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Commentary on Jacquette

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REPLY TO PROFESSOR JACQUETTE'S PAPER

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How are we to understand the relationship between informal logic and formal logic?

(a) One extreme view is to identify logic *simpliciter* and formal logic (such that logic = formal logic). On this view informal logic has nothing at all to do with logic. I call this *the right-wing view* because it construes logic very narrowly, is resistant to change, and is more or less associated with the old-guard. Perhaps Larry Powers, or Lambert and Ulrich hold such a view of the relationship between informal and formal logic.[1]

(b) I should mention immediately *the left-wing view* of the relationship between informal and formal logic. It is that logic is to be entirely identified with informal logic, and that formal logic has nothing at all to do with logic. Possibly Michael Scriven comes close to holding this kind of a view.[2]

(c) Happily, there are less extreme positions to be found. One of them we may call *the subject-matter distinction*. Some people have suggested that the subject matter of informal logic is different than the subject matter of formal logic. Thus we read that informal logic is that branch of logic that "takes argumentation as its focus, particularly the argumentation of nontechnical everyday discourse and discourse about issues in the *polis*".[3] It is not clear whose job it is to deal with all the other kinds of arguments, but the same volume assigns the "decontextualized sets of sentences or symbols viewed in terms of their syntactic or semantic relationships" to the formal logicians.[4] Thus, one way of distinguishing between informal and formal logic, claimed on the basis of the general nature of the kinds of subjects they study, is by contrasting:

> non-technical subject matter vs technical subject matter
> market place subject matter vs specialized subject matter

(d) Yet another distinction found in the literature holds that informal and formal logicians mean completely different things by the term "argument." One sense of "argument" denotes a (recognized) disagreement between at least two parties; such disagreements are sometimes called "dialectical arguments."[5] Some informal logicians have claimed the dialectical kind of argument as their territory, at least those disagreements that lend themselves to normative adjudication. The other sense of "argument" denotes the premise-intention-conclusion unit; this is the non-dialectical, or monolectical, view of argument. The formal logicians—the ones in the Frege-Russell tradition, at any rate—are unable to venture beyond the limits of the non-dialectical sorts of arguments. Let us call this way of drawing the distinction between formal and informal logic *the definitional distinction* since it claims that the two kinds of logic take different definitions of "argument" as fundamental to their respective enterprises. This way of making the distinction is sometimes combined with the *subject-matter distinction*, although the two are really conceptually independent.

(e) Finally, there is a way to distinguish informal and formal logic that we may call *the property distinction*. On this distinction both informal and formal logic study exactly the same things-non-dialectical arguments—but they are interested in different properties of those things. If we think of logical form as a non-relational property of an

argument, then we can say that formal logic studies only the non-relational property, *logical form*, whereas informal logic is interested not only in this and other non-relational properties of arguments,6 but also in the relational properties of arguments (that is, in how arguments stand in respect to other arguments, questions, agendas, assumptions and topics, etc). When the distinction between informal and formal logic is drawn this way, then the informal logician's concerns are seen to be much wider than the formal logician's.

Professor Jacquette's is not basing the difference between informal and formal logic on what I called "the subject-matter view," because he wants to train informal logic not only on everyday arguments but also on arguments and problems like the liar paradox and the ontological argument, two philosophical chestnuts that clearly do not belong in the marketplace. Nor does it seem to be the case that Jacquette has the definitional distinction in mind, for he is not thinking that informal and formal logic owe their independence to distinct senses of "argument." The left-wing view, that formal logic has little or nothing to do with logic, is clearly not Jacquette's view either.

This leaves the right wing view and the property view. Jacquette says things that incline us to both of these.

On the one hand, we have a distinction between formal and informal logic based on language:

> a logical theory or procedure is formal if and only if it adopts a specialized symbolism for representing logical forms that does not occur in ordinary nonspecialized nonsymbolic thought and language. (Jacquette's paper)

This distinction between formal and informal *procedures* is based on whether or not a symbolism for logical forms is present in the language of the logic. If the symbolism is present, then it is a formal procedure; if it is absent, then it is informal procedure. Strictly speaking, Jacquette is not finding two kinds of logic—formal and informal—but two kinds of logical procedures, formal and informal. This is not quite "the property view" I mentioned above, but it is consistent with it.

Jacquette rightly points out that his way of making the distinction succeeds in preserving much of the status quo: All of formal logic as it is now recognized, as well as syllogistic logic is formal logic by this distinction. Informal logic picks up the remainder; it considers questions of validity by discursive reconstruction in natural languages, counter examples and rhetorical (informal) fallacies.

On the other hand, we find Jacquette remarking that "all of logic *has to do with* logical form" (Jacquette, my italics). If informal logic is logic, this implies that informal logic has to do with logical form (albeit the non-formal expression of logical form.) One reading of this is that logical questions are questions of logical form; or to put it another way, the scope of logic is defined by what can be accomplished by the study of logical form. If this is Jacquette's view, then it is very close to what I earlier called the right-wing view.

The right-wing view and the property view are consistent with each other, if we think that the set of properties studied by informal logic are ultimately reducible to the set of properties studied by formal logic. But I don't think they are. Here are some of the reasons:

(a) there are semantically valid arguments that are not formally valid,

(b) inductive arguments can be good arguments, but they are never correct solely on the basis of form; and if there are non-deductive arguments, then the properties of those arguments won't reduce to formal properties.

(c) it will not be possible to express some negative judgments, e.g., that an argument commits a nonformal fallacy, in formal symbolism.

Given this, we will abandon the right wing view and be forced back on the property view. But what then, exactly, does Jacquette mean by his remark that all of logic has to do with logical form?

Notes

1. Karel Lambert and William Ulrich, *The Nature of Argument*. New York: Macmillian, 1980.

2. Symbolic logic "can be regarded... essentially as a part of mathematics; it is an extremely precise and formal discipline, and not one that can be readily, if at all, applied to the analysis of everyday arguments. When we talk in this book about logic, we simply mean the discipline or principles of careful and systematic reasoning. We are concerned not with the abstract kind of logic but with the more practical species." [Michael Scriven, *Reasoning*. New York: McGraw- Hill, 1976. pp. 37-38.]

3. Van Eemeren *et al.*, *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*. Mahwah: Erlbaum, 1996. p. 164.

4. *ibid.*, p. 165.

5. I am sorry that the term "dialectical" has acquired this usage. I would have used it in its traditional sense, where it is related to *topoi*, to indicate the importance of an arguments relation to other arguments.

6. (a) It's a possibility that there are other internal relations than those captured by logical form. Certainly there will be more internal relations than those depicted in *a* logical form since all arguments are instances of more than one form, even within a given logical system.

(b) There is room here for a kind of property dualism, most obviously with regard to 'validity'. (Leaving aside the problematic cases, we can say that) An argument is valid iff it has the property of being formally (syntactically) valid *and* the property of being informally (semantically) valid. It's open to the reductionist to argue that semantic validity just is formal validity, and there is really only one property in play.

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