Needless to say, the course as I teach it requires a commitment to tutoring individual students. But what is surprising is that if the homework assignments and quizzes are carefully developed, most students learn the material with no special assistance; and, this in classes of students in their first year of college and including many with impoverished high school backgrounds and a host of intellectual and socio-cultural problems. The students learn logic through coming to grips with the logic of learning the technical disciplines in an artificiallly enhanced but fairly standard undergraduate setting.

III

The main contention of this paper has been that the elements of formal logic, if carefully presented, are useful for teaching a wide range of skills required for the learning of technical subject matter. Notice: I am not claiming that teaching formal logic is the only way to teach those skills. Just as informal logic affords a useful and available tool for teaching critical thinking, so formal logic affords a useful and available tool for basic techniques required for learning technical subject matter. Critical thinking skills can be taught through a wide variety of courses: history, literature and general philosophy courses, just to mention a few obvious cases. It is the claim of advocates of informal logic that informal logic courses can also teach critical thinking, but teach it in a more effective way. The basic skills of formal analysis can also be taught in a wide variety of courses. It is my claim that elements of formal logic, if properly presented, can be a device for teaching these technical basic skills in a maximally effective and self conscious way.

Notes

1. Kahane, Howard, **Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric**, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1980, 3rd Edition.
2. I use Schagrin, Morton L., **The Language of Logic**, New York: Random House, 1979. ✳

response

Why Be Charitable?

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In "Charity Begins at Home," Ralph Johnson [1], following Michael Scriven [2], proposes as the Principle of Charity that:

> ...the critic should provide the best possible interpretation of the material under consideration.

Johnson takes the primary justification for this principle to be ethical: "One is under the general obligation to be fair in one's dealing with others..." A **secondary** justification, again following Scriven, is prudential:

> ...you want to interpret the argument's meaning in whatever way makes the most sense and force out of it, because otherwise, **it can easily be reformulated slightly in order to meet your objections.**

My question about this pattern of justification for the Principle of Charity is epistemological: Johnson and Scriven appear to be viewing the analysis and evaluation of arguments as essentially **pragmatic**, rather than **objective** (less context-relative, as a rought implication). In giving primacy to fairness to others, and placing the secondary prudential justificaiton in a debate-like context, they are using ',argument" in its familiar, rather than technical sense. Can one find a justification for the Principle of Charity that fits with a more technical sense of argument, or a less rhetorical understanding of argument? Behind my main question is a more general one: can one provide an account of informal logic that unifies it with the theory of (cognitive) inquiry or methodology?

Broadly speaking, (cognitive) inquiry is aimed at comprehensive truth. We know from Peirce, Dewey and others that taking this aim seriously we can draw implications for the preferential forms inquiry shoud take. In particular, the public availability of hyotheses and data, open discussion and criticism, a **community** of inquiries sharing mutual respect, and so on, are among the optimal conditions for reaching that aim. What is most promising here is that this pattern of justification allows us to ground both the methodology and ethics of our teaching and investigating a problem in similar terms. We show these practices as promoting our general aim, rather than motivated by political, economical, prudential or even arbitrary reasons. I take it that we would prefer the former "**internal**" to the latter "**external**" justifications. We would

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 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.