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Fallacies and the concept of an argument

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Title: Fallacies And The Concept Of An Argument

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1. Introduction

It is commonplace to hold that one's theory of fallacious reasoning is linked to one's view of argument in general. If Wreen (1994a) is correct, there is good reason to expect this connection. According to Wreen, to argue fallaciously is to fail in some way to provide a good argument. It follows, then, that an account of fallacious argument implies a theory of good argument. A theory of good argument, however, is functional theory. One first determines what the goal or function of an argument is and then defines a good argument as one that satisfies the function of an argument. Good arguments are successful arguments. Fallacious arguments are those that fail to be good arguments.

If this account is plausible, then one might be able to glean some insights into the nature of contemporary theories of argument by examining the theories of fallacious argument they propose. If such theories are found lacking, then one likely source of the problem, given the argument above, is the theory of argument that grounds the theory of fallacious argument in question.

In section (2) two important theories of fallacious argument are briefly examined: the standard treatment and the pragma-dialectical treatment. Both theories of fallacious argument have problems accounting for the way in which the concept of a fallacy is used in ordinary practical contexts. These problems are linked to the picture of argument that grounds each theory of fallacious argument. Section (3) begins with a brief discussion of two epistemic treatments of fallacious arguments. Although both treatments are ultimately implausible, they set the stage for a sketch of an alternative account of the concept of a fallacy developed in the final section of the paper. This alternative account of fallacious argument/reasoning is inspired by Wright's (1995) picture of argument. While it is not likely to convert strong adherents of more traditional views, it does avoid some of the major problems that beset such views and does seem to account for the wide range of uses the concept of fallacy has in ordinary practical contexts.

2. Two Approaches to Understanding the Concept of a Fallacy

2a. The Standard Treatment

Hamblin (1970) suggests that the standard treatment makes the following claim about the concept of a fallacy:

A fallacious argument, as almost every account from

Aristotle onwards tells you, is one that *seems to be valid* but *is not* so. (Hamblin 1970: 12)

Several features of this definition are worth discussing. First, a fallacy is an argument. To merely assert false statements is not to commit a fallacy unless, as Hamblin points out, "the statements constitute or express an argument."¹ (Hamblin 1970: 224) An argument, according to the standard treatment, is a set of statements, one or more of these statements (the premise(s)) is offered as support for another statement (the conclusion). Second, a fallacious argument is a bad argument and a bad argument is an invalid argument. Third, a fallacious argument is not just any invalid argument, it is an invalid argument that appears valid. Finally, to claim that an argument is fallacious is to assert that the mistake is serious enough to consider the possibility that the argument has been refuted.

There are good reasons to take the standard treatment seriously. Since validity and invalidity are formal notions it seems that one can talk about fallacious argument types. So, the standard treatment provides an account of fallaciousness (invalidity) that indicates what the traditional fallacy categories, the gang of eighteen as Woods (1994) calls them, have in common. The gang of eighteen are invalid argument types that appear valid. As a consequence of this first point, the standard treatment provides a vocabulary and method for criticizing arguments.

However, as Hamblin and many other critics have shown², the standard treatment is plagued with problems. The account provides neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for fallaciousness. First, there are arguments that beg the question that are not invalid; however, at least some of these arguments are fallacious. So, the standard treatment fails to provide a necessary condition for fallaciousness. And there are countless arguments that are invalid but are not fallacious. Consider the following argument:

S1: There is oil on the driveway this morning.

S2: The oil was not on the driveway when I parked the car in the driveway last night.

S3: The car wasn't moved between last night and this morning.

C: The car has an oil leak.

Strictly speaking, the argument is invalid: the support claims can be asserted and the conclusion denied without contradiction. In fact, this argument can be recast as an instance of affirming the consequent. However, intuitively, this argument is not fallacious. Even if there is a mistake in the argument, it is not the kind of serious mistake that would entitle one to charge that the argument is

fallacious and therefore refuted. So, the standard treatment fails to provide a sufficient condition for fallaciousness.

A related concern is that the standard treatment either turns all non-deductive arguments into fallacious arguments, or it makes it impossible for any non-deductive argument to be fallacious. By definition inductive arguments are invalid. It follows, then, that according to the standard treatment, all inductive arguments are fallacious. But this cannot be right. One impugns every instance of an inductive argument without ever having to examine the substantive claims the argument makes. Given how much successful reasoning is inductive, this consequence of the standard treatment indicates a serious problem with the account. A defender of the standard treatment might respond by pointing out that since inductive arguments do not even appear to be valid, the standard account leaves room for non-fallacious inductive arguments after all. There are two problems with this move. First, while there is something plausible about the claim that fallacious arguments are the ones that we are tempted by, defenders of the standard treatment have said little about what the term "appears valid" means. Second, this move makes most, if not all, inductive arguments non-fallacious by default. This is an equally problematic result since it is as implausible to hold that inductive arguments are non-fallacious in virtue of being inductive as it is to hold that inductive arguments are fallacious in virtue of being inductive.

The central problem with the standard treatment, then, is that it is too narrow. An invalid argument is not necessarily a fallacious argument. Unfortunately the standard treatment gives us no way to talk about fallacious arguments except in terms of invalidity.³

What accounts for the standard treatment's failure to provide an adequate analysis of fallaciousness? First, the failure is due to the fact that the standard treatment works backwards. Instead of looking at the variety of ways in which the term "fallacy" is used in ordinary contexts, the standard treatment works to a theory of fallaciousness from an antecedently held picture of argument. Second, the antecedently held picture of argument is itself problematic. The standard treatment is based on a deductivist picture of argument. If fallacious arguments are invalid and therefore bad arguments, then at least a necessary condition of good arguments is that they are valid. While this move is tempting⁴ it is not plausible. It's not plausible primarily because good arguments rarely rest on semantic skills alone, they rest on substantive judgments of plausibility (See Wright, 1999 for a thorough exploration of this claim). But for present purposes, there is another reason the deductivist picture is not plausible. An adequate understanding of argument should provide some general insight into the way in which arguments go astray. So the failure of the standard treatment of fallacies indicts the deductivist picture at its core.

2b. The Pragma-Dialectical Treatment

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, the co-developers of the pragma-dialectical treatment of fallacies, offer the following account of the concept of a fallacy:

...the term "fallacy" is reserved for speech acts which hinder in any way the resolution of a dispute in a critical discussion. Thus this term is systematically connected with the rules for critical discussions...In this conception, committing a fallacy is not tantamount to unethical conduct, but is wrong in the sense that it frustrates efforts to arrive at the resolution of a dispute. (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1987: 284)

The concept of a fallacy, then, is part of a larger pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation. According to Van Eemeren and Grootendorst, an argument is a complex speech act that arises between two or more people engaged in a rational dispute over an expressed opinion of one of the disputants. The argument takes place in four stages that the disputants must pass through if rational resolution of the dispute is to occur: the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentative stage and the concluding stage. Each stage is governed by one or more of the ten rules of "good" conduct (e.g., *Rule 2: A Party that advances a standpoint is obliged to defend it if the other party asks him to do so*⁵). The rules ensure that the purpose of the discussion, to rationally resolve the dispute, is fulfilled. This approach, then, provides something akin to an algorithm for rational dispute resolution. As such, one commits a fallacy when one violates one or more of the rules of the algorithm causing it to break down and frustrate the function of argument.

Like the standard treatment, there are good reasons to take the pragma-dialectical treatment of the concept of a fallacy seriously. First, this approach gives the pragmatic function of argument its due. Second, like the standard treatment, the pragma-dialectical treatment provides a unitary account of the fallacies; but unlike other accounts, it can "peg" each of the traditional gang of eighteen (Woods, 1994). To peg a fallacy requires one to point out the rule it violates, the stage of the critical discussion in which the violation occurs and the person who is bound by the rule during that stage. Thus, the pragma-dialectical treatment provides one with an easy way to identify instances of fallacies and with a theoretical understanding of what makes each of these instances fallacious. Moreover, the pragma-dialectical treatment expands the applicability of the concept of a fallacy beyond the narrow conception of argument often used by more traditional logicians.

However, in spite of the systematicity and recognition of the essential human element in argument, the pragma-dialectical treatment is not very plausible. First, since the approach takes a dialogue between two or more discussants as its starting point, it does not seem to leave room for the "lone arguer." As such it is impossible on this account for a lone arguer to commit a fallacy. However, it certainly seems to be the case that one can engage in all of the activities associated with argument, including committing fallacies, by oneself.

The obvious response to this concern is that the case of the lone arguer is the degenerate case and can be treated as an instance of dialogue in which the individual puts on both the hat of the protagonist (the party advancing the standpoint) and the antagonist (the party attacking the standpoint). This response is unsatisfying. Perhaps in some contexts a lone arguer is essentially engaging in a two-party dialogue. In such contexts, the theoretical idealization that the pragma-dialectical treatment suggests is unproblematic. However, this context is rare and highly artificial. One could imagine this kind of argument occurring in the context of preparing for a debate for example. But it is not the case that in every context a lone arguer is engaging in a bifurcated two-party dispute. When one walks out of the house and silently concludes that the oil on the driveway is the result of oil leaking from the car, one does not seem to be engaged in a dialogue, even with oneself. The burden of proof is on Van Eemeren and Grootendorst to provide a reason to take their claim seriously. And that reason cannot be simply that it is a consequence of their theory that all argument and therefore all fallacies require two or more parties.

Second, on the pragma-dialectical treatment, a fallacy has been committed when one of the disputants in a critical discussion breaks one of the rules of the dispute resolution algorithm. However, there are multiple ways to frustrate the algorithm and not all of them count as fallacies. One could, for example, shoot the protagonist in the middle of a dispute. This action clearly frustrates the goal of a critical discussion, but it is not a fallacy. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst respond by restricting fallacies to speech acts that violate the rules. But as Wreen (1994b) suggests this response will not do. There is no obvious reason to restrict the concept of fallacy to speech acts, except the ad hoc reason that it blocks an objection to the view. More importantly, even if such a restriction is allowed, there are countless speech acts (e.g., switching mid sentence to a language the other party does not understand) that frustrate the goal of dispute resolution that are not fallacies.

The pragma-dialectical treatment fails to provide an adequate understanding of the concept of a fallacy. What accounts for this failure? As with the standard treatment, the problem is caused by the fact that the pragma-dialectical treatment starts with an antecedently held view of argument and then constructs a theory of fallacies based on that view. The pragma-dialectical account of argument is a functional/pragmatic one. The function of argument is rational dispute resolution. Once one accepts this move fallacies virtually fall out of the analysis as violations of the rules that ensure rational resolution of a dispute between two or more parties.

While it is certainly true that in some contexts arguments can be given in order to aid the resolution of disputes, it is implausible to hold that *the* purpose of an argument is dispute resolution. This conception of argument is far too narrow to capture the variety of ways in which offering reasons for a view functions and thereby gains its human significance. Yet, the pragma-dialectical treatment seems to imply such a view. Grootendorst, discussing the extension of the concept of a fallacy outside the confines of dispute resolution, claims:

In the case that the purpose of a discussion is not to resolve a dispute there is little point, in the dialectical approach, of referring to a fallacy, because that condition has not been fulfilled. In the case that it is not clear whether the purpose of a discussion is or is not to resolve a dispute, it is a good idea to apply the strategy of maximal reasonable interpretation, and to treat the discussion as if its purpose *is* to resolve a dispute. (Grootendorst 1990: 340)

But one can commit a fallacy while arguing in multiple contexts. One could commit a fallacious argument while engaging in inquiry, exploring an issue, or attempting to locate disagreement between oneself and one's "opponent." If this claim is true, it's a mistake to appeal to the principle of charity as the motivation for casting cases that don't fit the mold of dispute resolution as dispute resolutions. Casting every argument as part of a dispute resolution is an indication of an uncharitable and overly narrow conception of argument.

There is an even deeper concern, however. Dispute resolution, even rational dispute resolution, is much closer to negotiation than it is to argument. When one argues, one gives reasons to believe a view is true; whereas when one engages in rational dispute resolution, whether or not the view under discussion is true, well confirmed, epistemically worthy, or what have you is not the primary focus. The primary focus of rational dispute resolution is the resolution of a dispute. One can imagine rationally resolving a dispute without ever considering the truth or reasonableness of the view under discussion. In fact, this is what negotiation is often all about. But if this is true, then the pragma-dialectical conception of argument cannot provide much insight into the way in which arguments go astray because it cannot provide much insight into what it means to argue in the first place.

3. Epistemic Treatments: Toward an Alternative Account of Fallacies

Fogelin and Duggan (1987) and Wreen (1994a) both begin their analyses of the concept of a fallacy by claiming that it has a wide range of uses. Fogelin and Duggan, for example, cite Philip Kuhn's assertion that Chinese intellectuals commit what Kuhn calls the *hardware fallacy* in holding the belief that China can import Western technology without importing decadent Western values. (Fogelin & Duggan 1987: 256) Wreen suggests that one can speak of the fallacy of opting for the mean rather than the median as a measure of central tendency. (Wreen 1994a: 93) Examples like these lead Fogelin and Duggan to assert that, "The term fallacy is our most general term for criticizing anything used for the fixation of beliefs," (Fogelin & Duggan 1987: 256) and Wreen to claim that a fallacy is, "a cognitive mistake of some sort or other, with the suggestion once again that it's a mistake of some importance." (Wreen 1994: 93)

These remarks provide a good start for constructing an alternative account of the concept of a fallacy. Treating fallacies in the broad way suggested above accords well with actual usage; moreover, both Fogelin and Duggan and Wreen correctly focus on the epistemic function of argument and reasoning more generally. But both Fogelin and Duggan and Wreen develop their accounts in ways that are unsatisfying.

Fogelin and Duggan, for example, ultimately restrict the concept of a fallacy to the context of argument (Fogelin & Duggan 1987: 260) and adopt a relatively standard epistemic criterion for employing the term "fallacy:"

We call something a fallacy when it is an instance of a general procedure for fixing belief that has a high tendency to generate false or unfounded beliefs.
(Fogelin & Duggan 1987: 257)

Although this account is a welcome improvement over both the standard treatment and the pragma-dialectical treatment, it shares with both accounts a traditional tendency to try to understand the concept of a fallacy in formal terms. Fogelin and Duggan's treatment of fallacies reduces to an inductive version of the standard treatment since on their account the traditional gang of eighteen turn out to be at least a good part of a list of belief fixing procedures that have a tendency to produce false/unfounded beliefs.

There are several problems with Fogelin and Duggan's fully articulated treatment of the concept of a fallacy. First, their definition of a fallacy as a belief fixing procedure that has a high tendency to produce false/unfounded beliefs does not help the student or theoretician determine the goodness or badness of any particular argument. The traditional gang of eighteen may, on this account, be argument patterns that have a tendency to produce false belief, a contentious claim at best, but it doesn't follow that any particular instance of one of the traditional fallacy schemas actually produces a false/unfounded belief. For example, even if one grants that arguments from ignorance have a high tendency to produce false/unfounded beliefs, the following instance of an argument from ignorance does not.

S1: I do not hear any loud pinging noises outside.

S2: I am inside a building with an aluminum roof and no attic insulation.

C: It is not raining.

So, Fogelin and Duggan's attempt to say something of a formal nature about fallacies does not help one determine if any given argument is in fact fallacious. To make such a determination one will have to dig into the substance of the particular argument in question.

Second, it is just assumed that the traditional gang of eighteen, or a significant majority of them, are in fact belief fixing procedures that have a high tendency to produce false/unfounded beliefs. This is an empirical question. It is entirely possible that the fallacy categories describe perfectly plausible ways to fix belief in most normal contexts. For example, inference to the best explanation in many contexts is a plausible belief fixing procedure. However, all such arguments can be cast as arguments that affirm the consequence. Many particular arguments from ignorance and correlation to cause arguments are perfectly plausible, in spite of the fact that both are categorized as fallacious argument types. If this is the case for most of the traditional gang of eighteen, then they may not have a high tendency to produce false/unfounded beliefs, and therefore may not be fallacious argument types at all.

Wreen ultimately adopts an approach that in many ways is similar to Fogelin and Duggan's. Wreen reigns in the concept of a fallacy, tying it securely to the context of argument, and he adopts a standard epistemic definition of a fallacy as well. A fallacy is, "...a bad or mistaken inference, or better, an inference that shouldn't be made." (Wreen 1994a: 96) The central difference in the two accounts, however, is that Wreen is skeptical of the possibility of any list of fallacious argument types or schemas. The reason for this skepticism seems to be that there is no reason to expect a theory of bad inference. A bad inference is just an inference that fails to be a good inference.

Wreen's non-theoretic approach raises several concerns. First, his definition of a fallacy is too restrictive; any mistake that is not explicitly a bad inference cannot, on Wreen's view, be a fallacy. So the *hardware fallacy* is not really a fallacy and neither is the fallacy of using the mean instead of the median. Wreen accepts this implication of his view arguing that, "ambiguity, complex question, accent, straw man, false dilemma, and so on aren't fallacies, strictly speaking-not in the sense that the theorist of *argument* is interested in." (Wreen 1994b: 289) If Wreen is serious about this remark, then he is guilty of the same kind of mistake that he accuses Van Eemeren and Grootendorst of committing: molding one's account of fallacies to fit one's antecedently held picture of argument. Since it seems to be the case that every fallacy theorist discussed in this paper is engaged in a similar pursuit, it is worth giving a name to this kind of mistake. When one fails to account for the phenomenon in question because one has provided an analysis of an antecedently held picture of the phenomenon, and not the phenomenon itself, one has committed the *picture fallacy*. It's worth noting that this fallacy does not seem to involve a bad inference at all.

Another concern with Wreen's treatment of fallacies is the claim that a fallacy is an inference that shouldn't have been made. As it stands, the account is too broad. Many instances of pathological reasoning involve making inferences that ought not be made. For example, one might reason pathologically by using the addition rule of propositional logic to add "p" to itself, creating ever more complicated, but useless, disjunctions. This is an example of an inference that shouldn't have been made, but it's not a fallacy. So, Wreen's account fails to

distinguish pathological from fallacious arguments.

Finally, given the historical significance of the traditional gang of eighteen, an account of fallacies should at least say something about why theorists have thought that these categories indicate important classes of mistakes. Wreen's account is silent on this point.

4. An Alternative Account of the Concept of a Fallacy: A Thumbnail Sketch

One can develop an outline of an account of the concept of a fallacy that avoids the pitfalls of previous accounts by examining some of the key facts about the phenomenon under investigation. First, to commit a fallacy is to make a mistake of some kind. This explains why fallacies are to be avoided. However, as Wreen (1994a) points out, a fallacy cannot be just any kind of mistake; for if a fallacy is committed whenever one makes a mistake of any kind, then, failing to correctly punctuate the sentences in one's premises would count as an instance of a fallacy. Wreen's suggestion, to define the mistake as an inference that one should not have made, is also problematic. This suggestion restricts the range of the concept of a fallacy too much. The concept applies in contexts that are not, strictly speaking, argumentative contexts. Moreover, this move fails to account for the difference between pathological and fallacious reasoning.

Second, when one is accused of committing a fallacy one is accused not only of a mistake, but a serious mistake. Failing to include a relevant piece of support that reinforced an already plausible inference might be a mistake, but it's not typically understood as a fallacy. Moreover, the mistake need not involve producing an invalid argument or violating the rules of a critical discussion or instantiating an argument schema that has a high tendency to produce false/unfounded beliefs for reasons adduced above.

Third, in order for a mistake to be considered fallacious it must be the case that it is the kind of mistake that one is tempted to make. Fallacies are not obvious or easily avoided mistakes; rather they are mistakes that seduce reasoners. It is also worth noting that by adding this requirement the problem of pathological reasoning vanishes, for the kind of mistakes that the pathological reasoner makes are not ones that tempt reasoners at all.

Fourth, the effect of accusing someone of committing a fallacy is dependent on the context in which the accusation is made. To accuse someone in a professional philosophic context of committing a fallacy does not have the same significance as accusing someone of committing a fallacy in a pedagogic context. For example, the significance of accusing Jerry Fodor of arguing from ignorance is very different from the significance of accusing a student in a critical thinking course of the same mistake. In the latter context the accusation is often taken as a refutation, whereas in the former context the accusation is typically not taken as a refutation, rather it is either taken as

something like a request for further discussion and clarification, or as an indication of deep disagreement.

A plausible treatment of fallacies should be able to account for the data described above. The following suggests itself: A fallacy is an important cognitive mistake that one is tempted to make. The context in which one is tempted to make a mistake is the context of reasoning broadly construed. There are three components of this account of fallacies. A fallacy involves an important cognitive mistake. The mistake occurs in the context of reasoning broadly construed. And, the mistake is one that tempts the reasoner. These components need to be discussed in more detail.

The context in which the concept of fallacies applies is reasoning broadly construed. The reason to extend the context beyond that of argument or inference is in order to be sensitive to the way in which the concept is used. To account for the kinds of fallacies mentioned by Wreen and Fogelin and Duggan without simply eliminating them requires expanding the context in which a fallacy can take place beyond that of an argument or inference. Moreover, the context must be expanded if one wants to account for "interpretive" fallacies like the *strawman* fallacy. Wreen will respond by claiming that such an extension of the concept is unnecessary since the theorist of argumentation is worried about arguments and the way that they go astray. Thus, interpretative fallacies are simply not fallacies. However, if one is interested in the concept of a fallacy first and foremost, then it seems that one should attempt to determine if there is anything interesting to be said about the concept as such and not just about the concept as it applies to argument and inference.

According to the proposed definition of the concept of a fallacy, a fallacy is not simply a mistake. Neither is it simply a mistake made in the context of reasoning. In order to avoid the problem of the pathological reasoner and to capture the phenomenology of committing fallacies, an accurate account of the concept must recognize that a fallacy is a mistake, made in the context of reasoning, that one is *tempted* to make.

The inclusion of the concept of temptation in the analysis of fallacies is not an ad hoc move to block the charge that this account cannot deal with the pathological reasoner. The standard treatment reserved a role for temptation and the concept does seem to be part of what one means when one uses the term "fallacy." More importantly, however, without the inclusion of temptation one is left baffled about why people commit serious mistakes when they engage in reasoning. A complete account of the concept of a fallacy should remove some of the mystery regarding why such mistakes are made. Including temptation in the analysis goes a long way toward satisfying this goal.

Philosophers have shied away from including temptation in the analysis of the concept of a fallacy because it is very difficult to say anything interesting or precise about temptation. The concept is too psychological to be relevant to a

philosophical account of fallacies. This worry is not unfounded but it can be assuaged. A plausible account of temptation should provide answers to the following questions: 1) What does it mean to be tempted? 2) When is one tempted? Answers to these questions are forthcoming if one sees that the temptation and competence are intimately connected.

Briefly, temptation is an indication of incompetence. One is tempted to make a mistake because one lacks the requisite competence to avoid the mistake. But an adequate account of temptation is more subtle and complicated than that. The very possibility of being tempted to commit a fallacy depends on one's being competent in normal circumstances. For one who is totally incompetent the temptation to reason fallaciously never arises. Such a person lacks the requisite skills to be tempted to make mistakes in the first place. Similarly, a two year old child cannot be fooled by the distant puddle mirages on the highway.⁶ This point has been made by both Kant and Wittgenstein: to be tempted, to succumb to illusion, one must possess the competencies that are exploited by that illusion. One would not be tempted or fooled if one was not normally competent. Thus, that one is tempted to make a mistake both indicates a competence and alerts us to its limits. To commit a fallacy, then, is to succumb to temptation and this implies that one has reached the limits of one's competence; one is, so to speak, employing one's reasoning competencies in a context where one is in over one's head. That is, one is reasoning in a context that is too far removed from the contexts in which the original competencies were developed.

This is a thumbnail sketch of an alternative treatment of the concept of a fallacy. It needs to be fleshed out in much more detail. However, the account does seem to accord well with the data adduced above and it does seem to avoid some of the pitfalls associated with more traditional approaches. First, it is broad enough to capture the way the concept is typically used. The *hardware fallacy*, if it is one, is just as much a mistake one is tempted to make as is any of the more traditional fallacies.

Second, this view makes sense of Wreen's claim that there can be no sacrosanct list of fallacy categories. Individuals are tempted to make particular mistakes at particular times in virtue of a local failure of competence. There is, then, nothing fallacious per se about arguments from ignorance, for example. Walton (1996) has pointed out that many instances of such arguments are perfectly plausible. The problem is not that one has made use of a fallacious argument schema, the problem, when there is a problem, is that one has employed an argument in a context where one is not competent. As such there may be something interesting to say about many of the traditional fallacy categories without having to adopt any of the traditional approaches previously discussed. The traditional fallacy categories may in fact denote kinds of mistakes that people competent enough to give reasons, but not familiar with the context of abstract arguments, are tempted to make. Thus, this account can explain why the accusation of a fallacy in the pedagogic versus the academic context carries such a different significance. In the former context when one is

accused of committing a fallacy one is in fact unfamiliar with the context of abstract philosophical reasoning, therefore the accusation points out a genuine incompetence. On the other hand, when one accuses a professional philosopher of committing a fallacy, one is not accusing her of incompetence. The term has a different significance in this context because the competence of the reasoner is not usually in question.

Third, it seems that what is required to explicate the notion of "a mistake one is tempted to make" is not merely a formal schema, but a two-part narrative. First, one must develop a narrative that explains why the mistake in question is in fact a mistake. Second, one must develop a narrative that explains why one was tempted to make the mistake. Perhaps narratives could be cashed out for particular kinds of mistakes; for example I take Walton's work in explicating the individual fallacies to be a possible instantiation of what such narratives might look like.

However, even if one can say something of a general nature about the temptation to make a mistake, given the previous discussion of temptation, what can be said cannot be formal in nature. The mistakes that tempt us are intimately connected to our competencies and how our competencies fail us in certain circumstances. So, an account of fallacies will always require that the theorist spell out the way in which the context rendered someone incompetent and therefore tempted to make a mistake. The contextual element is an essential part of the narrative.

Endnotes

1This feature of the standard treatment is not universally accepted. Johnson (1987) and Johnson and Blair (1983), for example, argue that an argument with false support is a fallacious argument. See Wreen (1994a) for pertinent objections to this claim.

2See, for example, Finocchiaro (1981) and Govier (1987).

3This point is well recognized by critics of the standard treatment. However, some critics, most notably Massey (1981) do not think that the narrowness of the account is the central problem. Massey argues that the central problem with the standard account is that there is no formal theory of invalidity and so no way to show that an argument is invalid and so no way to show that it is fallacious. As a result of this fact Massey is skeptical of fallacy talk altogether. Of course, his skepticism is only as plausible as the standard treatment on which it is based.

4It is easy to see why one would be tempted to hold that all good arguments must at least be valid. When one argues one gives reasons for a view. What is the relationship between the reasons and the view? When can one be confident that the reason really is a reason for the view? The deductivist has an

answer to both questions: the ideal relation between reasons and the view they are reasons for is implication; one can be confident that one has good reasons for a view, then, when one's reasons guarantee the truth of the conclusion. This is, of course, just what a valid deductive argument provides.

5 See Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) for a complete discussion of the ten rules for rational dispute resolution.

6 I am indebted to Larry Wright for this example.

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