true, but for reasons that have nothing directly to do with p's truth.*

(6) *I hold that p is true on the basis of an argument devised only to elicit my assent to p.* (Aikin, 2011, pp. 85-86)

According to Aikin, unqualified belief is *reality centered*, it is held on the basis of *facts*, not the subject's inclinations, beliefs and unique standards. What follows from this is that a consistent person will qualify every belief she has reason to suspect of having formed in her mind under the influence of her subjective characteristics (e.g. prejudices, idiosyncrasies, but also assumptions and mere beliefs).

How, then, can argumentation elicit *unqualified* assent in a person?

Arguments, if they have to fulfill both the standard of eliciting unqualified belief in this sense and the standard formulated in R2 are good only if they - in addition to persuading their audience - guarantee the truth of their claim beyond doubt.⁴ Argumentation aims at truth. If it cannot guarantee truth, then it will not be able to fully convince. Under these circumstances, RTA would in fact be self-contradictory. Let us follow Aikin's argument:

Someone who holds that RTA and R1 and R2 are true will believe this on the basis of arguments A1, A2,... An. However, as these arguments are presented by agents of RTA, and as these agents claim that all argumentation is rhetorical, she will know that these arguments will be devised for eliciting her assent. Instead of being restricted to making use only of facts etc., they will be free to make use of her beliefs, inclinations etc. Because she knows this, she will not be able to give unqualified assent to RTA, the theory these arguments are made to support. She will have to endorse sentence (6). Therefore, she will not be able to believe that R1 and R2 are true on the basis of arguments given for R1 and R2. By the standard of R2, these arguments must be bad. She will therefore also endorse sentence (4): I was convinced by A to accept p, but A is a bad argument for p.

Aikin's point seems valid: It is impossible to give unqualified assent to RTA on the basis of arguments made by someone who endorses RTA.

However, let us go back to our interpretation of Aikin's idea of a good argument according to RTA: Because of R2, an argument is good only if it

⁴ Even "I believe p" was categorized as qualified assent by Aikin, as can be seen above.

elicits assent in its author's target-audience. According to the qualified/unqualified assent distinction, R2 is fulfilled only if an argument guarantees the truth of its conclusion because only then does it allow its audience to give its unqualified assent to the conclusion.

Interesting here is the second point, for it seems that by endorsing it, Aikin would introduce one of two things into the discussion:

- 1) An additional condition of goodness for arguments: That they create *unqualified* assent and therefore that they guarantee truth. Any argument that cannot create unqualified assent is a bad argument, by some degree.
- 2) A descriptive assumption about human beings: That they will be content only with unqualified assent, that is, that they will evaluate arguments as convincing only if they guarantee truth.

The grounds for interpreting Aikin this way arise from the following: "*If R2 is true, then the arguments must not be particularly good arguments, because the quality of an argument is determined by the degree of adherence. Since this is qualified assent, the argument must not be effective, and hence, on R2, is not a good argument.*" (Aikin, 2011, p. 87)

Here it seems that any argument that elicits only qualified assent is therefore not convincing enough to be anything but a bad argument. It therefore seems as if we either *should* not be sufficiently convinced by any argument that does not guarantee truth, or we *will* not be sufficiently convinced by any argument that does not guarantee truth. (It seems being really convinced is not possible in a qualified way. Perhaps that is why sentence four uses the past tense: "(4) I *was* convinced by A to accept p, but A is a bad argument for p." [Italics not in the original] (Aikin, 2011 p. 86)).

There are, however, two problems with this:

- 1) Most arguments that would be judged good under the terms of most theories of argumentation (not only RTA) cannot guarantee truth, not even under the condition that the premises are guaranteed to be true – which is rarely the case. And many people often act as if they were convinced by such arguments, fully knowing they do not guarantee truth.

- 2) The rhetorical theory of argument does not see arguments as a tool for arriving at a guarantee for truth. Perelman, for example, makes an explicit distinction between argumentation and correct demonstration. While correct demonstration is truth preserving, argumentation is not (Perelman, 1982, p. 9ff). Argumentation in this sense deals with dialectical reasoning: “As a consequence, it is necessary that we clearly distinguish analytical from dialectical reasoning, the former dealing with truth and the latter with justifiable opinion.” (Perelman, 1982, p. 3). Agents of RTA would therefore not accept the demand for unqualified assent into their theory. However, it is this demand that causes the self-defeat problem.

Interpreted this way, Aikin’s critique rests on rather unreliable assumptions. We must have interpreted him wrong: He cannot have meant that *any* kind of qualified assent is a reason for not calling an argument good.

4. Truth, qualified assent and contextual doubt

If we examine our beliefs carefully and are honest with ourselves, then we will realize that our assent of most of these beliefs is qualified to some degree. For most of our beliefs, we do not have a justification that guarantees their truth. However, we still hold onto our beliefs, often based on the reasons we have for them. It seems that not every qualification of our beliefs stops us from holding them based on the reasons we have for them. Reasons, even if they do not guarantee the truth of a belief, seem to still be good reasons (sometimes the best we can imagine to be available). Analogously, we can assume that having to qualify our assent to a claim we accept based on arguments does not automatically mean that we are no longer convinced by the claim. The important thing seems to be *how* we have to qualify our assent, not *that* we have to qualify it.

Aikin seems to believe that knowledge of R1 and R2 in regard to the arguments for RTA causes us to qualify our assent for RTA in a way that diminishes our conviction of RTA enough for the arguments to fail to convince us. Then, by the standard of R2, they are bad arguments. What are his reasons for believing this?

On Aikin's terms, argumentation should give us truths, but according to R2 it cannot do that – it can only give us assent: “For there to be a tight connection between assessing oneself to be committed to a proposition and holding that proposition true, one must take oneself to hold the commitment on the basis of reasons indicative of that proposition's truth, not reasons designed to elicit assent” (Aikin, 2011, p. 86).

The concept of truth behind these thoughts is an objective concept of truth: Aikin makes a strict distinction between facts on the one hand and subjective beliefs on the other: A fact is what is actually true. A belief is what one holds to be true – but that could be true or not. For argumentation to give us truths, it has to be concerned only with facts. It cannot be based on subjective beliefs. R1 and R2 openly focus on the adherence of subjects instead of the correspondence to reality. It follows that arguers convinced of R1 and R2 will build their arguments based on beliefs etc., instead of on facts. Such arguments cannot give us truth in Aikin's sense.

However, this concept of truth is highly problematic itself. In 2000 years, no guaranteed way of arriving at truths has been found, and there is no reason to believe any such discovery is imminent. But we have to argue now and we have to come to conclusions within limited time. Argumentation cannot be evaluated by asking whether it gives us this kind of truth – there would be no good arguments then.

Here lies a real difference in perspective between Aikin and agents of RTA. According to Aikin, argumentation has to give us objective truths for it to be good. Agents of RTA do not believe this. To them, what counts as truth (or facts) is community determined. By creating agreement, understanding, or by opening up new perspectives, argumentation plays its role in the development of these truths. It is judged on how effectively it meets the ends it aspires to meet.

This does not necessarily defeat Aikin's argument. When people express qualification for their beliefs, they usually do not do so only because they do not want to claim that what they believe is a full blown objective Truth with the capital T. Often such qualification shows that the qualifying person is not actually convinced. If the reaction to an argument is such a strong qualification, then the argument might not have met its goal. Aikin himself gives a good example of such a case: He claims to have been convinced by almost anything that President Bill Clinton said, but also claims that he

would not therefore say that what Bill Clinton said was true (Aikin, 2011, p. 85).

Such a thing happens. We feel convinced by someone's arguments, but because we are aware of our own biases and shortcomings, or of that person's shortcomings, we disregard this conviction as (possibly) deceptive. Often, reacting this way is very appropriate, for example if we are the audience of a notorious liar, under the influence of drugs, or if we know that we are biased in a certain way. We might feel a strong inclination to give assent and adopt the claim argued for, but we do not, or do so only very tentatively, because we have good reason for doubt. In the case of the notorious liar, we can find his arguments convincing as far as the premises presented are acceptable, but we cannot trust the one presenting the premises and we do not ourselves have the means to test them. Then we might give our assent, but qualify it by adding: "...if what you say is reliable." When cautious because of our own biases, we might not trust our own reasoning, or our own way of weighing premises and we might qualify by saying: "... as far as I can see."

The reasons we have just seen for qualifying one's assent are of a special kind: They are contextual reasons. The flaw that stops us from giving our assent without qualification does not lie in the 'product' argument presented, but in the context in which the argument is presented – we doubt the validity of the argument not because we find a flaw in it, but because we know of a flaw in us or in the arguer, and so forth, that might keep us from finding a flaw in the argument. We qualify our assent because of *contextual doubt*. Contextual doubt can cause us to qualify our assent to a degree that we are not at all convinced of the conclusion.

If an arguer presents his arguments in ways that lead to such a reaction, then, by R2, his arguments will have to be evaluated as bad arguments. The question we have to ask therefore is whether knowledge of R1 and R2 causes contextual doubt so strong that every audience gives considerable qualification to their assent.

Aikin claims that anyone who believes in RTA on the basis of arguments A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n has to endorse the following statement: "(11) A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n are devised only to elicit my assent with regard to R1 and R2 and are to be evaluated according to how well they elicit my assent" (Aikin, 2011, p. 87). He seems to believe that this statement is reason for a contextual doubt so

strong that it diminishes the achieved conviction enough for the arguments presented to be bad.

We can in fact see that this statement could cause someone to endorse two other connected statements that give good reason for contextual doubt:

- 1) A1, A2,... An, might be based on subjective beliefs I hold and work with inclinations I have that are wrong or valueless.
- 2) An arguer who devises his arguments only to elicit my assent will not abstain from using such wrong or valueless subjective beliefs or inclinations.

While there seems to be reason for believing 1) whenever an audience member has to evaluate an argument herself and decide whether she will give her assent to the conclusion, 2) seems to be specific to RTA. However, if 2) is true, then an audience member might think the problematic scenario described in 1) is the reality in this case of arguing.

Endorsing statement (11) might lead to a strong qualification of the assent to RTA because it gives reason for fearing deception – both by the arguer and by one's own mind. It is the fear of deception that lies at the heart of the argument that RTA is self-defeating. If the only standard for evaluating arguments is gaining assent, and if arguments are based only on subjective beliefs instead of objective facts, then there is never a guarantee that we have not been deceived by the arguer or our own biases in the absence of independent criteria for the goodness of arguments.

According to this interpretation, the reason why RTA might end up self-defeating is a problem of ethos – it seems that an agent of RTA, just because he is an agent of RTA and therefore bound to its view on arguments, fails at establishing trust in his audience. That is a problem, for ethos (along with logos and pathos) is one of the important factors agents of RTA identify in argumentation:⁵ It involves the arguer's ability to create trust in his audience and so create trust in the arguments presented and prevent contextual doubt.

If the claim that RTA is self-defeating due to contextual doubt can be

⁵ For a detailed discussion of ethos and pathos, see Tindale (2004, pp. 19-24).

refuted, then in showing that there is no reason for distrusting the arguments presented, the agents of RTA have to improve the ethotic element in their arguing.

Luckily, as we noted earlier, effectiveness is not the only criterion for assessing argument known to RTA. Agents for RTA also ask for arguments to be reasonable. Therefore, explaining the sense in which RTA uses the notion of reasonableness in arguments is the most obvious way of re-establishing trust in their arguments. It is the role of the universal audience to determine the reasonableness of arguments. We will have to show that the notion of the universal audience and the ethical consideration connected to it are enough for eliminating contextual doubts. In addition, we will need to show why RTA does not include audience-independent criteria for goodness of argument that would make such ethical determination unnecessary.⁶

5. Ethics, cognitive environments and trust

Aikin cites the following claim in his papers: *[T]he rhetorical is the vehicle for the development of the logical, for the logical is a product of audience and can be nothing more, nor less.*" (Tindale, 2004, p. 143). This claim appropriately represents the radical way in which rhetoric is conceived of as the basis for everything that happens in argumentation. Logic (and especially deductive logic) is usually seen as an unmoving standard for reasoning. It has been criticised by the recent movement in argumentation theory and informal logic. But this critique has usually left untouched the idea that logical standards are infallible and need no further justification. Instead, the complaint has been that logic was too restrictive because it oppresses the creative element in argumentation and evaluates arguments as invalid that are in fact valuable (see e.g. Johnson, 2000, p. 58ff).

The claim that the rhetorical is the vehicle for the development of the logical entails that even the standards logic sets for arguments depend on

⁶ One could argue that trust in the arguer would become unnecessary because the audience then has criteria to evaluate arguments that will mechanically reveal any use of deceptive methods – *trust is good, control is better* (German proverb).

the adherence of the audience. Since logical standards are usually seen as the most steady ones available, this means that all standards for arguments and for reasonableness depend on the adherence of the audience. How can such a claim be justified?

When Newton wrote about gravity, it was not the apple who had to learn that and how it would fall. Argumentation does not take place between subject and object, it takes place in the intersubjective. If one subject wants another to accept its claims, then it has to make use of devices that, in the broadest sense possible, cause the other subject to accept these claims. If these devices are communicative and can be claimed to take the form of reasons, then argumentation takes place. As humans can communicate about everything they can put into words, gestures, pictures, etc., nothing is safe from being dragged into the argumentative sphere between the subjects and tested there with intersubjective reasoning – not even standards about what is reasonable, or what is a good argument. Harald Wohlrapp spends a rather large amount of time on this phenomenon: Argumentation theory is self-reflective: The object that is theorized about is at the same time the tool used for theorizing. (Wohlrapp, 2008, chapter 9, Reflexivity)⁷ However, if even the standards for what is reasonable/ what is a good argument/ what is a valid inference can be argued about, then, at the very basis of argumentation, we do not find audience-independent criteria for the goodness of argumentation. All we find are arguer and audience. This means that if we follow the implications of our understanding of argumentation to the end, if we see things through in this way, the only standard for argumentation that remains unchanging is the ever changing audience.

⁷ In his book “The Concept of Argument” (*Der Begriff des Arguments*), Wohlrapp argues in the following way: “*Arguing is a practice that produces theory – including theory about argumentation. Every argument presented can be conceived of as being presented with the inherent claim of being a good argument. Because of this, the step into argumentation theory is always possible – by questioning or discussing whether a specific argument is in fact a good one*” (Wohlrapp, 2008, p. 451). “*Arguing about argumentation has a very specific structure: here the practice of arguing refers to itself, describing itself and – perhaps more importantly – finding norms and standards for itself*” (Wohlrapp, 2008, p. 452). Innovations in the theory of argumentation will therefore change the way arguments about the standards of argumentation are being composed – and this can lead to new innovations. According to Wohlrapp, a good practice of argumentation is therefore a condition for a good theory of argumentation, and the other way around (Wohlrapp, 2008, p. 445).

The refusal of RTA to give audience-independent standards for argumentation is grounded in the recognition that no such standard could survive the rejection of the audience that has reasons (however they might appear) for not accepting it.⁸

The universal audience and certain ethical standards and ideas like that of the cognitive environment take the place of the audience-independent standards. They control the doubts we have identified above and provide the trust in arguments that is necessary for adopting conclusions on the basis of arguments. Achieving this end is hard, as all standards that can be formulated within the determination of these notions have to be audience dependent. The intersubjective has to do the task of the objective without falling back into it.

In his 2008 paper, Aikin acknowledges that agents of RTA employ a further, subordinate criterion for the quality of arguments: reasonableness. He discusses two features for determining what this reasonableness consists of: one moral (respect for the audience) and one cognitive (the cognitive environment). We will now take a look at these and try to clarify the role they play in the task explained above.

5.1. Moral standards

Aikin explains that Tindale derives his conception of the moral feature in argumentation from the interactive elements in arguing, quoting the claim that arguers “*think ahead of themselves; project themselves into the minds of the other, and draw that counterposition into the construction of their own*” (Tindale, 2004, p. 104). For argumentation to function unobstructed, the interaction between arguer and audience has to be “respectful and responsive” (Aikin, 2008, p. 7). However, Aikin claims that “[r]espectful and responsive interaction surely is a good means of refining and clarifying argument, but it has no obvious connection with the quality of the reasons

⁸ This does of course not mean that establishing standards for argumentation, and arguing about standards for argumentation is useless or should be stopped: When arguing about important matters, we obviously need guidelines – and justified guidelines – on how to react to certain forms of argumentation. To establish such guidelines is therefore very helpful and necessary. However, they should be identified as something that is open to criticism and change.

that survive the process." (Aikin, 2008, p. 7) We need to take a closer look at the ideas Aikin is criticising to judge whether he is right here.

The rhetorical approach under scrutiny starts out in a descriptive manner, adopting important features of Bakhtin's theory on the interaction of utterer and audience in the formation of an utterance: An utterance is directed to someone, and thereby towards a response. It is formed within a certain situation that is a constitutive element in its development. For Bakhtin: "*The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction*" (Tindale, 2004, p. 97).

The role of the audience thereby becomes active in a deeper sense than that the audience simply has to listen, understand and evaluate the arguments presented to it. In forming arguments directed at a certain audience, the arguer is influenced by that audience. As his arguments anticipate the audience's answer, the audience plays a role in the development of the arguments meant to elicit its assessment. Every argument then does work on both arguer and audience, and it does this work in a unique manner every time it is being presented – because its influence is not only determined by the signs produced, but also by the arguer and by the audience that get influenced (see, e.g., Tindale, 2004, pp. 100-101).

Argumentation theory, when it can no longer flee to the security of audience-independent standards, has to pay special attention to the complicated relationship of arguer and audience. On terms inspired by Bakhtin's ideas, this relationship between arguer and audience includes "involvement, anticipation, and response" (Tindale, 2004, p. 104). In Perelman's words, it includes a "meeting of minds" (Perelman, 1982, p. 9). Only if the arguer gets involved with his audience can he understand it. And only if the arguer understands the audience can he adapt his arguments to their anticipated responses. If he succeeds in this, then it is not him (as a person) who persuades his audience (Tindale, 1999, p. 109). Rather, he moves his audience to convince themselves with the arguments presented – "*if they are to be persuaded, they will be so on their own terms, from a perspective they have helped construct and see as plausible, rather than one imposed on them.*" In such a setting, rhetoric is invitational (Tindale, 2004, p. 50).⁹

⁹ This summary is, of course, much too short to give an appropriate account of the way

These observations allow us to say that only invitational rhetoric permits argumentation to unfold its full impact. In the openness of a respectful and responsive argumentative context, the influence of reasons on arguer and audience reaches its peak. Not only is the scope of influence the arguments have greater (the arguer cannot exclude himself from those that are influenced by the reasoning), it is also more thorough – if the audience helps in the construction of arguments, then the persuasion accomplished is more stable.¹⁰ It is therefore a normative demand if agents of RTA ask the arguer to enable invitational rhetoric by being respectful and responsive in the contact with his audience. The use of argumentative reasoning in the development of opinions is seen as a value that should be advanced as much as possible.

The above is true for all audiences and all argumentative situations. Its impact, however, is even greater when it comes to the audience that is supposed to be the standard for rationality, the universal audience. We can present two aspects of the concept of the universal audience that are the cause for this much greater impact:

- 1) Interestingly, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca claim that the arguer himself always belongs to the universal audience (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 44). This means that if the arguer addresses the universal audience, he enters the arguer-audience relationship with himself. It is now his responsibility to convince himself with the arguments he presents if he wants them to be good arguments. While the ideal of invitational argumentation already includes the involvement of the arguer as a goal, here it is vital.¹¹ Without it, the universal audience is not even being addressed in the first place. In contrast,

agents of RTA determine the relationship between arguer and audience. It should, however, give enough information for understanding the following arguments.

¹⁰ *“Indeed, adherence begins as a state of the mind, as an intellectual contact, but as it develops it comes to encompass the entire person. The aim is not to secure purely intellectual adherence but to incite an action or create a disposition to act, since the uptake need not be immediate”* (Tindale, 2010, p. 352, interpreting Perelman, 1982, p. 13). Adherence, in the best case, is a long lasting adoption of a belief or disposition that leads to future action, not the mere declaration of assent for the moment.

¹¹ This also demonstrates that even self-deliberation has a social dimension.

if the arguer does not attempt to convince the universal audience, he can distance himself from his audience to some degree: He still has to construct his arguments such that they accommodate his audience's characteristics, and are permissible by their standards, but he can limit the influence this involvement has on him. For addressing a particular audience, he does not have to be convinced by his arguments himself. When addressing the universal audience, the arguer himself is a part of this audience. This means he has to adhere to his own standards of what is reasonable.

- 2) Self-conviction is not enough. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca acknowledge, the arguer, as every other human, is limited by his own subjectivity (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 42). He therefore has to acknowledge that there can be standards of reasonableness he is not aware of or does not understand. From the standpoint of rhetorical argumentation, nothing is valid that cannot be argued for and then approved by the relevant universal audience. An arguer has to answer to the standards of this audience and this responsibility never ceases. Since universal audiences are unpredictable in their demands, they can only be anticipated by universalizing the reasonableness of specific audiences. Nonetheless, the responsibility of the arguer can only be restricted by Kant's maxim that there can be no "must" where there is no "can": The arguer cannot be asked to answer objections of which he cannot be aware. But if he argues for the universal audience, he has to answer to every reasonable objection brought forward.

The arguer as seen by agents of RTA, then, is in a situation of extreme responsibility when he argues for the universal audience. The universal audience is not even addressed if he ignores either his own standards of reasonableness or his audience's standards of reasonableness (as far as he can know them). He can never flee to the security of his own standards of reasonableness because those standards are up for discussion themselves. Therefore, he can never refuse answering either his own or his audience's objections. The moral dimension of rhetorical argumentation is everything but abstract. It is a standard of responsibility that is almost descriptive: An

arguer *will* be asked to respond. If he refuses, that is as good as admitting defeat – his arguments did not persuade and now he gives up the task of improving them.

Is it correct that the ethical aspects of RTA have “*no obvious connection with the quality of the reasons that survive the process*” (Aikin, 2008, p. 7)? No. Adherence to the ethical demands of RTA means that an arguer has to meet the most advanced standards of reasonableness his time has to offer. Arguments that survive the process of being tested by the universal audience inherent in the totality of specific audiences will have met the very latest standards of reasonableness – those standards that are the product of the process of argumentation about argumentation.

5.2. Cognitive standards

Having discussed the moral standards RTA brings forward for promoting universality without sacrificing intersubjectivity for the image of apparent objectivity, we now look at one way by which RTA determines an arguer’s responsiveness to particular audiences without thereby letting go the ideal of universalization – the idea of the cognitive environment.

Dealing with this is important: That agents of RTA openly admit that arguers should adapt their arguments to their audience’s subjective characteristics might be a cause for contextual doubt. This doubt can only be prevented by showing that such adaption to the audience does not automatically entail exploitation of the audience.

In his 2008 paper, Aikin discusses the conception of the cognitive environment that is used for determining the audience-relevance of the premises used in argumentation. He examines a quote taken from *Acts of Arguing*: “*A cognitive environment is a set of facts and assumptions that an individual (...) is capable of representing and accepting as true (...) These environments tell us nothing about what people know or assume, but about what they could be expected to know or assume*” (Tindale, 1999, p. 107, cited in Aikin, 2008, p. 7).

Aikin notes that an audience is reasonable if it accepts facts and assumptions that are manifest to it– facts and assumptions manifest in the cognitive environment are *acceptable* to an audience, independent of whether single audience members accept them (Aikin, 2008, p. 7). He

acknowledges that this entails that acceptability in a rhetorical sense is a generalization of the factual acceptance found within many or most members of an audience – however, he limits this feature to assumptions. Aikin views assumptions as unstable elements and he does not consider them as able to solve the self-refutation problem of RTA.

Facts, are another matter according to Aikin. He interprets the notion of manifestness of facts such that a fact is manifest iff “cognizers would fail in some serious way if they did not respond appropriately to the manifest facts” (Aikin, 2008, p 8). His next sentence reveals in which sense he sees these cognizers to fail: Their failure is an objective failure – the subject, faced with an objective fact, fails in recognizing this fact as such. It is on such an interpretation that he understands the use of cognitive environments in rhetorical argumentation as a reference to standards that are audience-independent: “This is now no longer a rhetorical-response conception of reasonability or acceptability, where the quality of a reason depends on how they are received, but rather one based on properties of the propositions independent of the cognizers taking up with them.” (Aikin, 2008, p. 8).

However, things are not that easy. If we take a closer look at the conception of the cognitive environment, we will see that there are two important differences between Aikin’s understanding and the actual role the cognitive environment plays: Who is being judged using the cognitive environment and the role of facts.

To clarify: a cognitive environment is a set of facts manifest to a subject. A fact is manifest to a subject at a time x if the subject can represent and endorse the fact at the time x , regardless of whether the subject actually does so (Tindale, 1992, pp. 179-182). Cognitive environments are all about the potential access to ideas, rather than their actual possession. In addition to facts, cognitive environments also include assumptions that may be false. The difference between facts that are only rarely manifest (accessible only with great effort) and those that are not manifest at all is always vague. The cognitive environments of two different subjects might, for historic and personal reasons, be very different. However, subjects might have access to the same facts. Then they share parts of their cognitive environments.

As the manifestness of facts to certain subjects does not mean that they actually represent them, but only that they have access to the means for

representing them, an arguer can at least roughly determine which facts are manifest to an audience by gaining information about their way of life, their education, traditions, cultural disposition, and so forth.

All this can be found in Aikin's interpretation of the concept of a cognitive environment. However, he does not account for the way the idea of a cognitive environment is used for clarifying argumentation. The introduction of the cognitive environment gives the arguer a tool for adapting his arguments such that they will fit his audience. An arguer has the task of determining which facts are in the cognitive environment of his audience so that the premises he uses will be relevant (Tindale, 1992, p. 182). However, if an assumption or fact an arguer thought to be manifest to his audience turns out not to be, then that is not a failure of the audience. Rather, the arguer now has the task of gaining a better understanding of the audience. If the arguer wants to introduce new facts as premises, he has to make first them manifest: *"In addition, where new ideas are being presented to an audience and argued for, audience-relevance would require that as much as possible of the information being given in support of those ideas be related to (relevant to) assumptions which we know are manifest in that audience's cognitive environment. This must occur even when audiences are introduced to a new body of information"* (Tindale, 1992, p. 183).

Arguments therefore cannot be judged to be good *even though* the audience turns out not to represent the facts the arguer thought were in its cognitive environment – if they get judged on this basis, then they would be evaluated as being worse because the arguer had the wrong idea of his audience and therefore of their cognitive environment.

A second problem of Aikin's account is his usage of facts. He seems to look at the difference between facts and assumptions from the outside – where facts about the world are objectively given so that everyone who gets in touch with them has to acknowledge them, while assumptions are merely subjectively justified ideas. Agents of RTA, because of their emphasis on subjects and intersubjectivity in argumentation, would see the difference between facts and assumptions as one that is important on the inside; it is subjects who make these distinctions.

An audience, for example, can believe both sentence p and sentence q with the same intensity, and might from its point of view even be justified in these beliefs. Seen from this audience's point of view both p and q are

facts. The arguer, on the other hand, might view p as a fact but q as an assumption. In Aikin's words, he might accept q only in a qualified way. Whether a proposition is factual depends on the adherence it gains from subjects. Factuality is audience-determined too.

Why then should the difference between facts and assumptions be important? We can find the answer to this in the following quote: "*To gain adherence of an audience in a reasonable way (...), the argumentation must be contextually relevant (...) and comprise premises that are acceptable to the particular audience and to the universal audience formed from it*" (Tindale, 1999, p. 95).

An arguer who knows that his audience views both p and q as facts but himself thinks of q as merely an assumption can gain reasonable adherence from this audience only if he represents q as no more than an assumption. If he presented q as a fact (perhaps because that will help him persuade his particular audience), then he does not address the universal audience appropriately, as he is a member of this audience and he does not believe that q is a fact.

By introducing the cognitive environment for determining which premises are audience-relevant, we do not, therefore, introduce an audience-independent criterion for goodness into rhetoric. Nor do we open up a way to claim that arguments are good even though they do not convince the audience. Instead, we have a reason for why arguments that do not convince their audience are to be judged bad: The arguer had a wrong picture of his audience's cognitive environment and therefore made use of premises that are not accessible to his audience. However, a demand for using premises that are accessible to the particular audience does not make the arguer free to exploit his audience's wrong assumptions. Still bound by his task of gaining the adherence of the universal audience, he is restricted to those premises he finds just as acceptable as he presents them to be.

This leads us to a stronger consideration on what is the appropriate outcome of argumentation. Aikin's epistemic approach necessarily favours a certain understanding of truth here. From our perspective, an arguer of RTA will construct arguments in such a way that they can elicit assent from the audience. For that, he will take the subjective beliefs, assumptions, and so forth, of his audience into account. Aikin therefore is right when he says that arguments, according to RTA are subject centered. But under the nor-

mative restrictions that we have seen above, this does not mean that they cannot lead us closer to the truth, or give us knowledge. This truth and this knowledge, however, are not those that Aikin seems to have in mind. They are neither the objective Truth with the capital T nor the once-and-forever-fixed knowledge of correspondence theory. The knowledge that argumentation leads us to is the opinion most justified by the best available reasons, and the truth that can be gained through rhetorical argumentation is the body of knowledge consensually agreed to by the community of arguers. The best available means for gaining knowledge can be found in the cognitive environments of the audiences an arguer addresses (including himself). Argumentation as Aikin seems to demand it is epistemic in that it finds knowledge. Rhetoric is epistemic in another sense; it also creates knowledge.¹²

We have now seen two restrictions on the arguer that make the persuasion he accomplishes reasonable. In terms of the universal audience, the arguer is restricted because he has to adhere to the standards of reasonableness. In terms of the particular audience, the arguer is restricted because he is limited to using premises that are accessible to this audience. Is this information able to prevent contextual doubt in the RTA-agent's audience?

Not completely:

First, even if an arguer has to adhere both to the standards of rationality valid for him and his audience and to the specific needs of his audience, argumentation does not cease to be an uncertain enterprise. No argument, however valid it is according to the best standards, can guarantee objective Truth with a capital T. The best that can be reached is an intersubjective truth. RTA does not try to hide this fact by giving subject-invariant standards for argument-evaluation. This most basic doubt – the possibility that what is believed might turn out wrong and need to be revised in light of subsequent, better reasons – will always be there. However, because of the nature of argumentation, it is there for every theory of argumentation, whether or not that is admitted within the theory. And it is not the kind of doubt that eliminates conviction – it is just the doubt that, if we are honest,

¹² A rich rhetorical tradition supports this claim, beginning with Aristotle's discussion of invention in the *Rhetoric* (1.1.2). See also Leff (1983) and Tindale (forthcoming).

qualifies almost every one of our beliefs enough for it to be open to change in the face of better arguments (or evidence).

Second, the possibility that the arguer tries to deceive his audience, and is so apt at deceiving that the audience does not notice it, is always a given. Presenting the normative side of RTA and the reasons for it cannot make that fact disappear. Even an active audience that tests all arguments given with their own standards might find themselves in the unfortunate position of having met an arguer who can exploit just those biases and weaknesses the audience is not aware of. However, this, too, is a problem that always waits in the background no matter what theory of argumentation is at issue, since none can guarantee that all arguers will play fair. No rules, however strict, can prevent their own violation. Thus, contextual doubt is never completely absent. But, again, it cannot be strong enough to prevent warranted conviction - otherwise there would be no convincing arguments.

What has been presented above, however, shows that the inherent structure of RTA does not give reason for any extraordinary contextual doubt. Seen in the context of the moral and cognitive standards RTA sets for arguing, that arguments aim at assent and are evaluated in terms of that aim (Aikin, 2011, p. 87), gives no more reason for contextual doubt than does the consciousness of being in an argumentative context under any theory. The power of the arguments for RTA to convince is in no way diminished by the goal of assent (or adherence). They are therefore not automatically bad arguments. RTA is not self-refuting after all.

6. One last argument

Finally, we deal with one last argument Aikin presented at the start of his 2011 paper: An agent of RTA who defends his theory by pointing to a point or datum that has been overlooked would use standards of argument evaluation that go further than audience adherence. This critique, if valid, would make all the arguments presented in this paper worthless for accomplishing our objective in the paper, for they are exactly of this kind: We have explained certain features of RTA in order to show that Aikin's critique does not defeat RTA.

Aikin argues the following way: *“But note now the defense of the theory*

is very different from the theory: isn't it the rhetor's job to address the audience? Moreover, this defense requires that there are justifying elements to arguments that must obtain independently of audience assessment or acceptance, ones that, presumably, audiences are obliged to attend to if they are to be reasonable interlocutors" (Aikin, 2011, p. 83).

Aikin is, of course, right. It is the rhetor's job to address the audience. However, by pointing out features of RTA that might help prevent misunderstandings or clarify the meaning of RTA's commitments, the arguer does not necessarily make use of audience-independent standards of argumentation. That would only be the case if he thereby tried to show that the objections brought forward, the reasons the audience had for not being convinced, were unjustified, unreasonable or should not have been there in the first place. Otherwise, clarifying the features of RTA is just an argumentative move in the arguer's task to convince his audience. Earlier we said that the rhetorical arguer can never refuse to answer. This paper is an attempt to give such an answer to a reasonable objection that has been presented.

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