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EVALUATING FALLACIES: PUTNAM'S MODEL-THEORETIC LEGACY

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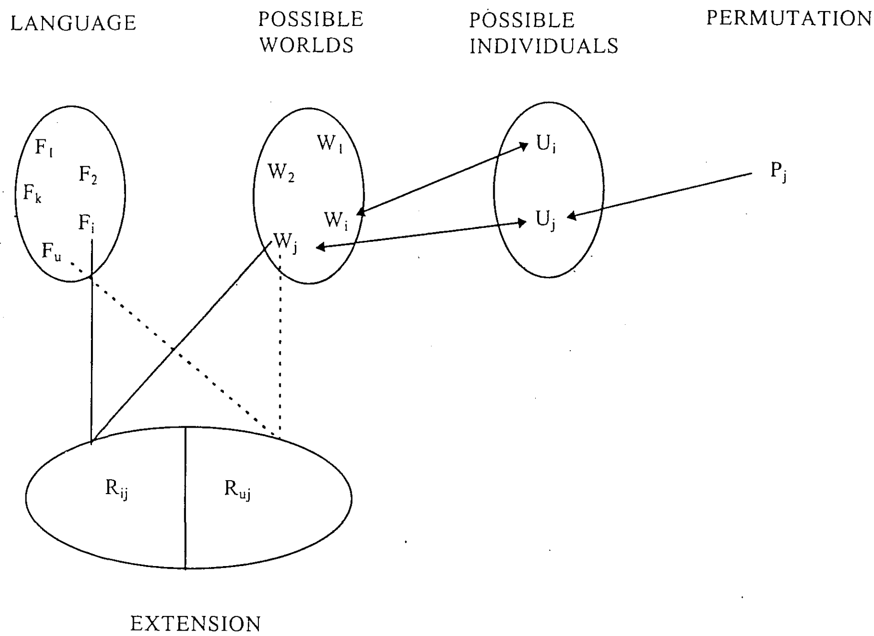
1. Putnam's Model-Theoretic Argument

Metaphysical realism is, as described by Putnam, 'a bundle of intimately associated philosophical ideas about truth' (1988, p. 107). Its assumptions are threefold. Firstly, there is a unique correspondence relation between the propositions of language and features of the external world. Secondly, there is One True Theory of this external world or mind-independent reality. And thirdly, there is a commitment to bivalence, such that each proposition of language must be either true or false.

Putnam employs these assumptions of the metaphysical realist within a model-theoretic or permutation argument (see Figure 1). Central to this argument is a language which has been formalised. This language contains a range of predicates which differ in their number of argument places. In this way, the language may contain monadic predicates, such as x is fat; dyadic predicates, such as x is the father of y; and triadic predicates, such as x is between y and z. This argument also employs a set of possible worlds. This set contains the actual world which differs from other possible worlds in that it is realised. Next, there is the set of possible individuals. U_i represents all the individuals in the possible world W_i, and equally, U_j represents all the individuals in the possible world W_j. Finally, we have extension, such that R_{ij} is the extension of the predicate F_i in the possible world W_j. Equally, R_{uj} is the extension of the predicate F_u in the possible world W_j. Three terms are closely related in this context. The first term is extension, the set of things that a predicate refers to in a single possible world. Next is the intension of a predicate. An intension of a predicate is obtained when that predicate is assigned an

extension in each possible world. Finally, there is the interpretation of the language. An interpretation is obtained when an intension has been assigned to every predicate of the language. Figure 1 represents one interpretation of the language which I am going to call interpretation I. I want to look at a second interpretation of the language, interpretation J. This second interpretation is the result of a permutation performed on the set U_j. As can be seen from the interconnecting arrows on figure 1, such a permutation will effect changes in the entire system, such that the extension of F_i in the possible world W_j will no longer be R_{ij}, and the extension of F_u in the possible world W_j will no longer be R_{uj}. In effect, a situation is created in which one and the same predicate has a different reference relation under each new interpretation of the language, to the degree where F_i can refer to the set of things which are bald under interpretation I, the set of things which are fat under interpretation J, the set of things which are red under interpretation K, and so on.

To demonstrate this further, imagine the case of the actual world in which the cat is on the mat and the cherry is on the tree. In the actual world the term 'cat' refers to the set of cats and the term 'mat' refers to the set of mats. The statement 'the cat is on the mat' and the statement 'the cherry is on the tree' are both true in the actual world. A permutation which maps the set of cats onto the set of cherries and the set of mats onto the set of trees has the effect of maintaining the original truth-value of each of the statements (the different models of the language are, after all, isomorphic), while altering the reference relations of their component terms — the term 'cat' now refers to the set of cherries, etc. When this procedure is applied across all possible worlds for each of the sentences of the language, the result is a thoroughgoing indeterminacy of reference.



<u>**NOTATION**</u>

(1) $<U_j;R_{ij}\ (i = 1, 2, ..., k)>$ 'Intended model of the language in W_j relative to interpretation I'

(2) $P_j\ (R_{uj})$ [illegible] R_{uj} **PERMUTATION**

(3) $<U_j;\ P_j\ (R_{ij})\ (i = 1, 2, ..., k) >$ **INTERPRETATION J**

(4) $P_j\ (R_{ij})$ [illegible] R_{ij} **PERMUTATION**

(5) $<U_j;\ P_j\ (R_{ij})\ (i = 1, 2, ..., k)>$ } **ISOMORPHIC**

(6) $<U_j;\ R_{ij}\ (i = 1, 2, ..., k)>$ }

FIGURE 1: Model-theoretic argument (based on Appendix, Putnam 1981).

As Putnam sees it, the problem with metaphysical realism is that 'it leaves us with no intelligible way to refute ontological relativity' (1994, p. 280). Yet we cannot accept ontological relativity, for we cannot even make sense 'of the idea that the world consists of objects any one of which is a quark in one admissible model, the Eiffel Tower in a second admissible model...but is no more intrinsically any one of these than any other' (p. 280). The paradoxical nature of a conclusion of ontological relativity is construed by Putnam as a rejection of the position, metaphysical realism, that led to that conclusion. In this way, Putnam is using his model-theoretic argument as a reductio argument against the metaphysical realist. Quine's response to this indeterminacy in our own language is to 'choose as our manual of translation the identity transformation, thus taking the whole language at face value' and he has it in mind that 'reference is then explicated in disquotational paradigms analogous to Tarski's truth paradigm' (1990, p. 52). A different response to this indeterminacy is given by Michael Devitt (1984). For Devitt, the true relation of reference is a causal relation. Jerry Fodor (1990) appeals to counterfactuals to explain reference. Fodor's counterfactuals express an asymmetrical dependence between truths of the form 'Xs cause "cat" tokenings'. In this way, the referent of 'cat' is arrived at through a counterfactual of the form 'If cats didn't cause "cat" tokenings, then... (cat pictures, cat statues, the sound "meow", and so on) wouldn't cause "cat" tokenings either' (Putnam, 1992, p. 38). A more recent response to the referential indeterminacy conclusion of Putnam's model-theoretic argument is advanced by Bas van Fraassen. Van Fraassen claims that the paradox created by this conclusion dissolves when we choose a use conception of language over the conception of language which is integral to the model-theoretic argument, a conception in which 'to understand or have a language is to know its syntax and to grasp an interpretation of that syntax' (1997, p. 39):

> I will offer a different way to look at Putnam's model theoretic argument. If we insist on discussing language solely in terms of a relation between words and things, we may well be forced into a metaphysical realist point of view, on pain of paradox. But on the level of pragmatics, in a discussion of language that also addresses the roles of user and use, the air of paradox dissolves all by itself (1997, p. 17).

According to van Fraassen, within a use conception of language we do not understand language by obtaining an interpretation of language (and Putnam's model-theoretic argument is flawed for its assumption of just this point); rather, language understanding proceeds by means of pragmatic tautologies. As examples of pragmatic tautologies, the reader is asked to consider the following sentences:

> "cat" denotes cats.
>
> "Paul is a cat" is true if and only if Paul is a cat.
>
> ...the first and second sentences are paradigmatic examples of pragmatic tautologies in my language. They are undeniable by me, exactly because I acknowledge "cat" to be a word in my language...If our language had developed differently in a certain way then "cat" would have denoted gnats, rats or bats. Under such circumstances, uses of "cat" would not have been acts referring to cats, and "Paul is a cat" would have been used to state that Paul is (not a cat but) a gnat, rat, or bat. Pragmatic tautologies (for me) are sentences of my own language which state something that could indeed be (or could have been) false but which I cannot coherently deny (1997, p. 35).

In relation to the problem of reference, then, van Fraassen claims that these pragmatic tautologies are central to an explanation of why there is no problem of which we can speak. His argument can be summarised as follows. Being able to explain the problem of reference requires that we show why the predicates of our language have the extensions that they do have, and not some deviant set of extensions, and this in turn requires that we be able to state the conditions under which our extensions are the correct ones. While the demand to establish such conditions has the form of an intelligible demand, it actually constitutes a type of 'pseudo problem', according to van Fraassen:

> Now, what is the worry when we worry that this word ["green"] might not have the right extension? The only answer I can come up with here is:
>
> The worry that there are lots of green things out there which aren't in the extension of "green" and/or things that are not green yet are in that extension.
>
> But what *sense* do I make if I say to myself:
>
> There are green things which are not in the extension of "green".
>
> There are some things x such that x is green but "is green" is not

> true of x.
> If I say this sort of thing *I do not make sense.* I may convey through this utterance either that I have no grasp of the philosophical jargon ("extension", "is true of"), or that I do not acknowledge the words (e.g. "green") in that sentence as belonging to my vocabulary. The worry that there might be green things out there not denoted by "green" – or cats not denoted by "cat" – is a pseudo problem (1997, p. 36; emphases added).

In effect, to explain the conditions under which "cat" denotes cats and not, say, dogs or cars (to justify a pragmatic tautology[1], in other words), is to assume the *unintelligible* perspective of a metaphysical standpoint. A metaphysical standpoint exists apart from all human concepts and from all modes of conceptualisation. It is, to use Putnam's term, a God's Eye point of view, a vantage point from which the whole of rational discourse can be surveyed without in turn presupposing such discourse. It is van Fraassen's claim that the very conception of language upon which Putnam's model-theoretic argument proceeds derives from such a standpoint. It was described above how this conception of language posits a syntax to which we must then add an interpretation. However, the assumption that we can grasp an interpretation is as nonsensical as the assumption that we can somehow justify the particular pragmatic tautologies that we do in fact subscribe to – in both cases, we lack a conceptual perspective from which we can proceed to grasp an interpretation and justify a pragmatic tautology. As van Fraassen remarks:

> This picture is *nonsensical*, as comes to light as soon as we ask: in what language is this grasp expressed, in what language do we describe this interpretation that we grasp (1997, p. 39; emphasis added).

Given that a particular conception of language is generative of the paradoxical conclusion of Putnam's model-theoretic argument, it is this conception, van Fraassen claims, which we must dispense with. Yet, van Fraassen's objections to the contrary notwithstanding, this is effectively what Putnam is also claiming[2]. The very reason why 'Putnam would appeal to [this conception of language in 1976] implicitly and expect his audience to go along' (1997, p. 23) is that this is the only conception of language which is consistent with a metaphysical realist viewpoint. In

rejecting metaphysical realism, Putnam is, in effect, rejecting the conception of language that is motivated by metaphysical realism. What is more, in Putnam's more recent writings, particularly in his attacks on an interface conception of perception and conception (writing, as he is, in 1997, van Fraassen should be aware of these attacks), Putnam is effectively challenging the view of language which says that language consists in an interpretation and a separately identifiable syntax. It thus emerges that van Fraassen and Putnam are both equally opposed to the same conception of language and that their views on the upshot of the model-theoretic argument converge rather than, as van Fraassen is claiming, diverge.

2. A Pragmatic Conception of Argument

It is clear that for Putnam and van Fraassen metaphysical realism contains an unintelligible demand to explain the referential relation which our language does in fact have with the world. It is also clear that for these theorists our only way through this unintelligibility is to reject a conception of language that posits a separate syntax and interpretation and to institute in the place of this conception a pragmatic view of language in which the roles of user and use assume analytical significance. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of pragmatic models of both argument and fallacy. Notwithstanding this proliferation, many fallacy theorists either habitually express reservations about the analytical merits of these models or proceed to employ them in a way that suggests that they are perceived by these theorists to be inferior to strictly logical models of argument. In the next section, I relate fallacy theorists' scepticism about the analytical merits of pragmatic models of argument and fallacy to a certain metaphysical urge on the part of these theorists. This urge, I contend, compels fallacy theorists to inflate the standards that they bring to the task of fallacy evaluation with the result that many non-fallacious or rationally acceptable arguments are judged to be fallacious. I argue that this inflation results from the fallacy theorist's assumption of a metaphysical standpoint, the same standpoint that ultimately vitiated the metaphysical realist's attempt to explain reference. In the meantime, however, I examine how pragmatic notions of use and user are variously employed in fallacy inquiry and I discuss the dissatisfaction with these

concepts that is frequently voiced by fallacy theorists.

2.1 Approaches to Argument and Fallacy Analysis

Notions of use and user enter into a number of key approaches in the study of fallacies beyond that of the strictly pragmatic. Thus we find proponents of psychological, rhetorical, dialectical and epistemic approaches, in addition to a pragmatic approach, employing these concepts within their respective analyses. I begin by stating briefly what each of these approaches consists in (I will combine discussion of the pragmatic and dialectical approaches by examining the approach of pragma-dialectics). Central to an *epistemic* analysis of fallacy are the notions of knowledge of or belief in the premise(s) and conclusion of an argument. While some theorists characterise these notions in argument-relative terms[3], their user- (inferer-) relative nature in undeniable. For example, Sanford (1981) defines 'degree of reasonable confidence', his epistemic criterion of question-begging argument, thus:

> A primary purpose of inference is to increase the degree of reasonable confidence which one has in the truth of the conclusion. This purpose can be accomplished only if the antecedent degree of reasonable confidence (DRC) the *inferer* has in the premises and in the proposition that the premises imply the conclusion is higher than his antecedent DRC in the conclusion. This condition is not satisfied if either his belief in the premises or his belief that the premises imply the conclusion is based on his prior belief in the conclusion (p. 150; emphasis added).

Proponents of a *psychological* analysis of argument and fallacy typically look to a reasoner's cognitive processes for an account of these notions. Philip Johnson-Laird, for example, has undertaken to explain the deductive inferences that humans compute in terms of a theory of mental models. Tversky and Kahneman, amongst others, have sought a psychological account of various aspects of our capacity for inductive reasoning. Dale Hample characterises the entire phenomenon of fallacy in cognitive terms: 'a message can only stimulate a fallacy; the actual fallacy is a *cognitive event*' (1982, p. 59). What each of these approaches has in common is the recognition that the arguer or inferer is central to any explanation of argument and fallacy.

Logical studies of argument and fallacy have historically flourished at the expense of their *rhetorical* counterparts. An attempt to reverse this trend was first intiated in 1952 when Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca published their seminal work entitled *Rhétorique et philosophie pour une théorie de l'argumentation en philosophie*. The achievement of this study was the rediscovery of 'a part of Aristotelian logic that had been long forgotten or, at any rate, ignored and despised. It was the part dealing with dialectical reasoning, as distinguished from demonstrative reasoning – called by Aristotle analytics – which is analysed at length in the *Rhetoric, Topics*, and *On Sophistical Refutations*' (Perelman, 1979, p. 9). This 'new rhetoric', as it was called, brought with it an emphasis on previously neglected audience-relative notions in the study of argument, notions like audience adherence: 'It [argumentation] aims at obtaining or reinforcing the adherence of the audience to some thesis, assent to which is hoped for' (Perelman, 1979, p. 10). Such audience-relative notions continue to be definitive of a rhetorical analysis of argument and fallacy.[4] Given that an audience consists in a collection of users of argument, it is clear that user relative-notions are central to the rhetorical approach.

Notions of use or function are most evident in the approach of pragma-dialectics to the study of argument and fallacy. Prominent among this approach is the work of Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst who have been influenced to a large extent by Searle's (1969) speech act theory. That theory extends language meaning beyond that based on propositional content to include the *functions* (speech acts) that utterances perform. Each speech act carries a set of felicity conditions 'that jointly constitute the meaning of such acts and that are required for their appropriate performance' (Jacobs, 1989, p. 346). This same conception of felicity conditions pervades van Eemeren and Grootendorst's model of argument and fallacy analysis, a model in which 'The principles authorizing the distribution of the verbal moves over the consecutive stages [of argumentative discourse] are accounted for in a set of rules for the performance of speech acts' (1995, p. 135). Moreover, 'Taken together, these rules constitute a theoretical definition of a critical discussion' (p. 135). It is only within the context of a critical discussion, van Eemeren and Grootendorst argue, that any determination concerning the existence of a fallacy can be made:

> In the pragma-dialectical approach, fallacies are analysed as ... incorrect discussion moves in which a discussion rule has been violated. A *fallacy* is then defined as a speech act that prejudices or frustrates efforts to resolve a difference of opinion and the use of the term "fallacy" is thus systematically connected with the rules for critical discussion (1995, p. 136; emphasis in original).

2.2. Fallacy Theorists' Objections to the Notion of User

Since 1970, when Charles Hamblin resurrected interest in the study of fallacies, fallacy theorists have been wont to criticise the standards and criteria by means of which fallacies are evaluated. Thus, we find Biro (1977) criticising rhetorical and dialectical approaches to the analysis of question-begging argument for the dependence of these approaches on the 'user-relative notions of assent and acceptance':

> I have not discussed the other versions of the FA [the "non-formalist analysis"] view which attempt to explicate begging the question in terms which Perelman and Mrs. Olbrechts-Tyteca call "rhetorical" and Hamblin "dialectical". Both of these approaches, in spite of their great interest, share the flaw we have seen to be fatal in Sanford's treatment: relying, instead of on the necessary argument-relativity of the notion of knowability, on the essentially user-relative notions of assent and acceptance. In their quite proper concern to shift the focus of analysis from formal to extra-formal considerations, they lose sight – as Aristotle never did – of the possibility and necessity of regarding BQC [begging-the-question criticism] as an objective matter (p. 270).

More recently, this same intolerance of user-relative criteria of evaluation is what motivates Johnson's rejection of the rhetorical criterion of effectiveness as 'a normative model of argument to help with analyzing fallacies':

> Johnson's final conclusion, and most serious charge against Hamblin, is the allegation that Hamblin has replaced "the logical criterion of goodness with the rhetorical criterion of effectiveness" (p. 285). Johnson's claim is that mere "acceptance" or "effectiveness" in causing a listener to accept something she did not accept before is too weak a standard to do the job of providing a normative model of argument to help with analyzing fallacies. According to Johnson (p.

> 285), "an argument might be accepted by its audience but contain tricks or cheats" (Walton, 1993, pp. 307-308).

Often a rejection of user-relative notions is what underlies a further, seemingly unrelated rejection. Such is the case when Kahane rejects any role for psychology in a philosophical analysis of fallacious reasoning. At the root of this rejection is Kahane's unwillingness to attribute any philosophical significance to the user-relative notion of acceptance:

> Well, then, do we overstep the bounds of logic and philosophy when we theorize about fallacious reasoning. Not, it seems to me, when we attempt to specify what fallacious reasoning consists in, nor when we specify the logical factors which make fallacious reasoning fallacious. These are questions of methodology, and thus of logic and philosophy. But we do overstep when we attempt to specify psychological mechanisms that lead to fallacious reasoning, and when we devise psychological categories useful in avoiding fallacious reasoning. The attempt to avoid bad reasoning requires a bringing together of philosophical and factual information, just as does every application of philosophy to real life. So the question "What makes arguments fallacious" is philosophical; the question "*What leads us to accept bad arguments*" is not (1980, p. 38; emphasis added).

Not infrequently, psychology and user- (audience-) relative notions like acceptance undergo simultaneous rejection. This is unremarkable in one respect given that it is to psychology that we look for an account of audience adherence or acceptance:

> All of these difficulties seem to suggest strongly that Sanford's insistence on the *audience-relativity* of the "begging the question" criticism as well as his *psychologizing* of the notion are steps in the wrong direction. The essential thing to see, I think, is that begging the question has to do not with causal or temporal relations among our beliefs, but with the relative epistemic status of the propositions we assert (Biro, 1977, p. 263).

Clearly, there is considerable reluctance on the part of fallacy theorists to include user-relative notions in a normative analysis of the fallacies. I will contend in the next section that at the heart of this reluctance lies an urge to metaphysical theorising on the part of the fallacy theorist.

Central to this urge is the fallacy theorist's assumption of a metaphysical standpoint, a standpoint from which it seems that we can employ as criteria of fallacy evaluation, standards which exist apart from our conceptual schemes. These inflated standards lead us to develop a dissatisfaction with our rational processes of reflection, chief amongst which is our capacity for rational evaluation. It is this dissatisfaction, I contend, which leads fallacy theorists to reject user-relative notions such as assent and acceptance as evaluative standards in the normative analysis of the fallacies. I will argue subsequently that in our pursuit of inflated *metaphysical* criteria of fallacy evaluation we are, in reality, pursuing no *intelligible* criteria of fallacy evaluation *at all.* In the meantime, I examine how metaphysical theorising is manifested in the analysis of one informal fallacy, the argument from ignorance.

3. Metaphysical Theorising and the Argument from Ignorance

Fallacy theorists have traditionally viewed the argument from ignorance as a form of fallacious reasoning. In their earliest article on this fallacy, Woods and Walton (1978) identify confirmation, epistemic and dialectical variants of the argument from ignorance, each of which is flawed in some essential respect. Thus, in the *confirmation* form of the fallacy, represented by (F_1) and (F_2) below, the flaw consists 'in the suppression of the possibility that *H* may be unconfirmed' (p. 91):

(F_1) *H* is not disconfirmed
Therefore, *H* is confirmed

(F_2) *H* is not confirmed
Therefore, *H* is disconfirmed

The *epistemic* variant of the fallacy, represented by (F_3) and (F_4) below, is flawed, according to Woods and Walton, for the reason that: 'Simply because nobody knows that p is true, it does not follow that p is false. Simply because nobody knows that p is false, it does not follow that p is true. Thus (F_3) and (F_4) are fallacies' (p. 92):

(F_3) $\sim(\exists x)Kxp$
Therefore, $\sim p$

(F_4) $\sim(\exists x)Kx\sim p$
Therefore, p

Finally, Woods and Walton characterise the *dialectical* variant of this

fallacy[5] as an unacceptable shifting of burden of proof from Mr X to Mr Y in a context of dialogue:

> ... Mr Y may maintain that no relevant evidence sufficient to favour either acceptance or rejection is available. In this case it may be quite unreasonable, even fallacious, for X to insist that Y produce evidence for p's negation (p. 93).

It soon became apparent to fallacy theorists that many so-called fallacies were non-fallacious or rationally acceptable within certain contexts of use. For example, it had long been recognised that within a court of law, the legal presumption of innocence is none other than a non-fallacious argument from ignorance:

> this mode of argument is not fallacious in a court of law, because there the guiding principle is that a person is *presumed* innocent until proven guilty (1961, p. 57; emphasis added).
> the defense can legitimately claim that if the prosecution has not proved guilt, this warrants a verdict of not guilty (1972, p. 77).

In more recent years, fallacy theorists have continued to assert the non-fallaciousness of the argument from ignorance:

> This ... argumentation scheme for the argumentum ad ignorantiam has the following form:
> It has not been established that all the true propositions in D are contained in K.
> A is a special type of proposition such that if A were true, A would normally or usually be expected to be in K.
> A is in D.
> A is not in K.
> For all A in D, A is either true or false.
> Therefore, it is plausible to *presume* that A is false (subject to further investigations in D) (Walton, 1992, p. 386; emphasis added).

A clear pattern emerges from the above quotations — the argument from ignorance is either viewed as fallacious in nature or, when it is considered to be a non-fallacious mode of reasoning, it can only ground a *presumption*-based conclusion.[6] I want to examine the basis of this

largely negative evaluation of the argument from ignorance. *Completeness* emerges as the central concept in the normative assessment of the argument from ignorance – it is only against the background of a *complete* knowledge base that we can infer that a proposition is false if it is not part of that knowledge base. It is my contention, however, that within the normative analysis of the argument from ignorance completeness undergoes a type of *metaphysical inflation*. The effect of this inflation is to preclude the description of any knowledge base as essentially complete. In the absence of a complete knowledge base we cannot proceed to derive any conclusions about the truth or falsity of a proposition from the knowledge that that proposition is not contained by the knowledge base. Moreover, any attempt to so derive a conclusion leads justifiably to a charge of fallaciousness against the argument from ignorance. However, what is not justified in this scenario is the original inflation of the concept of completeness. In the rest of this section, I examine the features of a metaphysical conception of completeness through a comparison of this notion with the notion of scientific completeness. I relate this metaphysical conception of completeness to the largely negative normative assessment that has attended the argument from ignorance. In the penultimate section, I discuss how the same metaphysical standpoint that leads us to inflate the concept of completeness forms the source of our dissatisfaction with user-relative notions like acceptance as normative standards in the evaluation of the fallacies.

The scientist's domain of inquiry is that of the natural world. When the scientist poses questions about the natural world, he is concerned to establish not only the physical entities which make up this world, but also how these physical entities connect to other physical entities to form the basis of structures which are biological, chemical, geological, etc. in nature. Each physical entity and each interconnection between physical entities finds representation in the form of a theory, a theory which undergoes successive reformulations as new knowledge emerges from inquiry. This process of theory construction proceeds against a background in which there is at least the possibility that a point will be reached in inquiry where no further reformulations of theory can be achieved and the development of a theory will be complete. What makes the completeness of scientific theorising possible in principle, if not in practice, is the relationship of the processes of scientific thought to the

processes of rational thought. Scientific thinking, whilst representative of rational thinking, is effectively subsumed by rational thinking. Indeed, it is on account of this relationship of subsumption between scientific and rational thought that the processes of scientific thought are both possible and intelligible. Now, a complete scientific theory is a theory which cannot be reformulated on the basis of any processes of scientific thought which are within our present-day scientific knowledge. However, while we make necessary use of processes of scientific thought in developing complete scientific theories, any assessment of the completeness of a scientific theory is an assessment which can only proceed when processes of rational thought that are of a different order to the processes that are involved in the establishment of a scientific theory are presupposed by that theory. My point is quite simply that in posing scientific questions and in developing complete scientific theories, the scientist is not posing questions and developing complete theories about rational thought; rather, the scientist's theories and questions presuppose rational thought.

Now consider the case of the philosopher in pursuit of inquiry. The philosopher believes, mistakenly I contend, that he can pose questions about, and develop complete theories of, rational thought in much the same manner that the scientist poses questions about, and develops complete theories of, physical phenomena. However, what the philosopher fails to appreciate when he poses such questions and develops such theories is that when those questions and theories involve rational thought itself, then the rational framework which is presupposed by scientific methodology and which confers sense upon the questions and theories of the scientist is lacking in the case of philosophical methodology. The nature of the particular questions and theories that the philosopher is concerned to investigate requires that he deny the rational presuppositions of scientific inquiry – while the scientist can claim completeness for his analyses, analyses which at the same time presuppose rational thought, the philosopher, who is theorising about rational thought itself, can only claim completeness for his analyses by denying that these analyses presuppose rational thought. The philosopher's entire theoretical pursuit is the unintelligible one of attempting to theorise about rational thought from a metaphysical standpoint which is itself devoid of rational thought.

This same standpoint, I want to claim, is occupied by the fallacy theorist who sets about the evaluation of the argument from ignorance.

I described earlier how this standpoint was essentially aconceptual in nature, that it existed apart from concepts which constitute rational thought itself. In the absence of these concepts it seems that we are no longer confined to the mundane types of verification and judgement that are performed by our various rational procedures. Rather, it seems that we can transcend these procedures to the point where we can consider *all* the evidence that is relevant to a particular thesis, *all* the information that is relevant to a theory. It is against this background that we judge the knowledge base at the centre of the argument from ignorance to be essentially incomplete. For regardless of the amount of knowledge that we can accrue from within our conceptual resources on a particular issue, this knowledge appears incomplete against that which *seems* to be available to us if we transcend those resources. The outcome of this inflation of the concept of completeness is twofold. Firstly, we assess the argument from ignorance to be fallacious – the mundane knowledge that we can achieve from within our rational procedures is inevitably viewed as incomplete against that which seems to be available to us if we transcend those procedures. Secondly, even when the argument from ignorance is not deemed to be fallacious, the conclusion of this argument is only attributed the epistemic standing of a presumption – this conclusion does not warrant the title of knowledge by virtue of its dependence on an incomplete knowledge base (incomplete by metaphysical standards, of course). However, a deeper challenge still can be made against the fallacy theorist. For although it seems as if the fallacy theorist is applying *metaphysical* standards to the evaluation of the argument from ignorance, in reality this theorist is applying no (intelligible) standards at all to the evaluation of this argument. In the absence of rational concepts – this is effectively what a metaphysical standpoint amounts to – we cannot so much as *make sense* of or even *identify* metaphysical standards of fallacy evaluation. In the next section, I describe how this same metaphysical standpoint effectively motivates fallacy theorists' rejection of user-relative notions in the normative assessment of fallacies.

4. Rejecting User-Relative Notions in Fallacy Evaluation: The Role of Metaphysical Theorising

The recent history of fallacy inquiry, I have argued, has been one of rejection of user-relative notions in the normative evaluation of the fallacies. In this way, I claimed above that notions like assent and acceptance are routinely rejected by fallacy theorists as are rhetorical and dialectical frameworks of which these notions are a central part. What motivates this rejection can now be directly examined. The fallacy theorist, I contend, is engaged in a process of metaphysical theorising as he sets about the task of fallacy evaluation. In the previous section, I demonstrated how this theorising proceeded from within the perspective of a metaphysical standpoint, a standpoint that caused the fallacy theorist to view the knowledge base of the argument from ignorance as essentially incomplete. The incompleteness of this knowledge base derived from the metaphysical inflation of the concept of completeness – from within a metaphysical standpoint it seemed that we could step outside of our conceptual schemes and survey knowledge in its totality, against which the knowledge that could be attained from within our rational procedures seemed to be incomplete. In the same way, I now want to argue that a metaphysical standpoint underlies the fallacy theorist's rejection of the user-relative notions of assent and acceptance. An essential presupposition of both of these notions is the existence of a mind that is endowed with *rational* concepts – the notions of assent and acceptance that are at issue in this context contain an inherent demand to *justify* an accepted thesis. It seems to the fallacy theorist that this mind confers a vitiating subjectivity on all the rational procedures and notions that are dependent upon it. Moreover, it seems that this subjectivity can only be avoided by transcending the mind and its concepts – it is this transcendence alone that permits us to pursue an *objective* evaluation of the fallacies. One manifestation of this pursuit of objectivity is the attempt by the fallacy theorist to characterise the fallaciousness of an argument in terms of concepts that are argument-relative. Thus, we find fallacy theorists like Biro above rejecting rhetorical and dialectical treatments of question-begging criticism – these treatments overlook 'the possibility and necessity of regarding begging-the-question criticism as an *objective* matter', an objective matter that is captured, according to Biro, by the argument-relative notion of *knowability*. However, transcendence of the

mind and its concepts has but the *appearance* of effecting objective evaluations of the fallacies. For in the absence of rational concepts — in transcending the mind we effectively lack access to rational concepts — we are not pursuing *objective* evaluations of the fallacies; rather, we are pursuing no *intelligible* evaluations of the fallacies *at all*. The appearance of being able to transcend the mind makes it seem that we are able to free ourselves from the subjective judgements of particular minds and assume an all-encompassing epistemic standpoint, one from which a form of objective evaluation of the fallacies is possible. In the absence of rational concepts, however, what appears to be an *objective epistemic* standpoint is, in reality, an *unintelligible metaphysical* standpoint.

I argued above that while completeness of analysis constitutes an intelligible theoretical pursuit in scientific inquiry - such analysis presupposes rational thought, thought which confers sense on that analysis - completeness of analysis in philosophical inquiry leads to much unintelligibility in that inquiry - the rational thought which confers sense on that analysis is absent when that analysis is a complete description of rational thought itself. In effect, my claim was that where the scientist theorises from a standpoint or perspective which presupposes rational thought, the philosopher, in theorising about rational thought itself, can only do so from a type of metaphysical standpoint, the essential feature of which is that it is devoid of rational thought. Similar claims can now be shown to apply to the fallacy theorist's pursuit of *objective* evaluations of the fallacies. Here, again, a comparison of the fallacy theorist's notion of objectivity with a scientific conception of objectivity is instructive. Scientific objectivity consists essentially in the scientist's pursuit of methods which have a proven reliability as indicators of truth. What this notion of reliability comes to is that each of the scientist's methods should be susceptible of discussion in a public forum and, importantly, that each of these methods should be susceptible of implementation by any of the members of that forum, identical results being obtained with each implementation of the method concerned. Thus science rejects astrology as a method of prediction for the reason that the astrologer's predictive methods, so the scientist claims, cannot be demonstrated to another who can use them to replicate the results that were obtained upon the initial implementation of these methods. Similarly, when the mystic claims to have belief in a reality which surpasses normal human understanding and experience, the scientist claims that the methods that the mystic uses for

grounding his/her belief cannot be communicated to another who can implement them in order to describe the mystic's reality – the mystic's methods, the scientist argues, are entirely within his/her experience. In short, where mysticism emphasises the *subjectivity* of experience, science, the scientist claims, emphasises the *objectivity* of the public domain.

Central to a scientific conception of objectivity, it was argued above, is the rejection of private experience with all its inherent subjectivity. The philosopher or fallacy theorist who wishes to develop a conception of objectivity for use in his own analyses sets about a similar rejection of experience. However, as the philosopher pursues this rejection, the whole notion of a mind, within which these experiences occur, comes to be rejected. But then there is nothing to distinguish the philosopher's viewpoint from the type of metaphysical standpoint that I described earlier. For this viewpoint, like a metaphysical standpoint, is essentially devoid of the processes of rational thought. Fisher comments as follows on just such a 'negation of "mind"' in the case of symbolic logic:

> While positivism was busy denying metaphysics as a legitimate philosophical study and conceiving of value statements as meaningless, mathematical (symbolic) logic was moving toward a negation of "mind". Following a line of thought stretching from Aristotle through the works of Gottfried Leibniz, George Boole, and Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell asserted in 1905:
>
> > Throughout logic and mathematics, the existence of the human mind or any other mind is totally irrelevant; mental processes are studied by means of logic, but the subject-matter of logic does not presuppose mental processes and would be equally true if there were no mental processes. It is true that in that case we should not know logic; but our knowledge must not be confounded with the truths which we know (1987, pp. 6-7).

In the same way that the logician believes he can confer objectivity on logic by making any assessment of the correctness of axioms and the validity of rules of inference a matter of the form of these structures[7], thus eliminating any role for the subjective judgements of individual minds in these assessments, the fallacy theorist believes that in order to pursue objective evaluations of the fallacies, he must effectively assume the perspective of a metaphysical standpoint, a standpoint from which any and all conceptual contribution from the mind is absent. However, in so

assuming this standpoint, the position of the fallacy theorist who is aiming to pursue objective evaluations of the fallacies is exactly that of the fallacy theorist who operates with a metaphysical conception of completeness in the evaluation of the argument from ignorance – his evaluations are not *objective* so much as they are *unintelligible*, for the reason that this standpoint lacks the conceptual resources with which to make sense of these evaluations.

If, as I have been claiming, a metaphysical standpoint is the source of unintelligibility in fallacy evaluation, then a *pragmatic* conception of argument and fallacy, I believe, represents our best hope of overcoming that unintelligibility. It is only when we give central significance in analysis to the *use* of arguments by *arguers* that the urge to assume a metaphysical standpoint in fallacy evaluation no longer seems so compelling. An examination of our use of the concept of completeness, both in inquiry in general and in the argument from ignorance in particular, tells against any metaphysical analysis of this notion – we do not strive in inquiry for knowledge that is complete beyond that which can be ascertained by our rational procedures. In the same way, an examination of the objective criteria that we employ in the evaluation of the fallacies tells against the negation of mind. Indeed, on at least one conception of objectivity,[8] objective criteria of fallacy evaluation are objective for the very reason that they *could be* acceptable to all reasonable minds. Attention to the notions of use and user in analysis precludes our assumption of a metaphysical standpoint and, more ultimately still, our adoption of metaphysical standards of fallacy evaluation. It is only by attending to how we use concepts like completeness and objectivity in argumentative contexts, as well as in a range of other rational contexts (explanation, decision making, etc), that we can begin to trust our various rational procedures and to trust the capacity of these procedures to furnish us with rationally acceptable criteria for use in the evaluation of the fallacies. It was described above how van Fraassen took a pragmatic conception of *language*, a conception of language that focuses on the roles of user and use, to achieve the dissolution of the need to explain reference. It now emerges that in forcing us to focus on our *use* of criteria of fallacy evaluation, a pragmatic conception of *argument* achieves the dissolution of metaphysical standards in the evaluation of the fallacies.

5. Summary

In this paper, I have examined a type of metaphysical standpoint that underlies, I claim, the fallacy theorist's evaluation of the fallacies. This standpoint, I have argued, effects a metaphysical inflation of the criteria that we employ in a normative assessment of the fallacies. Against these inflated criteria even reasonable forms of argument can appear to be fallacious. I demonstrated how a metaphysically inflated concept of completeness caused us to view the knowledge base of the argument from ignorance as essentially incomplete and to evaluate as fallacious any argument that was based on such a knowledge base. Similarly, a metaphysical inflation of the notion of objectivity caused us to view acceptance by users as a weak, essentially subjective standard of evaluation and to judge any argument that satisfies this standard as fallacious. I have argued that this metaphysical inflation of standards in the evaluation of the fallacies results in the unintelligibility of those standards – an argument from ignorance that satisfies a metaphysical conception of completeness is not a form of rationally acceptable argument so much as it is a form of unintelligible argument. We cannot so much as *make sense* of an argument from ignorance that contains a metaphysically complete knowledge base for the reason that such a knowledge base is itself only possible from within a metaphysical standpoint, the key feature of which is its lack of *rational concepts*. This same unintelligibility was argued by van Fraassen to characterise the attempt to explain reference. Moreover, van Fraassen argued that within a pragmatic conception of language which emphasised the roles of user and use the very appearance of their being a problem of reference that required explanation quite simply dissolved. I have argued that a pragmatic conception of argument in which there is a similar emphasis on user and use precludes our assumption of a metaphysical standpoint and, in the final analysis, our adoption of unintelligible, metaphysical standards in the evaluation of the fallacies.

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NOTES

1. The attempt to justify pragmatic tautologies is comparable to the attempt to judge the laws of logic (see Cummings (2002) for discussion of one attempt to judge the laws of logic), a point which is not lost on van Fraassen when he mentions 'Poincaré's quip about logicism: [meta]logic is not sterile, it engenders paradoxes' (1997, p. 39). Both attempts result in *nonsense* or *unintelligibility* – we cannot so much as *make sense* of a justification of pragmatic tautologies or of a judgement of the laws of logic when our only perspective for doing so is aconceptual in nature.
2. In fairness to van Fraassen, he does at least hint at the possibility that Putnam is making a similar claim to his own: 'On my reading of Putnam's model-theoretic argument, the paradox dissolves. What remains is a striking reductio of a certain view of language, which we can independently verify to be inadequate. Perhaps that was just what Putnam intended; perhaps the view of language found wanting is implied by that correspondence theory of truth which Putnam locates at the heart of metaphysical realism. I would like to think so; but authorial intent is notoriously indiscernible; the text has broken its moorings and must in any case be dealt with in its own terms' (1997, p. 34).
3. Biro (1977) proposes 'an epistemic version of the FA [non-formalist analysis] view' (p. 268) of question-begging argument, a version which employs the notion of 'epistemic seriousness', '*a feature of arguments* which has to do with the relative knowability of premises and conclusion' (p. 264; emphasis added).
4. '...rhetorical logics concern arguing – reasoning with an audience...' (Fisher, 1987, p. 4).
5. A more recent account of the flaw of the dialectical variant of the argument from ignorance is provided by Walton: 'The typical sequence of question-reply dialogue corresponding to this strategy is the following:

   Case 2.4: Black: Why A?
   White: Why not A?

   The fault of reasoned dialogue in such a reply is to be found in the backward-chaining burden of a why-question that requires, in this case, proof of A. Where the rules of dialogue indicate that an answer is required, the pattern of replying to one question by asking another is not to be tolerated' (1991, p. 76).
6. Woods and Walton (1978) characterise the *presumptive* character of the argument from ignorance as follows: 'It is often observed that there is one special context where ad ignorantiam is not a fallacious mode of reasoning, namely in the courts. Does not the law rule, for example, that a person is

presumed innocent until proven guilty? Thus, writes Copi, "[t]he defense can legitimately claim that if the prosecution has not proved guilt, this warrants a verdict of not guilty." There is no fallacy here, however, according to our analysis of ad ignorantiam, for it is no fallacy to presume a statement is false, unless presumption is meant to imply knowledge of the falsity or disconfirmation of the statement. The legal requirement is not that innocence be confirmed or known, but only presumed' (pp. 94-95).

7. Biro's location of begging-the-question criticism in the argument-relative notion of *knowability* mirrors the logician's attempt to locate the correctness of axioms and the validity of rules of inference in the *form* of an argument.
8. I have in mind here Perelman's notion of a universal audience: 'This objectivity will not consist either in conformity to some exterior object or in submission to the commands of any particular authority. It envisages an ideal of universality and constitutes an attempt to formulate norms and values such as could be proposed to every reasonable being' (1980, p. 70). Of course, for Perelman a universal audience constitutes an ideal as opposed to something that is actually realised. Nevertheless, my point still holds – *acceptance* of a thesis by all reasonable *minds* is the defining criterion of the notion of objectivity.

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