

Urth Digest, Vol 76, Issue 7

The Urth list — 2 messages, 1 voices, 02 Dec 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5794>

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Nick Lee — 02 Dec 2010, 07:20

On Thu, Dec 2, 2010 at 12:45 AM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

It is not legitimate. It is a logical fallacy to judge the validity of an argument by referring to the motivations of the person who makes the argument.

An ad hominem is an attack on the character or impartiality of the arguer rather than his position. In the discussion you're talking about, Wright's thesis is attacked on textual grounds. Then the explanation given for Wright's error is his supposed atheism (though I am not sure how we know he's an atheist).

Even if Wright's thesis were attacked on the basis of his atheism, as it is framed in the discussion, this is not an attack on his character. No one is saying there is something wrong with being an atheist. It's not a personal attack.

And even if this were a personal attack, that would not make it inherently fallacious: "The *argumentum ad hominem* is not always fallacious, for in some instances questions of personal conduct, character, motive, etc., are legitimate and relevant to the issue." pg 170. Douglas Walton,* Informal Logic: A Practical Approach*.

It might amuse you to know that Wright is himself a user of reader response theory. The idea of reader response theory is that individual readers bring their own experiences and motivations to readings and use those to create interpretations. I expect this particular information might shed light on the issue as a whole.

Nicholas Goodman

Nick Lee — 02 Dec 2010, 16:16 · in reply to Nick Lee

On Thu, Dec 2, 2010 at 1:20 AM, Nick Lee <starwaterstrain at gmail.com> wrote:

And even if this were a personal attack, that would not make it inherently fallacious: "The *argumentum ad hominem* is not always >fallacious, for in some instances questions of personal conduct, character, motive, etc., are legitimate and relevant to the issue." pg >170. Douglas Walton,* Informal Logic: A Practical Approach*.

I really shouldn't have posted at 1 AM. The title of Walton's book is *Informal Logic: A Pragmatic Approach*.

I'll also take this opportunity to clarify, as I think I might have been unclear on one point. Dan'l Danehy-Oakes seems to think others in this thread are guilty of* ad hominem circumstantial* rather than *ad hominem abuse*. I didn't explain the difference before. I'll direct you to Wikipedia as you probably don't have a copy of Walton lying around.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_hominem

This fallacy is not present in previous discussions because this reasoning is not being used to attack the validity of the argument. Rather it is an after-the-fact discussion of his biases. You can certainly discuss someone's biases as long as it is not being used as your sole means of attacking the argument. Even if you did, this would still not be a fallacy necessarily because: "Where the source taking a position seeks to convince us by a claim of authority, or personal observation, observation of their circumstances may reduce the evidentiary weight of the claims, sometimes to zero" (Wikipedia). Also Walton, quoted above (another version of which I now see is actually quoted by Wikipedia at the start of their article).

If anyone would like to read up on fallacies,
<http://www.fallacyfiles.org/> is a good resource.

Nicholas Goodman <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ad_hominem#cite_note-five-3>