Walton’s latest of several books on argumentation claims that any meaningful account of the logical fallacies depends first upon understanding the diverse purposes which arguments serve in dialogue. At the very least, his observations suggest that “informal logic” would do well to investigate a wider range of argument-types, and the diverse contexts in which they appear.

Walton extends Grice’s idea that the content of claims depends upon a context of (presumed) agreement as to the purposes of a conversation, and related considerations of relevance. He concentrates upon six types of dialogue, starting from Hamblin’s abstract model of conversation, and analyses arguments according to the role they play with respect to the purposes served by the dialogue (which purposes may range between such as persuasion, inquiry, negotiation, even quarreling). Further, Walton argues, any account of “fallacy” must take these different purposes into consideration. This claim has two parts: first, we can only call a form of argumentation fallacious if we understand what it does, or fails to do, as regards the dialogue-type in which it appears; and, second, different types of conversation mark off differences as to what, exactly, counts as fallacious. On the first count, the book should prove useful. Walton is probably right that logic and critical-thinking texts too often talk about fallacies too matter-of-factly, without convincing examples of the ways in which these forms of reasoning can fail to advance goal-oriented discussion or reasoning. To fill this gap, Walton references much of the literature on the various dialogue-forms, and his book stands as a good jumping-off place for more detailed investigation of how they work, or fail to work, to their ends. (It should be noted, too, that no small part of this other literature is also Walton’s work.)

The second part of Walton’s claim—which he calls “revolutionary,” and (perhaps infelicitously) “postmodern”—may be less convincing. At its strongest, the idea is that forms of reasoning may be fallacious in some dialogues, but perfectly reasonable in others. A dialectical fallacy consists merely in use of arguments out of proper context, illegitimately shifting a conversation away from its intended purpose. In Gricean terms, most all fallacies are fallacies of relevance. The “new dialectic” finds places for a number of supposedly fallacious argument-forms, allowing that they contribute to different sorts of end-related language-using activity; however, some may resist this way of talking. Traditionally, the fallacies have been denigrated because they fail to achieve one particular and important goal of logical argumentation: to get from some set of true claims to some new (and likewise true) set of claims. Fallacies arise where argumentative methods either fail to lead reliably from truth to truth, or (e.g., begging the question) fail to lead to something novel. Walton argues that this feature is not of primary importance, since persons do not always use dialogue to argue to the truth of some conclusion.
Consider one of his examples. Use of argument *ad baculum*, or “argument from threat,” is generally frowned upon—that we have been threatened into agreeing with a conclusion is no guarantee that it is true. And yet, Walton argues, threats may constitute an important strategy during negotiations, and cannot be ignored just because some critical-thinking text calls them “logically fallacious.” This is surely right, but some readers might not be convinced of the overall point. We may think that fallacies are tolerated in such contexts precisely because here we are not concerned with argument, after all. It could be said that some functions of conversation, as varied as they are, have nothing to do with establishing the truth of claims, and so the dialectical moves permissible there do not need to pass the logical test. Or, to put it another way, the fallacies are still bad forms of argument—it is just that certain contexts allow the insertion of bad arguments. Perhaps, however, this is just a matter of taste, and it is certainly not Walton’s burden that some of us might want to restrict our interests more narrowly than his own. In truth, he struggles gamely with some of these issues, as when he considers the shift from “open-minded” dialogue into the “eristic” or quarreling sort of conversation, where, he admits, the presence of fallacy signals the shift to a genuinely different sort of activity.

It must be noted, lastly, that the book suffers somewhat from loose, and perhaps hasty, editing. Its structure (ten chapters, ten sections each) is artificial, and marked by what seem to be cut-and-paste revisions. Some terms (“dark-side commitments,” “mæutic”) are used a number of times before an explanatory note or definition indicates Walton’s meaning, and a few errors creep in (the Kripke conditions for intuitionist-negation [74] should close with “. . . otherwise . . . = T” and not “. . . otherwise . . . = F”). The last chapter, in particular, could stand some revision, since some of its points remain unclear.

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