

# informal logic

newsletter

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## from the editors

In the early stages of its growth, any discipline confronts a number of obstacles to its continued development. One of these is the absence of an agreed-upon agenda of the problems which the discipline is attempting to develop answers to. Informal Logic appears to be at such a point now. Hence the presence of such an agenda would, in our opinion, pave the way for future growth—though it goes without saying that the agenda we're thinking of cannot be forced or fabricated. It must be thrashed out, puzzled about and worried over.

We mention this because it is our hope that the upcoming Second Symposium on Informal Logic (more details of which are contained herein) will provide an opportunity for those doing research in informal logic to get together and see just what is on everyone's agenda. There is good reason

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to think that such a goal is not out of reach, for we seem to see signs that the agenda is developing. The contents of this issue are a case in point.

Research interests which have developed independently seem to be converging. Thus, fallacy theory remains a focus of interest—and that in spite of several blows aimed at its solar plexis. In her article, Trudy Govier takes on several criticisms of fallacy theory, most important of which is Maurice Finocchiaro's article, "Fallacies and the Evaluation of Reasoning" which appeared in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Finocchiaro's piece was provocative, but so is Dr. Govier's rejoinder. The interest in fallacy theory is also evident in Leo Groarke's article about conventional accounts of the "Two Wrongs" fallacy and where they fall short.

Another item on the agenda, we think, is the project called "critical thinking" and how it relates to informal logic. In this issue, Mark Weinstein (who earlier contributed an article about the role of formal logic) discusses a way in which fallacy approach can be adapted to the teaching on critical thinking in the strong sense (cf. Richard Paul, "Teaching Critical Thinking in the 'Strong' Sense," *ILN*, iv.2 (May, 1982), pp. 2-12).

Paul Thagard's discussion note attempts to sketch a classification scheme of fallacies in the area of practical (means-end) reasoning—a topic new to these pages and one potentially on the agenda along with those mentioned before: the viability of fallacy theory, and the connection between fallacy theory and critical thinking.

William Maker's article deals with a situation which many of our readers may recognize: "getting stuck with the S%\_&' informal logic"—an increasingly common experience as informal logic gets recognized as a legitimate subject in the curriculum (or an enrollment booster, or both). Maker relates the teaching of informal logic to mainstream philosophy teaching objectives in a way that calls to mind both Paul's and Weinstein's views on strong sense critical thinking.

The paper by Dale Moberg brings in another potential item for the agenda: the reconceptualization of argument. Moberg argues for in-context, dialectical appraisal of arguments, which ties in with connections between informal logic and rhetoric that are increasingly being made (cf. Toulmin, et al., *An Introduction to Reasoning*; Fahnestock and Secor, *A Rhetoric of Argument*; and Preston Covey's project at Carnegie-Mellon—just three examples of many that could be cited).

Finally, Ralph Pomeroy's article makes an interesting connection between Ryle and informal logic and helps bring into better perspective the historical impulses behind the development of informal logic.

All in all, we believe this group of articles not only suggests the shape of agenda but also manifests the range and vitality of research interests in informal logic.

We continue to tinker with the format of *ILN*. Beginning with this issue, we are printing the complete address of each contributor at the end of his or her submission so that any of our readers who might wish to write to the author may conveniently do so. (We have borrowed this idea from *Teaching Philosophy*.) In subsequent editions, we plan to institute a "Notes on Our Contributors" section so that our readers may know a little about our contributors. We

therefore ask that anyone submitting material for future numbers include a brief note (half a dozen lines or so) for that column.

We begin our fifth year of publication pleased with the support we have received and hopeful of more of the same in the future. ●

## articles

# Who Says There Are No Fallacies?

Trudy Govier

Believe it or not, some do. A new text by Lambert and Ulrich contends that various arguments alleged by authors of rival texts to exemplify informal fallacies have nothing in common with each other. And a recent paper by Maurice Finocchiaro, published in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, alleges that fallacies, formal or informal, are very rarely actually committed by real people. I have a colleague who maintains that those who find fallacies in ordinary reasoning do so only by approaching that reasoning in an uncharitable way and failing to interpret it appropriately. Here, I shall try to grapple with these lines of thought, and I hope to show that there is as yet no warrant for wholesale revisionism about fallacies.

First, however, a few words about the concept of fallacy. A fallacy is a mistake in reasoning, a mistake which occurs with some frequency in real arguments and which is quite characteristically deceptive. That is, an argument which will seem like a good argument to many people much of the time. There are some points to attend to here. Since a fallacy is a mistake in reasoning, in order to commit one, a person must be reasoning—she must be using a statement or statements as rational support, inferential support, for further statements. Here, we can express this point succinctly by saying that if a person is to commit a fallacy, she must be arguing. To correctly allege that someone has committed a fallacy, we must have correctly interpreted her as having offered an argument. A fallacy is a mistake in reasoning, but not just any old mistake in reasoning; it is a mistake in reasoning which has some frequency in real arguments used by real people. The mistake cannot be so idiosyncratic that it could scarcely recur outside its original context. This aspect of fallacy