

*LOGICAL DIALOGUE – GAMES AND FALLACIES*, by Douglas N. Walton, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984. ix+315 pages.

Since the appearance of Hamblin's *Fallacies* in 1970, considerable work has been done in the area of formal dialectic (or logical dialogue games). Generally, research into the formal theory of dialogues has been motivated by the desire to develop a better tool than standard FOL (First order logic) for explicating informal fallacies. Douglas Walton has written a considerable amount on both fallacies and dialogue games, and thus one would expect his recent book, *Logical Dialogue – Games and Fallacies* to shed new light upon these issues. The result, however, is not fully satisfactory.

Walton begins by reviewing the standard informal fallacies (*ad hominem*, begging the question, *ad ignorantiam*, irrelevant conclusion, complex question, emotional appeals and strawman arguments). He indicates some of the problems with the use of traditional symbolic logic to explicate these informal fallacies. For instance, what sort of failure of argument (as usually defined in FOL texts) is involved in an *ad baculum* argument? If a mugger says:

- 1) If you don't give me your wallet, I'll shoot you.
- 2) You don't want to be shot.

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You ought to give me your wallet.

is he giving a good argument (if not valid in the deductive sense, then perhaps in the sense of a practical syllogism)? If not, then what makes it logically bad? The sorts of difficulties Walton discusses will be familiar to any instructor who has tried to unify FOL and informal fallacies in the same course.

Walton then reviews the dialogue models most prevalent in the literature. He discusses models of dialogues put forward by Hamblin, Mackenzie, Hintikka and Rescher. I found this to be the most valuable section of the book, because Walton lays out the models clearly, and contrasts them by looking at sample dialogues. He

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gives good explanations of dialogue strategy and the use of graph theory to represent dialogues. The book also has a good bibliography which focusses on research on formal dialectic done over the last fifteen years.

Walton then moves on to apply dialogue games to the explication of informal fallacies. This of course is what the reader is waiting for, but the results are disappointing. For instance, arguments from expert testimony are covered. These methods involve assigning probability weights to the experts, and selecting from their statements that maximally consistent subset which maximizes probability. This method, while interesting, was explored years ago by Rescher (in his *Plausible Reasoning*), and doesn't seem to have much to do with formal dialectic.

Even where the dialogue games are brought to bear on informal fallacies, we don't see to get much out of the exercise. For example, consider Walton's treatment of the *tu quoque* form of the *ad hominem* argument. Most traditional textbooks would regard a son who dismissed his father's advice to quit smoking on the basis of the fact that his father still smokes as having committed a fallacy. But Walton suggests we view the son as accusing the father of "positional inconsistency," and such *ad hominem* refutations can be a correct mode of argument if one's opponent does have a positional inconsistency. (The son would be committing a fallacy only if his accusation of positional inconsistency is false or if he draws the wrong conclusion from it.) And different dialogue games have different things to say about how positional inconsistencies are handled: some models view inconsistency as entailing the immediate loss of the dialogue game, others as merely requiring the player to resolve the inconsistency in his position.

But the formal dialectic/dialogue games tell us little of substance about *ad hominem* arguments, especially regarding the crucial issue in *tu quoque*: is it inconsistent for a man to say smoking is wrong and yet himself smoke? Not in the sense of logical inconsistency. And even if a person's belief system is shown by the attacker to be inconsistent, does that make the *tu quoque* argument acceptable? If the son proves that the father's belief system is inconsistent, would it not be shifting the burden of proof to require the father to embark on the task of straightening out his belief system?

Similarly, when we apply dialogue game theory to the fallacy

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of arguing in a circle, we don't get a particularly enlightening explanation.

Begging the question is similarly harmless, and seems equally silly as a strategic sequence of play in dialogue. If my thesis to be proved is T, then since the game is a disputation, you will not be strategically inclined to accept T, or any statement that directly implies T. Therefore if I ask you to accept T by a rule of the game, you are hardly likely to acquiesce. Assuming you are even moderately experienced or knowledgeable in playing the game, my moves will almost certainly be wasted in such an obtuse ploy.

We concluded then, somewhat paradoxically. . . that neither arguing in a circle nor begging the question are fallacies. (p. 287)

But people do in fact succeed in getting others to accept propositions by circular arguments or even simple repetition – as Goebbels showed only too well. When the ploy succeeds, we still want to say that a fallacy was committed (by the arguer, not the listener).

So far formal dialectic has not lived up to its promise as a tool for explicating the traditional informal fallacies. Why that is, I cannot say. But we ought not to conclude that formal dialectic is useless. Besides being interesting from the purely mathematical point of view, formal dialectic is potentially useful in artificial intelligence, specifically in the development of expert systems for scientific research.

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