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In Response to: David Hitchcock's *Sampling scholarly arguments*

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My comments will focus on Hitchcock's "general theory of inference appraisal", which occupies roughly 1 page of his large paper and appendix. In the brief time available, it is where I have most to contribute, though I admire both Hitchcock's unprecedented care in empirical analysis and the scope of his project. My discussion is informed by a reading of two other papers of Hitchcock's especially the recent one in *Argumentation* and a brief e-mail correspondence.

What disturbs me is Hitchcock's distaste for searching for hidden or missing assumptions. I deliberately put it in the overtly vague terms of 'distaste' because I want my remarks to be viewed more as provocations than as objections. Hitchcock himself does not outright reject this search for hidden assumptions. However, he does make theoretical remarks that disparage the search and his own analyses stop prior to looking for these. Finally, he does not in any of his papers look to the myriad examples of the great insights gained by uncovering hidden or missing assumptions, a couple of which I'll sketch or allude to.

Hitchcock's theory holds that

a conclusion follows...from premises adduced in its support if and only if some covering generalization of the argument is non-trivially acceptable...(p.1)

He defines a covering generalization as a

generalization of the conditional sentence whose antecedent is the conjunction of the premisses and whose consequent is the conclusion.

A generalization is *acceptable* if and only if

it deserves to be accepted by the appraiser...(p.1)

Finally,

the acceptability of a generalized conditional is *non-trivial* if it is based neither on the ...unacceptability of its antecedent nor on the ...acceptability of its consequent.(p.1)

Now an immediate worry is *that acceptable to the appraiser* is an inappropriately *subjective* criterion for whether a conclusion follows, even if one adds the qualification "deserves to be". For would not that validate persuasive fallacies? Here's a slight variant of an example I used elsewhere:

Scientists discovered that the Morning Star and the Evening Star was Venus. They might not have made the discovery. So, the identity of the Morning Star and the Evening Star is contingent. (Adler, 1997))

That this reasoning is fallacious was established by Kripke, and until his lectures it was persuasive. (Kripke, 1972) If "deserved" keeps its connection to intellectual responsibility, then the argument deserves to be accepted (and "non-trivially"), at least prior to Kripke's work. But the way to express what we learn is that the premises do not support the conclusion, even if the covering generalization deserves to be accepted.

Of course, Hitchcock could equate "deserves" with some objective notion, but trivialization is threatened: the generalization deserves to be accepted just in case the antecedent does imply the consequent.

But let us turn to the main issue: the covering generalization as a warrant, not a premise (1998). In the third paragraph, Hitchcock offers an example:

looking at the grey sky and blowing tree branches outside my window, I may infer that today's forecast of rain is likely to be correct.

The covering generalization is:

It probably will rain today: the sky is a leaden grey, and the tree branches outside my window are blowing furiously in the wind.

He contrasts this covering generalizing with a generalization that would make the argument formally valid, if added as a premise:

Whenever the sky is a leaden grey, and the tree branches outside my window are blowing furiously in the wind, it is going to rain.

His crucial claim seems not to be about the content of these generalizations, but whether to add them as an extra premise. [[For the only substantial (content) difference is that his generalization is qualified by "probably", but this one is not. However, since the inference is described as to the conclusion's being "likely", we could just add the suitable qualification to yield "it is likely going to rain." So Hitchcock's main claim must be not that his covering generalization is substantially different from the one that would validate the argument by addition as an extra premise, but that his generalization itself expresses the cogency of the argument if it is acceptable.]]

I endorse rejection of the extra premise maneuver either as a way to mechanically generate a connection the conclusion or to validate an argument. Elsewhere I have gone further in criticizing the common theoretical practice of defending fallacious arguments by a benighted use of the principle of charity to gratuitously add a premise. (Adler, 1996)

Clearly, for Hitchcock, the purpose of the covering generalization is not to validate the argument, but to represent its reasoning. Indeed, once Hitchcock presents the generalization, he goes on to evaluate it, and so confirm that as goes the generalization so goes the argument. So we can say that the Morning Star argument is invalid--indeed fallacious--because it is (now) unacceptable to hold roughly

If it is an empirical discovery that $A=B$, then it's a contingent truth.

But it seems to me that Hitchcock has a further and broader gripe against the addition of premises, which would apply as well to warrants. He seems to hold something like that arguments as presented are pretty much complete (with, perhaps, contextual assumptions), and that to go much beyond the surface of an argument in analyzing it is an informal logical blunder. Call this 'surfacism'.

The tendency toward surfacism is apparent in Hitchcock's remarks and his analyses. The crucial line is "the conclusion of [an] inference follows from the premises just as they are stated, without supplementation". In the paper he supports the notion of 'enthymematic consequence' as an alternative to the view that enthymemes have missing (unstated) premises. On his view there is no 'gap' to be filled, and what his covering generalization does is simply give us the rule or generalization that effects the way the reasoning moves i.e. as a warrant. In an e-mail to me he says that his analysis of the 50 passages is "meant to test the claims that it is generally not necessary to supply an additional premiss in order to test whether a stated conclusion [follows?]

from stated premiss(es), and that where such additional premisses do need to be supplied they can be found in the immediate context of the written argument."

Now I agree with many of his criticisms of traditional approaches to the enthymeme and missing premises. What I worry over is surfacism--that once we produce the covering generalization, no deeper analysis is required or helpful to grasp or criticize the argument. The example from Kripke seems to me to challenge this view. But I would also remind you of Dretske and Nozick's exposure of the hidden 'closure' assumption in many skeptical arguments to the effect that

If I know that **p** and I know that **p** entails not-**q**, then I know that not-**q**. (Dretske, 1970. Nozick, 1981: Chapter 3 sections I and II.) e.g., If I know that there is a piece of paper in front of me and I know that there is a piece of paper in front of me entails that I am not now only dreaming that there is a piece of paper in front of me, then I know that I am not now only dreaming that there is a piece of paper in front of me. (Notice that this condition is weaker than another that might have been proposed:

If I know that **p** and **p** entails not-**q**,
then I know that not-**q**)

By exposing this assumption, skeptical reasoning--Descartes', in particular-- was subject to a new, insightful understanding and criticism. Or, think of Grice's recognition that the logicians and the ordinary language philosophers, though drawing opposite conclusions were both sharing an assumption: that the logic of ordinary language does deviate from formal logic. I assume each of us can point to many other examples like this, as no doubt could Hitchcock. If you turn to a book like Santas' Socrates in the Arguments of the Philosophers series, a book and a style with which I am sure Hitchcock is familiar, you will find Santas analyzing into numerous steps (so as to yield a formally valid argument), what are from our point of view brief, casual arguments by Socrates as to, say, why he should not escape prison. I do not see how these valuable exercises are respected in Hitchcock's approach, and I am puzzled by it.

Consider now Hitchcock's sample of 50 arguments and his analyses. Everyone interested in argumentation should attend to Hitchcock's methodology and his survey. [[We learn from it of extreme variability and that should make us worry. It places under suspicion the notion of argumentation as a natural kind. Hitchcock finds 22 reasoning schemes among just these 50 arguments, and there is almost none that dominates (some exception for evaluation by criteria (11)). The examples are enormously heterogenous. Given that he is using written texts and his theory involves finding covering generalization, there is a bias toward middle-sized arguments. Only one of his arguments is from conversation, which is an important class for Hitchcock, since they are heavily assumption dependent and he must claim that all assumptions are immediate, contextual ones. On the other extreme are extended arguments such as how one might treat a chunk of Berkeley's Treatise as a single argument for idealism. Such arguments are prominent in Alec Fisher's textbook The Logic of Real Arguments. But the omission of these from Hitchcock's sample may be an insight of his approach--perhaps our reasoning must be via sub-arguments if we cannot grasp the covering generalizations.]]

When we look to his analyses we will see surfacism in play, though not uniformly. Mostly, we find Hitchcock's generalizations mimic the texts, as do all his premises and conclusions, whereas an approach that I would favor would aim for standardization and abstraction. Thus, consider the following inference-licensing covering generalizations [[hand-outs]]:

1. [[There will be little doubt in a colony approaching independence that its system of government while a colony will continue if it is the only system of which the politically conscious minority has had first-hand experience, if those prominent in the nationalist movement have studied and come to respect its principles, if it seems to have no real rivals, if some institutions of this system have been in effect for almost three decades, and if a challenge to its suitability is met by the response that the country had long been accustomed to this system of government and it had a long history behind it.
2. If a region of a country is inferior economically and materially impoverished, but has scenic beauty and architectural marvels, and has produced many of the country's greatest men of letters and affairs, then it is not simply, or even primarily, a place where poverty, illiteracy, poor soil, earthquakes, brigandage, and disease abound.
3. The original idea for the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, established by Executive Order 9981, came from the author of a letter to U.S. President Harry Truman on May 11, 1948 in which the following sentence appeared: "I would suggest . . . a defence establishment board . . . charged with the development of a uniform racial policy in the Services consistent with the President's two goals of equal opportunity and non-discrimination."
4. If a private school founder's refusal to ask for an endowment which he might well have got embroils it in over fifty years of controversy with other institutions which believe it has taken what rightly belongs to them, if his making it outrageously large and expensive puts it into debt for many years and makes it an object of envy and hatred on the part of other schools all over its jurisdiction, if his importing masters from elsewhere exhibits a disdain for local teachers which is a characteristic of the school for decades, and if his allowing such an overwhelming proportion of the masters to be clergymen from one denomination negates his far-sightedness in making the school non-denominational by tarring the school with a sectarian brush, then the fact that the school is so much his own personal vision and that he does not take advice easily causes him to build in elements which almost destroy it.]]

These are the typical ones, but there are others that are more abstract, and which I cite to highlight the contrast I'm after:

5. [[If gravity slows time and the slowing of time slows the frequency of vibration and the excitation of something under the influence of gravity is rather like a vibration, then the energy of excitation of this thing will be reduced somewhat.
6. If company A offers company B something which B does not need and A used immoral means to acquire, then B should refuse to buy it from A.
7. If the question at issue is how something can be A without being B, then it no good saying that it is B because it is A.]]

5-7 are more abstract and standardized, and I want to argue that this is the right direction for argument analysis, although I do not think even 5-7 go as deeply beneath the original text as my own examples (Kripke, Dretske, Santas, and Grice) illustrate.

The rationale for striving for standardization and abstraction goes against surfacism. The rationale is that if argument analysis aims at clear exposure of the reasoning, then we will be getting at the essence of that reasoning only rendering explicit (and highlighting) the pattern or

structure (what remains constant) as contrasted to its substantive content (what varies). To do otherwise is to preserve (reasoning) irrelevancies. Thus, to take one of numerous easy examples when Hitchcock keeps "fifty years of controversy" in example 4, rather than substituting e.g. "long-standing controversy" he gets the benefit of accuracy to the text, at the expense of a clearer representation of the reasoning, which turns on the length of the controversy, not that it took 50 rather than 43 or 56 years. As Hitchcock recognizes in his "Conductive Arguments" (1994) paper, only if we determine what should be the variables and what the constants in an argument do we have a clear guide to formulating counter-examples.

Correspondingly, the covering generalizations of 1-4, which are the dominant ones, seem to suffer from the flaw that characterizes cheap deductivism--they are mechanically generable or nearly so. They simply amount to putting together the premises as antecedent of a conditional with the conclusion as consequent. There is no deeper analysis, and I do not see that the concern here is answered if we view what is so generated as a premise or a warrant.

Let me summarize. I have raised three criticisms: First, the criterion of acceptability is (too) subjective. Second, argument analysis should aim for the most abstract and standardized reconstruction (compatible with fidelity), generally deviating greatly from actual presentation. Third, and most important, argument analysis should search for hidden assumptions whereas Hitchcock's approach stays on the surface.

The search for deeper analysis is a search for an argument's commitments, which may go beyond what is explicit or even implicit in the argument. The search is initiated when a claim for an argument's cogency or that one statement implies another cannot be cashed out into explicit steps of premises, contextual assumptions, rules of inference, or meaning. We need to look to underlying assumptions, whether premises or warrants. We have to go beyond surface expression or mechanical generation--we need to find further steps which are (epistemically or pragmatically) informative and which have some intuitive credibility. These are the great insights to be gained by argument analysis, and I hope that Hitchcock will explain to us how compatible with his theory and research project, he can be a fan of it too.

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