

fair, then, to allow Professor Hitchcock a reply to his critics. This will be the last thrust in the inductive-deductive debate that we will run in the ILN for a while. (But didn't we say that before?)

Your editors have, in the past, been loath to publish their own work in the ILN. We view the Newsletter as a clearing house and forum for others, not a personal mouthpiece. This policy of restraint has had us bursting at the seams on more than one occasion, and finally the pressure has become too great. This year Ralph Johnson is on sabbatical leave, writing on informal logic. He has written a number of articles, none originally intended for the Newsletter. Thus it was that his co-editor, wearing editor's hat, approached him, wearing sabbaticant's hat, and convinced him to part with a couple of pieces for our columns. As a result we have an in-depth review of the recent text by Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke and Allan Janik, An Introduction to Reasoning, the first part of which appears in this issue, and the completion of which will appear next issue. And in the next issue we will also run a piece by Johnson on the Principle of Charity.

#### A NEWSLETTER/JOURNAL OF INFORMAL LOGIC?

We appreciate the double bind many potential contributors to the ILN find themselves in. On the one hand, they want to support the ILN and put their work before an audience that is interested in it; on the other hand they want to (a) support the informal logic movement by getting articles in informal logic published by established and prestigious journals (thus getting the subject/field recognized as a legitimate philosophical concern), and (b) advance their own work by having it taken seriously by the professional establishment.

There is no simple solution to this very real dilemma. We would ask those who are writing articles in the field to include ILN in their rotation--send us a piece for every one or two you send to Phil. Review, Meta-philosophy, APQ or Phil. & Rhetoric. Remember, we give you fast publication, quick published responses, and a readership 100% of whom are interested in informal logic. (Our current subscriptions total 335, and are growing weekly at a steady rate.)

To several friends who have expressed concern that our evolution towards a journal would be at the cost of valued informality and ready accessibility, let us reassure you that we see no need to give up the latter in order to become the forum for serious work in the theory and application of informal logic. Teaching ideas, examples for comment, brief notes, conference reports, notices, lists of textbooks, and so on--all must continue to have plenty of space in these columns. \*

Very special thanks to June Blair for editorial and production assistance in getting out this issue, and to Violet Smith for typing it.

# article

## Attitudes to Reasoning

Thomas J. Richards  
La Trobe University

I will make two assumptions in this paper. One is that reasoning can be taught; and the second is that the teaching of reasoning is the most important activity in the curriculum. In this I am at one with the Victorian Universities and Schools Examination Board, who have made English the one compulsory paper in Higher School Certificate, and who say in its prescription "The Course ... is intended to cultivate in students the whole variety of skills involved in an active, critical understanding of written and spoken English ... (to) enhance the student's critical abilities ... training him to think and express himself more clearly ..."<sup>1</sup>

At least, one would be forgiven for thinking they and I are at one on the importance of reasoning. But more of that later.

If I may make so bold as to improve upon the words of Leavis, whose thinking seems to dominate core English in the schools, I am looking for a logic that is for life. I want to devise a curriculum for Reasoning that can be taught in the schools and that aims to impart attitudes and skills of logicity and rationality; attitudes and skills that will serve in ways of importance in all aspects of life. I am thus not concerned with what logic should be taught as a background for academic philosophy; nor with the question of what should comprise the elementary stages of a University course in Logic. I have my views about both these questions, and one of my views is that they are distinct questions. If you want my views on the first of these questions, read my book, which is aimed at providing the background in Logic that I think is needed for academic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> But that, for various reasons, seems

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"Attitudes to Reasoning" first appeared in the Australian Logic Teachers' Journal, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 1-11, and the editors of ILN express their gratitude to Professor Richards and to ALTJ editors R. A. Girle and T. A. Halpin for their kind permission to reprint it here.

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to me to be entirely distinct from the question of what should be taught if we are to provide a reasoning for life, if we are to teach broadly applicable skills of considerable usefulness; skills that may be described as exercises of logicity or rationality.

To devise a curriculum that works, I think the starting place is to try to evaluate what the role of reasoning is conceived to be; not by me the philosopher or you the teacher, but by Society with a capital S. What is the prevailing set of norms that tends to mould the attitudes of people to such questions as: What can reasoning achieve? How does it work? To what problems is it applicable? What does it stand in opposition to? What other and better ways are there of doing what reasoning tries to do? What sort of strength or force does reasoning have? There's a horde of such questions to be asked, and it seems to me that without some guide to the norms and the popular opinion that settles the received answers to these questions, one is in danger of shaping a logic course that simply doesn't connect with the thinking of those taking it. If, for example, it is accepted that reasoning is something that we can all do intuitively with ease and accuracy, and that the attempts of logicians to formulate the laws of logic for explicit use is about as silly as writing a book on how to learn bike-riding; then it might be wise to start with Heuristic and look in a self-testing way at some logical and illogical ways commonly used to solve problems. Certainly, starting with symbolic logic is only likely to confirm the student's opinion and thus waste his time. Mind you, I'm inclined to think that if your goal is a Logic for Life, then symbolic logic is more of a waste of time than its practitioners are willing to admit.

Well then, what is the Received Theory of Reasoning in our society? What are the normative standards governing the attitudes to reasoning? I'm going to spend most of this paper saying what I think they are; for I think these norms are very dangerous and largely unnoticed and unfelt by the practicing logician, whose job tends to protect him from them. It seems to me, as will be apparent when I explain them, that these norms make the teaching of reasoning just where it matters most, concerning practical matters, extremely difficult. What I say will of course be more of a caricature, I'm sure, than a sober portrait; but then I think that here as with politicians, a caricature is more valuable than a portrait, and for much the same reasons.

It seems to my observation that there is an attitude to reasoning that is the root of a great political and social malaise in our society. It is that the activity of critical reasoning ends when one has become clear about what others are saying and what their reasons are for saying it. From that point on there is no role for reasoning, since we are dealing with opinions and not with facts. Opinions are to be judged by whether they are sensitive, sympathetic, and based on a cultured interpretation of the background and lifestyle of their holders; in short by whether they issue from a heart informed by empathetic understanding. But opinions are

not to be judged by their truth or falsity, correctness or incorrectness, their internal and external consistency, the resilience and strength of arguments in support and against, or the acceptability of their presuppositions. For none of these concepts are applicable to opinions, as they are objective concepts whereas opinions are just a matter of opinion. If indeed you do accept such an extreme individualistic subjectivism about all statements except the most undeniably "factual" ones, then there is precious little else by which to judge opinions except by appeals to insight, empathy, and similar non-rational approaches to belief.

The acceptance of such a philosophical position about opinions leads fairly inevitably, it seems to me, to the adoption in practice of a group of three tenets about the nature of reasoning and how reasoning should be done in our society, which I shall dub the Received Theory of Reasoning. Together they determine a fairly rigid format for the operation of debate. The three tenets I shall call the Doctrine of Bastardized Liberalism, the Embrace of the Genetic Fallacy, and the Emphatic Theory of Evidence. Let me introduce them by way of describing the accepted format of debate.

The accepted format of debate in our society, on television, in Parliament, in newspapers, in conversation, is to state your opinion and your reasons (in either sense, psychological or logical) for holding it. You then listen to your opponents, then inform them that they have a right to their opinions, but nevertheless it seems to you that ... True, part of the accepted format is to disprove factual premisses of an opponent, in clear cases only such as where he has his numbers wrong. In unclear cases however you may only say that you disagree, that you think he is wrong. In such cases a logical counterargument is not permitted in the format, since to give one would be contrary to the principle of what I call Bastardized Liberalism, that in all but uncontroversial factual matters, everyone has a right to their belief. In such cases you may say only "Well, that's your opinion and you're entitled to it", or "To me that seems different", or, one of increasing currency, "You have a different philosophy from me there". These moves all function to stop logical argument continuing on the point, by denying its legitimacy.

A particularly blunt way of stopping debate at this stage, and favoured by those in power, is "You're entitled to your views, but I reject them and see no point in listening to your reasons."

Let us examine the Principle of Bastardized Liberalism in action. The first move is to assert the principle itself, that each of us has an equal right to hold and express a belief, no matter what that belief is, (unless it's clearly factually false). Anybody who then tries to mount a logical attack on a non-factual opinion is seen as undermining a person's right to hold that opinion. Why? Because to mount the attack the attacker must be assuming the opinion is factual, and on the whole one is not entitled to factually false beliefs. The Principle of Bastardized Liberalism, then, requires that

logic be irrelevant to opinions. One may put it this way to bring out an equivocation in the Principle: we all have an equal moral right to our opinions, hence we must have an equal logical right to our opinions, hence logic makes no difference to the right to hold an opinion. Logic becomes irrelevant, and a crass attempt in a debate to make it relevant is, by the rules of the accepted format of debate, shunned as an invasion of rights.

It should be clear that I reject Bastardized Liberalism, but that might make it seem that I am opposed to freedom of opinion, which I am not. So I want to explain what is being rejected, and why. I espouse the view that the notion of a rationally supportable opinion is not a contradiction in terms, and the further view that it is of prime importance in very many cases to try to determine what is the most correct, or the most rationally acceptable, opinion. Thirdly I hold that logical reasoning is a necessary part of determining the correctness of any opinion, and fourthly I hold that logical reasoning as an activity is less than completely certain, and that includes deductive reasoning. I think it follows from these premisses that one requirement for the defence of a free society in which truth may be searched out and prevail is that there is no moral right at all to ignore evidence, to believe what one likes or say what one likes. There is instead an obligation to seek the truth most strenuously. While this obligation entails, both because of the dialectical nature of argument and its lack of certainty, that no opinion may be suppressed, it also entails that one has a duty to positively refute falsehood, and in the case of conflicting opinions, to seek out the truth so that the incorrect opinions may be seen as incorrect and dropped. Thus if I have a well-defended opinion and you a weakly defended contrary one, while I ought not deny to you the right of expressing it, I also claim that you have an obligation to assess my arguments against yours in a disinterested manner and adopt the most logical conclusion.

You have a positive obligation to determine your opinions only by the light of reasoning and evidence. In short, you have a right to hold only true beliefs. It is that restriction on rights to belief that Bastardized Liberalism rejects. My moral right to hold a belief exactly equals my logical right to hold it. What Bastardized Liberalism adds to that tenet is that we all have equal moral right to any belief whatsoever, thus denying any obligation to seek the truth. Opinions become like a child's seashell collection; he may put into it any one that takes his fancy.

Let me stress that on this argument of mine, heterogeneity of opinion is to be valued and prized, for the reasons Mill gave. So is the coming to understand why people have the various opinions they do; "why" in both senses: the cause and the logical justification. For thus is dogmatism avoided and humility strengthened, which is the beginning of rational assessment. But only the beginning. To concentrate on sympathetic understanding period is to reject the further requirement to determine the truth.

The second of the three tenets that I see

as making up the Received Theory of Reasoning is the Embrace of the Genetic Fallacy. Just to make sure that that rather Irish title is taken aright, let me be more Irish and say that I mean that the Genetic Fallacy is rejected as not fallacious. Precisely, no distinction is to be drawn between the causes a person might have for his state of belief concerning a given statement he believes, and the rationality of the justification he can offer for the truth of that statement.

Why should the Genetic Fallacy be embraced? Because if all opinions have equal right and thus reasoning makes no difference, then the only way to construe reasons, which after all the Accepted Format of Debate allows people to give, is as causes of their believing. If opinions aren't true, their reasons must be their causes or perhaps their effects, their rationalizations.

The practical consequences of embracing the Genetic Fallacy are three-fold. The first is that the prohibition on logical reasoning is further strengthened, since the offering of any logical reason which it is difficult to construe as a cause tends to undermine the Embrace of the Genetic Fallacy, hence the Principle of Bastardized Liberalism from which it derives, and hence the underlying philosophy of Extreme Individualist Subjectivism. The second consequence acts in an opposite way to the first. Here, the effect of embracing the Genetic Fallacy is to neutralize the sting of any logical reasons that may creep in to debate. This is done in two ways. One is to encourage us to see even them as causes of belief and not also as increasing the likelihood of the truth of the belief. The other is to encourage us to see logical reasons as the sort of things a person would say anyway, since they already have the belief. Being caused by the state of belief, they are not relevant to the truth of that believed. They are rationalizations.

The third consequence of embracing the Genetic Fallacy is that a person's opinions and the reasons for them are viewed merely as a symptom of one's social role, affiliations, hang-ups, or job, whatever it might be that would cause those beliefs. Thus the move in debate: "Well, you would have to say that, wouldn't you? You are an employer (or Labor man, or pensioner, or in general a member of some interest group)." Hence, what one may believe depends on the interest groups to which one belongs. Consequently the main effect, and indeed purpose, of debate is to identify what opinions serve the interests of which interest groups and hence what opinions oneself should have.

At this stage there enters the third ingredient of the Received Theory of Reasoning, what I call the Empathetic Theory of Evidence. The problem now is, given the Theory of Reasoning so far, what are the legitimate grounds on which one may change or make up one's mind? It is quite unsatisfactory to be a permanent prisoner of one's roles and interests; it must be possible to break free from these and thus change one's opinions. But how, given that reasoning embraces the Genetic Fallacy? How can one change the causes of one's belief? Since reasoning embraces the Genetic Fallacy and is perceived as cause or effect of a state of belief, its

power to appeal lies only in any ability it has to strike responsive chords in listeners, to elicit in them the same causal states. If it is these interests, those desires, this self-image that is the reason for someone's opinion, then insofar as I can come to feel those interests and desires, aspire to that self-image, I too may embrace that opinion. Empathy becomes the legitimate channel for changing opinion. Empathy, of course, can be portrayed as a cultured and intellectually sensitive state, to be distinguished from emotionalism and sentimentality. One can, on the Empathetic Theory of Evidence, reject the crass blandishments of salesmen and extreme political groups, for one can through empathising with them see how un-empathetic they are, how they fail to empathise with the customer about to be duped or with the minority about to be scapegoated. One can see that their opinions, not being based on empathy, cannot be shared by oneself for one's own opinions must be based on empathy.

Thus it is that empathising becomes the criterion of good judgment, and the person who cultivates it can see himself as superior in judgment to those who allow their opinions to be swayed by emotional reasons. The reasons that should determine opinion should, for one thing, stand the test of time. Emotional pressure and sentimentalism do not; the appeal to lower appetites does not. So those reasons are not good reasons for belief. One should not allow oneself to be influenced by such causes. But empathy is different. If I can come by empathising, to share the experiences of others I am ipso facto opening my mind to the reasons, the causes, that have swayed others, and I can savour them for myself. I can't be more open to reason than that. I can come to feel the force of those opinions whose causal states have weathered the outrages of time; I can sift amongst the durable ones from those that are blind and insensitive and endure only through the thickness of their skin, the ones that are empathetic and sensitive. Then through my powers of empathy I will make the causal states of those opinions to be causal states in my mind too. I will adopt those reasons.

That completes my analysis, my caricature, of the Received Theory of Reasoning. I would sum it up in this way. De gustibus non est disputandum, and gustus is extended to include all but matters of purest certainty. If you are to improve your judgment you should merely try to appreciate why others should have the taste they do. Perhaps one should even learn to savour it. People of sensitivity and good judgment visit ethnic restaurants.

I think it should now be clear that I am alarmed at the current emphasis in the English curriculum in the Schools. The one compulsory subject, compulsory because the teaching of critical understanding and clarity of thought is avowedly the most important thing that can be taught, seems to me to be taught from within the framework of the Received Theory of Reasoning.

What is my evidence? First there is the prescription for H.S.C. English. Let me read the aims. They sound noble and to oppose them is like opposing motherhood. But as I read them, listen for any word about using

critical understanding and thought to reason with, to determine the correctness of beliefs, the justifiability of beliefs, the sifting of truth from error. You will find no such word.

The course ... is intended to cultivate in students the whole variety of skills involved in an active, critical understanding of written and spoken English in relation to other modes of expression and communication.

It should enhance the student's critical abilities enabling him to direct them not only toward what others may say and write but also towards his own written and vocal expression.

Through training him to think and express himself more clearly about the content and import of what he has read, the course should develop in the student that critical understanding without which accurate reading of all kinds of writing is not possible, an understanding enabling him to distinguish the point or purpose of a writer or speaker and what is relevant or irrelevant to it.

In these ways, the course should cultivate the formation of balanced judgements on matters which though controversial are nevertheless important to the individual and to the community to which he belongs.

It should seek to improve the presentation of these judgements, in the setting of the reasons for accepting them in both writing and speech, promoting in so doing the intellectual virtues of clarity, honesty and fairness.<sup>3</sup>

The intellectual virtues of rationality and seeking the truth, which are absent from the Received Theory of Reasoning, are absent here too. The "cultivation of the formation of balanced judgments" is urged, which is an aim of the Received Theory of Reasoning; but the cultivation of tests for the correctness of judgments, which is not part of the Received Theory, is not urged. Nowhere does the syllabus require the teaching of reasoning.

Perhaps however the booklist will provide models of reasoning. If this is the compulsory course, aimed at teaching critical understanding and clarity of thought, surely the booklist will contain a variety of models upon which the reader might, even unconsciously, mould his own skills of thought and criticism. Not so. Indeed it is in the booklist that one can see clearest that thinking is being taught from within the framework of the Received Theory of Reasoning, and in particular the Empathetic Theory of Evidence. There are a few autobiographies; otherwise the texts are entirely works of fiction, usually prose, occasionally verse or drama. The books are chosen, the prescription tells us for the following purpose:

in studying these books ... to determine as clearly as possible, and to assess, whatever each ... can add to the student's understanding of themselves, their social milieu, and the world.

There is no mention of the books helping them to reason.

Students should be encouraged to illuminate the particular personnel or social issues aroused by their study of the group of books ... and, having done so, they should be able to express the insights they have gained in simple, direct and economical prose.<sup>4</sup>

The books are there, it seems, to give insight, to deepen understanding in the Bastardized Liberalism sense, but not to teach how to think and reason. Moreover, and this too is part of my objection to the Empathetic Theory of Evidence, it is assumed that such books are what students should be reading if they are to increase their understanding. There is no question of putting any work of history on the list, to increase our understanding of, say American military involvement in the Far East. Instead we have Greene's Quiet American. Nor do we have the work of a Laing or for that matter any scholar or scientist at all of any sort on the matter of society and sanity; we have One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

One does not wish to disparage the peculiar contribution that can be made to understanding of the human condition by parabolizing aspects of it into stories. At least one religion was founded on teaching done mainly in that mode.

What I object to is what is left out; the contributions made by history, sociology, psychology, and, dare I add, philosophy. This is entirely inconsistent with the professed aims of the course in providing a language for life, all aspects of life. This is the only compulsory course in H.S.C., and the literary model provided is: fiction. No student is required to rub his nose in a bit of history to teach him a little about evidence and interpretation. He is given no philosophy to provide a model for abstract reasoning in the vernacular or how to try to settle non-factual opinions. That would run quite counter to Bastardized Liberalism. He is given no sociology to teach him how to look for and assess interactions between a person and a community. He is, in short, in the compulsory course ostensibly devoted to improving thinking, critical powers, and expression, given no models for creative reasoning, no works of logical argument to analyse, no books that explain the nature and skills of reasoning, in short no understanding that there is a skill called reasoning which is what one must use to find out the truth. He is given rather a course that can only encourage in him the view that truth is subjective, that logical reasoning is irrelevant and probably spurious; and that intellectual virtue consists in sympathetically understanding the point of view of another and in gaining insights.

Of course it would be inconsistent with Bastardized Liberalism to put any scholarly work on such a booklist, for the distinction between a scholarly and a literary work is that a scholarly work is open to criticism about its factual correctness, its logical consistency, the adequacy of its methodology in relating theory and evidence, and in other similarly logical regards. In short, scholarly works are open to criticism by a logic

that accepts that opinions are opinions about what is the case, and inadequately supported opinions do not have a right to be held.

I have spoken at some length about Victorian H.S.C. for two reasons. The first is that it is about to be replaced by a new and less centralized system of teaching and assessment at twelfth year level and so there is some importance in the question of what direction the English paper will take. It looks as if English will remain compulsory, and it is clear already that the English Committee has set its face against significant change away from the Received Theory of Reasoning. It says in its Green Paper of June 1978:

The study of English in Victorian sixth form has two broad objectives. The first of these is twofold: to extend and deepen the range of the student's experience through reading, discussion and writing, and then encourage the student to reach considered points of view relevant to the subjects of his own and others' experience.<sup>5</sup>

The stress is theirs. The stress is on reaching considered points of view, not on reaching the truth, not on learning how to find the truth, not on learning how to assess the rational acceptability of a point of view. True, some things are said in passing that indicate that the teaching of some amount of reasoning is compatible with the proposed English syllabus, for the committee stresses that students, in their study of English above all pay attention to the relevance and coherence of what is said. Coherence is defined as "so ordering thoughts that the "logical" and "rhetorical" connections between them are apparent."<sup>6</sup> Though consistent with the teaching of reasoning, that statement does not even suggest, let alone entail, any study of that activity, even at the most rudimentary level of, say, trying to characterize an argument.

The purpose of the stress on relevance and coherence is, anyway, not expressed in terms familiar to a logician. Instead the purpose appeals more to literary goals:

Taken together these criteria can be used to show how generalizations and particular statements, qualifications, apt illustrations, relations of cause, effect, and other conditions, and the unifying power of an emotion or mood may contribute to an adequate paragraph, essay, novel or work of non-fiction.<sup>7</sup>

If that is the sort of thing expected of students, maybe it is just as well that scholarly works do not appear on the reading list. We would get Plato's Apology analysed for its virtues as a dramatic portrayal of a point of view about the state and suicide; and Mill's On Liberty would be assessed as a political pamphlet for the unifying power of its majestic rhetoric. Mill might in passing be commended for setting out his reasons. His reasons. But, such is the suffocating omnipotence of the doctrine of Bastardized Liberalism, you can bet your boots that even if Mill were studied, nobody would presume to try to determine the extent to which Mill is right.

The second reason for discussing the Victorian H.S.C. at such length was to bring out what seem to me to be the general attitudes to reasoning in our society, and to try to indicate the ways in which this sort of syllabus presupposes and reinforces them. \*

[Editor's Note: This paper was presented at the 1978 ALTA Conference together with a second paper in which Dr. Richards suggested details of a school curriculum in reasoning. This second paper, entitled "The Fourth R", was published in the Australian Logic Teachers' Journal, Vol. IV, No. 2 (February 1980), pp. 1-10.]

#### Notes

1. V.U.S.E.B. H.S.C. Handbook, 1978. p. 191.
2. Richards, T.J. The Language of Reason (Sydney, Pergamon, 1978).
3. Ibid.
4. Op.cit. p. 193.
5. Committee on English in the Sixth Form, "English and English Literature in the Sixth Form", V.U.S.E.B. duplicated, June 1978. Quote is from statement of aims, p. 6.
6. Op.cit. p. 9.
7. Ibid.

# response

## Deduction, Induction and Conduction

**David Hitchcock  
McMaster University**

The last issue of this Newsletter featured four articles (2, 5, 7, 10) on the inductive-deductive distinction. Sherlock Holmes would deduce that practitioners of informal logic have a great deal of interest in this topic. Or should that be "induces"? Perhaps a few more words on the topic will be conducive, if not conductive, to more enlightenment.

In what follows, I first try to situate the dispute about the deductive-inductive distinction within the context of the appraisal of arguments. I respond briefly to Samuel Fohr's objections (2) to my position. I then explore

through a series of examples Perry Weddle's renewed claim (10) that all carefully drawn arguments are deductively valid. I concede that it is possible to fill out the premises of a traditionally inductive argument in such a way as to make it deductively valid, but argue that in general this requires the addition of premises justifiable only by inductively weak arguments. It is therefore a better strategy in argument appraisal to omit such premises and take the argument to be inductively strong. Consideration of these examples leads naturally to a discussion of Trudy Govier's defense of a third "conductive" standard of appraisal of arguments. I conclude by advancing amended criteria for determining the appropriate logical standard for appraisal of an argument.

#### I

What is at issue in this debate? As practitioners of informal logic, we are oriented towards the appraisal of arguments which people actually advance in an attempt to convince others (or themselves) to believe or to do something. The question at issue, then, is whether any version of the distinction between deduction and induction is helpful in appraising arguments. If so, which one?

Usually our purpose in appraising an argument is to come to a decision about whether to accept its conclusion. I use the term "cogent" of an argument which deserves to convince us of its conclusion, i.e., which provides adequate grounds for believing or doing what the conclusion says. I take an argument to be cogent for somebody when and only when (1) that person has justifications which are independent of the conclusion for accepting its premises and (2) the conclusion follows from the premises. Some arguments are potentially cogent. That is, they would be cogent if they were filled out with premises which their author perhaps takes for granted as known background information, accepted normative assumptions, and so forth. The cogency or potential cogency of an argument is a relational property; arguments are cogent or potentially cogent to those people who are in possession of relevant evidence. Furthermore, the appraisal of an argument is both an epistemological and a logical matter.

Roughly three positions on the deductive-inductive distinction have emerged.

(1) Perry Weddle (9, 10) maintains that we should abandon the deductive-inductive distinction. "...some traditionally inductive and some traditionally deductive arguments provide conclusive grounds for their conclusions and some do not." (9, p. 4) The ones that do not are apparently not carefully enough drawn. We should presumably fill out their premises and/or hedge their conclusions so that they become deductive in the sense that "it is absolutely impossible for the premises to be true unless the conclusion is true also." Having made the strength of the conclusion proportional to the strength of the premises, we can evaluate the cogency of the argument by evaluating the acceptability of the premises. There are then two questions to ask about any argument: Does the conclusion follow deductively from the premises? What is the relation of the premises to the world? (9, pp. 4-5)