

Introduction: Reasoning for Change

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Abstract: This special issue of *Informal Logic* brings together two important areas of philosophy that have shown significant development in the last three decades: informal logic and feminist philosophy. A significant innovation they both share is new thinking about practices of argumentation and related practices of reasoning. Feminist theorizing supporting social and political change foregrounds “reasoning for change” in a way that draws attention to the contextual and rhetorical dimensions of argument, and thus connects with significant developments in informal logic.

Resumé: Ce numéro spécial de *Informal Logic* rassemble deux domaines importants de la philosophie qui ont fait des progrès significatifs durant les trois dernières décennies : la logique non formelle et la philosophie féministe. Une innovation importante à laquelle ils ont contribué est une nouvelle façon de penser sur les pratiques argumentatives et les pratiques reliées au raisonnement. Les théories féministes qui appuient des changements sociaux et politiques forment le premier plan de l’emploi du raisonnement pour réaliser ces changements d’une façon qui attire l’attention sur les dimensions contextuelles et rhétoriques des arguments, et ainsi se relie à des progrès importants dans la logique non formelle.

Reasoning and change are often connected, each propelling the other. Often there is reason or cause or evidence for change; often change or desired change brings about new reasoning. Our main focus in this special issue is the relationship between reasoning and forms of social or political change that aim to counter injustices linked to the subordination of women and other politically marginalized people. Reasoning can take many forms, and our main

focus here is reasoning that involves arguments—the special purview of *informal logic*. Countering injustice can also take many forms, both practical and theoretical, and our main focus is theorizing in *feminist philosophy* as that has developed significantly over the last three decades. We thus see this special issue as contributing to the development of a “rhetorical space” (Code 1995) connecting these two important areas of philosophy.¹

There are notable similarities between *informal logic* and *feminist philosophy*. Both developed as distinct sub-areas in philosophy around the same time, in the mid to late 1970s.² Both developed as “movements” aimed at challenging particular limitations in traditional or “mainstream” philosophical theorizing. Informal logic questions the emphasis on formal deductivism in philosophy, the “theoretical prejudice...that the only respectable philosophical reasoning and argumentation employ deductive inferences.” (Johnson and Blair 2000, p. 101) Feminist philosophy challenges sexist assumptions in canonical Western philosophical texts and arguments, assumptions that were typically linked to a general supposition that the ideal reasoner or knower, and, in turn, the ideal moral or political agent was male. As a perhaps inevitable consequence of these challenges, both informal logic and feminist philosophy have been marginalized in the discipline as a whole. In their 2000 overview of informal logic, Ralph H. Johnson and J. Anthony Blair note that “[informal logic] needs to penetrate the philosophical establishment, so that its theoretical findings become better known and better reflected in undergraduate instruction” (2000, p. 101). A similar marginalization of feminist work has been noted by many feminist philosophers, and some have examined particular forms of disciplinary “backlash” against feminist philosophy.³

Yet these “marginal” areas in philosophy are the sites of innovative thinking and theorizing that propel the discipline as a whole forward. Perhaps the most significant innovation they both share is new thinking about practices of argumentation and related practices of reasoning. Argumentation is the working medium of philosophy,

¹ An important volume examining the relationship between feminist theory and *formal logic* and philosophy of logic is Falmagne and Hass (2002).

² While some works published before the 1970s are considered “classics” in informal logic and argumentation theory, *The First International Symposium on Informal Logic* (held at the University of Windsor in June 1978) is often noted as a significant launching event for the informal logic movement (Johnson and Blair 1980). Similarly, while a number of earlier works are considered classics in feminist philosophy, the development of feminist philosophy as a specific area in philosophy took off in the 1970s. For a helpful account of this development, see Nancy Tuana’s, “Approaches to Feminism” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-approaches/>>.

³ Many of the essays in Superson and Cudd (2002) examine specific forms of backlash against feminism in philosophy.

that is, doing philosophy significantly involves the making of arguments (and counter-arguments...) about the nature of truth, goodness, and beauty, and everything and anything in between.⁴ Yet, as developments in both informal logic and feminist philosophy show, philosophy has often been constrained by adherence to types or forms of argument and argumentation that limit possibilities for new insight and understanding. The discipline may not even acknowledge, let alone theoretically support, significant arguments (in everyday or in theoretical contexts) that do not conform to ideals of reason modeled on formal deductive inference. Introductory texts and classes in reasoning (in philosophy and in other disciplines) typically gloss over the many forms of reasoning and argument now examined and categorized by informal logicians and argumentation theorists (Hundleby, this issue). Feminist philosophy also draws attention to particular limitations in traditional philosophical argumentation, and in philosophical thinking about argument more generally. Among the fundamental questions feminist philosophers ask are the following: What would philosophy and philosophical argumentation (in the Western tradition) look like if women had had an equal share in their development? What would philosophical arguments about human nature, reason, morality, and politics look like if they hadn't implicitly assumed that males (or males of privileged groups) were the norm or ideal of humanness? How did assumptions about women's irrationality inform conceptions of reason (Rooney 1994), and understandings of argument as that was taken to be a key practice of reason (Rooney, this issue)? How did philosophical argumentation about social change and justice hinder rather than help progressive change on behalf of women and others who were socially and politically marginalized? That is, why did philosophical argumentation supporting real constructive feminist change only take off when women began to enter the discipline in greater numbers in the latter part of the twentieth century?

In bringing together developments in informal logic and feminist philosophy (especially feminist epistemology), the following essays address these and other important questions about the relationship of reasoning as argument to progressive or liberatory change. Many of the authors argue that limited conceptions and practices of argument have inhibited change by implicitly excluding or silencing the voices of those who could speak most directly to the need for change. Many also examine the change already brought about in theoretical developments in feminist and related work, and they argue that this work provides new models of rea-

⁴ Daniel O'Keefe (1977) distinguishes "argument₁" the premise-conclusion complexes that we call arguments, from "argument₂" the speech acts in which people produce such arguments, acts that he refers to as "making an argument."

soning and argument that support social and political change. These models, in turn, encourage the further development, in informal logic, of theoretical accounts of argumentation that give prominence to forms of reasoning and argument that contribute to significant change.

Most of the authors in this collection pay particular attention to practices of theorizing and argumentation in the discipline of philosophy, particularly as those practices are elucidated by feminist philosophical work. Four of the five authors take up concerns raised by Janice Moulton (1983) in her classic paper examining the limiting effects of adversarial argumentation as a paradigm of reasoning in philosophy. Three of the five refer to Lorraine Code's critique of "mainstream" epistemology in its promotion of generic knowers and arguers who reason at a distance from the real contexts of knowing where good reasoning and good argument matter (Code 1991, 1995). One author shows how Miranda Fricker's recent work on the political dimensions of testimonial exchange (Fricker 2007) has important application in an examination of the political dimensions of argumentative exchange. All of these examinations are informed by scholarship in informal logic and argumentation theory which helps to underscore particular insights. The work of Michael Gilbert, Ralph Johnson, Trudy Govier, Christopher Tindale, and Douglas Walton (among others in informal logic and argumentation theory) helps to extend the philosophical significance of feminist analyses, particularly as they pertain to philosophical examinations of argument and argumentation.

Both Phyllis Rooney and Sylvia Burrow take up one of Moulton's central arguments: that the "Adversary Paradigm" as a dominant method of philosophical argumentation discourages women, and thus contributes to philosophy's remaining a male-dominated discipline. Rooney, however, is not content with explanations of women's discouragement that primarily rest with claims to the effect that women (whether due to natural inclination or socialization) are less comfortable with combative argumentation. She argues that the root of the problem is in the history of Western philosophy, in the way that gender metaphors and symbols informed philosophical understandings of reason, and of argument considered as a prime example of reason or reasoning. Such metaphors established "masculine" reason as *embattled reason*, as continually warding off the ever-lurking threats or distractions of "feminine" unreason—whether in the form of passions, bodily incursions, natural instincts, or bewitching charms. Embattled reason is metaphorically linked with *argument-as-war*, and understanding this link, Rooney maintains, is key to displacing the embeddedness of the latter metaphor in the practice and theory of argument. Many theorists (not just feminists) argue that this metaphor has signifi-

cantly constrained the theory and practice of argument, in philosophy and in other contexts.

Burrow also addresses the concern that women are likely to be less comfortable with adversarial argumentation, but she takes it in a different direction, examining it in light of research on feminine and masculine “discourse norms and strategies.” The everyday real contexts of argumentation come to light, in Burrow’s account, as contested ground in which expectations and norms relating to gender and other social differentiations play a complex role. More particularly, Burrow is interested in “feminine politeness” norms, in the way they often put women in oppressive double binds. Women often feel that they need to adopt adversarial “masculine discourse strategies” in contexts where those strategies determine who is recognized and granted authority. Yet women who “transgress” feminine politeness norms are often perceived and described using hostile terms reserved for women (bitchy, catty, shrill, uppity, for example), terms that function to undermine their authority. She argues that women need to make conscious use of “politeness selectivity” when they approach argumentation contexts where gender norms operate in determining status and authority. While both Rooney and Burrow pay particular attention to the theory and practice of argument in philosophy, their analyses clearly also pertain to other discourse contexts—many of which have been significantly informed by the history and culture of philosophy.

Burrow’s emphasis on the *contexts* of argumentation is an emphasis that is also taken up by the papers following hers. Such attention is not new in argumentation theory, and it has played an important role in recent developments in the field (Tindale, 1999). At the very least, such attention requires us to examine arguments as something more than discrete sets of propositions in a premise-conclusion complex. Understanding individual propositions in an argument often requires us to attend to the cultural context of the person (or persons) who made it, if for no other reason than to better understand the terms used. Such attention also helps uncover implicit assumptions brought to bear in the argument. As Rooney argues, understanding some arguments in the history of philosophy requires attending to the role of metaphors in philosophical argumentation, and, in particular, to the ways in which metaphors sometimes carry implicit assumption—though, as she notes, these metaphors may only “work” as such for particular philosophers in particular historical-cultural contexts. Burrow directs attention to particular aspects of the social identities of arguers in dialectical contexts. Such particularities, she argues, often determine how we understand propositions as utterances in argumentation, or whether we take them seriously in the argument situation. This kind of attention bears on recent feminist work in the *epistemology of testimony*. Epistemologists who focus on testimony argue that since

much of what we know or claim to know comes from other people (including via newspapers and other media), it is important that we examine how assessments of the credibility and authority of testifiers are determined. However, as feminist epistemologists point out, such assessments often track social divisions, when, in particular, those in subordinate social positions are (perhaps unconsciously) given less credibility and authority. Fricker (2007) has examined such tracking in what she determines is a recurring problem of “epistemic injustice.”

Patrick Bondy takes up Fricker’s analysis of epistemic injustice and examines its application in argumentation contexts. What he calls “argumentative injustice” involves situations or cases “where an arguer’s social identity brings listeners to place too much or little credibility in an argument.” Bondy, in effect, challenges a traditional supposition that we should examine arguments without attention to the identity of the arguer. As much work in social psychology reveals, however, we do attend to the identity of arguers when we make implicit assumptions about the likely truth of propositions conveying testimonial evidence. Sometimes, such attention is warranted, as, for example, when we take account of the arguer’s particular background or expertise in the matter at hand. But such attention is also warranted, Bondy argues, when “identity prejudices” are likely to cause reduced or excessive credibility judgments. He recommends adopting a stance of “metadistrust” with respect to our inclinations to believe or doubt in such situations. Such a stance, he maintains, is necessary to improve our ability to evaluate arguments in an argument exchange. Bondy argues that the stance of metadistrust he proposes fits well within the framework of “manifest rationality” developed by Ralph Johnson (2000). Like many theorists in informal logic and argumentation theory, Johnson understands argumentation as social and dynamic, including when it supports norms of rational persuasion and the furtherance of truth.

Catherine Hundleby also argues that there are significant developments in informal logic and argumentation theory that can be usefully applied to the development of accounts and theories of argumentation that attend to the complex contexts of real argumentation, including those contexts informed by status and power differentials. Hundleby’s main focus is the teaching of fallacies and, especially, the way fallacies are presented in introductory textbooks in critical thinking and logic. She argues that some of the limiting effects of the Adversary Paradigm are quite evident there, most notably when fallacy allegations are presented as tools to “defeat” or silence opponents. For example, many textbooks have “no discussion of argument repair,” so they, in effect, overlook the important role of argumentation as a process of exchange in situations where everyone might constructively seek to make some epistemic gain.

The presentation of fallacies in most of these texts, Hundleby argues, supports an implicit epistemology that is authoritarian. Reforming this “authoritarian pedagogy” requires greater uptake of the nuanced analyses of fallacies undertaken by informal logicians and argumentation theorists. A fallacies pedagogy more attuned to these scholarly developments would, Hundleby maintains, provide an “authoritative alternative” that could also take account of feminist and liberatory epistemological insights about reasoning and argumentation in situations marked by epistemically salient status or power imbalances.

James Lang provides an account of an alternative epistemological framework that supports the examinations of argument and argumentation that the other authors emphasize. Lang’s main focus is “epistemologies of situated knowledges” (ESK) as developed especially by Donna Haraway (2004/1988) and Code (2006). As a significant development in feminist/liberatory epistemology, ESK affords epistemological analysis of the political dimensions of knowledge practices and communities. In paying particular attention to the fact that knowledge is “situated” in non-trivial ways by the social identities and locations of inquirers who bring specific interests, questions, and goals to their inquiries, ESK fundamentally challenges traditional epistemological assumptions that all knowers are interchangeable and that knowledge exists independently of knowers. Lang maintains that examinations of argumentation that are informed by ESK can make important contributions to analyses of the rhetorical dimensions of argument—as developed in informal logic and elucidated by Tindale (1999) especially. Lang notes, for example, that Tindale emphasizes that “argument is not just a tool for resolving local disputes, but is instrumental in the improvement of human communities” (Tindale 1999, p. 203). Lang suggests some specific ways in which Tindale’s work “could be expanded to accommodate rhetorical implications of situated knowledges.”

All of the papers in this special issue draw attention to significant advances in both informal logic and feminist epistemology that promise fruitful further development, and particularly when these two areas of philosophy more actively draw each from the other. However, as the paper by Rooney shows, such further development also requires additional reflection on a tradition of philosophical theorizing and practice that still has some lingering effects in determining who does and who does not feel welcomed into important and authoritative contexts of reasoning and argumentation.

Acknowledgements:

This issue of *Informal Logic* on the topic of “Reasoning for Change” was developed as an extension of the conference “Reason, Activism & Change: Philosophical Considerations,” held at the University of Windsor, Ontario, in October 2008. Both the conference and this issue were supported by the *Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy* and the *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada* (SSHRC). SSHRC also provided financial support for the work of Candace Nast and Margaret Hundleby as editorial assistants on this issue, and we are grateful to Candace and Margaret for their dedication, care, and reliability.

The conference also received financial support from Carol Reader and the following sources at the University of Windsor: Department of Philosophy; Office of the President; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences; Centre for Studies in Social Justice; “Excellence in Engineering (3-E); Faculty of Law; Martha Lee, Stephen Jarislowsky Chair in Religion and Conflict (University of Windsor and Assumption University); Stephen Pender, Research Leadership Chair; Women’s Studies Program; Political Science Department; Environmental Studies Program; Psychology Department; Centre for Research in Reasoning, Argumentation and Rhetoric; and the Windsor University Faculty Association.

We would also like to thank the editors of *Informal Logic*, J. Anthony Blair, Ralph H. Johnson, Hans V. Hansen, and Christopher W. Tindale for their encouragement and support with the development of this special issue.

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