

examine the relation of the premisses to the world which occasioned them. To call the difference between these two ways to examine reasoning the difference between formal and informal logic might be useful. But doing so would oversimplify and risk another troublesome distinction or variant of an old one. And with 2,000-odd years behind it our craft already has distraction enough.

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"What Type of Argument
is an Ad Verecundiam?"

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Elsewhere¹ we have stressed the need, in teaching informal logic, to include in the logical repertoire the skill of discerning the type of argument that the student is to evaluate. For if there is more than one type of argument, as we believe, the correctness or incorrectness of an argument may vary with the factor of type. For example, if there are inductively correct arguments, some of them (perhaps even all of them) may be deductively incorrect (invalid). Consequently, neglecting this type of distinction could spawn many a fallacy. For example, a systematic sophist might take one's correct inductive arguments and rule them deductively incorrect, ergo bad arguments. For all their deductive incorrectness they may be perfectly good arguments, taken as what they were meant to be, i.e. inductive arguments. Thus the sophist's ploy is based on a true premiss of deductive incorrectness, but it is a sophistical refutation because it equivocates on the factor of type.

This factor of type is particularly critical in teaching the evaluation of arguments ad verecundiam. It has sometimes been thought reasonable that appeals to authority can be a legitimate type of argument--that is, not always fallacious--but rather fallacious only given that certain conditions of the appropriateness of the appeal fail to obtain.² Even so, one may ask--what type of argument is involved? Hamblin (1970, p. 218) suggests that we could start from the valid argument, "Everything X says is true, X said that p, therefore p," and expect to find weaker but still not fallacious forms of argument where premisses of the form "X is an authority on facts of type so-and-so" lend some support to p. Salmon (1963, p. 64) asserts however that the appeal to authority

is not deductively valid, for the premisses could be true and the conclusion false--no authority, by these lights, is infallible or omniscient. Rather, according to Salmon the appeal to authority may be inductively correct if it has this form: "The vast majority of statements made by X concerning subject S are true. p is a statement made by X concerning subject S; therefore p is true."

Who is right? Is the ad verecundiam a type of argument that can be either deductive or inductive, is it perhaps inductive but never deductive as Salmon urges, or could it be something else altogether, neither deductive nor inductive in character? These are fundamental questions for anyone who would want to find ways of teaching students to identify and evaluate the ad verecundiam.

Two fundamental characteristics of appeals to authority should be brought forward at this point. First, ad verecundiam, like its partner in crime ad hominem, is subject-based. That is, what one authority X asserts may in general be different from or even contradictory to what is asserted by another authority Y. Second, ad verecundiam is subject-matter-sensitive. That is, an authority's pronouncement that p may be correct or not depending on whether or not the subject-matter of p is one in which the putative authority is indeed a legitimate expert. Since neither the subject-based or subject-matter-sensitive characteristics are true of the standard or classical approaches to the logic of either deductive implication or inductive conditionals, it seems reasonable to think that there may be some deeper reasons why the ad verecundiam can be neither deductive nor inductive as a type of argument. But how could it be proved?

We would now like to introduce the thesis that arguments ad verecundiam could be of a type that is neither inductive nor deductive, and suggest that the required type is that of the plausible inference of Rescher (1976). Plausible reasoning comes to bear on cases of informational-overdetermination, e.g. inconsistency; where we have too much information and have to decide what must be given up. Characteristic therefore of the case of plausible reasoning is the less than total veracity of our sources, for in an inconsistent pair of pronouncements, one source must be wrong. In this climate, neither deductive nor inductive inference is a propos, and in fact Rescher proves that the required type of argument can be neither deductive nor inductive.

Here are the essentials of the proofs given in Rescher (1976, p. 2ff.). If the inference "X (a generally veracious but imperfect source) maintains p, therefore p" were deductively valid, then so would the following inference be deductively valid for some other generally veracious but imperfect source Y: "Y maintains $\neg p$, therefore $\neg p$." But if both inferences are indeed deductively valid then from "X maintains p" and "Y maintains $\neg p$ " it follows that $p \wedge \neg p$ is true. Clearly this consequence is absurd however, for merely because authorities maintain

conflicting pronouncements it hardly follows that $p \wedge \neg p$ is in fact true. The same consequence follows by elementary laws of probability from taking "X (a generally veracious but imperfect source) maintains p, therefore p is highly probable" as a correct inference.³ Thus Rescher has shown that for an essentially subject-based (for two sources X and Y, or greater than two) appeal to authority, the type of inference can be neither deductive nor inductive. In essence, these disproofs reflect the conception that for multiple authorities that are imperfect and may be expected to have conflicting pronouncements, deductive and inductive models of inference are "too perfect". Hamblin's and Salmon's conceptions of the ad verecundiam are too idealized to adequately represent the practice of appeals to imperfect authorities whose pronouncements may clash. But confronted by contradiction we must not give up--even though deductive or inductive logics give no further guidance--but press on to resolve the contradiction by means of plausibility theory.

Now that we have eliminated the deductive and inductive models, and identified plausible inference as a preferable model for the type of argument exemplified by the ad verecundiam, it would seem the way is open to an analysis of this fallacy. And so indeed it may be, but this is not a project we shall attempt here. Suffice it to say for the moment that as Rescher conceives it plausible inference is not subject-matter-sensitive, so at very least plausibility theory will have to be conjoined to a theory of the subject-matter content of propositions⁴ in order to be adequate to the full ad verecundiam. These refinements aside however, we are at least in the position now of being able to identify one noteworthy insidious form of the ad verecundiam.

The fallacy we allude to occurs where an appeal to authority is construed so strongly, or such a lack of specification of its type of argument has transpired, that the argument is taken to have (a) deductive, or (b) inductive correctness. Yet if the appeal is meant to be taken--as it should be generally--to a less than perfectly veracious authority, then its construal as (a) or (b) is fallacious. The specific fallacy here lies not in the appeal to authority as such, but in the spurious escalation of the appeal towards a claim to a source of truth that is more perfect or infallible than a plausible argument has any logical right to be. In short, this fallacy is to misidentify the type of argument.

This particular error is of course not the only way in which an appeal to authority can go wrong, and elsewhere¹ we have suggested that ad verecundiam is an umbrella concept for several specific pitfalls of argument from authorities. But this particular species of the ad verecundiam is an important one, we think, in teaching students how to confront and deal with the fallacies, because it underscores the need to take into consideration identification of the type of

argument as a necessary skill of informal logic. The first step in attempting to adjudicate any allegation that a fallacy has been committed is to ask the question "What (exactly) is the argument?" Answering this question involves more than simply specifying a set of propositions--as in the approach of formal logic--it includes, among other tasks, specification of the type of argument that has been advanced.

Notes

¹See our article "Fallaciousness Without Invalidity?" Philosophy and Rhetoric, 9, 1976, 52-54, and "Formal Logic and the Logic of Argument" to be presented at the 6th International Congress of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science in Hannover, Germany, August, 1979.

²See our article "Argumentum Ad Verecundiam," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 7, 1974, 135-153.

³The proof, parallel to the one above, is given by Rescher (1976, p. 3).

⁴For such a theory, the reader should look to Douglas N. Walton 'Philosophical Basis of Relatedness Logic,' Philosophical Studies, to appear.

References

C. L. Hamblin, Fallacies, London, Methuen, 1970.

Nicholas Rescher, Plausible Reasoning, Assen/Amsterdam, Van Gorcum, 1976.

Wesley Salmon, Logic, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1963.

discussion notes

A NOTE ON THE "SURPRISE TEST" PUZZLE

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A schoolteacher announces to her class that there will be a surprise test during the following week. She specifies that by a "surprise test" she means one which no one could reasonably predict while walking to school. Immediately, one of her brighter students claims that she has contradicted herself. He offers this argument: The surprise test could take place on Friday, for if there had been no test up until Friday, then from that fact and the knowledge that there will be a test any student could

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