Is there an informal logic approach to argument?

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I argue that there is on the face of it no theory of logic or argument denoted by 'informal logic'. I explore the possibility that there is an open-ended family of doctrines (not all consistent), various subsets of which intelligibly count as aspects of an informal logic theory of argument. It turns out that the doctrines can be arranged as the ingredients of a theory.

KEY WORDS: Argument, definition, informal logic, theory

1. INTRODUCTION

From time to time in the scholarly literature reference is made to informal logic and various properties are predicated of it. Groarke's account of it in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of* Philosophy, under the title, "Logic, informal" revised in January 2017 is an example; so is Blair's ISSA keynote speech in 2014, "What is informal logic?". And so is Walton and Gordon's "Formalizing informal logic" (2015). If they were going to formalize informal logic, what is it that the term 'informal logic' denotes that can (arguably) be formalized? If you are going to deliver a speech titled "What is informal logic?" there had better be some characterization of something that might be called 'informal logic' that you will argue is correct or isn't correct. Alas, Groarke seems to want anything to do with arguments to be part of informal logic, with the consequence that all sorts of things, from deductivism to visual argument, belong to an informal logic approach. He also allows for various approaches to the analysis of arguments, and for an array of argument assessment methods to count as informal, but he doesn't distinguish what identifies an informal logic perspective and from others. Blair is little better. He distinguishes different approaches to argument analysis and to its assessment, but he offers no reason for identifying any of them with informal logic other than that people who self-identify as informal logicians take those approaches.

Until we have set of doctrines that identify a distinct approach to the interpretation and assessment of arguments, and a basis for labeling that approach "informal logic", the answer to the question asked in the

title of this essay is "No". In this paper, I begin by looking for help to be provided by definitions of informal logic, reasoning that if these are accurate definitions they should set me on the path to my objective, namely and account of an informal logic approach to argument analysis and evaluation that distinguishes it from others. After that hope is dashed, I propose the hypothesis that informal logic is a cluster concept of a particular kind. Some of its properties are close to being necessary conditions; others, are distributed more vaguely, so while their presence helps to identify the activity as informal logic, the absence of many of them from a perspective on argument does not alone disqualify it from belonging to informal logic. Yet others are entirely optional. They can be shared with approaches that are not informal logical. An attempt to itemize the constitutive elements that any informal logic theory would possess, combined with the distribution of the items in the cluster concept to what seem to be their natural elements, produces the prospect of an informal logic theory of argument after all.

2. DEFINTIONS OF 'INFORMAL LOGIC'

One might hope that definitions of 'informal logic' would readily pave the way to characterizing an informal logic approach to argument. Alas, definitions are as scarce as hens' teeth. Some textbooks with "informal logic" in their titles, such as Robert Fogelin's (2001) *Understanding Arguments, An Introduction to Informal Logic*, or Irving Copi's (1986) *Informal Logic*, don't insult their readers with what is, apparently, so obvious as to go without saying: a definition of the content billed in their titles.

Walton's *Informal Logic, A Handbook for Critical Argumentation*, is an exception; or, at least a definition can be teased out of the following passage, where he writes that the purpose of the book, "is to furnish the reader with the basic methods of critical analysis of arguments as they occur in natural language in the real marketplace of persuasion on controversial issues in politics, law, science and all aspects of daily life" (Walton 1989, p. ix). I take it this means that, for Walton, informal logic consists of the basic methods of critical analysis of arguments as they occur in natural language in the marketplace of controversial issues in all aspects of daily life. Johnson and Blair offer several definitions, which in itself is some indication of the indeterminacy of this concept. Here is one by Johnson: "By informal logic I mean to designate a branch of logic whose task is to develop non-formal standards, criteria, procedures for the analysis, interpretation, evaluation, critique and construction of argumentation n everyday discourse" (Blair & Johnson, 1987, p. 147). Finocchiaro's (2005, p. 93) definition is similar: "... informal logic [is] ... the formulation, testing, systematization, and application of concepts and principles for the interpretation, evaluation, and practice of argument or reasoning".

The trouble with these definitions is that they are too broad. For instance, most of them would include Pragma-dialectics as a branch or version of informal logic. Although they are similar in objectives, the Pragma-dialectical approach to argument is not an informal logic approach to argument—whatever the latter may be. So, these definitions fail to provide us with the features of a distinctive informal logic approach to arguments and argumentation.

Moreover, what I am after in this paper is not an answer to the question, "What is informal logic?", but instead an answer to the question. "What is an informal logic approach to argument?" By an "approach" I have in mind the basic assumptions made about the nature of an argument, the method of interpretation used.

3. A PROPOSAL

Consider the hypothesis that the term 'informal logic' serves as a shelter for an assortment of views or assumptions about arguments and arguings. Those who see themselves as "doing informal logic" can be so identified by virtue of their holding these views and making these assumptions. It is difficult to identify any single one that alone suffices to identify the approach it entails as an informal logic approach. Some are positive; others are negative. There are disagreements among informal logicians about how to characterize even the tenets that they would agree are central. Some theorists who declare themselves sympathetic, or somewhat sympathetic, to informal logic also maintain views about arguments and arguing that lie outside what one would call the traditional informal logic perspective (e.g., Tindale, 1999).

Accordingly, the hypothesis is that informal logic is a cluster concept like democracy. There is no set of necessary and sufficient conditions of an informal logic approach to argument. There is a bundle of features, various subsets of which their adherents would identify as informal logic. Something like Hansen's characterization of it is appropriate:

> The principal aim of informal logic is to develop methods for evaluating natural language arguments by non-formal means. It is also part of the spirit of informal logic that its methods should be as widely usable as possible and not demand any special technical skills of the users, as do formal logic and probability theory. The methods of informal logic thus aim to be user-adequate, meaning that they are suitable to the knowledge and abilities of the arguers. (Hansen, 2019, p. 12)

This characterization of the nature of informal logic explains why it is easy to criticize but difficult to refute. There is usually something to criticize about a theorist's account of one or another of these views or

assumptions, but to refute informal logic as a whole requires refuting a large number of them.

4. THE VARIOUS TENETS OF INFORMAL LOGIC

Here, then, is a list of views each of which has been said or implied to be an element in the make-up of informal logic. For brevity I will often refer to what many proponents of informal logic want for it or believe about it by writing "informal logic wants" or "informal logic believes", etc. When I use these expressions, I am not attributing wants or beliefs, etc., to informal logic.

4.1 Be primarily interested in arguments-1.

Informal logic endorses and uses D.J. O'Keefe's (1977, 1982) argument-1/argument-2 distinction, holding that O'Keefe is right that the word 'argument' is ambiguous in that it references two distinct kinds of things. One is an abstract object consisting of premises and conclusions; the other is a kind of communication characterized essentially by expressions of disagreement between or among communicating interests. Arguments-1 may be used to try to resolve arguments-2.

Hereafter, unless I am referring to a distinction between the two, I will be talking about argument-1; so, I will drop the ungainly "-1" suffix.

4.2 Conceive arguments as "reason-allegedly supports-claim" complexes.

Informal logicians disagree about the particular characteristics of arguments that are assumed. In general, they take arguments to consist of reasons for claims and the claims that are backed by those reasons, but they tell different stories about the specifics. Consider a list of definitions or characterizations of an argument.

- "The argument consists of a set of premises which are said to 'imply,' that is, lead to,' a conclusion or set of conclusions. " (Scriven, 1976, p. 36)
- "A simple argument, or piece of reasoning, consists of a conclusion and a premise or premises. The conclusion is that which is or seems to be supported, the premise or premises that which support." (Weddle, 1978, p. 4)
- "... arguments are discourses containing some statements that are given to support or back up other statements, ..." (Thomas, 3rd ed., 1981, p. 10)
- "An **argument** ... may be defined as a sequence of declarative sentences, one of which, called the **conclusion**, is intended to be evidentially supported by the others, called **premises**." (Nolt,1984, p. 2)

- "...a message which attempts to establish a statement as true or worthy of belief on the basis of other statements." (Freeman, 1988, p. 20)
- "... a set of claims a person puts forward in an attempt to show that some further claim is rationally acceptable". (Govier, 5th ed, 2001, p. 3)
- "In the context of critical thinking the term 'argument' refers to a set of claims, some of which are presented as reasons for accepting some further claim—the conclusion. The reasons are presented with the aim of persuading the hearer or reader to accept the conclusion." (Fisher, 2001, p. 235)
- "The word 'argument' ... here ... is used in the ... sense of *giving reasons* for or against some claim." (Fogelin and Sinnott-Armstrong, 6th ed., 2001, p. 1)
- "... a set of reasons in support of a claim." (Groarke & Tindale, 3rd ed., 2004, p. 2)
- "An argument ... is a group of statements, one or more of which (the premises) support or provide evidence for another (the conclusion)." (Damer, 5th ed., 2005. P. 11)
- "... arguments in the broad sense are social exchanges between two or more parties in which premisses are offered in favour of a conclusion according to a given set of rules or standards." . . . "Arguments in the narrow sense are simply sequences of "propositions, one of which is the argument's conclusion and the rest of which are the argument's premisses." (Woods, Irvine & Walton, 2004, p. 2)
- "An argument is an instance of reasoning that attempts to justify a conclusion by supporting it with reasons or defending it against objections." (Finocchiaro, 2005, p. 15)
- "What someone makes or formulates (reasons or evidence) as grounds or support for an opinion (the basis for believing it)." (Johnson & Blair 2006, p. 7)
- "By an argument that is made, we mean the reasons that someone has collected which that person thinks show that another claim is true, or at least deserves consideration." (*ibid*., p. 8) "... argument ... a set of claims.
- The purpose of an argument is to provide reasons to believe a claim. An *argument* is a set of claims, one of which, the *conclusion*, is supported by one or more other claims, called *premises*." (Bailin & Battersby, 1st ed. (2010), p. 41)
- "A simple argument consists of one or more of the types of expression that can function as reasons, a 'target' (any type of expression), and an indicator of whether the reasons count for or against the target. (Hitchcock, 2019, p. 122)

An examination of these definitions, or characterizations, of 'argument' reveals a general similarity. All of them make an argument out to have

three elements. (1) Something in the argument-function of *premises*: grammatical function (sentence), speech-act function (statement, claim, assertion), ontological function (proposition), indefinite (Hitchcock's "type of expression"). (2) Something in the argument function of *conclusion*(s). And (3) an alleged or intended illative relation between the former and the latter, usually one of support for, evidence for, grounds for, back up for, the conclusion, but alternatively, support, evidence, or backup for the denial of the conclusion (see Table 1). Some texts use 'argument' as denoting just the premises; others use 'argument' to refer to the entire {reasons + illative + conclusion} complex.

	1st term	connection	2nd term
Scriven	premises	imply, lead to	conclusion(s)
Weddle	premise(s)	support	conclusion(s)
Thomas	discourse, statements	support back up	discourse, statements
Nolt	declarative sentence	evidential support	declarative sentence
Govier	claims	show rational acceptability	claim
Fogelin & Sinnot-Armstrong	reasons	for or against	claim
Groare & Tindale	reasons	support	claim
Damer	Premises, statements	Supports, provide evidence for	conclusion
Johnson & Blair	reasons, evidence	ground, support, are basis for	opinion, belief
Bailin & Battersby	premises, reasons, claim	support, to believe	conclusion
Finocchiaro	reasons or defense, instance of reasoning	justify by supporting or defending	conclusion
Fisher	reasons, claim	for accepting to persuade to accept	conclusion, claim

Freeman	message, statement	establish as true or worthy of belief	statement
Woods, Irvine & Walton	premisses, proposi-tions	conse-quences...,, in favour of	proposition, con-clusion
Hitchcock	reasons	for or against	target

Table 1

Arguments are taken to be attempts to justify beliefs or other attitudes, or actions or policies—some X. They are expected when there is resistance to X, that is, to someone's holding that belief, adopting that attitude, doing or forbearing to do that action or endorse that policy. But they are also fitting when someone seeks to satisfy himself or herself, or someone else (such as a teacher), that he or she, or any group or everyone is justified in holding that belief, adopting that attitude, performing those actions or endorsing that policy. Whenever justificatory reasons are expected or wanted, arguments belong. Trying to resolve disagreements using reasons is one such context. But arguments are appropriate, or even called for, whenever reasons are expected or wanted—wherever justification is wanted.

Usually no distinction is made in the definition of 'argument' to mark the difference between arguments for or against beliefs (truth) and arguments for or against actions (rightness or goodness). Hitchcock builds this distinction into his definition. Also usual is a failure to distinguish arguments that directly support a claim from arguments that support it indirectly by having the denial of objections to the claim as their conclusion. Finocchiaro builds this distinction into his definition. Sometimes the definition implies only a successful supporting relationship, so that by definition there can be no arguments whose premises fail to support the target conclusion. This is usually a slip, and an examination of the details provided in the text surrounding the statement of the definition reveal that the author did not mean to imply that there can be no bad arguments.

4.3 Arguments-1 are conceptually independent of arguments-2.

The concept of argui*ng* and the concept of argu*ments* that are traded in arguings are independent. Some, such as the Pragma-dialecticians, seem to hold that there is no concept of argument apart from the moves that are made in the exchanges called argumentation. (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, \1984). Put another way, this is the view that if there were

no disagreements, there would be no arguments. The informal logic view is that this is false; argument can play other roles than disagreement expression or resolution. For instance, arguments often serve to explain why a belief is held or is thought to be justified, or why an action was performed. (See Walton 1989, Johnson 2000, Blair 2012.)

4.4 Arguments can have a variety of uses.

A corollary of 4.3 is that there is a variety of uses of arguments (though no universal agreement about what belongs on a list of these various uses): justification, persuasion, investigation, explanation, negotiation, etc. (See Walton 1998, Blair 2012, Ch. 14)

4.5 Informal logic has a pedagogical orientation.

Informal logic is a good approach to teaching people how to be reasonable users of arguments. It is conceptually straightforward. It can be taught without requiring extensive background knowledge of pragmatics or linguistics. It requires a minimum of technical vocabulary. Hansen sounds this note in his characterization of informal quoted above. (See also Scriven, 1976.)

4.6 Symbolic logic is neither necessary nor sufficient for argument analysis.

While it can be clarifying to analyze the expression of an argument by restating it in an ordered format, restating it in a symbolic logical form so that it can be assessed for its deductive validity according to the rules of some formal logical system is not necessary and normally not an efficient use of time and effort. It is not necessary to learn symbolic logic before being able to analyze and evaluate arguments. And it's not sufficient, for deductively invalid arguments can be good arguments—for instance, if they are inductively strong. I am not aware of any empirical evidence that learning symbolic logic improves reasoning or critical thinking skills. (This is not at all to suggest that learning symbolic logic is not useful for other purposes.)

4.7 "Soundness" is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion of argument merit.

If a "sound" argument is understood to be one with true premises and a deductively valid inference from the premises to the conclusion, soundness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion of an argument's logical merit. Valid arguments with premises it is merely extremely reasonable to believe are good arguments; and question-begging arguments with true premises are sound but bad arguments (see Hamblin, 1960).

4.8 The inductive/deductive distinction is problematic.

This is so in two ways. (1) Inductive strength has been understood in a wide sense and in a narrow sense. Understood in a wide sense, inductive strength and deductive validity exhaust the acceptable kinds of premise-to-conclusion inference in arguments. Put another way, an argument is either deductively valid or inductively strong or else it is inferentially defective. If induction is understood in the wide sense, then such argument types as arguments from *a priori* analogy and balance-of-considerations arguments have to be included along with statistical generalizations and other types of inference traditionally taken to exemplify inductive inferences. Understanding inductive strength in a narrow sense, inductive and deductive validity do not exhaust the acceptable kinds of inference in arguments, for in that case, arguments from a priori analogy and conductive arguments, etc., can be acceptable without being deductively valid or inductively strong. (Govier n.d. [2018]) There is a third way arguments can succeed or fail.

(2) The view that these two terms name two types of argument—that there are deductive arguments and inductive arguments—is mistaken. Goddu calls it a "misapplication" of the concepts of deduction and induction (2019, pp. 401f.). These terms name qualities of support that reasons provide for conclusions, not types of argument. If the reasons entail the conclusion, the reasoning or argument is deductively valid; if they don't entail it, but supply support at or above the level required for the context, the reasoning or argument is inductively strong. (Notice that Goddu here uses 'inductive' in the wide sense just described in (1) above.)

4.9 Informal logic is a branch of epistemology, not of logic.

Why? Logic is about necessary consequence relations between or among sets of propositions or sentences—what is a necessary consequence of what. That is not the subject matter of informal logic. Informal logic is about what warrants what, about what is plausible or believable, given what. It is about the conditions that arguments must satisfy in order to justify accepting their conclusions. Epistemology is the study of the conditions of knowledge and of justified belief. So informal logic is a branch of epistemology, not of logic. (See Battersby 1989, Pinto 2001, Ch. 3).

Other informal logicians, using a different definition of logic (viz., that logic is the study of the norms of good arguments and good reasoning), insist that informal logic is a branch of logic (see Johnson, 2000).

4.10 Informal logic sees an argument as dialectical.

Why? From an informal logic point of view, an argument is seen as, in its simplest form—at ground level—a set of alleged reasons responsive to doubt or question or other need for justification about the proposition at issue. Or else it is a set of reasons that answer a challenge to such ground-level arguments for the position. The arguments (if they are acceptable) that in the latter way indirectly support the proposition at issue are meta-reasons, or meta-meta-reasons (and so on), the credibility, bearing and force of which are in principle open to question (see Blair & Johnson 1987; see Finocchiaro 2013. for the "ground-level argument" *vs*. "meta-argument" distinction).

4.11 Informal logic sees arguments as essentially dialogical.

That is, arguments are, or are best modeled as, turns in a dialogue. Often the parties to an argumentative exchange are living people or the texts of formerly living people, and the arguments2 that ensue are exchanges of challenges and responses, thus true dialogues. Even a "solo" argument can be modeled as a turn in a two-person conversational interchange. This seems to be Walton's view. When reasoning about what to do or about what to believe without an interlocutor, a person serves as her or his own interlocutor. She or he challenges herself or himself to defend any contentions in the argument that she or he recognizes as problematic (i.e., likely to be questioned by others). Thus, an argument can be a turn in an "interior dialogue", responsive to critical scrutiny by its own proponent even if it is not questioned by others. (Perelman and Olbrechst-Tyteca, 1969 and van Eemeren and Grootendorst ,1984, among others who are not informal logicians, also embrace such view of interior dialogues.)

4.12 Deductivism is false or wrong-headed.

Deductivism is sometimes defined as (a) the view that an argument is either deductively valid or it is a bad argument. *Sed contra*: Inductively strong arguments, such as appropriately qualified inferences that are generalizations about properties of populations inferred from the opinions of well-drawn (i.e., representative) samples of the population in question, are not bad arguments, although they are deductively invalid.

Deductivism can also be characterized as (b) the view that in making an argument, we are trying to make a deductively valid argument. *Sed contra*: Most people have no idea what a deductively valid argument is, so the alleged attempt must be unconscious. Postulating such motivation begs the question.

Yet another variant of *deductivism* is (c) the view that regardless of the author's intentions (which, in any case, might be unknowable, assuming that he or she had any), one should interpret his or her argument as if it were intended to be deductively valid. *Sed contra*: Such a policy,

sometimes called "deductive reconstructionism", risks attributing to an argument an unexpressed premise that is implausible, and so condemning it, when an alternative reconstruction yielding a defeasible yet highly plausible inference, is available.

4.13 Informal logic is the name for the theory of critical thinking.

This view is held by Scriven (personal communication) and Finocchiaro (2015). Its plausibility depends on understanding the domain of critical thinking to be restricted to the use of arguments. However, any theory about the use of arguments would qualify as informal logic if this characterization of it were adopted, including, for example, Pragma-dialetics. So, at best informal logic is the name for one particular theory of critical thinking, and such a characterization of it doesn't tell us very much.

4.14 Visual argument is impossible/exists.

Propositions have truth values. Pictures don't. But arguments are propositional (and so have truth values). So, pictures cannot be arguments. Or: Arguments are constituted by propositions, statements or sentences. If what can influence people's attitudes or conduct are such things as drawings or paintings, colours, odors, tactile sensations or sounds, then unless these can be expressed propositionally, they are not arguments. (See Johnson n.d.)

Broader concepts of argument, such as Hitchcock's (*supra*), allow "types of expression" in general to count as premises, and this wider door than the one restricting entry to propositions, permits pictures and other types of expression to be admitted as arguments.

4.15 Acceptability, relevance and sufficiency are criteria of logical merit in arguments.

According to this view (nicknamed "ARS" or "RAS). The reasons adduced in an argument should satisfy three criteria. They ought to be *acceptable* to the target audience; or they must be worthy of acceptance by the target audience. They ought to have a bearing on the truth, reasonableness or acceptability of the conclusion; that is, their adduced premises must be individually or in conjunction, probatively *relevant*. And the premises together must be weighty enough to justify accepting the conclusion (as qualified) on their basis. In other words, the grounds offered ought to be *sufficient* to justify the conclusion. Johnson and I have promulgated this view, although speaking for myself, I would not characterize it as essential to an informal logic perspective. (Hansen contends [in conversation] that this view is already found in Perelman, although I haven't yet located it there.)

4.16 Arguments rely on warrants.

Many informal logicians (e.g., Hitchcock 2017, Chs. 6 & 23) have been influenced by this view of Toulmin's. It is the position that any argument invokes, explicitly or implicitly, a general conditional proposition asserting that grounds of the sort and degree appealed to in the argument justify claims of the sort allegedly supported in the argument, the argument's conclusion. The warrant replaces the relevance requirement in the ARS criteria. The warrant of an argument is summarized by the illative indicator "therefore".

4.17 Satisfying the critical questions associated with an argument scheme is the (or "a") criterion of a logically good argument.

Studies of large samples of arguments-1 from wide range of subject matters reveals a large, but finite, number of patterns of reasoning, which have been called argument, or reasoning, "schemes" (see, e.g., Kienpointner 1992, or Walton, Reed & Macagno 2008). An argument's scheme is a generalization of its particulars. Instances of these schemes can be taken to be *pro tanto* logically good arguments if they are not refuted by one or more of the defeaters that are associated with that particular scheme. The defeaters are activated by the wrong answer to what are called the "critical questions" that can be raised about any instantiation of the scheme. They are the questions that a critical interlocutor would want answered affirmatively or negatively (depending on the question) in order to judge the argument exhibiting that scheme to be cogent. They test for the presumptions required if the argument is to be accepted.

Although great, long lists of argument schemes and families of schemes have been described and analyzed, and their associated critical questions formulated, no one has claimed his list to be complete. Accordingly, it is possible for an argument exhibiting none of the extant schemes to be discovered. That is not a problem for this view. Simply formulate the scheme that this novel argument instantiates, and formulate the questions that will test the use of that argument in the situation in which it occurs—and add it to the list.

4.18 An argument is logically good if its premises are true, or highly probable or plausible, and its inference or support stands up to counter-examples.

A counter-example to an argument is a fact or a probability or a reasonable possibility that is consistent with the given premises and that, if added to them, would render the conclusion false or unlikely or implausible. Example: Mary and Joe love one another, and they are of age, so they should

get married. Counterexample: Mary also loves Pete, to whom she is married. Testing arguments by seeing if no true, reasonable, likely or plausible counter-examples to them can be discovered relies on the critic's knowledge and imagination. Since in most cases proving a negative is impossible, this basis for argument assessment can fail to produce an open-and-shut case.

4.19 Theory of fallacy

A strong argument is a fallacy-free argument. Using a strong theory of fallacy, a fallacious argument is to be rejected as flawed beyond repair. This is Walton's (1987) view. Using a weak theory of fallacy, a fallacious argument, depending on the fallacy in question, will fall on a range between flawed beyond repair and easy to repair with the addition of a qualification or some easy to find supplementary information. This is Johnson & Blair's (2006) revisionist view.

It is useful to gather these 19 views about understanding and evaluating arguments-1 from an informal logic perspective in a list. Here it is:

4.1 Be primarily interested in arguments-1.
4.2 Conceive arguments-1 as "reason-allegedly supports-claim" complexes.
4.3 Arguments-1 are conceptually independent of arguments-2.
4.4 Arguments-1 can have a variety of uses.
4.5 Informal logic has a pedagogical orientation.
4.6 Symbolic logic is neither necessary nor sufficient for argument analysis.
4.7 "Soundness" is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion of argument merit.
4.8 The inductive/deductive distinction is problematic.
4.9 Informal logic is a branch of epistemology, not of logic.
4.10 Informal logic sees an argument as dialectical.
4.11 Informal logic sees arguments as essentially dialogical.
4.12 Deductivism is false or wrong-headed.
4.13 Informal logic is the name for the theory of critical thinking.
4.14 Visual argument is impossible/exists.
4,15 Acceptability, relevance and sufficiency are criteria of logical merit in arguments.
4.16 Arguments rely on warrants.
4.17 Satisfying the critical questions associated with an argument scheme is the (or "a") criterion of a logically good argument.
4.18 An argument is logically good if its premises are true, or highly probable or plausible, and its inference or support stands up to counter-examples.
4.19 Theory of fallacy

5. PUTTING ORDER INTO THE LIST

Is there any way to give some order to this list? I think so. Suppose there *were* a theory of natural language arguments that was user-friendly (i.e., not too technical). What would its ingredients be?

It would have to contain an account of an argument of the sort it will theorize: ordinary-language arguments of the kind everyone encounters on a daily basis. Call this *a conception of the argument type*. If this is but one among many, then as a corollary the theory might include an account of other sorts of arguments and how they differ.

Since this is imagined to be a theory about the sorts of ordinary-language arguments we encounter in daily life, our theory would need to offer an account of how to interpret everyday discourse in order to find in it and extract from it such arguments. In other words, our theory would have to contain (i.e., invent, or borrow and modify) *a hermeutics for arguments in of everyday discourse*.

We know that our aim is to be able to distinguish among the everyday arguments we encounter the good from the bad, the strong from the weak, the compelling from the misleading. Accordingly, we will need *a theory of argument merit*, which will tell how to distinguish sound arguments that should influence our thinking, attitudes and behaviour from fallacious arguments that should not.

Since historically logic was considered to be the theory of argument, or the theory of good argument, we need to have an account of *how our theory of argument relates to logic*. Why do we need a new one; why not simply spell out a theory of logic for everyday arguments?

Since historically the domain of argument has been considered to consist of the provinces of logic, dialectic and rhetoric, our theory ought to contain an *account of how these three are to be distinguished and of how they are related in application to everyday arguments.*

It has been a feature of informal logic that it is user-friendly in the sense that it can be taught to ordinary people with relative ease. If our theory is to take that feature seriously, it will have to be *straightforward and readily accessible*. For instance, it shouldn't have to presuppose advanced mathematical skills.

This detour into meta-theory gives us the following short list of the ingredients of a theory of arguments in everyday discourse:

1. *a conception of the argument type,*
2. *a hermeneutics for arguments in of everyday discourse*,
3. *a theory of argument merit,*
4. *how our theory of argument relates to logic,*
5. *how logic, dialectic and rhetoric are related re. everyday arguments,*
6. *evidence that the theory is straightforward and accessible.*

Now let us see whether and if so, how our list of 19 features distributes itself over these six ingredients of a theory of everyday argument. (Supplementary ingredients are added in plain type.)

The ingredients of an informal logic theory of argument:

1. It includes a conception of the argument type informal logic focuses on.
    4.1 Be primarily interested in arguments-1.
    4.2 Conceive arguments-1 as "reason-allegedly supports-claim" complexes.
    4.3 Arguments-1 are conceptually independent of arguments-2
    4.4 Arguments-1 can have a variety of uses
    4.14 Visual argument is impossible/exists
2. It contains a hermeneutics for arguments in of everyday discourse.
    4.12 Deductivism is false or wrong-headed.
    Add: Advice about interpreting arguments, supplying missing premises.
    Add: Rhetorical views about argument interpretation
3. It includes a theory of argument merit or worth.
    4,15 Acceptability, relevance and sufficiency are criteria of logical merit in arguments.
    4.16 Arguments rely on warrants.
    4.17 Satisfying the critical questions associated with an argument scheme is the (or "a") criterion of a logically good argument.
    4.18 An argument is logically good if its premises are true, or highly probable or plausible, and it's inference or support stands up to counter-examples.
    4.19 Theory of fallacy
4. It offers an account how our theory of argument relates to logic
    4.6 Symbolic logic is neither necessary nor sufficient for argument analysis.
    4.7 "Soundness" is neither a necessary nor a sufficient criterion of argument merit.
    4.8 The inductive/deductive distinction is problematic.
    4.9 Informal logic is a branch of epistemology, not of logic
5. It explains how logic, dialectic and rhetoric are related re. everyday arguments.
    4.10 Informal logic sees an argument as dialectical.
    4.11 Informal logic sees arguments as essentially dialogical
    Add: A rhetorical perspective on constructing audience-centred arguments
6. There is evidence that the theory can be learned and used by non-professionals.
    4.5 Informal logic has a pedagogical orientation

4.13 Informal logic is the name for the theory of critical thinking.

In sum, by sorting the various research preoccupations of scholars who self-identify as working on, or within, informal logic into what seem, *a priori*, to be the elements of any theory of informal logic, we discover that a picture of informal logic takes shape as a theoretically coherent approach to arguments. The disagreements in the field—e.g., can there be visual arguments? is deductivism unjustified? how should be theorize different kinds of objection? how does rhetoric relate to informal logic?—are not due to incoherence in the approach, but to the normal process of developing consistent analyses of the various issue that informal logic addresses.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I add a few observations about each of these components.

6.1 Informal logic's focus is on arguments-1. Arguments-1 are what deliver the goods in arguments-2. Arguments-2 may be the contexts for (many) arguments-1, and understanding how arguments-2 work is important. But arguments-1 are the arguments that people dispute over, and they are what in the end settles the disputes, if they get settled. The theory is interested in how such arguments may be critiqued and defended; how such arguments can be structured in ever more complex iterations; how they function to justify belief and action; how and to what extent their elements permit of different modes of expression and communication; what range of uses they may be put to.

6.2 Virtually every informal logic textbook has a section on how to identify the arguments-1 in a text, and how to "extract" them for examination. So does any textbook that tackles the understanding of ordinary-language discourse. But informal logic's hermeneutics are simple, not sophisticated, and this is deliberately so. Informal logic's emphasis on being user-friendly mitigates against working with elaborate theorizing in the fields of semantics, with the intricacies of anything more complex than basic speech-act theory. It is counterproductive to have a theory of interpretation that only trained experts can understand and use. Even to assume that every argument is intended to be deductively valid puts the cart before the horse.

6.3 The point of informal logic theory is to be able to judge what support is offered for a claim or proposal and for its denial or rejection. Several sub-theories about what norms are appropriate have been proposed and critiqued. Are these compatible or inconsistent? Have all the possibilities been considered? The whole topic of the purposes, and the appropriate tools, of argument evaluation is under lively debate.

6.4 Informal logic's relation to logic is a vexed topic. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* lists its entry as "Logic, informal"—that is, it

classifies informal logic as a branch of logic, a theory will take a stand on the question. Meantime, an argument of the form "*p*, therefore *p*" is both deductively valid and question-begging.

6.5 In my lifetime the ancient doctrine of dialectic has moved back in with logic and the ancient doctrine of rhetoric has elbowed its way forward, so that now any theory of argument has to accommodate all three. Informal logic, an upstart, has to do no less than find its footing with these three. It has been struggling with dialectic for about three decades (see Blair and Johnson, 1987; Walton, 1998;Johnson, 2000; Finocchiaro, 2005), and only in the last two decades have some of its theorists, led by Tindale (1999, 2004, 2015), broached the relation to rhetoric.

6.6 I have already indicated that the elementary hermeneutics of argument interpretation is evidence of informal logic's aim of being accessible. Some of the sub-theories of evaluation also illustrate this aspect of the theory. The ARS criteria are a case in point (although Kock 2017 has been lobbying to restrict their application to epistemic arguments and to keep them away from the assessment of practical argument). It should not be necessary to master modern hermeneutical theory or symbolic logic in order to make astute judgements about the editorial in today's newspaper.

In sum, it appears that informal logic theorists have been working away at different aspects of a distinctive theory of argument, without paying much attention to, or worrying too much about, where and how their labours fit into a broader picture. So my answer to the question posed at the outset of the paper, "Is there an informal logic approach to argument?" is, Yes and No. Yes, in that there is a moderately coherent theoretical menu identifiable as informal logic's. No, in that the details are still being worked out, and much of the theoretical work being done consists of settling disagreements over details of the items on that menu. There is no single doctrine to be reported in the end.

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