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978-0-521-88617-8 - *Informal Logic: A Pragmatic Approach*, Second Edition

Douglas Walton

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Informal Logic is an introductory guidebook to the basic principles of constructing sound arguments and criticizing bad ones. Non-technical in approach, it is based on 186 examples, which Douglas Walton, a leading authority in the field of informal logic, discusses and evaluates in clear, illustrative detail. Walton explains how errors, fallacies, and other key failures of argument occur. He shows how correct uses of argument are based on sound strategies for reasoned persuasion and critical responses. Among the many subjects covered are: forms of valid argument, defeasible arguments, relevance, appeals to emotion, personal attack, straw man argument, jumping to a conclusion, uses and abuses of expert opinion, problems in drawing conclusions from polls and statistics, loaded terms, equivocation, arguments from analogy, and techniques of posing, replying to, and criticizing questions.

This edition takes into account many new developments in the field of argumentation study that have occurred since 1989, many created by the author. Drawing on these developments, Walton includes and analyzes thirty-six new topical examples and also brings in recent work on argumentation schemes.

Ideally suited for use in courses in informal logic and introduction to philosophy, this book will also be valuable to students of pragmatics, rhetoric, and speech communication.

Douglas Walton is Distinguished Research Fellow of CRRAR (Centre for Research in Reasoning, Argumentation and Rhetoric) at the University of Windsor, and Assumption University Chair in Argumentation Studies (University of Windsor). The author of more than thirty books, he has received major research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Isaak Walton Killam Memorial Foundation. He was awarded the ISSA Prize by the International Society for the Study of Argumentation for his contributions to research on fallacies, argumentation, and informal logic, among many honors he has received for his achievements.

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Informal Logic

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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For Karen, with love.

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Preface

The purpose of this handbook is to furnish the reader with the basic methods of critical analysis of arguments, as they occur in natural language in the real marketplace of persuasion on controversial issues in politics, law, science, and all aspects of daily life. This is very much a practical (applied) subject, because each individual argument is, to some extent, unique. The technique of applying the general guidelines of criticism for each type of argumentation scheme to each individual case requires practical skills of good judgment and judicious interpretation in identifying the argument, and sorting out the main thread of the argument from the discourse it is contained in. These are pragmatic skills requiring prior identification of the type of dialogue in which an argument occurs.

Logical semantics is an important subject in its own right. It is the construction of consistent and complete theories based on semantical constants and the use of variables. Chapter 5 is about semantics, but the remaining eight chapters are mainly about the pragmatics of argumentation. For the most part, applying critical rules of good argument to argumentative discourse on controversial issues in natural language is an essentially pragmatic endeavor. It is a job requiring many of the traditional skills associated with the humanities: empathy, a critical perspective, careful attention to language, the ability to deal with vagueness and ambiguity, balanced recognition of the stronger and weaker points of an argument that is less than perfectly good or perfectly bad, a careful look at the evidence behind a claim, the skill of identifying conclusions, sorting out the main line of argument from a mass of verbiage, and the critical acumen needed to question claims based on expert knowledge in specialized claims or arguments.

A basic requirement of critical argumentation is that any argument that a critic attempts to evaluate must be set out and sympathetically appreciated in the context of dialogue in which the argument occurs. This means that we must sometimes contend with lengthy and complex arguments, and we must sometimes probe in depth into the unstated parts of an argument, into the arguer's position and commitments as indicated by the evidence of the text, and into the question that the argument was supposed to

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answer. This requirement means that if a criticism is to be made of an argument, or if the argument is to be called weak, erroneous, or even fallacious, substantial justification for the reasonableness of the criticism must be given in the form of documented evidence from the actual wording and context of the given argument. This dialectical type of approach to the study of arguments means that the question-answer context of an argument is crucially important to bring out in all reasoned criticism and analysis of arguments. Thus every argument is conceived along the lines of a challenge-response model of interactive dialogue, where two people “reason together.” Some of the most important types of contexts of argumentation will be profiles of sequences of question-answer dialogue on disputed subjects. Thus generally the theory of informal logic must be based on the concept of question-reply dialogue as a form of interaction between two participants, each representing one side of an argument, on a disputed question.

As Erik Krabbe (1985) has indicated, the concept of critical argument analysis as a dialogue logic deserves to be the cornerstone of the emerging theories of argumentation now the subject of so much interest. In recent times, the attention to the classical logic of propositions and its extensions has begun to shift, through the need for a practical approach to the study of arguments, towards a pragmatic conception of reasonable dialogue as a normative structure for argument. This shift has been signalled by the appearance of many new practically oriented textbooks but also by scholarly work in this emerging field. Two new important journals have recently begun publication – *Informal Logic* and *Argumentation* – and the Association for Informal Logic and Critical Thinking, as well as the International Society for the Study of Argumentation, have been founded. On June 26–28, 1978, the First International Symposium on Informal Logic was held at the University of Windsor. In more recent years, the development of argumentation systems has become an increasingly important research topic in computing, especially in the area of artificial intelligence. The first international conference on computational models of argument (COMMA) was held in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Liverpool in September 2006. Topics studied included systems for learning through argument, tools for supporting argumentation, dialogue-based argument systems, and computational properties of argumentation (Dunne and Bench-Capon 2006). These trends point to a welcome shift towards the practical in logic, accompanied by a growing use of argumentation theory in computing, and a resurgence of interest in the study of argumentation generally.

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At this point in the history of the subject, it is timely to raise the terminological question of whether it should still be called ‘informal logic’ or something else, such as ‘argumentation’. It is good that the term ‘logic’ should be retained, but it is a problem that for the purposes of computing, an exact science, any useful system of analyzing and evaluating arguments needs to be at least partly formal. Standardized forms of argument that represent common species of arguments encountered in everyday conversational argumentation need to have a precise, partly formal structure. However, these forms of argument also have a pragmatic factor. As a result, the practice is arising in artificial intelligence of calling these forms of argument semi-formal. Verheij (2003, 172) has described them as “semi-formal rules of inference” or “semi-formal argument templates”. What is happening now could be described as a movement from informal logic to semi-formal logic. By these lights, a more suitable title for this book might be *Semi-formal Logic*, but the title *Informal Logic* has been retained (but with the new subtitle, *A Pragmatic Approach*), to preserve continuity with the first edition.

Whatever happens in the next few years in the theory of argumentation study, it is clear that a new approach to logic and argument study has already begun to be taught in logic classes around the world, and has been taken up not only in philosophy but in fields like computing, linguistics, and speech communication. While that new logic is based on new theoretical foundations, including abstract structures of formal dialogues and pragmatic structures of discourse analysis, at the same time it is a subject that has moved much closer to many of the traditional aims of the humanities through a more practical approach to the study of particular arguments in natural language.

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There were some influences on my thinking about the subjects in the second edition of this book that should be acknowledged. A discussion forum that shaped my views on some pragmatic aspects of relevance was the conference Relevance in Argumentation, held in June 1991, at McMaster University. Among the participants with whom I discussed the problem of relevance at the conference, I would especially like to thank Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst again, as well as Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson, Chris Tindale, John Woods, Tony Blair, Jim Freeman, David Hitchcock, and Erik Krabbe. For support in the form of a Research Grant in 1994–1997, and another one in 1999, I would like to thank the

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I learned a lot about new developments in computing that turned out to be central to my changing views on argumentation theory at the Symposium on Argument and Computation at Bonskeid House in Perthshire, Scotland, in June and July 2000. I would especially like to thank Tim Norman and Chris Reed for organizing the conference, and for what they taught me during the tutorials and discussions at the conference. The following conference participants also deserve thanks for informing me about the state of the art of AI and clarifying many questions related to defeasible reasoning: Trevor Bench-Capon, Daniela Carbogim, Jim Crosswhite, Aspassia Daskalopulu, John Fox, Jim Freeman, Janne Maaïke Gerlofs, Michael Gilbert, Rod Girle, Floriana Grasso, Leo Groarke, Corin Gurr, David Hitchcock, Hanns Hohmann, Erik Krabbe, Peter McBurney, Henry Prakken, Theodore Scaltsas, Simone Stumpf, and Bart Verheij.

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