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# A Pragmatic Theory of Fallacy (Studies Rhetoric & Communicati)

*Mr. Douglas Walton*

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Although fallacies have been common since Aristotle,
until recently little attention has been devoted to identifying and defining
them. Furthermore, the concept of fallacy itself has lacked a sufficiently
clear meaning to make it a useful tool for evaluating arguments. Douglas
Walton takes a new analytical look at the concept of fallacy and presents
an up-to-date analysis of its usefulness for argumentation studies. Walton
uses case studies illustrating familiar arguments and tricky deceptions
in everyday conversation where the charge of fallaciousness is at issue.
The numerous case studies show in concrete terms many practical aspects
of how to use textual evidence to identify and analyze fallacies and to
evaluate arguments as fallacious. Walton looks at how an argument is used
in the context of conversation. He defines a fallacy as a conversational
move, or sequence of moves, that is supposed to be an argument that contributes
to the purpose of the conversation but in reality interferes with it. The
view is a pragmatic one, based on the assumption that when people argue,
they do so in a context of dialogue, a conventionalized normative framework
that is goal-directed. Such a contextual framework is shown to be crucial
in determining whether an argument has been used correctly. Walton also
shows how examples of fallacies given in the logic textbooks characteristically
turn out to be variants of reasonable, even if defeasible or questionable
arguments, based on presumptive reasoning. This is the essence of the evaluation
problem. A key thesis of the book, which must not be taken for granted
as previous textbooks have so often done, is that you can spot a fallacy
from how it was used in a context of dialogue. This is an innovative and
even, as Walton notes, "a radical and controversial" theory
of fallacy.

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