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1. INTRODUCTION

In his (2009) paper "What is a 'real' argument?" Geoff Goddu controversially claims that informal logicians have not succeeded in articulating a distinction between 'real' and 'unreal' arguments that performs any theoretical use. He discusses five articulations and three possible theoretical uses. He concedes that the distinction may have a pedagogical use, but denies that this is a theoretical use.

In his (2012) response to Goddu, Ben Hamby gives an articulation and a use. Agreeing with Goddu on many points, he defends the practical/theoretical distinction as an articulation where an argument is 'practical' to the extent that it can be prospectively used, and it can be prospectively used when "it could be offered in practice to support a controversial candidate claim that calls for judgment in the context of deciding what to believe or do" (Hamby, 2012, p. 314), whether this support is deductive or not. This articulation or one very like it can be found in the work of most informal logicians and has the theoretical use of "demarcating the arguments that should be studied in a basic reasoning course."

2. THE USES OF 'REAL' ARGUMENTS

In the paper here presented Goddu responds to Hamby's paper in two parts. In the first part, he discusses Hamby's motivation for making the 'real'/'unreal' distinction, and in the second part he discusses Hamby's articulation of the distinction.

In the first part, Goddu concedes that the use of 'real' arguments in basic reasoning courses is legitimate but that it is not a theoretical use but a pedagogical use that he has already conceded. He says that this does not mean that the distinction itself is a theoretically legitimate one, and that if it is not then there is no reason to suppose that the distinction pulls any theoretical weight.

We can grant Goddu's point that that there need not be a theoretically legitimate distinction underpinning the pedagogical use, and we can grant also that "the legitimacy of the distinction is prior to the determination of the focus of basic reasoning courses" and that the reasons to focus on such arguments in such courses are pedagogical rather than theoretical. But, for precisely these reasons, we cannot conversely conclude that the distinction is *not* a theoretically legitimate distinction,

and if it is and has a legitimate pedagogical use then legitimate theoretical uses such as the ones Goddu lists are likely to follow, Hamby can claim.

In the second part, Goddu considers some of the things Hamby says about 'real' arguments – that they are "substantial, relevant, non-trivial, matter in real-life, and involve controversial claims" – and asks whether these are necessary and/or sufficient for an exhaustive classification of arguments into the 'real' and the 'unreal.'

Goddu then claims that this makes the distinction relative to aims and interests and the time at which the argument is used – what was once considered trivial, and trivially true, may now be non-trivial and controversial. If we remove this relativism by saying that the argument is 'real' because non-trivial or controversial for the one making the argument, then no argument at all is ruled out. On the other hand, if we remove it by relying solely on the 'prospective use' criterion then the distinction is relative to our practical abilities, and if these radically improved, 'unreal' arguments would become 'real.' But if we remove this relativism by saying that the argument is 'real', once again no argument at all seems to be ruled out, except perhaps those that are logically impossible to use. The difficulty is to find a stable middle ground that definitively rules out some arguments that is not relativistic in one of these ways.

The definition of a 'real' argument is that it is one that could be used as a tool of persuasion in a context of controversy, the other criteria named being symptoms without being part of the definition. This does not actually require the context in which the argument is offered to be a context of controversy. Thus, I think that Hamby might agree that being uncontroversial now does not make an argument 'unreal' – this seems to be implied when he says that arguments are no less 'real' for being specialized (Hamby 2012, 317-19). In the specialized context the conclusion is controversial, but there are some arguments for which there is no context that makes it epistemically possible for their conclusion to be controversial and these do seem to occupy the middle ground.

Consider this example of an 'unreal' argument given by Hamby: "Socrates was a man; All men are mortal; therefore, Socrates was mortal," Hamby (2012, p. 322) comments, "is not real, because it is unlikely that anyone would ever use it to support its uncontroversial conclusion: in other words it would never be used in practice to establish the conclusion as a candidate for belief." Goddu describes a context where it seems reasonable to use the 'unreal' argument as a tool of persuasion to argue that Hamby's articulation does not rule this out. It is not entirely clear what part of Goddu's description is generating this intuition: is it that the audience comes to agree on Socrates' mortality on the basis of these premises, or is it that having agreed that this is a good argument, this argument is then used to persuade an audience about some philosophical claims about the referent of "Socrates"?

If the first, then I do not share Goddu's intuition; what makes the argument unsuitable as a tool of persuasion is that the audience could not agree that all men are mortal and that Socrates is a man unless they already implicitly agreed that Socrates was mortal. Although not *logically* impossible, no context is *epistemically*

possible in which the premises are uncontroversial and the conclusion controversial. The stable middle ground is the ground of the *epistemically possible*.

If the second, then it is not obvious that it is the argument itself, rather than just its conclusion, that is being used to persuade. Supposing that it *is* the argument, this case seems to be the same as one Goddu raises in the context of his claim that it is self-defeating to argue that there are genuine arguments that could not be prospectively used. To do so one would have to give an argument like "X lacks the properties required for an argument to be a 'real' argument; hence, X is not a 'real' argument." If the conclusion is true then X is not a 'real' argument, yet it is being used as a tool of persuasion, viz., to persuade that X is not a real argument.

Goddu considers whether it could not be responded that although X is being used to persuade, it is not being used to persuade for its own conclusion, but responds by questioning the distinction between using an argument to argue for its own conclusion and being used as an example, giving the following example as doing both: "Some arguments are composed solely of existential generalizations, so some arguments are composed solely of existential generalizations."

Since it is not obvious that X is being used as an example, I do not really understand Goddu's reasoning here. Whether X is an example depends on X having a particular form, and we cannot assume that X has one of these forms. Furthermore, even if we do make this assumption, it is still not the case that X is being used to argue for its own conclusion when substituted into the argument. Substituting Goddu's "petunia" argument for X it is still not the case that X is being used to argue for its own conclusion, for the conclusion of that argument was "X is not a 'real' argument" and the conclusion of X is "Some 'unreal' arguments have absurd premises." Lastly, there is a marked disanalogy between Goddu's examples, for unlike his other example, the "petunia" argument is invalid, thus this is not a case where the conclusion is claimed to follow from the premises and also exemplified by the argument; only the latter is true.

CONCLUSION 1

The motivation for making a distinction is irrelevant to its theoretical legitimacy.

CONCLUSION 2

There are at least some arguments that could not be prospectively used to persuade in any context, e.g., those that are epistemically circular.

CONCLUSION 3

The class of arguments that can be reasonably used is likely to be wider than the class of epistemically circular arguments.

CONCLUSION 4

To cash out what is and is not included in the definition of 'real' arguments as Hamby presents it is an on-going theoretical task.

CONCLUSION 5

This does not mean that the definition is inadequate or illegitimate.

REFERENCES

Goddu, G. (2009). What is a 'real' argument? *Informal Logic*, *29* (1), 1-14
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