A THEORY OF ARGUMENTATIVE SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT: What is it for an argument to be successful? Some take success to be mind-independent, holding that successful arguments are those that meet some *objective* criterion such as soundness. Others take success to be *dialectical*, holding that successful arguments are those that would convince anyone meeting certain (perhaps idealized) conditions, or perhaps some targeted audience meeting those conditions. I defend a set of desiderata for theories of success, and argue that no objective or dialectical meets those desiderata. Instead, I argue, success is *individualistic*: arguments can only (plausibly) be evaluated as successes (*qua* argument) relative to individuals. In particular, I defend The Knowledge Account, according to which an argument *A* is successful for individual *i* iff *i* knows *A* is sound and non-fallacious. This conception of success is a significant departure from orthodoxy and has interesting and unexplored philosophical and methodological implications for the evaluation of arguments.

KEYWORDS: Arguments, Reasoning, Success, Failure, Soundness, van Inwagen

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1. INTRODUCTION

Argument evaluation is central to the philosophical enterprise: philosophers trade in arguments. We have this in common with mathematicians and lawyers, but philosophers alone are charged with evaluating argument evaluation itself. How can we determine which arguments are successful? What *makes* arguments successes or failures? This important topic has been unduly neglected.[1] That is partly because an intuitive account of success, according to which successful arguments are all and only those that are *rationally compelling*, is widely taken for granted.[2] Unfortunately, this intuitive account is not correct. So developing an adequate account of argumentative success is more pressing than is generally recognized.

The structure of this paper is as follows: a taxonomy of theories of success is provided in §2; the desiderata by which theories of success should be evaluated are outlined in §3; some important background concepts are clarified in §4; and in §5-7 I argue that one theory of success—The Knowledge Account—best satisfies the desiderata. I respond to some objections in §8.

[1] But not completely ignored: the most notable recent work builds on van Inwagen (2006: Ch.3), and includes Fischer and Tognazzini (2007), Hanna (2015), Chalmers (2017), Keller (2017), Kelly and McGrath (2017), and van Inwagen (2017). Sadly, those authors have largely neglected an older literature culminating with Feldman (1994) and Goldman (1994), but revisited in the articles in *Informal Logic* 25/3 (2005). Discussion of successful *religious* arguments can be found in Mavrodes (1970), Oppy (2006), and Wainwright (2016), which is sadly independent of *either* of the above-mentioned literatures. There is also a significant non-philosophical literature on the topic (see, e.g., Dutilh Novaes 2024 and Groarke 2024). If this paper does nothing else, I hope it gets everyone talking to one another!

[2] This naïve account is the "pre-theoretic" view, the most commonly presupposed view, and the most commonly explicitly-defended view (e.g., in Oppy 2006). The ubiquitous practice of objecting to an argument by pointing out that a "reasonable person" could reject one of its premises seems to presuppose this naïve account.

2. THEORIES OF SUCCESS

Theories of success can be divided into two families: *objective* theories that make success independent of anyone's mental states, and non-objective theories that don't. Non-objective theories can be divided into three (possibly overlapping) genera: *general dialectical* theories make success dependent upon convincing all people (perhaps satisfying some condition); *targeted dialectical* theories make success dependent upon convincing some targeted group of people (perhaps satisfying some condition);[3] and *individualistic* theories that relativize success to individuals. There are multiple species in each genus:

Objective Theories: An argument *A* is a success iff it
- is sound. (The Soundness Account: defended in Robinson 1971)
- is sound and non-fallacious.[4] (The Soundness+ Account)
- is sound and non-fallacious and comes packaged with evidence *E* that has the power to underwrite knowledge that *A* is sound and non-fallacious.[5] (The Soundness+ Evidence Account)

General Dialectical Theories: An argument *A* is a success iff it
- would convince *all* people. (Universalism)
- would convince *all rational* people. (Rationalism: defended in Oppy 2006)
- would convince *all agnostics* about *A*'s conclusion. (Agnosticism)
- would convince *all rational agnostics* about *A*'s conclusion (Rational Agnosticism: roughly the account defended in van Inwagen 2006)
- would *increase the credences* (in *A*'s conclusion) of *all rational agnostics* about *A*'s conclusion (Weakened Rational Agnosticism: roughly the account defended in van Inwagen 2017)

Targeted Dialectical Theories: An argument *A* is a success, *for a targeted group t,* iff it
- would convince (or be counted as successful by) *all* members of *t*. (Targeted Universalism: if *t* = one's *audience*, this is the account defended in Huss 2005.)
- would convince (or be counted as successful by) all *rational* members of *t*. (Targeted Rationalism: if *t* = *one's audience*, this is roughly the account defended in Goldman 2003)
- would convince (or be counted as successful by) all *rational* members of *t* who were initially agnostic about *A*'s conclusion. (Targeted Rational Agnosticism)
- would convince (or be counted as successful by) *the powerbrokers (journal editors etc.) in t.* (Powerbroker Communalism)
- will be found convincing (or counted as successful) in *the considered historical judgement of the future members of t.* (Future Communalism)

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[3] Compare with the distinction between *universal* and *particular* audiences in Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969).

[4] I won't try to define 'fallacious', despite the fact that the term is often abused. One might worry that it is improper for an ill-defined word such a 'fallacious' to appear in a philosophical analysis. I take it to be clear, however, that successful arguments can't be fallacious. So, as far as I can see, there are only two alternatives to using 'fallacious' in an analysis of 'successful argument': (1) provide an analysis of 'fallacious' myself, and substitute that analysis for 'fallacious' in my analysis of 'successful argument'; or (2) give an analysis of 'successful argument' that, without *explicitly* forbidding fallacious arguments, *entails* that there are no fallacious successful arguments. Alternative (1) would be nice, but it can't reasonably be demanded of me: analyses can legitimately proceed in stages (analyzing *knowledge* as *justified true belief* doesn't require having an analysis of *truth*). Of course, if 'fallacious' were defined or analyzed in terms of success—something like "a fallacy is the kind of thing that prevents a sound argument from being successful"—The Knowledge Account would be circular. In that case, non-fallaciousness could perhaps be replaced with a basing condition (see §8.2). This would be an instance of alternative (2) above.

[5] This account was suggested by Nathan Ballantyne.

Individualistic Theories: An argument *A* is a success, *for an individual i,* iff

- *i believes A* to be sound and non-fallacious. (The Belief Account)
- *i correctly* believes *A* to be sound and non-fallacious. (The True Belief Account)
- *i justifiably* believes *A* to be sound and non-fallacious. (The Justified Belief Account: roughly the account defended in Feldman 1994)
- *i knows A* to be sound and non-fallacious. (The Knowledge Account)
- *i knows that they know A* to be sound and non-fallacious. (The KK Account)
- *A produces understanding* for *i*. (The Understanding Account)[6]

Obviously, this list is not exhaustive, and further variations are discussed below. But the list spans a wide range of theories, and the merits and demerits of theories that aren't on it should parallel the merits and demerits of the theories that are.

3. DESIDERATA FOR A THEORY OF SUCCESS

How should theories of success be evaluated? To properly answer that question, we must distinguish between *practical* and *epistemic* success. Analyzing practical success is trivial: an argument *A* given with goal *g* is practically successful iff *A* achieves *g*. My interest is *epistemic* or *theoretical* success: success *qua* argument.[7] Many argumentative goals are non-epistemic, but even practical success in achieving epistemic goals should be distinguished from epistemic success. (This is an important point. If, as some believe, truth is an epistemic goal, it doesn't follow that sophistical arguments that produce true beliefs are epistemically successful. Epistemically unsuccessful arguments can produce epistemic value, and conversely, sometimes successful arguments don't and plausibly *can't*: see §8.2.) When Oppy (2006: 10) says that "the *telos* of argumentation is bound up with reasonable belief", he is talking about the *epistemic telos* of argumentation. Epistemically successful arguments must, at a minimum, make acceptance of their conclusions rational. Practically successful arguments—practically successful political arguments, for example—generally face no such constraint, as long as they induce people to *accept* their conclusions.[8]

The opposite of success is failure. What is it for an argument to fail? Unsuccessful arguments fail to establish their conclusions. That isn't a definition or analysis: we don't have a clearer understanding of the truth-conditions of '*A* establishes *c*' than we do of '*A* is a successful argument for *c*'. But the former, being an expression from ordinary language, has

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[6] Phrases like '*i* knows *A* to be sound' should be interpreted as shorthand for phrases like '*i* knows each of *A*'s premises and *i* knows that *A* is valid (or *A* is obviously valid)'. The point of this is to ensure that the individuals for whom arguments are successful actually know (etc.) their premises: to rule out cases where one knows (etc.) *that* some argument (perhaps in an unfamiliar language) is sound without actually knowing or perhaps even believing its premises.

[7] To illustrate the difference between practical and epistemic success, consider this passage from (Groarke 2024): "The different goals arguer's [sic] try to achieve via argument may make their [practical] success and legitimacy turn on norms and rules that add to (or subtract from) the traditional strictures that guide argument evaluation. In some circumstances, it makes ultimatums, exaggerations, threats and insults a permissible element of arguing." Obviously, ultimatums, exaggerations, threats and insults could never be *epistemically* successful "arguments".

[8] Dan Sperber and Hugo Mercier argue (e.g., in their 2011) that the evolutionary function of reasoning is to devise arguments that produce *persuasion*, rather than justification or knowledge. That might be so, but it doesn't follow that persuasion is the *epistemic* telos of successful argumentation: arguments may have an epistemic function in addition to their evolutionary function. Some evolutionary psychologists hold that the evolutionary function of music was to help people walk in sync. Even if that's true, it wouldn't follow that the best or most *aesthetically* successful songs are marches.

the virtue of familiarity, and is thus useful for circumscribing the notion we are theorizing about. The idea of an epistemically successful argument is the idea of an argument that "works", that does what it is supposed to do. And arguments are supposed to establish their conclusions. There are ordinary language uses of 'demonstration' and 'proof' that express something like this idea, but in philosophical contexts we tend to think of demonstrations and proofs as being *rationally compelling* arguments that deliver *certainty*.[9] This is not something that should be analytically required of arguments that succeed at establishing their conclusions. Epistemically successful arguments must make acceptance of their conclusions rationally *permissible*, but it is an open question whether they must make acceptance of their conclusions rationally *compelling*. (Delivering certainty is probably out of the question, but see §7.1.2.)

3.1 Desiderata. The essential core, then, of our concept of argumentative success is that successful arguments *rationalize*. Hence, the most important desideratum on a theory is success is:

> **Rationality**: Possession of a successful argument A for conclusion c should (*ceteris peribus*) make acceptance of c *rational*, in the sense that someone in possession of A who accepts c demonstrates no rational *failing*—is not amenable to rational *criticism*—on the basis of their acceptance of c.[10]

Rationality has significant implications. For example, the theories listed above that require soundness only (plausibly) apply to deductive arguments. These theories could be made to accommodate non-deductive arguments by using a more general notion of of confirmation or rational support: e.g., A is a success iff A's premises are true and support A's conclusion. But non-deductive arguments are *non-monotonic*: an argument A might have true premises that support or confirm conclusion c, but whether it's rational for an individual i in possession of A to believe c will depend on the other things i knows or believes. So no non-deductive argument can guarantee that i's acceptance of c is rational unless it contains (implicitly or explicitly) a premise that says that i has no other information bearing on c: something that will obviously vary from individual to individual. So, given Rationality, success for non-deductive arguments will pretty clearly have to be individualistic (or restricted to audiences in an epistemic equivalence class). The conclusion of this paper is less obvious: success is individualistic even for deductive arguments.[11]

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[9] In what follows, I use 'proof' in this way.

[10] Two comments. First, the *ceteris peribus* clause is needed to avoid taking a stand on complicated issues concerning the interaction between rationality and the individuation of propositions. On some views, one can rationally reject (under one guise) and accept (under another) the same proposition at the same time. (See Braun 2006.) Second, there are difficult questions about what it means to "possess" an argument—questions that largely parallel the difficult questions about what it is to "possess" evidence. Happily, on The Knowledge Account these questions are less pressing than they are on other accounts. Note that one might "demonstrate no rational failing by accepting c" even if critics of A wrongly think otherwise, and that "demonstrating no rational failing" in one's acceptance of c does not require epistemic *perfection* in all matters, but only epistemic *satisficing* when it comes to one's acceptance of c.

[11] Hence the focus on deductive arguments in this paper. This focus is common, if not standard, in (many strands of) the literature. (The argumentation theory literature is an exception, but even there the "Natural Language Deductivism" school argues that informal arguments should be evaluated through a deductive paradigm. See, e.g., Govier 1987.) Of course, deductive arguments can have premises that are supported non-deductively. And many non-deductive arguments can be transformed into deductive arguments by adding a (non-deductively supported) conditional premise linking the original argument's premises and conclusion. In many cases, believing

A second desideratum is that a theory of success should be *extensionally adequate*: it should classify arguments correctly. This gives us:

> **Paradigms**: Paradigmatically successful arguments should be classified as successful, and paradigmatically unsuccessful arguments as unsuccessful.

Rationality and Paradigms are the two clearest desiderata on a theory of success. But since 'success' is a success term, it's plausible to think that there cannot be successful arguments for false conclusions. This would give us:

> **Verity:** Arguments for *false* conclusions should not be classified as successful.

I will make restricted appeal to Verity in what follows, partly because it would immediately rule out a number of theories defended in the existing literature, and partly because it seems less central to our pre-theoretic concept of success. Rationality and Paradigms are the *core* principles governing that concept: an adequate theory of success *must* satisfy them. An acceptable theory of success *could* fail to be veritistic, although it would be better if it didn't.

3.2 Success vs Goodness. Just as it is important to distinguish practical from epistemic success, so it is important to distinguish *success* from *goodness*. (Sometimes, 'good argument' is used to mean more or less what I mean by 'successful argument'. I am using 'good argument' as a synonym for 'valuable argument'. On my usage, good arguments can differ both quantitatively and qualitatively: in *how* valuable they are, and in what *kind* of value they have.) Good arguments—even epistemically (as opposed to practically) good arguments—can fail to make belief in their conclusions rational: for example, Zeno's arguments for the impossibility of motion and Descartes' skeptical arguments are good (fertile, clever, deep, and intellectually interesting) arguments, but their conclusions are false, and they plausibly fail to justify belief in those conclusions. More generally, when someone believes something outrageous—especially if it is outrageous and *objectionable*—we think they had better have a *successful* argument for it, not just a good one.

It's worth noting that success can't even be identified with *maximal* goodness, since many successful arguments are less than maximally good. For example, it is bad for an argument to be unnecessarily complicated or to have unnecessary premises. But mathematical proofs are paradigmatically successful, even though many such proofs are unnecessarily complicated and have unnecessary premises. The classic proofs of the Prime Number Theorem by Hadamard and Vallée-Poussin, for example, are more complicated and less illuminating than the proof eventually given by Newman. Indeed, it's *common* for mathematical proofs to be less than perfect: finding evermore elegant and illuminating proofs is a major mathematical pastime. And of course, *most* mathematical proofs contain unnecessary premises: they make use of theorems instead of deriving everything from the axioms.[12] Such less than perfect proofs are still paradigmatically successful.

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such a conditional premise seems phenomenologically indistinguishable from believing that the conclusion the original argument non-deductively follows from its premises, so it may not always be clear whether some bit of reasoning is deductive to begin with.

[12] On the other hand, deriving everything from the axioms would make (most) proofs unnecessarily complicated, and it is not wholly obvious how these two kinds of "badness" are to be traded-off.

Some might think that success, like goodness, is itself graded, such that we can say that some arguments are more or less successful than others. For many accounts of success *simpliciter*, there are natural ways to define such a graded notion of success in terms of success *simpliciter*. Could one define success *simpliciter* in terms of graded success—something like, "to be successful *simpliciter* is to be successful to at least degree *X*"? That seems to put the cart before the horse, like trying to define 'good' in terms of 'better',[13] but in any case, the topic of this paper is success *simpliciter*: our desiderata are for a theory of *non-comparative* success.

4. AGAINST OBJECTIVE THEORIES

Many textbooks endorse The Soundness Account, according to which soundness is necessary and sufficient for success.[14] But while soundness may be *necessary* for success, it isn't sufficient.

4.1 Against Soundness: Consider the following arguments:

1. The Peano axioms	1. The Peano axioms
2. The Peano axioms ⊃ the Riemann hypothesis is true	2. The Peano axioms ⊃ the Riemann hypothesis is false
3. *Therefore*, the Riemann hypothesis is true	3. *Therefore*, the Riemann hypothesis is false

One of these arguments is sound. Call it 'The Bad Argument'. Even though The Bad Argument is sound, it clearly isn't *successful*. Most clearly, it fails to satisfy Rationality, since it doesn't make it rational to accept its conclusion, for the obvious reason that it isn't rational to accept its second premise. (The Soundness Account also runs afoul of Paradigms, at least if The Bad Argument counts as paradigmatically unsuccessful.) It may be true that only sound arguments can be successful, but that no more suggests that success *is* soundness than the fact that only justified beliefs can be knowledge suggests that knowledge is justified belief.[15]

4.2 Against Soundness+: The Bad Argument also shows The Soundness+ Account—according to which success is a matter of being *non-fallacious* and sound—to be incorrect, at least unless The Bad Argument is fallacious. But the only fallacy The Bad Argument could plausibly be accused of is begging-the-question, and all plausible accounts of begging-the-question are non-objective. For example, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (1999: 183) says that "to avoid begging the question one's reason to believe the premise must be independent of both (a) one's belief in the conclusion and also (b) one's reason to believe the conclusion", and Fischer and Pendergraft (2013: 584) claim that "an argument begs the question just in case the proponent of the argument has no reason to accept the relevant premise, apart from a prior acceptance of the conclusion.". On such accounts, a sound argument could be question-

[13] It doesn't seem odd to define 'tall' as 'taller than average', but defining 'successful' as 'more successful than average' seems like a non-starter, and there doesn't seem to be some other threshold that would be much better.

[14] Perhaps because it is assumed that soundness entails being rationally compelling. This is suggested by, e.g., Howard-Snyder (2017: 255), who says that a sound argument is a "maximally good reason to believe its conclusion". That isn't so, for reasons given in the main text. Robinson (1971) explicitly defends The Soundness Account, and Groarke (2024) claims that "In classical logic…the ultimate aim of arguing is a "sound" argument…".

[15] It's very difficult to articulate the intuitive connection between validity and rationality (see Harman 1984). One might try to defend The Soundness Account by arguing that it's no fault of the Bad Argument that we don't know it to be sound: that the problem isn't with the argument, but with us. But that's just to reject Rationality as a desideratum of a theory of success.

begging (and so unsuccessful) for one person but non-question-begging (and so successful) for another, thus rendering The Soundness+ Account a form of Individualism.[16]

4.2.1 Argument Possession. One reply to this objection to the Soundness Account would be to insist that while *possession* of a successful argument must make accepting its conclusion rational, we don't actually possess the Bad Argument. Since the Bad Argument is written in plain English right in front of us, this objection must appeal to a technical sense of 'argument possession'. Merely *believing* the premises of the Bad Argument wouldn't be enough to make accepting its conclusion rational, but—to anticipate what's to come—*knowing* that the Bad Argument was sound (and non-fallacious) seems sufficient. More generally, one might try to preserve an objective account success like the Soundness Account by "pushing" any non-objective factors into one's account of argument possession. But if argument possession is to play such an important role in explaining how successful arguments satisfy Rationality, it seems like the important "target notion" will end up being *possessing a successful argument* rather than *being a successful argument*. Possessing a successful argument is pretty clearly an individualistic (person-relative) notion, so this would be congenial to the broad aim of this paper. But more importantly, we have just seen one reason that it can't *just* be argument possession that is individualistic: if successful arguments must be non-fallacious, and if begging-the-question is a fallacy and an argument can beg the question relative to one person but not another, then no objective account of success itself (as opposed to successful argument *possession*) can be correct. Indeed, this would seem to straightforwardly entail that success itself is individualistic.

4.3 Against Soundness+Evidence: The Soundness+Evidence Account holds that successful arguments must come "packaged" with evidence that has the power to underwrite knowledge that they are sound. This account seems tailor-made to avoid the problems generated by The Bad Argument, but depending on how we understand "packaging", the account runs afoul of Paradigms, Rationality, or both.

The ultimate sources of evidence are, plausibly, perception and reason.[17] Obviously, most perceptions can't be "packaged" with arguments in any reasonable sense, so the Soundness+Evidence Account seems like it would rule out most successful arguments with *a posteriori* premises, including many paradigmatically successful scientific arguments. That's problem enough, but the account even fails as a theory of successful *a priori* arguments. Perhaps *self-evidently sound* arguments can be said to be "packaged" with rational intuitions of their soundness; if so, self-evidently sound arguments will satisfy The Soundness+Evidence Account. But many paradigmatically successful *a priori* arguments are not self-evidently sound: most mathematical proofs make use of non-self-evident theorems as premises, so this approach wouldn't count most proofs as successful. The Soundness+Evidence Account thus conflicts with Paradigms. And of course, different things are self-evident to different people, and so this approach would seem to render the Soundness+Evidence Account a form of Individualism.

To avoid lapsing into Individualism, one might interpret 'the power to underwrite knowledge of soundness' such that if there's *anyone* for whom the packaged evidence has that power, then the evidence has that power *simpliciter*. This avoids relativizing success to

[16] Or, perhaps, a targeted dialectical theory where the intended audience is in a specific epistemic state.

[17] Some deny that reason is an ultimate source of evidence, others take there to be additional ultimate sources of evidence. The argument in the main text should be consistent with any plausible account. See Lycan (2019) for related discussion.

individuals, but generates a conflict with Rationality. Just because I have an argument that is packaged with evidence that has the power to underwrite knowledge of its soundness for *someone else*, it doesn't follow that it has that power for *me*, much less that I actually know it to be sound, or would be rational in believing it to be. Perhaps there is a god or mathematical savant for whom the second premise of The Bad Argument is self-evident, and thus for whom The Bad Argument is self-evidently sound. This version of the Soundness+Evidence Account would then classify The Bad Argument as successful. But since The Bad Argument does not provide *me* with a good reason to accept its conclusion, this conflicts with Rationality.

5. AGAINST GENERAL DIALECTICAL THEORIES

No objective theory, then, satisfies our desiderata. As we will see, no general or targeted dialectical theory does either.

5.1 Against Universalism. According to Universalism, successful arguments must convince *everyone*. But alas, there *are no* arguments that convince everyone. And so Universalism conflicts with Paradigms: convincing everyone is not necessary for success. It's also not sufficient—in particular, it's not sufficient for satisfying Rationality. While it is plausible that any *actual* argument that convinced everybody would make acceptance of its conclusion rational, it's false that this *must* be so. A group of irrational zealots convinced by some specious argument might kill off the rest of us. Their specious argument would not become successful once the last dissenter was laid to rest.

5.2 Against Agnosticism. One problem with Universalism is that people are biased. Agnosticism—which says that successful arguments must only convince *agnostics* about their conclusions—attempts to remedy this concern. But Agnosticism still fails to satisfy Paradigms: successful arguments are not even guaranteed to convince agnostics about their conclusions. Most people are agnostic about most interesting mathematical theorems, for example, but those without the relevant background will typically fail to be convinced by proofs of those theorems. (Many valid steps in many mathematical proofs will seem invalid to novices.) Mathematical proofs are, however, paradigmatically successful. And of course, the mere fact that one is an agnostic about the conclusion of an argument does not suggest, much less entail, that one will respond to the argument rationally.[18]

5.3 Against Rationalism. Rationalism aims to remedy the problem of non-rational responses by holding that successful arguments are only required to convince everybody rational. This view deserves to be called the naïve conception of success: it is often *implicitly assumed*, as when we object to an argument by suggesting that a rational person could reject one of its premises; it is sometimes *explicitly endorsed*, as when Plantinga (1974: 112) and Pawl (2016: 7) suggest that successful pieces of natural theology must *prove* their conclusions; and it is sometimes *explicitly defended*, as by, e.g., Graham Oppy (2006). Nonetheless, there is an obvious problem with Rationalism: it runs afoul of Paradigms, unless we set the bar for "being rational" implausibly high. There are rational people who have rejected the "classic arguments" for the standard theory of elementary particles (Albert Einstein), the atomic theory of matter (Ernst Mach),

[18] Keller (2017) argues that agnosticism is "infectious": to be neutral about the *conclusions* of many arguments, agnostics, or at least *rational* agnostics, would also have to be agnostic about their *premises*. But if we're agnostic about the premises of an argument, the argument won't justify accepting its conclusion.

and the theory of evolution (Michael Behe). It doesn't follow that those classic arguments were unsuccessful.

5.3.1 The "Reasonable Man". In some legal and medical contexts, claims and arguments are evaluated by asking whether the "reasonable man" (the "man on the Clapham omnibus") would accept or be convinced by them.[19] If we interpret 'the reasonable man' as a *generic*, distinct from '*all* reasonable people', we get a theory in the spirit of Rationalism that avoids the above conflicts with Paradigms. While the semantics of generics is vexed,[20] the truth of 'most *X*s are *F*' at least lends support to the generic '*X*s are *F*'. And one could argue that *most* rational people would be convinced by the arguments for the standard theory of elementary particles, the atomic theory of matter, and the theory of evolution. That seems doubtful, but it doesn't matter: *whatever* the semantics of 'the reasonable man is *F*', 'the reasonable man will be convinced by extremely complex mathematical proofs' is clearly false. But (even very complex) mathematical proofs are paradigmatically successful arguments, and so the "reasonable man" standard conflicts with Paradigms.

5.3.2 Rationalism.* A more promising way to reconcile Rationalism with Paradigms would be to point out that while Einstein, Mach, and Behe are or were *generally* rational, they are or were *imperfectly* rational, and their respective negative assessments of the arguments for the standard theory, atomism, and evolution were irrational. If so, they are not counterexamples to:

> **Rationalism*:** An argument *A* is a success iff it would convince anyone who *rationally assesses it*.

This is plausibly what defenders of Rationalism meant to endorse all along. Nonetheless, some paradigmatically successful arguments can be rationally rejected. After all, some logicians (e.g., McGee 1985) deny the validity of *modus ponens*, mathematical Intuitionists deny the universal validity of *reductio* proofs, and so on. Are these judgments irrational? If not, then paradigmatically successful arguments making use of those inference rules can be rationally rejected. But if so, the standard for 'rational assessment' rules out the considered evaluations of mathematicians and logicians. Unless we stipulate that being rational *entails* tracking the truth—in which case we're back to the Soundness Account—we will likely have to admit that some paradigmatically successful arguments can be rationally rejected. After all, since one's prior credence in some conclusion *c* might be arbitrarily low, for an argument supporting *c* to be rationally compelling, it would have to have premises to which one assigned *arbitrarily high* priors.

5.4 Against Rational Agnosticism. This worry about low priors might appear to be solvable by requiring our audience to be antecedently neutral, or agnostic, about the issue at hand. If unbiased reasonable people (acting reasonably) are convinced by an argument, how could it fail to be successful? And if an argument is successful, how could it fail to convince such an unbiased and rational audience? This is the key idea behind Rational Agnosticism, defended by Peter van Inwagen.[21] There are, however, serious problems facing this view—problems that, as we will see, afflict all non-Individualistic views.

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[19] Thanks to Lara Buchak for suggesting that I discuss this standard.

[20] See, e.g., Leslie (2008).

[21] See van Inwagen (2006: Ch.3) for his full account, although I will mention two important points here: first,

5.4.1 Bayesianism. The first problem is that Rational Agnosticism doesn't really solve the problem of differing priors. According to Bayesianism, the rational response to new evidence depends on one's priors. But it is rationally permissible, and often obligatory, for different people to have different priors, reflecting differences in the evidence they've previously encountered, and (perhaps) differences in their ur-priors.[22] Thus, if Bayesianism is even roughly correct, it will be rationally permissible, and often obligatory, for different people to respond differently to the same argument, even if they all assign the conclusion a prior credence of .5. This is because they may assign substantially different credences to the *premises* of the argument.[23] Bayesianism thus provides support for Individualism, and rules out Rationalism, Rational Agnosticism, and perhaps Weakened Rational Agnosticism.

5.4.2 Total Evidence. But we don't need to appeal to Bayesianism to reach this conclusion. For what it is rational for someone to believe depends on their *total* evidence. Since different people have different amounts of (perhaps misleading) evidence for and against the premises and conclusions of arguments, different people *should* respond differently to arguments depending on the other evidence they have bearing on the arguments' premises and conclusions. Indeed, since an individual can have arbitrary amounts of misleading evidence against a claim, it can require an argument with arbitrarily well-supported premises to (rationally) convince them of it. We've seen that this cannot be circumvented by requiring successful arguments to be "packaged" with evidence for their premises. So Rationality appears to entail Individualism even for non-Bayesians.

5.4.3 Evidence Non-Neutrality. This conclusion gains further justification if, as Williamson (2007) argues, evidence is *non-neutral*. The "non-neutrality" of evidence entails that (rational) parties will not generally agree on what the evidence is, or what it supports. On Williamson's view, one's evidence is one's knowledge, and so, since different people know different things, an argument might be compelling for someone who knows its premises, but not for someone who doesn't. Given Rationality, this provides direct support for Individualism, and The Knowledge Account in particular. But the non-neutrality of evidence is not tied to Williamson's account of evidence: taking one's evidence to be one's justified beliefs makes evidence no more neutral than taking it to be knowledge. And if evidence is non-neutral, we should be Individualists.[24]

5.4.4 Rational Agnosticism:* In response to considerations like these, van Inwagen (2017: 382) says,

> If [this set of considerations] is cogent, it tells against the possibility of there

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van Inwagen stipulates that the argument has been "ideally presented" in the presence of an "ideal opponent"; and second, as will come up later, van Inwagen really accepts *Communal* Rational Agnosticism: his agnostics are to be drawn from our time and culture, thus relativizing success to a time and culture. Note that the objections in the main text also apply to the modification of van Iwagen's view defended in Hanna (2015).

[22] Even objective Bayesians, if sensible, allow for a *range* of acceptable ur-priors. Yes, objective Bayesians who accept the Uniqueness Thesis deny this (cf. White 2010). But I said *sensible* objective Bayesians.

[23] Priors can be "swamped" by the evidence, but they are not always swamped. See, e.g., Doob (1971) and Gaifman and Snir (1982).

[24] Note that evidence non-neutrality also provides reason to think that the Soundness+Evidence Account is an individualistic rather than an objective theory of success.

> being any argument in any field of enquiry that is a non-individual-relative success. This one, for example: 'Only a ball casts a circular shadow from all angles; hence, if the boundary of the shadow the earth casts on the moon during a partial lunar eclipse is always an arc of a circle, then the earth must be a ball.'

But these considerations do not have that unwelcome implication. Priors *can* be swamped, and it is plausible that the "Ball Argument" would swamp any reasonable set of priors one could have for its premises, thus convincing all rational agnostics.[25] But the fact that *some* successful arguments would convince all rational agnostics doesn't entail that *every* successful argument would. And it's plausible that some paradigmatically successful arguments do not have the power to swamp every set of reasonable priors that could be assigned to their premises, consistent with assigning their conclusions a credence of .5. Van Inwagen thus proposes to tweak his view such that arguments that do *not* swamp all consistent sets of priors may count as successful. He writes:

> …I think we may speak of the "core priors" of the (adult) [people of our time and culture], the priors that they (almost) all share…I am happy to relativize my account of success to "success with respect to those whose set of priors (whose *consistent* set of priors) includes the core priors of our time and culture."

This modification generates a *targeted* dialectical theory:

> **Cultural Rational Agnosticism:** An argument *A* is successful iff it would convince *all rational agnostics* from our time and culture, and who have our core priors, to accept *A*'s conclusion.

5.4.5 Essentially Individualistic Arguments. An important problem for Cultural Rational Agnosticism, and indeed all non-individualistic views, is that there are *essentially individualistic* arguments: arguments that only work, are only *supposed* to work, for one specific person. The most famous example is Descartes' *Cogito*. (If you don't think the *Cogito* is an argument, take 'the *Cogito*' to refer to the argument 'I think, *therefore* I am'.) The *Cogito* can't be used to convince everyone that I exist, or everyone rational, or an audience of agnostics, or an audience of *rational* agnostics.[26] It couldn't even be used to raise the *credences* of such an audience. (If you are agnostic about my existence for some reason, *seeing me* might increase your credence that I exist—but you shouldn't increase your credence any further if I go on to recite the *Cogito*.) But the *Cogito* is a paradigmatically successful argument. Thus all non-individualistic views run afoul of Paradigms.

Van Inwagen (2017: 375) acknowledges the force of this objection and proposes to further amend his account so that it applies to arguments composed of context-sensitive *sentences* as well as to arguments composed of *propositions*. His idea is that rational agnostics will judge that the sentence 'I think, *therefore* I am' expresses a cogent argument no matter who utters it, even

[25] The point about total evidence is likewise consistent with some arguments—perhaps including the Ball Argument—being such that any or almost any "total evidence set" that includes their premises supports their conclusions. Evidence non-neutrality is similarly consistent with there being things that are evidence for anybody or almost anybody who is rational. Rational Agnosticism fails if there are *any* arguments it misclassifies, even if it classifies many arguments correctly.

[26] Or everyone in my community, or everyone rational in my community, or…

though the conclusion of the argument will express different propositions when uttered by different speakers. It's worth asking whether this is just a disguised way of saying that 'I think, *therefore* I am' is only a success *relative to the speaker*. If so, this would simply be admitting that success is individualistic. Be that as it may, no such fix will repair the deeper problem, which is that some arguments are only successful for individuals. The *Cogito* is the most famous essentially individualistic argument, but there are others. For example:

1) Only David knows that his back hurts.
2) David is not a rational agnostic.
3) Therefore, there are facts that no rational agnostic knows.

Only David *could* know that this argument is sound, since only David could know that (1) is true. If David *does* know the argument is sound, it is clearly successful for him, but not for anyone else. And in this case, rational agnostics wouldn't be in a position to know that the argument was cogent for David in the way that they know that the *Cogito* would be. Of course, a jury of rational agnostics might know that this argument would be compelling for anyone who knew it was sound. But that clearly isn't enough to deem it successful, unless the rational agnostics knew that there *was* someone who knew it was sound. But they don't, and indeed they *couldn't*. Rational Agnosticism can be further refined, of course, but it seems unlikely that the refinements required to handle objections such as these will leave us with a plausible (and non-*ad-hoc*) theory.[27]

5.4.6 Essentially Defensive Arguments. This concern is bolstered by the fact that some arguments, while not essentially individualistic, are essentially "defensive": some arguments are not intended to change anyone's mind, but only to defend the rationality of those who already accept their conclusions. Any successful response to skepticism will likely be essentially defensive in this sense. As Williamson says:

> [I]f one uses only premises and forms of inference that a skeptic about perception will allow…one has little prospect of reaching the conclusion that one has hands. But that does not show that we should not be confident that we have hands. (Williamson 2007: 238)

> Of course, skeptics will say that…claims about our environment [like "dreams with the sustained coherence of waking life are very rare"] merely beg the question…But the claims were not addressed to skeptics, in a futile attempt to persuade them out of skepticism. Instead, they figure in our appraisal of skeptical arguments, from our current non-skeptical point of view. (Williamson 2007: 249)

Rational agnostics about skepticism can't hold that dreams with the sustained coherence of waking life are very rare, since confidence that such dreams are rare derives from knowledge of the external world. But non-skeptics can and should follow Williamson in saying that claims like "dreams with the sustained coherence of waking life are very rare" are not addressed to agnostics about skepticism, in a futile attempt to persuade them out of their agnosticism. Instead, they figure in our appraisal of skeptical arguments, from our current non-skeptical

[27] Thanks to John Hawthorne for helpful discussion about these other essentially individualistic arguments.

point of view. If such responses to skepticism can be successful, Rational Agnosticism cannot be correct.[28]

5.5 Against Weakened Rational Agnosticism. According to Weakened Rational Agnosticism,[29] an argument is successful if it would sway, without necessarily convincing, a jury of rational agnostics. Many of the above criticisms of Rational Agnosticism carry over to this view, but it faces an additional problem of its own: if Weakened Rational Agnosticism merely requires a successful argument for *c* to raise the credences (neutral) rational agnostics assign to *c at all*—say, from .5 to .6—then it will conflict with Rationality, since not all such arguments articulate sufficient reasons to accept their conclusions.[30] But if Weakened Rational Agnosticism requires successful arguments to raise the credence neutral agnostics assign to *c* to the threshold of (rational) *belief*, it is equivalent to full-strength Rational Agnosticism, with all the problems it faces.

6. AGAINST TARGETED DIALECTICAL THEORIES

It should be clear that targeted dialectical theories, according to which success is relativized to a targeted audience of some kind, will inherit many of the problems of their untargeted cousins. For example, according to Communal Universalism (one version of which is defended in Huss 2005), an argument is successful for a community *c* iff it would convince all members of *c*. But like Universalism, Communal Universalism runs afoul of Paradigms: sometimes the problem is with one's audience, not one's argument. Even epistemically *ideal* arguments won't always convince one's audience (due to irrationality or ignorance).[31] Conversely, a biased audience might be convinced by bad or unsuccessful arguments.

Similarly, like Rationalism and Agnosticism, Communal Rationalism (defended in Goldman 2003) and Communal Agnosticism can't make sense of essentially individualistic arguments. We've already seen the problems with van Inwagen's version of Communal Rational Agnosticism, and Powerbroker Communalism (according to which successful arguments are those that the powerbrokers in a community deem successful) and Future Communalism (according to which successful arguments are those that will be deemed successful in the considered historical judgment of future community members) also face serious problems. Most obviously, they tie success to the responses of a possibly biased or unreasonable audience. Misogyny led the philosophical community in the 17th Century to ignore or underappreciate the arguments of some women who are now forgotten. Both Powerbroker and Future Communalism entail that the arguments of those philosophers were not successful.

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[28] It might be argued that a high credence in "dreams with the sustained coherence of waking life are very rare" is one of our "core" priors, and hence that Cultural Rational Agnosticism is compatible with such responses to skepticism. But if there are successful essentially defensive responses to skepticism, there are successful essentially defensive arguments for currently unfashionable conclusions, such that high credences in the premises of *those* arguments are *not* among the core priors of our current society. In any case, this point doesn't help with the essentially individualistic arguments discussed above.

[29] Defended in van Inwagen (2017: 385).

[30] This objection, as well as many of the objections to Rational Agnosticism, applies in spades to:

> **Probability Raising:** An argument *A* for conclusion *c* is successful iff the rational response to it would be to increase one's credence in *c*.

[31] If we modify the view such that it only has to produce justified belief in some sort of idealized rational audience, we get a view like Rationalism.

But surely some such women sometimes argued successfully: that is part of what makes their exclusion from the canon so tragic.[32]

Moreover, it is clearly possible for hermits—people belonging to no community and who have no audience—to produce successful arguments. This is so even in the extreme case where there are no communities: where hermits are the only people in existence. If you are tempted to think that hermits are communities of one (or their own audiences), consider whether targeted dialectical theories are plausible relative to such singular communities. Powerbroker and Future Communalism don't even make sense for such a "community",[33] Communal Universalism would entail that *every* argument the hermit finds compelling is a success, Communal Rationalism would entail that every argument the hermit *rationally* finds compelling is a success,[34] and so on.

6.1 Possible Permutations. There are two obvious ways to tweak the dialectical theories considered above: instead of requiring successful arguments to convince everybody, or everybody rational, etc., we could require them to convince

(1) *most* people, or *most* rational people, etc., or

(2) *some* people, or *some* rational people, etc.

The first route—changing 'all' to 'most'—won't help with essentially individualistic arguments, but the second route might seem promising. Consider:

> **Rationalism$_S$**: An argument *A* is a success iff it would convince *some* rational people about *A*'s conclusion.

Rationalism$_S$ avoids the main problems with Rationalism, since *some* rational people are convinced by all paradigmatically successful arguments. Of course, convincing some rational people isn't sufficient for having a true conclusion, and so Rationalism$_S$ still fails to satisfy Verity. But more importantly, Rationalism$_S$ fails to satisfy Rationality, since it can be irrational for someone to accept the conclusion of an argument that (rationally) convinces another rational person, since one may have information that shows or suggests that its conclusion (or one of its premises) is false—information that the other person lacks. A similar problem afflicts:

> **Rational Agnosticism$_S$**: An argument *A* is a success iff it would convince *some* rational agnostics about *A*'s conclusion.

And so on for Communal Rationalism$_S$ and Communal Rational Agnosticism$_S$. By only requiring arguments to convince *some* rather than *all* members of group *X*, we make it easier for arguments to count as successful. This helps avoid false negatives—paradigmatically successful arguments that are *not* deemed successful—but only by generating false positives: unsuccessful arguments that *are* deemed successful.[35]

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[32] Not that we should measure the quality or importance of philosophical writing merely by the number of successful arguments it contains.

[33] Well, a hermit *could*, in theory, publish their own philosophy journal. But getting published in that journal would obviously not be sufficient for success.

[34] Recall that those with misleading evidence can be rationally persuaded by arguments with false premises.

[35] Oppy (2022) argues that the "common conception" of good arguments is incompatible with expressing them in conversation, and so we should reject the common conception. While I don't find Oppy's argument compelling, readers that do (and that find the common conception attractive) will have a further reason to reject general or targeted dialectical accounts. (Although it is important to keep in mind that Oppy is giving an account of *good*—not successful—arguments.)

7. INDIVIDUALISTIC THEORIES

Individualistic theories differ from the theories we've considered so far in that they relativize success to individuals rather than groups: according to such theories, an argument can be a success for one person but not another, even within a group. Individualism might seem like a radical view, but we have already discussed several important considerations in its favor: Bayesianism, the total evidence requirement, evidence non-neutrality, essentially individualistic arguments, and essentially defensive arguments.

An additional consideration is the phenomenon that Laurie Paul (2014) calls *epistemically transformative experiences*: experiences that change what one is in a position to know or rationally believe, such as (perhaps) tasting Vegemite, seeing red for the first time, or having one's first child. If there are transformative experiences, those who have undergone them will be in a position to reasonably believe or know the premises of some arguments that those who have not undergone them will not be in a position to reasonably believe or know. While Rational Agnosticism could in principle accommodate this by stipulating some specific set of "core" transformative experiences the audience of agnostics will have undergone, the phenomenon lends intuitive support to Individualism.[36]

7.1 Forms of Individualism. There are good reasons, then, to accept Individualism. But what form of Individualism is correct? The Knowledge Account, according to which an argument is successful for *i* iff *i* knows it is sound and non-fallacious, satisfies our desiderata. It satisfies Rationality, since if one knows the premises of an argument, and knows that the argument is valid and non-fallacious, then accepting its conclusion is not rationally criticizable. It satisfies Paradigms, since paradigmatically successful arguments are known to be sound and non-fallacious (and paradigmatically unsuccessful arguments aren't). And it satisfies Verity, since there aren't sound arguments for false conclusions. None of the other forms of Individualism accomplish this feat. The Belief Account fails to satisfy Rationality and Verity, The True Belief Account fails to satisfy Rationality, and The Justified Belief Account fails to satisfy Verity. (Sometimes successful arguments aren't distinguished from good ones. That's a mistake, for the reasons indicated in §3.2. But while The Justified Belief Account isn't the best account of *successful* arguments, it is a promising account of *good* arguments. There can't be *successful* arguments for contradictory conclusions, but there can certainly be *good* arguments for them.) What we might call "The Justified True Belief Account" seems to satisfy our desiderata, but it is hard to see why one would prefer it to The Knowledge Account, unless one thought that that having a justified, true, but Gettiered belief that an argument *A* was sound and non-fallacious was sufficient for *A*'s being successful.[37] That seems implausible. The KK and Understanding Accounts, however, deserve a more extended discussion.

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[36] Paul's view is an instance of the plausible and widely accepted idea that some standpoints are epistemically privileged with respect to certain arguments or claims: that there are arguments and claims that equally intelligent and rational people are not equally well-positioned to assess. This idea, which fits nicely within an individualistic framework for success, is an important component of standpoint epistemology: see, e.g., Anderson (2019).

[37] Similar arguments suggest that knowledge is the aim of inquiry: see, e.g., Kelp (2014), and Friedman (2023) for an important response. Friedman's arguments for pluralism about the aim of inquiry are convincing, but note that The Knowledge Account is consistent with pluralism about successful argumentation, which is at least closely related to pluralism about the aim of argumentation, which seems related to pluralism about the aim of inquiry. Argumentation (and inquiry) can have a variety of different *practical* aims. But epistemic success can't be analyzed as the achievement of some epistemic aim: as argued in §3, true belief seems like an epistemic aim, but convincing

7.1.1 The KK Account. According to The KK Account, an argument *A* is successful for an individual *i* iff *i* knows that *i* knows *A* to be sound and non-fallacious. The KK Account clearly satisfies Rationality and Verity, but it's unclear whether it satisfies Paradigms, since it's unclear that every paradigmatically successful argument is such that we know that we know it to be sound. One reason that seems doubtful is that it would require anyone in possession of a successful argument to have the concept of knowledge. More fundamentally, it isn't clear what would motivate The KK Account over The Knowledge Account, perhaps other than a desire to have a very stringent standard of success. Of course, if knowing *entails* knowing that you know, the KK and Knowledge Accounts are equivalent. But if knowing doesn't entail knowing that you know, the KK Account implies that you could know an argument to be sound (and non-fallacious) without it being successful for you. That seems incorrect.

7.1.2 The Apodictic Knowledge Account. Similar considerations undermine what we might call

> **The Apodictic Knowledge Account:** An argument *A* is successful for an individual *i* iff *i knows with certainty* that *A* is sound and non-fallacious.

There is no question whether The Apodictic Knowledge Account satisfies Paradigms: it clearly doesn't. After all, there is precious little of which we can be truly certain: few if any successful scientific arguments produce certainty, and it is difficult for non-experts to be certain about the soundness of complex mathematical proofs. Indeed, even simple proofs may not satisfy this criterion: philosophers often hold that we can't be certain we're not dreaming or being manipulated by an evil demon. It would follow that we can't be certain that even simple mathematical proofs aren't dream- or demon-induced illusions.

7.1.3 The Understanding Account. Finally, what about the Understanding Account, according to which successful arguments are those that produce understanding?[38] As stated, the Understanding Account runs afoul of both Rationality and Verity. We can understand false claims, and so arguments that produce understanding, even with respect to their conclusions, may fail have true conclusions. Just so, possessing an argument that produces understanding of its conclusion does not necessarily justify or rationalize *acceptance* of that conclusion.[39] And the Understanding Account also runs afoul of Paradigms, at least if, as many mathematicians claim, there is a distinction between explanatory and unexplanatory mathematical proofs.[40]

None of this is to say that (unsound) arguments that produce understanding are worthless. They are certainly practically successful, relative to the goal of producing understanding. This may even be a kind of *epistemic* practical success: understanding is plausibly of epistemic value, even great value. Still, as argued in §3, we should distinguish practically successful arguments for epistemic goals from epistemically successful arguments. And arguments for false conclusions—indeed, arguments for conclusions that are *known* to be false—can be successful

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albeit fallacious arguments for true conclusions aren't epistemically successful.

[38] Thanks to the many people who pressed me to think more carefully about the connection between understanding and success, especially Laura Callahan and Chris Hauser.

[39] Arguments that produce understanding of some claim other than their conclusions are even less likely to rationalize acceptance of their conclusions, or to have true conclusions.

[40] E.g., "Our philosophical objection to transcendental proofs is that they may logically prove a result but they do not explain it, except for the special case of real numbers." (Brumfiel 1979: 166) See also Lange (2014).

in producing understanding, and even in producing understanding with respect to their conclusions. Nonetheless, such arguments violate both Rationality and Verity.

A better version of the Understanding Account might be

> **The Understanding-Knowledge Account:** An argument *A* is successful for an individual *i* iff *i understands A* and *knows* that *A* is sound and non-fallacious.

This is an interesting account, but it is underdeveloped. Most obviously, it doesn't specify what *level* of understanding is required. Requiring *perfect* understanding would conflict with Paradigms, since we perfectly understand very little. But requiring only *some* understanding would collapse the view into The Knowledge Account. So perhaps the best version of the view would require some middling level of understanding, such that it rules out arguments The Knowledge Account deems successful. But it's not clear why we should want to do that, nor that doing so is consistent with Paradigms. If I know that, say, a computer-generated mathematical proof is sound without really understanding it—I know the premises, but I don't really understand the mechanics: I only know *that* it is valid thanks to the computer—it seems like the argument is still successful for me (I have a successful argument for its conclusion). While there would be something valuable to be gained by coming to understand the proof, successful arguments don't need to be perfect (as argued in §3.2), and so even if understanding is better than knowledge, that doesn't entail that success requires understanding.

8. OBJECTIONS

We have, then, a variety of reasons to think that The Knowledge Account is the correct theory of (epistemic) argumentative success. But the total evidence requirement—and common sense—counsel us to consider reasons for thinking that it isn't.

8.1 Changing the Subject. Some might worry that Individualism can't be correct, since 'successful' is a (monadic) *property* of arguments rather than a relation, and so individualistic success—success relative to individuals—is just a different subject than success *simpliciter*.

While it's true that our naïve conception of success is monadic, we can and sometimes *should* analyze intuitively monadic concepts relationally: many philosophers accept, e.g., relativistic theories of wrongness, simultaneity, and motion. Even if moral relativism is false, the mere fact that it conflicts with our pre-theoretic judgment that 'is wrong' is monadic isn't probative. And the relativity of simultaneity and motion are, well, *true*. Insisting that some *analysandum* is a (non-relational) property is just posturing. And indeed, at least one developed and promising competitor to Individualism—van Inwagen's communal version of Rational Agnosticism—is relativistic as well.

But even if success is relativized, one might insist that it isn't relativized to individuals. Van Inwagen (2017: 374) argues that his theory is not in competition with individualistic theories, since his is a theory of success relative to cultures (at times), and individualistic theories aren't. It might be hard to see, in the abstract, how such different theories could be commensurable, but recall that cultural relativism about morality is in competition with both subjectivism (individualistic relativism) and objectivism (a monadic theory). And indeed, van Inwagen takes his own relativistic theory to be in competition with monadic theories like Universalism and Rationalism. He says, "[Rationalism] sets the bar too high. I propose to lower it by relativizing success…to [cultures]." (2006: 40) Just so, I might say, "Van Inwagen's account of success sets the bar too high. I propose to lower it by relativizing success to individuals." If van

Inwagen was not changing the subject when *he* lowered the bar by relativizing success to cultures, it is hard to see how I could be changing the subject when I lower it further by relativizing success to individuals.

8.2 Basing. Some might think that there should be a "basing clause" baked into The Knowledge Account, requiring that the conclusions of successful arguments are or could be known *on the basis of* their premises. If a plausible basing clause could be formulated, The Knowledge Account could be amended to accommodate it. But as intuitively plausible as the idea of a basing clause might be, it's difficult to formulate one that isn't violated by paradigmatically successful arguments. I want to be clear that I don't mean to dismiss the notion of basing, or ague that we lack an account of basing that can serve any important purpose (e.g., that of distinguishing between propositional and doxastic justification). Rather, my claim is just that there's no basing clause that clearly should be incorporated into The Knowledge Account.

Consider, for example, a *counterfactual* basing clause, as suggested by van Inwagen (2017: 383). Such a clause might require that an individual would know the premises of the argument to be true whether or not they knew the conclusion to be true. But this seems to rule out simple deductive arguments, including simple (paradigmatically successful) mathematical proofs. For example, it's a theorem of Peano arithmetic that 1<1,000,000. But one wouldn't know the Peano axioms if one didn't know the theorem: the theorem is so obvious that if one didn't know it one's mathematical capacities would have to be seriously impaired.[41]

A *causal* basing clause might require that one's knowledge of the premises of the argument causes (in whole or part) one's knowledge of the conclusion. But this seems incompatible with the success of the *Cogito*: my knowledge that I exist was not caused in whole or part by my knowledge that I am thinking. And this is a general phenomenon: many successful arguments merely confirm what we already know: e.g., proofs of elementary mathematical truths. Such proofs are still successful arguments.

A *modalized* causal basing clause might only require that one's knowledge of the premises of the argument *could* cause (in whole or part) one's knowledge of the conclusion. It's not clear that this helps with the *Cogito*, and it would seem to rule out successful arguments for obvious or non-inferentially known conclusions. Knowledge of the proof that 1<1,000,000 couldn't cause anyone to know that 1<1,000,000, since anyone capable of understanding that proof would already know, due to its obviousness, that 1<1,000,000.[42]

A *doxastic* basing clause might require that an individual believes (or knows) that the premises of an argument constitute a good reason to accept its conclusion. It's implausible, however, that everyone for whom an argument is successful has an explicit higher-order belief about the evidential weight of the argument's premises *vis-à-vis* its conclusion.

This concern is ameliorated by a *modalized* doxastic basing clause that only requires that an individual *could* (on the basis of some evidence *E*) believe or know that the premises of the argument constitute a good reason to accept its conclusion. On such an approach, we'd have to determine what evidence was admissible and how good a reason was good enough. Set that

[41] If we move from 'would' to 'could', things are different: it's metaphysically possible to believe the Peano axioms but not have drawn the dead obvious conclusion. But if metaphysical possibility is all that's required, the basing requirement loses all its teeth: every (non-explicitly-circular) argument will satisfy it. And explicitly circular arguments are already unsuccessful according to The Knowledge Account.

[42] These considerations show why we should resist the temptation to interpret The Knowledge Account as claiming that successful arguments are those that (could) produce the epistemic good of knowledge. That might be *sufficient* for success, but it isn't necessary. See also §3, §5.4.6, and §7.1.3.

aside; for reasons given in §5.4.6, there is reason to doubt that all successful arguments provide good reasons to *come to* accept their conclusions, since successful essentially defensive arguments merely provide good reasons to *maintain* one's prior acceptance of their conclusions without providing good reasons for antecedent agnostics to accept those conclusions. But if this basing clause is interpreted so liberally that all (non-fallacious) sound arguments provide good reasons for accepting their conclusions, it adds nothing to The Knowledge Account.

Other basing clauses might require, e.g., that successful arguments be non-circular (or non-question-begging), but circular and question-begging arguments are already ruled out by the "non-fallacious" clause in The Knowledge Account. (However, if 'fallacious' is deemed too vague to serve in a philosophical analysis, a basing clause of this kind may be a suitable replacement.) So, while The Knowledge Account *could* be amended to incorporate a basing clause, it's not clear that it *should* be.

8.3 Epistemic Success Pluralism. Another worry is that we should be pluralists about epistemic success. I've noted that there are varieties of argumentative success, and so granted that pluralism about this general notion is true: in addition to epistemic success, there is practical success: success with respect to achieving some goal, like getting published or elected or hired. Some arguments are good for convincing conservatives, other arguments are good for convincing progressives; some arguments are good for getting published in *The Philosophical Review*, others are good for getting published in *Continental Philosophy Review*; etc.

But perhaps success pluralism runs deeper: perhaps we should be pluralists about *epistemic* success. It is in responding to this suggestion that we reap the benefits of the tedious "process of elimination" argument employed above. If there were multiple *plausible* yet *significantly different* theories of epistemic success, epistemic success pluralism might itself be plausible. But there aren't, so it isn't. At least if the desiderata appealed to above are correct, it's basically The Knowledge Account or bust. While The Justified Belief Account is an interesting and plausible account of success—one that satisfies the two *most* important desiderata (Rationality and Paradigms)—it fails to satisfy Verity, and it is close enough to The Knowledge Account that pluralism seems inappropriate: The Justified Belief Account and The Knowledge Account are clearly not complementary, but in competition. That is, it is all but irresistible to think of them as competing analyses of the same *analysandum*, rather than non-competing analyses of different *analysanda*. Those with internalist sympathies may prefer The Justified Belief Account, and those with externalist sympathies may prefer The Knowledge Account, but no one should think that they're *both* correct. Likewise with The Justified True Belief Account and The KK Account.[43]

Some might have a slightly different worry: not that we should be pluralists about epistemic success, but rather that there isn't a pre-theoretic notion of epistemic success for us to be pluralists about. The worry is that 'epistemic success' is just a *technical term*. Technical terms can be stipulatively defined, but without a pre-theoretic concept one is trying to capture, those definitions can't be correct or incorrect. The only question is whether they're *useful*.

Many of the arguments in this paper could be rewritten as arguments for the conclusion that The Knowledge Account is the most useful conception of success from the perspective of epistemic evaluation. The arguments might lose some of their force, but not all of it. I have not taken this route, however, since I don't think 'epistemically successful argument' *is* just a

[43] I said above that The Justified Belief Account was a more promising account of good arguments than of successful ones. But goodness is different than success, so this concession doesn't support pluralism about epistemic argumentative *success*.

technical term. I think it expresses an (admittedly vague) pre-theoretic concept that competing analyses are attempting to capture. After all, there is an existing literature on the topic (see fn.1), and the disagreements one finds there don't seem any more verbal than most other debates in philosophy: there seems to be a shared concept that people genuinely disagree about. (Certain strands of the historical literature on demonstration were also, I think, attempts to elucidate this concept.[44]) Indeed, I think I *have* the pre-theoretic concept of epistemic success: it's the concept of an argument that "works", that establishes its conclusion. What I've argued in this paper, in effect, is that arguments can establish their conclusions for certain people without establishing them for others, and that an argument establishes its conclusion for someone iff that person knows it to be sound and non-fallacious. (There is a sense of 'establish' where an argument can only establish something for someone if it was the *first* argument that convinced them of it. That is not the sense of 'establish' intended here.)

8.4 Discipline-Specific Pluralism. With that being said, one form of pluralism is still on the table: *discipline-specific* pluralism. I take it to be a virtue of my account that it applies to *all* arguments—that I provide an analysis of 'successful argument' rather than, e.g., 'successful argument for controversial philosophical conclusion'[45]—but perhaps others will see this as a vice. It might, for example, be tempting to think that pluralism about epistemic success follows trivially from the fact that successful mathematical arguments must be *proofs*, while successful arguments in other disciplines may fall short of that standard.

But The Knowledge Account can explain the difference between success in philosophy and mathematics. Analyzing the concept of mathematical proof is beyond the scope of this paper, but there is a glaring difference between arguments in philosophy and mathematics: the axioms (and theorems) that mathematicians use in their proofs are perfectly precise and almost wholly uncontroversial. Virtually all mathematicians know that the proofs appearing in mathematical textbooks and journals are sound, and know that with something approaching certainty. Does this mean that there is a different *standard of success* when it comes to mathematics? No! If mathematical axioms and theorems are commonly and apodictically known, there is a *de facto* common (within the mathematical community at least) and apodictic standard of mathematical success. But there is no need to treat this as different *in kind* than success in other disciplines, including philosophy: to think that this is not a *merely de facto* difference. Rather, we can attribute the communal and apodictic nature of successful mathematical arguments to the fact that mathematical premises are communally and apodictically known. It is perfectly consistent with Individualism that there are some, indeed many, successful arguments that are communally and apodically recognizable as such. And if we *can* account for the differences between mathematics and philosophy in this way, considerations of parsimony suggest that we *should*. Postulating two kinds of success for this reason is unnecessary, given that we already know that premises can be communally or merely privately known, with or without certainty.

In a recent series of interesting papers, however, Jennifer Nado has argued that this approach is inadequate, since it can't explain why *probabilistic* arguments for Goldbach's Conjecture fail to settle the issue (it's still a conjecture, after all), despite the fact that

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[44] I can't defend this claim here, but it's important to note that I only mean this in the broad sense in which decision theory has the same subject matter as Thomistic and Kantian discussions of practical reason.

[45] Van Inwagen claims that his account is "perfectly general", in the sense that "it is to apply to an argument for any (controversial) philosophical conclusion whatever." (2006: 45) I am aspiring to a more perfectly general form of perfect generality.

probabilistic arguments of equal power would be sufficient to settle scientific disputes.[46] Goldbach's Conjecture has been verified for the first 10^{18} numbers, and there are reasons to think that if there were a counterexample, it would be smaller rather than larger. This suggests that it's not merely that successful mathematical arguments *are* proofs, but that they *must be* proofs: that even *very* powerful mathematical arguments that are not proofs are not successful. Nado also notes that conviction in criminal cases in the U.S. requires guilt to be established "beyond reasonable doubt", a stronger requirement than ordinary knowledge.[47] Overall, her position is that successful philosophical, mathematical, scientific, and legal arguments must produce higher grades of knowledge than arguments in ordinary contexts. Since these higher grades of knowledge are presumably not all the same, we might say that the aim of philosophical, mathematical, scientific, and legal arguments is to produce knowledge$_p$, knowledge$_m$, knowledge$_s$, and knowledge$_l$, respectively.

For reasons given above, I don't think we should require successful arguments to (be able to) *produce* knowledge at all, but The Knowledge Account could be amended to accommodate discipline-specific epistemic standards as follows:

> **The Disciplinary Knowledge Account:** An argument *A* is a success for an individual *i* in discipline *d* iff *i knows$_d$ A* to be sound and non-fallacious.

But there are a few reasons to think that such an amendment is unnecessary.

8.4.1 A General Worry. One general concern about the idea of discipline specific epistemic standards derives from the elegance and power of Bayesian epistemology, which provides an all-encompassing and seemingly exceptionless epistemic standard that would "crowd out" any discipline-specific epistemic standards. According to Bayesianism, evidence, by definition, (is whatever) raises the probability of a hypothesis.[48] So on standard Bayesian accounts, something is evidence for *p* or it isn't: if it raises the probability of *p*, it is, if not, not. Hence, if mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers have evidence that makes some hypothesis all but certain, then (given plausible background assumptions about how to move from credences to beliefs) it would be *irrational* for them not to accept the hypothesis, regardless of the disciplinary context. How one should update one's credences upon learning something new depends *entirely* on one's priors, not on whether one is a philosopher or a plumber or a judge or a juror. In conjunction with one's priors, one's evidence simply will, or will not, support a credence of, say, .9 in *p*. It is consistent with orthodox Bayesianism to *describe* someone with a rational credence of .9 in *p* as *knowing* that *p* in ordinary but not legal, mathematical, or philosophical contexts. But, as argued below, such contextualist theories of knowledge are compatible with The Knowledge Account as originally stated.[49]

In any case, one needn't be a fanatical Bayesian to think that epistemic norms that depart from the formalism should be treated with suspicion. And for orthodox Bayesians, there's simply no room for disciplinary differences in epistemic standards. There might be different

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[46] See Nado (2017, 2019).

[47] See Raz (2001) for related discussion.

[48] There remain questions about what best plays the evidence role: some say that our evidence is what we know, others say that our evidence consists of descriptions of our phenomenal states, etc.

[49] Might we say that knowing$_o$ *p* requires a credence of .85, knowing$_p$ *p* required a credence of .9, knowing$_s$ *p* requires a credence of .95, and knowing$_m$ *p* requires a credence of 1? Sure, but that would be naturally interpreted as a form of contextualism about knowledge. If it isn't, why think these propositional attitudes are forms of *knowledge*?

practical standards in different disciplines: given a rational credence of .9, what's permissible to *do, say, or publish* might be different in ordinary, philosophical, scientific, or mathematical contexts. But that's consistent with monism about *epistemic* standards.[50]

8.4.2 Contextualism and Individualism. It's important to note that if epistemic contextualism (about knowledge) is true, there will be cases that *appear* to support epistemic success pluralism: cases where an argument is an epistemic success in one context but not another, even for the same individual. For example, an argument might be successful in ordinary contexts but unsuccessful in philosophical contexts. This wouldn't entail that there is a different, highter, standard of success in philosophy than in ordinary life, however. Rather, that difference could be explained (assuming epistemic contextualism) by the fact that we *know* the argument is sound in ordinary but not in philosophical contexts. And even if epistemic contextualism is false, an argument might be successful in one context but not another simply because the argument is fallacious in one context but not another. For example, as Keller (2015) points out, the standard argument for the conclusion that the Earth rotates takes as a premise that Foucault Pendulums rotate. In philosophical contexts where the existence of motion itself is under dispute, this argument would be circular. In ordinary contexts where the existence of motion is taken for granted, this argument is unproblematically successful.

8.4.3 Beyond Reasonable Doubt. What, then, of Nado's examples? It seems fairly clear that the difference in legal standards is practical rather than epistemic, since jurors who deliver a non-guilty *verdict* might *know* the defendant is guilty. The question in criminal trials isn't what we know, but what can be established beyond reasonable doubt *while obeying certain procedural rules*. (E.g., if guilt can only be established beyond reasonable doubt using inadmissible but compelling evidence, the correct legal verdict is 'not guilty'.) Alternatively, one might say that the conclusions of legal arguments are tailored to the context: e.g., in OJ's *criminal* case, where he was found *innocent*, the proposition under debate was 'The admissible evidence shows beyond reasonable doubt that OJ is guilty', and in the *civil* case, where he was found *guilty*, it was 'The preponderance of admissible evidence suggests that OJ is guilty'. In other words, there aren't different epistemic *standards* in criminal and civil cases, but different *arguments* for different *conclusions*. Conversely, we could think of the arguments in the two contexts as being the same (having the same conclusion), but as being used for different practical or legal purposes. Each of these glosses is consistent with there being a unique *epistemic telos* of argumentation, and with the thought that there were *epistemically* successful arguments for OJ's guilt—arguments that established OJ's guilt for the jurors and the public at large—even if they failed (in the criminal case) as legal arguments.[51]

8.4.4 Proofs. The case of Goldbach's Conjecture is trickier, but ultimately uncompelling. For the example to work, mathematicians must know_o that Goldbach's Conjecture is true. It's indisputable that many mathematicians think that Goldbach's Conjecture is *probably* true, but

[50] Another general worry springs from the claim, defended in Friedman (2017), that one can only rationally inquire, in the epistemic sense, into a question if one doesn't know the answer to that question. If knowledge_o is a form of knowledge, this would suggest that mathematicians who inquire into questions to which they already know_o but do not know_m the answer (e.g., Goldbach's Conjecture) are engaged in non-epistemic inquiry, which then suggests that requiring mathematical arguments to produce knowledge_m is a non-epistemic norm.

[51] Sarah Moss (2021) defends the view that—setting aside the sort of worries about admissible evidence discussed above—to have "proven guilt beyond reasonable doubt" is to have provided an argument sufficient for generating knowledge of guilt. This sits nicely with The Knowledge Account.

it's less clear that they (fully) believe that it is true, much less know$_o$ that it's true. But why wouldn't they, if the inductive evidence for it is so strong? Well, perhaps it isn't; it's not clear that mathematics is, or that mathematicians believe mathematics is, "uniform" in a way that makes it a proper subject for inductive inference.[52]

But what if mathematics *is* amenable to induction, and mathematicians *do* know$_o$ that Goldbach's Conjecture is true? Do they keep working to prove it for epistemic reasons—because they don't know$_m$ that it's true—or because mathematics aims, as a *practical* matter, at the production of proofs? Mathematical practice suggests the latter. Nado claims that there's nothing wrong with mathematicians *believing* Goldbach's Conjecture even while "on duty", and if they know$_o$ that it's true, it's hard to see how there could be. And as noted above, mathematicians often try to find more elegant and illuminating proofs for *already proven theorems*—theorems that are already known$_m$ to be true—which suggests that mathematical inquiry is guided by norms that are not purely epistemic. This is also suggested by skepticism within the mathematical community about "brute force methods" (e.g., proof by exhaustion), although such skepticism seems to be waning.[53]

A final consideration derives from the fact that Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems are standardly thought to show that there are (known$_?$) mathematical truths that cannot be proven. These unprovable truths are known (known$_m$?) with as much certainty as other mathematical claims, but the fact that they're unprovable is taken to show an interesting limitation on mathematics. This in turn suggests that the norms or standards governing mathematics limit mathematicians to certain methods (e.g., the method of proof), comparable to the way in which trial rules limit the considerations jurors may consider. Mathematics, like the law, isn't a no-holds-barred search for the truth. We can be *certain* that someone is guilty, but we shouldn't convict if the procedural rules haven't been followed. And we can be *certain* that some mathematical claim is true, but it doesn't get added to the official edifice of mathematical knowledge until it has been proven.[54]

8.5 Proofs Again. A final worry along these lines is that The Knowledge Account doesn't actually satisfy the Desiderata. I've repeatedly appealed to the claim that mathematical proofs

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[52] See, e.g., (Baker 2007), although Baker argues that while mathematics isn't *generally* suited to induction, the inductive case for Goldbach's Conjecture is compelling.

[53] See Fallis (1997) for an extended argument that there's no *epistemic* reason for mathematicians to reject probabilistic proofs, although Fallis does grant that mathematicians "probably do have good reasons (for example sociological and/or pedagogical ones) for not using probabilistic methods" (1997: 166). Easwaran (2009) argues that probabilistic proofs are not accepted because they are not "transferable", which Easwaran describes as a "*social* epistemic virtue, rather than an individual one" (343). He goes on to say that "solitary mathematicians would have no need for transferability…The epistemic defect of non-transferability is not relevant to a mathematician as an individual choosing to believe or disbelieve mathematical claims". So while Easwaran's view is one on which there *is* something (possibly even epistemically) better about non-probabilistic proofs, it doesn't support Nado's contention that there is a higher standard for knolwedge$_m$ than for knowledge$_o$. Finally, it's worth noting that Easwaran seems somewhat sanguine about the epistemic value of transferability in the end, writing that while "[t]here is a difference between probabilistic proofs and traditional mathematical proofs…it may well be a distinction that mathematicians care about for irrational reasons—after all, the other sciences seem not to insist on it." (361) Similar considerations apply to the idea that scientific inquiry is essentially social: see, e.g., Longino (2019).

[54] I should note that even if some legal and mathematical argumentative norms are non-epistemic, that wouldn't undermine Nado's claim that there are different standards governing inquiry in different contexts, nor the end to which she puts it: arguing that even if intuitions can produce knowledge$_o$ (or perhaps even knowledge$_p$) they may still fail to be legitimate philosophical tools. Inadmissible evidence might be sufficient to establish guilt beyond reasonable doubt. But that doesn't change the fact that it's inadmissible.

are paradigmatically successful arguments, but there are two reasons why one might question this.

8.5.1 Johnson's Argument. Ralph H. Johnson has influentially argued for the surprising conclusion that proofs aren't arguments at all. According to Johnson,

> …a proof differs from an argument in several important respects. First, a proof will require axioms that are as clearly specified as rules of inference. But in the realm of argumentation, there are no axioms to which arguments may appeal…Second, a proof must be deductive; its conclusion must follow necessarily…Reasoning need not be deductive in character in order to qualify as an argument…Third, a proof establishes its conclusion not just as true but as a necessary truth. About the conclusion of almost no argument (whether philosophical or mundane) will this be the case. Last, an argument requires a dialectical tier, whereas no mathematical proof has or needs to have such. (Johnson 2000: 231-2)

There are serious problems with this argument, however. Johnson's first two reasons for thinking proofs aren't arguments are fully compatible with **The Standard View** according to which proofs are a *special subclass* of argument, and thus not reasons for thinking that proofs aren't arguments at all. The fact that many arguments aren't deductions from axioms doesn't entail or even suggest that *no* arguments are deductions from axioms. Johnson's third reason is likewise compatible with The Standard View: perhaps the "special subclass" of arguments that are proofs is just the subset of arguments that establish their conclusions as necessarily true. But if not—if there are proofs of contingent claims or non-proofs that establish their conclusions as necessary—then Johnson's third reason is based on a false pretext. And, in fact, it's false that the conclusions of all and only proofs are necessarily true: we use mathematics and logic to prove things in contingent domains (population genetics, etc.), and many arguments that aren't proofs have conclusions that are necessarily true. The statistical argument supporting Goldbach's Conjecture discussed above is one example, but plenty of others can be found in metaphysics, ethics, and theology.

That leaves us with Johnson's fourth reason. According to Johnson, "the process of argumentation must include a second—dialectical—tier in which objections and criticisms are dealt with" (2000: 160). The first thing to note is that this is an idiosyncratic requirement of Johnson's theory of argumentation, not a part of the pre-theoretic concept. And this idiosyncratic requirement doesn't seem plausible: just because a paper doesn't address potential objections and criticisms, that doesn't mean that it lacks an argument! Whether one should address potential objections and criticisms when presenting an argument depends on the particularities of the case: most obviously, on whether there are objections and criticisms that one expects one's audience to get hung up on. Some philosophical arguments (e.g., straightforward counterexamples and other straightforward deductive arguments) don't require such a "dialectical tier", and some mathematical arguments or proofs do (e.g., proofs involving inferences that are easily misunderstood). But even if that's wrong and a dialectical tier is required by all and only non-proofs, that is *still* compatible with The Standard View according to which proofs are a special subclass of argument: the subclass, perhaps, of arguments that don't require a dialectical tier. Thus, as far as I can tell Johnson has given us no reason to reject The Standard View.[55]

[55] Johnson discusses and responds to many of these objections (see, e.g., his response to Objection #1 on p.169).

8.5.2 Paradigmatically Successful for Whom? A remaining concern is that my view is hoist on its own dialectical petard, since The Knowledge Account entails that "paradigmatically successful" mathematical proofs won't be successful for *everyone*, successful *simpliciter*, given that some and indeed most people don't know them to be sound.

In response, note two things. First, a given mathematical proof will only be considered paradigmatically successful by those who know it is sound. And second, recall that on many other theories, some mathematical proofs aren't successful *at all*: they're *un*successful simpliciter. That is a much more serious problem. On The Knowledge Account, while mathematical proofs aren't successful simpliciter, they're not unsuccessful simpliciter either: they are successful for many mathematicians and others. And, upon reflection, it seems *right* to say that mathematical proofs aren't successful for everyone. It would be irrational for me to believe a mathematical theorem if I didn't know that it was a theorem: if I didn't know it had been proven. There could even be cases where one "has" a proof, at least in some senses of 'have', but where the proof is unsuccessful for one because one doesn't know it to be sound. There are highbrow cases like intuitionists not taking proofs that make use of *reductio* to be sound, and lowbrow cases like students mistakenly thinking that valid arguments are invalid. It is generally irrational to accept the conclusion of an argument one believes to be unsound, even if the argument is, in fact, a proof. On The Knowledge Account, there is an intuitive sense in which proofs are *potentially* successful: they're "eligible" to be successsful for anyone who comes to know that they are sound and non-fallacious. But it would be a mistake to think that all potentially successful arguments are successful, just as it would be a mistake to think that since all truths are potentially known—are "eligible" to be known by anyone who comes to justifiably believe them (and who is non-Gettiered)—it follows that all truths are known.

9. CONCLUSION

If what I've argued in this paper is correct, we should accept The Knowledge Account of epistemic argumentative success.[56] That's surprising news, and it has interesting and unexplored implications for how we should evaluate arguments. Most obviously, it casts into doubt the ubiquitous strategy of objecting to an argument by pointing out that someone could reasonably reject one or more of its premises. We should rather ask whether *we* know that the premises are true. If we also know that the argument is valid and non-fallacious, nothing else matters.

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While I find his responses unpersuasive, readers may wish to evaluate them themselves.

[56] If what I've argued here is *in*correct, I hope that the taxonomy and arguments I have presented will assist in further investigation of this important topic.

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