

May 17th, 9:00 AM - May 19th, 5:00 PM

Commentary on Blair

Maurice Finocchiaro

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Finocchiaro, Maurice, "Commentary on Blair" (2001). *OSSA Conference Archive*. 6.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA4/papersandcommentaries/6>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Philosophy at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in OSSA Conference Archive by an authorized conference organizer of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.

Author: Maurice A. Finocchiaro

In Response to: J. Anthony Blair's '*Argument' and 'Logic' in Logic Textbooks*

© 2001 Maurice A. Finocchiaro

In his paper "'Argument' and 'Logic' in Logic Textbooks," Professor J. Anthony Blair reports on his studies of the notions of logic, argument, and related concepts in logic textbooks of the second half of the twentieth century. And he advances some interesting conclusions concerning important and perennial issues.

Blair's key thesis may be formulated as the claim that (a) logic is a part, but only a small part, of the philosophical study of argument. From this he infers the corollary that (b) we ought not to equate logic and the philosophy of argument. To justify his key thesis Blair begins by (c) identifying logic with the conception of logic found in logic textbooks of the past fifty years; discovering that (d) the textbook conception is that logic is the theory of the deductive validity of arguments (or the theory of deductively valid arguments); and thus concluding that (e) logic is essentially equivalent to the theory of deductive validity. And then he argues that (f) the philosophical study of argument must focus on "full-bodied arguments"; that (g) the interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of full-bodied arguments raise many issues beyond those of deductive validity; and hence that (h) the philosophical study of argument must study many aspects of arguments besides deductive validity.

In reconstructing Blair's argument in this manner, I am simplifying the discussion somewhat by not taking into account the distinction between reasoning and argument; I do not deny this distinction, but none of the issues I want to raise hinges on this distinction.

My reconstruction is meant to make clear and explicit that Blair's final conclusion is proposition (b); that his key thesis (a) is an intermediate proposition immediately supporting (b) and in turn supported in a linked manner by propositions (e) and (h); that (c) and (d) are two linked propositions supporting (e); and that (f) and (g) are linked reasons for (h). Moreover, as reconstructed, Blair's argument appears to be deductively valid, and so any disagreements will ultimately hinge on the truth or acceptability of propositions (c), (d), (f), and (g). Of these, although (c) and (f) are presented as unsupported, (d) and (g) are supported by means of subarguments and so their acceptability will depend on the correctness of their respective supporting subarguments.

I begin with an issue involving a disagreement that may be mostly, if not exclusively, semantical or verbal. In fact, in a sense I agree with Blair's key thesis that logic is only a part of the philosophical study of argument. But my inclination is to formulate this claim by saying that deductive logic is only a part of logic, thus equating logic in general with what Blair calls the philosophy of argument, and equating his term logic with my phrase deductive logic. Blair seems to assume that the word 'logic' means what deductive logicians say it means; he seems to attach a particular meaning to the word. This assumption is embodied in his proposition (c), which, while not arbitrary, clearly could be questioned.

The alternative, broader conception of logic could be defended by a historical argument consisting of elaborating the connotation the word has had throughout most of the history of philosophy. This is the conception one could elaborate on the basis of such works as Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole's *Logic or the Art of Thinking* (1662), Benedetto Croce's *Logic as the*

Science of the Pure Concept (1909), and John Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938). However, in this context this issue needs no elaboration; it is a familiar point that has been discussed by such well-known authors as Stephen Toulmin (1958, 185-88). To conclude my first comment, the question I should like to raise is whether logic should be equated with formal deductive logic or with the philosophy of argument.

On the other hand, even without accepting such a generalized conception of logic, there is an intermediate conception that affects the correctness of Blair's claim (d). His supporting argument is a quasi-empirical survey of recent textbooks, which may be interpreted as an inductive generalization argument. And a further conclusion he draws from (d) is an explanation of why recent philosophy Ph.D. recipients or candidates end up teaching the theory of deductive validity when asked to teach a course on reasoning, argumentation, or critical thinking. The question I should like to raise here has two aspects: one is the fairness or representativeness of Blair's sample from the point of view of induction, and the second is the difficulty of his hypothesis explaining a particular aspect of the phenomenon that might be described as the relative neglect of induction. Let me elaborate briefly.

Suppose we were to add the following books to Blair's list: Morris Cohen and Ernest Nagel's *Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method* (1934), Irving Copi's *Introduction to Logic* (1st edn. 1953, 9th edn. 1994), Wesley Salmon's *Logic* (1st edn. 1963, 3rd edn. 1984), and Merrilee Salmon's *Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking* (1984). A common feature of these four books is that they define logic as the study of the relationship between the truth of the premises and the truth of the conclusion of an argument, in such a way that two important special cases are immediately distinguished, namely deductive validity and inductive correctness. Here inductive correctness is taken to be the property that an argument has when, although it is deductively incorrect, it is such that if all the premises are true then the conclusion is probably (but not certainly) true. And this distinction is not only presented abstractly at the beginning of these books, but it is upheld throughout their subsequent presentation, in the sense that they devote about the same amount of space to induction as they do to deduction. If one were to take such books seriously, one would end up practicing and teaching a version of logic which, while less general than that of Dewey, would be broader than the theory of deductive validity. Hence the question arises, what else (what other assumptions) enable Blair's prospective teachers to equate the study of argument with the study of deductive validity.

Perhaps, their argument has been historically influenced, or might be otherwise strengthened, by the following one found in the preface to W. V. Quine's *Philosophy of Logic* (1970), which otherwise shows an unusual and surprising sensitivity to induction. He begins by quoting the following definition of logic by Lewis Carroll: " 'Contrariwise', continued Tweedledee, 'if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic' ." Then Quine goes on to clarify:

We shall be occupied in this book with the philosophy of logic in substantially Tweedledee's sense of the word 'logic'. This is not the invariable sense of the word. Precedent could be cited for applying the word collectively to two dissimilar studies: deductive and inductive logic. The philosophy of inductive logic, however, would be in no way distinguishable from philosophy's main stem, the theory of knowledge. What arrogates a distinctive bit of philosophy to itself is deductive logic, the discipline that Tweedledee had in mind.

If pressed to supplement Tweedledee's ostensive definition of logic with a discursive definition of the same subject, I would say that logic is the systematic study of logical truths. Pressed further, I would say that a sentence is logically true if all sentences with its grammatical structure are true. Pressed further still, I would say to read this book. [Quine 1970, xi]

This issue of the inclusion or exclusion of inductive correctness is important because in his "critique" (i.e., his subargument for [g]), Blair mentions types of arguments and of considerations some of which (although not all) could be covered under the heading of inductive correctness. For example, "arguing for or against the legal guilt of an accused in a criminal trial" (p.7) consists primarily of arguments which can hope at best to be inductively correct; and the same would apply to what Blair calls "arguing for a fact or construction upon the facts (for example when one argues that global warming is, or is not, a pressing problem, or that pollution abatement programs are working, or that the bird singing by the lakeshore is a Yellowthroat warbler)" (p. 7). Similarly, consider Blair's principle (no. 7) that "the primary goal of an argument might be to weaken or strengthen the audience's adherence to a point of view, rather than to convince the audience for all time of its falsity or its truth. In such contexts, arguments that fall short of a decisive demonstration might well succeed in achieving their purpose" (p. 8). Now, inductive correctness is by definition a matter of degree and is designed explicitly to deal with such situations.

However, even if we add the study of the inductive correctness of arguments to the study of their deductive validity, there is still much more that would need to be done in the philosophical study of argument. Thus Blair is still importantly right. Or to be more precise, an important part of Blair's argument as reconstructed above is essentially correct, that is proposition (h) and the subargument going from (f) and (g) to (h). When we add a reference to induction, the last two propositions may be reformulated as (g') and (h'), and we then get the following modified argument: (h') the philosophical study of argument must study many aspects of arguments besides deductive validity and inductive correctness, because (f) the philosophical study of argument must focus on "full-bodied" arguments, and (g') the interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of full-bodied arguments raise many issues beyond those of deductive validity and inductive correctness. I now wish to make some remarks designed to strengthen this argument (but also to qualify other aspects of Blair's discussion).

I agree with Blair's emphasis on what he calls "full-bodied" arguments, and I also agree with the several types of examples he mentions. In particular, I agree that an important type is what he describes as "arguing for a scholarly paper, such as this one" (p. 7). We have already seen that, as Blair himself recognizes, the argument in his paper has an empirical component, which would raise issues of inductive correctness along the lines already alluded to. However, what I want to do now is to reinforce claim (g') by using Blair's own argument as an example of a full-bodied argument and subjecting it to an analysis that uses some of Blair's own (plausible) additional principles (pp. 7-8).

One of these principles is that in the context of (full-bodied) argumentation "who the arguer is makes a difference" (p. 7). This principle allows me to present in the form of a potential criticism a puzzle I have about one aspect of Blair's paper. My puzzle stems from the things he says about the motivation underlying it. Blair tells us that his paper was in part motivated by his administrative experience of being involved in hiring recent philosophy Ph.D.

recipients or candidates to teach courses on reasoning, argumentation, and critical thinking. He reports that in these courses such instructors tend to teach elementary symbolic logic, namely “virtually the same subject matter as is taught” (p. 1) in courses bearing the label “logic” at his university. Now, I must confess that I would find such a situation intolerable. Such prospective instructors should be given appropriate instructions. They should be instructed to study the catalogue description of the introductory reasoning course, which is: “An explanation of, and practice in, the basic knowledge, skills and attitude which are essential components of reasoning well.” He should point out to them that this description is such that their focus should not be deductive validity but rather full-bodied arguments and their analysis by means of a much wider set of principles, such as those discussed by Blair in this paper. In short, Blair should tell them to study some version of this paper.

What is the upshot of these considerations? The point is that there is a tension between Blair's claim (h) that the philosophical study of argument must include much more besides deductive validity, and the behavior, action, or conduct exhibited in his administrative experience. I am not clear at the moment about exactly where and how Blair's argument is affected, but it is clear that this is a criticism of Blair's “position” and that such criticism is an instance of *ad hominem* argument. It is equally clear that this *ad hominem* argument is of the “circumstantial” type and neither of the “abusive” or “poisoning-the-well” type, and so its correctness is an open question that would require further analysis.

On the other hand, the considerations that underlie this criticism add further support to Blair's thesis (g) that the study of full-bodied arguments must include more than questions of deductive validity (and [g'] questions of inductive correctness), such as considerations of “who the arguer is.” My analysis here also suggests that the first in Blair's list of additional principles relates to the notion of *ad hominem* argument, a topic much studied by informal logicians (e.g., Finocchiaro 1974, Johnstone 1959, Walton 1985).

According to Blair's plausible account, a second nondeductive, noninductive principle required in the philosophical study of argument is that “who the audience or interlocutor is makes a difference: it can impose constraints on the argument” (p. 8). Let us apply this principle to Blair's own argument.

The relevant audience is, narrowly conceived, the participants at the 2001 conference of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation, and more broadly, argumentation theorists and informal logicians everywhere, whether or not present at this conference. Let us examine, therefore, what elements of Blair's argument would be accepted by such scholars prior to and independently of his argument. I would venture to guess that, *in the sense in which Blair intends* the propositions making up his argument, this audience already accepted his key thesis (a), his further conclusion (b), as well as all the other propositions except for proposition (c) and the intermediate conclusion (e) it helps to support. In other words, the main questionable premise is the claim that identifies logic with the conception of logic found in the logic textbooks of the past 50 years. This means that he is trying to argue for an already accepted (or relatively acceptable) conclusion on the basis of a premise that is not accepted or relatively unacceptable. This seems to be to reverse of what one usually does in an argument, which is to render a claim more acceptable to an audience on the basis of claim(s) that it already accepts.

This sounds paradoxical, but perhaps Blair's argument may be rescued as follows. If Blair's argument is otherwise sound; if he has shown to this audience that if (c) is true then (a)

would be true; and if this audience already believed (a) to be true; then Blair has rendered (c) more acceptable to this audience than it was beforehand. In other words, he has made a plea to this audience for the persuasive definition of logic in terms of recent logic textbooks. In short, he has tried to convince us to use the term logic as synonymous with deductive logic. I do not think any disaster would follow if this stipulation were adopted, but if correct it would give a strange twist to Blair's argument. In any case, however, proposition (g), or (g'), emerges strengthened.

Finally, let us examine the fourth principle in Blair's list. It states that "the role of individual argument in the larger setting of making a case will affect the norms relevant to its appraisal. ... In other words, understanding the dialectical function of an argument -- its role in responding to objections, counter-arguments, or arguments for alternative positions -- will be important to its assessment" (p. 8). What Blair has in mind is arguments "designed just to establish a presumption ... to shift the burden of proof ... refuting an objection" (p. 8), and the like.

Here I don't think I completely agree with Blair. It seems to me that such issues do not escape the domain of deductive and inductive logic. On the one hand, if we are talking about case-building, where a particular argument is just one of several supporting a conclusion, then we are probably not in the domain of deduction but in that of induction; that is, a particular argument is trying to show that the conclusion is likely to be true, and so questions of inductive correctness would become relevant. On the other hand, most and perhaps all of what Blair calls the role or design of an argument could be handled in terms of identifying its conclusion correctly. For example, if the argument is designed to just establish a presumption rather than the truth of a statement, then the conclusion should be stated in a form such as "we may presume that p," rather than "it is true that p." If the argument has the role of refuting an objection, then the conclusion would have to specify exactly what flaw is being attributed to the objection, rather than that the proposition being objected to is true.

However, I don't want to give the impression that Blair is completely wrong here. For even if we can reduce these "dialectical" issues pertaining to "case-building" to questions of the inductive or deductive correctness of arguments along the lines just sketched, we are dealing with special types of arguments; one of these is "multiple argumentation" (Eemeren et al. 1966, 17), another is arguments about arguments (Finocchiaro 1980, 301). And such arguments are special both in the sense that they are usually not studied by deductive and inductive logicians, and that they deserve more careful study than they have received by informal logicians. Thus the spirit, if not the letter, of Blair's proposition (g), or (g'), is vindicated.

In conclusion, in these remarks I have tried to take seriously Blair's views on the logical and the philosophical study of argument by reflecting on them with the care they deserve. But since those views largely correspond to my own, I have also tried to *practice* some of what we preach. I have done so by taking Blair's views as constituting a "full-bodied" argument, reconstructing it in a nuanced manner, and evaluating it as much as possible in accordance with the principles elaborated by the philosophical study of argument which we commonly advocate. Hopefully, the result is a reinforcement of those views, as well as an exercise in what we preach.

References

- Arnauld, Antoine, and Pierre Nicole. 1996. *Logic or the Art of Thinking*. Translated by J. V. Buroker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. First published in 1662.
- Blair, J. Anthony. 2001. "'Argument' and 'Logic' in Philosophy." Paper presented at the conference "Argumentation and Its Applications," sponsored by the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation, held at the University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, May 17-19, 2001.
- Cohen, Morris, and Ernest Nagel. 1934. *Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Copi, Irving M, and Carl Cohen. 1994. *Introduction to Logic*. 9th edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. 1st edition. 1953.
- Croce, Benedetto. 1917. *Logic as the Science of the Pure Concept*. Trans. D. Ainslie. London: Macmillan. First published 1909.
- Dewey, John. 1938. *Logic, The Theory of Inquiry*. New York: H. Holt and Company.
- Eemeren, Frans H. van, Rob Grootendorst, and Francisca Snoeck Henkemans. 1996. *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*. Mahwah (NJ): Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Finocchiaro, Maurice A. 1974. "The Concept of Ad Hominem Argument in Galileo and Locke." *The Philosophical Forum* 5: 394-404.
- Finocchiaro, Maurice A. 1980. *Galileo and the Art of Reasoning*. Boston: Reidel Publishing Company [Kluwer].
- Johnstone, Henry W., Jr. 1959. *Philosophy and Argument*. University Park (PA): Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Quine, W. V. 1970. *Philosophy of Logic*. Englewood Cliffs (NJ): Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Salmon, Merrilee H. 1984. *Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.
- Salmon, Wesley C. 1984. *Logic*. 3rd edn. Englewood Cliffs (NJ): Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1st edn. 1963.
- Toulmin, Stephen E. 1958. *The Uses of Argument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walton, Douglas N. 1985. *Arguer's Position: A Pragmatic Study of Ad Hominem Attack, Criticism, Refutation, and Fallacy*. Westport (CT): Greenwood Press.