

prefer, for example, to be able to justify open discussion in class on the model of increasing the variety of ideas so that we are more likely to come up with the correct one, rather than because we want the students to feel more comfortable expressing themselves. The latter by itself is somewhat patronizing, and dangles the question of what is learned about the purpose and form of learning. Although this theme is important, I take its point as sufficiently familiar, and the constraints of space sufficiently severe, to allow application without further development at this level of generality.

If the study of informal logic is construed as within the theory of inquiry, then it should seek analyses and evaluations that bring us closer to the truth. Presumably, this implies that we want to maximize truth-relevant or epistemically relevant considerations over pragmatic or ethical ones in defending certain approaches, rules, or principles. An argument, minimally conceived, consists in statements some of which purport to **support** others i.e. either make the conclusion more likely to be true or more reasonable to believe. The Principle of Charity should be justified, at least as a first try, as significant for finding out whether the conclusion is correct given the premises, rather than merely winning the argument.

The so-called "prudential" justification of the Principle of Charity gains priority, and must be somewhat recast, if we take its point as akin to one central to Popper's philosophy of science: we want to formulate arguments at their best or greatest strength because that makes the evaluation a more "severe test". [3] A more severe test (a stronger statement of the argument) is more likely to reveal falsity (failure of this line of reasoning) than a less severe one (weaker statement of the argument). Johnson's corollaries (e.g. ignoring bad reasoning that is inessential to the main argument) fall out of this justification directly.

Fairness is an important ethical directive, but its epistemological relevance is less clear. As we have mentioned, certain ethical principles do seem to follow from the ideals of inquiry e.g. mutual respect is required for the full benefits of other points of view. Such seeking after other opinions and criticisms is part of the self-corrective nature of science which warrants faith in a convergence of opinion. Fairness may fall out also, though not, I would expect, in its fullest form. Inquiry demands that certain views not be given a hearing if their plausibility or initial credibility is very low upon introduction. Without such a restriction inquiry would be swamped. What this example illustrates in methodology, also holds for ethical inquiry generally, namely that considerations like fairness must frequently be weighed off against other consideration (e.d. giving special weight to the interests of those one has strong personal ties to).

In normal day-to-day life, as in the classroom, truth is not such an overriding desideratum as in science. We have multiple (non-cognitive) demands on our time, social concerns, and a limited period in which to reach closure. Under such conditions it is reasonable to introduce heuristics, rules, etc. which, though non-ideal from a purely internal point of view, allow us to reach a fair compromise. In particular, one constraint we might place is to try to understand and evaluate arguments within the context and terms in which they are presented. So the Principle of Charity will be more circumscribed in its use as our practical demands increase.

So in the end, my practice may not be too dissimilar from Scriven's or Johnson's. My point is epistemological. Ultimately all argument analysis may have to be viewed as argument with someone. But let us not accept that view without first seeing whether, or to what extent, the more objective one works. That approach will provide a regulative ideal that reminds us to be careful of the extent to which our "charity" has been limited by external factors, [4] and so correspondingly there is still a line of reasoning worth further exploration. Moreover, such an approach provides a block to relativism or subjectivism about the methods and rules of informal logic, and holds out the promise for a unified theory of criticism as inquiry.

#### Notes

1. Ralph H. Johnson, "Charity Begins at Home," *Informal Logic Newsletter* (iii.3), June 1981.
2. Michael Scriven, *Reasoning* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
3. I am obviously using the spirit behind Popper's proposal, not the letter. Severe tests are explicated with notions such as "potential falsifiers" that are not appropriate to a general theory of the evaluation of arguments.
4. For some dangers in hasty evaluation and niggardly use of the Principle of Charity see M. Finocchiaro, "Fallacies and the evaluation of reasoning," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 18 (1981), 13-22.



note

## Charity Again

In connection with my paper, *Charity Begins at Homes*, in which I attempt to locate the first enunciation of the principle, I have been informed by Professor Robert Ennis (Professor of Philosophy of Education, University of Illinois) of his attempt to formulate that principle in *Logic in Teaching* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969): The relevant passage reads:

Unfortunately there is no automatic way to tell what gap-filler to attach to an explanation. The following rules of thumb can be of some help, though admittedly they are somewhat vague:

1. Pay close attention to the context.
2. Other things being equal, select the simpler of the two gap-fillers.
3. Be fairly generous to the explainer, but not overgenerous. (p. 271)

Ennis then goes on to illustrate how these rules of thumb apply.

Ennis says that this is a vaguely formulated principle of charity. I agree. It is worth noting, also, that this principle is targeted for providing gap-fillers in explanations. These are analogous to missing premises in arguments, to be sure. But what I was interested in tracking down was this: the first mention or formulation of the Principle of Charity as a principle of **argument analysis**, no matter what level of analysis.

Ralph H. Johnson ❀

## query

We received the following note:

"I am trying to locate individuals who are currently researching into diagnostic problem solving.

My research interests are in the nature of diagnostic problem solving and how this skill is learned. I would like to find out about similar work, whether laboratory research or research in applied settings such as medical diagnosis, troubleshooting, scientific classification, etc.

I should be very glad to exchange information about ongoing research."

Replies should be sent to: N. C. Boreham, Lecturer in Higher Education, Department of Adult & Higher Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, England M13 9PL. ❀

## conference notes

### Second National Conference on Critical Thinking, Moral Education and Rationality

Sonoma State University  
Rohnert Park, California

May 13, 14 and 15, 1982

**Special Workshops, Discussion Groups and Debates** will focus on the following questions: 1. What is the nature of critical thinking and how best can it be taught? 2. Is it possible to educate students "morally" and what is the relation between such education and developing skill in critical thinking? 3. What is "rationality" and in what major ways can it be taught? 4. What is the relation between an education that enhances "rationality," "critical thought," and "morality"? 5. How does "indoctrination" fit into this picture?

**Invited papers** by: Nicholas Rescher, Michael Scriven, Joseph Ullian, Anthony Blair, Peter Diamandopoulos, Howard Kahane, John McPeck, Julius Moravcsik, Hubert Dreyfus, Stuart Dreyfus, Richard Paul, Ralph Johnson, Ruth Barcan Marcus. ❀

### Fourth National Conference/Workshop on Teaching Philosophy

Appalachian State University  
Boone, North Carolina

August 4-8, 1982

Sponsored by the American Association of Philosophy Teachers. See *ILN*, iv.1 (p. 10) for details. ❀

### Second International Symposium on Informal Logic

University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario, Canada

June 20-23, 1983

For details write to Symposium co-chairmen Anthony Blair and Ralph Johnson, Department of Philosophy, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4. ❀

### 7th International Congress of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science

Salzburg, Austria

July 11-16, 1983

Address all communications to: Paul Weingartner or George Norn (7th International Congress of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science), Institut fuer Philosophie, Universitaet Salzburg, Franziskanergasse 1/1, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria, Europe. ❀

## announcements

**Langages et Systèmes Informatiques** announces its Second Summer School "Linguistics for Computer Scientists" September 8-16, 1982 at Toulouse. The object of the program is to expose an audience of computer scientists to the present trends in linguistic research concerning the fields of computer science oriented towards natural language study and processing. One of the topics covered during the session is Natural Logic: linguistic expression of reasoning; argumentative structures; connectedness and coherence of reasoning; formal logic and natural language logic relations; relevant formalisms.

For further details, write to:

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