

Reflective Summary: Hamblin

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Hamblin begins this chapter by talking about what fallacies are. For him, “A fallacy is a fallacious *argument*” (p. 224). Fallacious things can happen, but the definition of fallacy is best understood when it is identified in an argument.

One then asks, “what is an argument?” Hamblin says that his point in this paper is to re-examine the concept of argument as it has been traditionally understood in formal deductive logic. He seeks to deal with 3 difficulties of formal deductive arguments: 1) When following the rules of FL (formal logic), that clearly indicates what an argument is or isn't, one can often get away with glaring fallacies simply by declaring that no argument was made; 2) Many natural language arguments, such as from authority, get tossed out the window by FL and are not well assessed; 3) An excellent argument, according to FL, can often be circular and unimportant when considered in natural language.

He spends a good deal of time in this essay talking about the evaluation of arguments, saying that “there are various criteria of worth of arguments...all this set the theory of arguments apart from Formal Logic and gives it an additional dimension.” His point is to incorporate reasoning and rationality into the evaluation of arguments, rather than relying simply on formal axioms and principles.

In the process, he encourages readers to be concerned “not so much with the truth of the statement as its epistemic status”. He abandons the notion of formal validity and replaces it with clarity of inference (the conclusions must clearly follow the premises). He says that we should be concerned with “arguments that persuade, as distinct from possibly unpersuasive arguments that are valid”, and that persuasion should begin by starting from something that an interlocutor will accept.

He summarizes the answers to his 3 points as follows: 1) We should stop seeking “perfect” arguments and accept that sometimes fallacies of formal logic will occur. But that doesn't render the argument completely irrelevant; 2) There are clear cases of arguments that are non-deductive that rely on other kinds of things that formal proofs to evaluate them; and 3) If we stop being concerned with accepting only absolutely truthful arguments, and instead evaluate the possibilities of beliefs, hypotheses and theses, question begging goes out the window. We needn't back up our arguments with axioms.

Reflection:

On this re-read, I was surprised to find references to and echoes of issues that I had previously not recognized in Hamblin. For example, the section referring to arguments that are *accepted* being “much more germane to the practical application of logical principles” (p. 241). He clearly supports the need for audience participation, echoing Perelman. He says that acceptability can be judged by the interlocutors, particularly the person who is being persuaded, and advocates that an arguer should start building his evidence from something the hearer will accept.

I also thought that I recognized a little Toulmin. Hamblin points out that, “when we divide the statements making up an argument into premises and conclusions we are importing another fixed idea; for many arguments in practice have a thread, a development, that involves intermediate statements belonging to neither of these categories”, (p. 229). This reminded me of

Toulmin's desire to include other aspects of the argument, such as the warrant or the qualifiers, Hamblin seems also to be suggesting that we consider other parts of an argument than simply premises and conclusions.

Finally, I thought I saw a nice segue into Johnson's work. On page 251, he reminds us that "nothing has been said in this chapter about the rationality or otherwise of accepting the conclusions of good arguments and of acting on them..." Certainly, when dealing with arguments that occur informally, rationality and reasoning are primary tools that must be incorporated. Hamblin sees the need for the development of a theory of argument that incorporates a theory of rationality.