

**Review of Douglas Walton, *Informal Logic: A Pragmatic Approach* (2nd ed.).** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 347pp., \$28.99 (pbk), ISBN 9780521713801.

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### 1. Introduction

Douglas Walton is justifiably well known in argumentation theory for his synthesis of perspicuous elements of the North American school of informal logic with those of the Amsterdam Pragma-dialectical school. The dialogical basis of Walton's theory traces back through Pragma-dialectics to Hamblin's early theory of agonistic logic. Walton's treatment of the fallacies descends from the Canadian tradition inaugurated by Johnson and Blair in *Logical Self Defense*. Walton's 1989 work, *Informal Logic: A Handbook for Critical Argumentation* was a concise presentation of the main contours of Walton's synthesis of these elements. The recently issued (2008) second edition of that work provides both newcomers to argumentation theory and experienced travelers an opportunity to encounter an updated version that incorporates insights gained from Walton's truly prolific work since the publication of the original. As in the case of its predecessor, the second edition of *Informal Logic* is a carefully crafted, concise, and largely up-to-date statement of Walton's theory. While it doesn't necessarily contain everything that a student in an introductory critical thinking course might need, and will not satisfy those who are looking for a thoroughgoing philosophical defense of the finer points of Walton's theory, it does put forward a clear and powerful framework for the critical study of argumentation in Walton's characteristically lucid, conversational, and example-rich

presentation. Those familiar with Walton's other, more specifically focused works will benefit from this book in seeing how the insights developed in them all hang together as a theory of argument.

## 2. Overview

In terms of its layout, the book follows the same pattern as the original. The first chapter locates the study of arguments within the context of dialogues. A taxonomy of dialogue types is given, as is a set of rules for dialogues. As in the first edition, Walton chooses the critical discussion as the paradigm case for the discussion of arguments and fallacies. The importance of studying arguments in the context of dialogues is then defended by way of two examples of arguments whose fallacious nature can be properly diagnosed and responded to only if they are considered as part of a larger dialogue. The second chapter deals with what many would consider the second most common feature of critical discussions or persuasion dialogues after the giving of arguments—the asking and answering of questions. The third chapter outlines a concept of relevance for critical discussions. Chapter four deals with proper and improper usages of emotion in argumentation. It includes discussions of arguments from popularity, force, and pity. From there Walton moves on to discuss deductive validity in chapter five. Arguments *ad hominem* and appeals to authority comprise the subject matter of chapters six and seven, respectively. Chapter eight covers inductive arguments and fallacies, and the book closes with a chapter on natural language in which Walton discusses problems stemming from vagueness, ambiguity, and arguments from analogy.

Overall the book proceeds from topic to topic in a clear and understandable manner, but there are minor exceptions. One such is the placement of new material on questions in polling and advocacy, or push-polling. Walton places this material in chapter 2, on questions and answers. This is reasonable enough, but the material seems as though it would add more to the treatment of statistical syllogisms and their evaluation that Walton takes up in chapter 8. Additionally, as I read it, an important secondary aim of chapter 2 is to make a pragmatic case for the dialectical approach to analyzing arguments, since a monotonic style of analysis would have no produc-

tive way of dealing with questions (see below). The material on polling and advocacy, interesting and important though it is, does not seem to me to further this aim. Hence I don't think Walton would have lost anything to move it to chapter 8. In fact, it might have provided the reader with a timely reminder of the importance of looking at arguments through the lens of the dialogues in which we find them. This is only a minor complaint, though. The substance of what Walton has to say on these matters is unaffected by it.

### 3. Walton's pragmatic, dialogue-based approach

Walton's overall strategy in *Informal Logic: A Pragmatic Approach* is unchanged from the first edition. After setting out and defending his dialogue-based approach in the first three chapters, he then goes on to develop a view of the field that largely consists of the elaboration of argument schemes and associated critical questions. By and large, the defense of the approach is pragmatic: We ought to evaluate arguments as we find them embedded in dialogues, because if we do not we will be unable to explain exactly what is wrong with some important failures of argumentation that we intuitively recognize. The new subtitle of the book, "A Pragmatic Approach" (the old subtitle was "A Handbook for Critical Argumentation"), places this pragmatic concern front and center. Walton's additions to chapter 1 in the second edition, dealing with the straw man fallacy and fallacious argument from consequences, present an elegant and much improved defense of the overall approach. To commit the straw man fallacy is, in essence, to misrepresent the position of another. Once the other party is present in our thinking however, it is clear that we cannot really make sense of the problem that occurs in the straw man fallacy—as a problem of argumentation—, unless we situate the obligation to get the other party right within the context of dialogue. A perspective that focused exclusively on the inference from premises to conclusion would not be able to account for this sort of problem. Walton's example of fallacious negative argument from consequences quite neatly shows that what goes wrong in such arguments is not always attributable to the inference made from the premises to the unwanted conclusion, but in some cases must be explained in terms of the subtle shift in the type of dialogue from a *persuasion dialogue*, in which the goal is to settle

the question of whether or not a thesis should be accepted by the participants on rational grounds, to a *deliberation dialogue*, in which the goal of the discussion is to settle on a course of action. As these two types of dialogues orient to different goals, they have corresponding differences in governing rules, strategic considerations and admissible dialectical moves for the participants. To be unaware of this sort of difference is to find oneself at a distinct disadvantage in everyday discussions. These examples and others make a strong cumulative case for Walton's pragmatic approach. Granted, it is a case that most people already working within argumentation theory will not need, but for those who are new to the study of argument, or for those whose only exposure to logic is a traditional course in natural deduction, Walton's pragmatic case serves a very necessary purpose.

Apart from the improved defense of Walton's method in Chapter 1, by far the most changed discussions in the book vis-à-vis the first edition are the chapters on questions and appeals to authority. Important additions have been made to every chapter, though, including new sections on red herrings in the chapter on relevance, and on defeasible reasoning in the chapter on validity, to name just two. Throughout the book the writing, which was already good, has been improved with minor modifications that enhance readability and clarity. Many examples, too, have been updated, replacing less clear or out of date examples of the same concepts, ideas, or types of argument. All of these changes are salutary, draw on extensive work done by Walton himself and others in the interim between the two editions, and enhance the book overall.

Like its predecessor, however, there are sections of the second edition of *Informal Logic* that seem to want slightly clearer treatment. This to some degree is to be expected, just given the thorny nature of the study of argument itself. Additionally, it pays to think of the principal concern of the book as the setting out of a theory rather than a defense of that theory. In that sense, it is likely to appear to be incomplete to those who do not know Walton's other works. In many cases, the defenses and deeper explanations one might want of the ideas of *Informal Logic* are to be found in the books that appeared in the interim between the first and second editions, and which are listed in the bibliography. That said, there are still places where perhaps some further discussion would have been salutary. For purposes of brevity,

I shall focus only on two of these areas. These are the discussions of red herrings and defeasible reasoning in Chapters 3 and 5, respectively.

#### 4. Red Herrings and Defeasible Reasoning

In chapter 3, which concerns relevance, Walton takes up the discussion of fallacies like red herring and *ignoratio elenchi*. The account that Walton gives of both is a highly truncated version of that developed in *Relevance in Argumentation* (2004). There, as here in *Informal Logic: A Pragmatic Approach*, Walton argues, correctly in my view, that red herring and wrong conclusion/*ignoratio elenchi* are two different fallacies. Red herrings are primarily the product of a strategy of diversion or distraction, whereas wrong conclusion/*ignoratio elenchi* is most often due to missteps in reasoning that lead one away from one's intended conclusion. In the latter case the nature of the error is obvious—one simply argues badly. It isn't as clear in this work exactly what is wrong with red herring maneuvers. In *Relevance in Argumentation* Walton is explicit in pointing out that the nature of the mistake in a red herring is that it leads the dialogue away from the issue, the issue being the set of theses up for discussion. He mentions this here, but does not stress the dialogical nature of the fallacy as he does with, for example, the aforementioned straw man fallacy in chapter 1. Further complicating matters is that, in a figure on page 95 that is labeled "The Structure of Fallacies of Irrelevance", it looks as though all fallacies of irrelevance pertain to mistaken inferences from premises to conclusions. The dialogical nature of red herring would seem to put it outside of the general account suggested by the figure. Clearly this doesn't seem to be what Walton intends. Nor would it seem reasonable to attribute a purely inferential account of red herring fallacies to him, given his excellent and unproblematic dialectical analysis of the red herring fallacy in the earlier book. As an aside, one wonders why the role of questions in red herring fallacies is not explicitly covered here. Walton's one example (admittedly not one of his own construction) crucially involves a question as the opening move that leads to the fallacy. This seems a common enough phenomenon to merit further inquiry. In such cases, is the question a red herring, is the resulting argument the red her-

ring, or is it somehow the combination of both that merits the term? Interestingly, this question isn't addressed in *Relevance and Argumentation* either. I have no doubt that a philosophically robust version of Walton's theory that integrated the presentation and defense of his ideas would contain the resources to answer this question, but it is one that isn't answered here.

The second item about which a little more discussion would have been salutary concerns the distinction between valid and plausible or defeasible argumentation that Walton gives in a new section of chapter 5. The difficulties here turn on Walton's use of the term 'argument', which seems, on my reading, to be ambiguous between three possible readings. In the first of these Walton may mean by 'argument' simply, 'pattern of inference', whereas on the second reading Walton may mean by 'argument', 'premise-conclusion complex advanced by an individual in an exchange of reasons' or something of that sort. Thirdly, there is the definition of 'argument' given by Walton on page 142: "An argument is an interaction between two or more participants which involves a claim by each participant that his contention can be justified." This third sense seems in some ways to resemble what Pragma-dialectical theorists have in mind by the term 'argumentation'. (It is perhaps worth noting that in some cases they seem to move between argument and argumentation in a way similar to what Walton does here with the various senses of 'argument'.) When talking about deductive validity, Walton seems to be using 'argument' in the first sense—merely referring to patterns of inference such as are typically studied in deductive logic. When talking about the difference between deductive and plausible arguments, he seems to shift between the first and the second sense. In much of the rest of the book, he seems to assume something like the third sense of 'argument'. This ambiguity is problematic mainly in two areas: in the definition of validity, and in the distinction between deductive and plausible arguments.

With regard to deductive validity, it is clear from the context that Walton does not intend to apply the concept of validity to an interaction between persons, but to inferential relationships between statements. Hence there is an important disconnect between the definition of 'argument' on page 142 and usage of the term almost immediately thereafter in the elaboration of the concept of validity on page 143. Perhaps more problematic for Walton's dialectical point of view, however, is his account of the difference between

deductive and plausible argumentation. In that respect, on page 159, Walton says that the principle difference is that “deductive arguments are monotonic, meaning that no matter how much new evidence is added to the premises the conclusion still holds”, whereas plausible or defeasible arguments are nonmonotonic, since “should new evidence come into the case, the argument that was formerly accepted as plausible may need to be rejected as defeated”. Now, if Walton is using ‘argument’ in the first sense and if by ‘deductive’ he means only ‘deductively valid’, he is of course correct. Deductively valid inference *is* monotonic in precisely this way. If, however, Walton is using ‘argument’ in the second sense, then a technical, yet possibly misleading confusion arises. Monotonicity is usually thought of as the property an argument has when the conjunction of its original premises, *P*, and any new information consistent with *P* form a revised premise set that retains the inferential connection to the argument’s conclusion as did the original premises, *P*, by themselves. As I said, if by ‘deductive’ Walton means only ‘deductively valid’, and by ‘argument’ Walton means only ‘pattern of inference’ then there’s no problem. This is not the case if by ‘argument’ Walton means something more than just a pattern of inference. Even with deductively valid arguments there is also soundness to consider and while new items of information consistent with *P* won’t change evaluations of validity, they could possibly change evaluations of soundness if they show that one (or more) of the premises at issue is false. Such cases are still monotonic albeit in a degenerate sense whereby the set comprised of the premises and the new information is inconsistent, and the inference follows from them deductively, but trivially. The point is that if we are looking at a participant’s argument simply as the case she makes, overall, for her conclusion, then we are entitled to look beyond the validity of her arguments to the truth of the premises. Hence, monotonicity is perhaps not the best way to distinguish between deductive and defeasible forms of argumentation. In real argumentation, deductive arguments can be overturned by dialogical moves that challenge the truth of one or more of the premises, monotonicity notwithstanding. Hence the presentation of new information in a dialogue could show that the inferential connection between the premises and the conclusion of a deductively valid argument –though technically preserved– is nonetheless stripped of much of its probative force. If Walton is using ‘argument’ in the third sense, then the usefulness of monotonicity as the marker of the

difference between deductive and defeasible arguments is even less helpful, since arguments from the very beginning are *interchanges between two or more persons* and as such are not subject to categorization under concepts like ‘deductive’, ‘valid’, or ‘plausible’ at all as we commonly understand them.

Though this is a problem for Walton’s exposition, it does not seem to me to be an insurmountable one for his overall theory. Really all he needs to do is be more explicit. Instead of saying that deductive *arguments* are monotonic, he could just say that deductive *validity* is a monotonic relationship and leave it at that. He does need to say at least this, however, as otherwise the reader could be misled into thinking that deductive arguments do not occur in dialectical settings, or that they can never be overturned in dialogue by new information. Clearly they can, as coming to know that one or more premises are false is a serious, and sometimes fatal, strike against an argument of any type. A better solution yet, and one which would preserve nearly everything of what he says in *Informal Logic*, would be to restrict the usage of ‘argument’ to the second sense I identify above, keeping in mind the understanding that arguments are necessarily embedded—and are only fully understood and evaluated within—the dialectical context within which they occur. At the end of the day, all arguments are artifacts of a dialectical exchange of some kind. To put it another way, arguments are to dialogue what proteins are to cellular tissue. There are other important ingredients in the make-up to be sure, but arguments are at or near the top of the list of the things that make up a dialectical exchange. Similarly, just as a bit of isolated protein doesn’t make up a bit of cellular tissue, an argument in isolation does not make a dialogue. Indeed, it seems to me that this may be the conception that Walton really is trying to put forward anyway, especially when one takes into consideration the distinction he makes in chapter 5 between the semantic (truth-functional) and pragmatic (dialectical) aspects of argument on page 143. Whether or not the solution I propose is feasible for Walton, is beyond the scope of a book review to settle. The question of how best to define ‘argument’ is a large and vigorously contested one. Recently, new interest in this debate has been sparked by the notion of the “dialectical tier” of argument discussed in Ralph Johnson’s *Manifest Rationality* (2000), though the contemporary debate reaches back at least to Daniel O’Keefe’s notion of “Argument 1” and “Argument 2” from “The Concepts of Argument and Arguing” in *Advances in Argumentation Theory*



*and Research* (1982). Clearly, there's a lot at stake in how one defines 'argument'. Walton's usage of the term just wants clarification so that the reader can place him in relationship to the larger discussion.

If there is anything else to be said against either the second edition (or the first edition, for that matter) of *Informal Logic*, it is that for all of its many theoretical virtues and tightly-knit presentation, it is perhaps not the best textbook for undergraduate newcomers to the study of argumentation. It lacks many of the pedagogical features that new students need, e.g. exercises, a glossary, etc. Nor is it really full-blooded enough for an advanced graduate course that would be pursuing the topics covered in its pages with a more critical, theoretically trained eye. (Walton's more focused works, those like *Appeal to Expert Opinion* are more the sort of thing for that niche.) For that reason *Informal Logic* is better suited for the middle ground. It would be a good fit for an upper-division undergraduate or first year graduate course, in which one expects students already to be acquainted with the basic skills of identifying and extracting arguments from text, and the rudiments of formal analysis. The book would then be useful as a way of marking out the territory of some problem areas for more sustained philosophical investigation. As a gateway into informal logic and the study of argumentation for the traditionally trained student of deductive logic who has yet to discover the world beyond Copi, the second edition of *Informal Logic* continues the tradition of its predecessor in being a great first step into an important, exciting and fascinating new world.