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On the Ethics of Real-Life Examples of Argument

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Article abstract

Argumentation theorists know that their work has real-life application, and similarly, they draw inspiration for that work from real-life experiences. Sometimes, it comes from some public medium – the newspaper, a blog, a debate stage. But we also draw from more private reason-exchanges – a conversation with a neighbor, small-talk with a colleague, or a lovers' spat. A few worries about publicly theorizing about those more private cases arise. We may be making public something that was unguarded, and so betray a trust. Our theoretical reflections may themselves warp the relationship we'd originally savored, particularly when our partners know about the possibility of them being publicly scrutinized. Novelists and poets regularly struggle with this challenge with their work, and we argumentation theorists should, too.

On the Ethics of Real-Life Examples of Argument

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Abstract: Argumentation theorists know that their work has real-life applications, and similarly, they draw inspiration from real-life experiences. Sometimes, it comes from some public medium – the newspaper, a blog, a debate stage. But we also draw from more private reason-exchanges – a conversation with a neighbor, small-talk with a colleague, or a lovers' spat. Worries about publicly theorizing about those more private cases arise. We may be making public something that was unguarded, and so betray a trust. Our theoretical reflections may warp the relationship we'd originally savored, particularly when our partners know about the possibility of them being publicly scrutinized. Novelists and poets regularly struggle with this challenge with their work, and we argumentation theorists should, too.

Résumé: Les théoriciens de l'argumentation savent que leur travail a des applications concrètes et, de la même manière, ils s'inspirent d'expériences réelles. Parfois, ces idées proviennent d'un média public – un journal, un blog, une tribune de débat. Mais nous nous inspirons aussi d'échanges de raisonnement plus privés – une conversation avec un voisin, une petite conversation avec un collègue ou une dispute amoureuse. Nous craignons de théoriser publiquement sur ces cas plus privés. Nous pouvons rendre public des commentaires irréfléchis et ainsi trahir une confiance. Nos réflexions théoriques peuvent déformer la relation que nous avions initialement très appréciée, en particulier lorsque nos partenaires savent qu'ils peuvent être scrutés publiquement. Les romanciers et les poètes sont régulièrement confrontés à ce défi dans leur travail, et nous, les théoriciens de l'argumentation, devrions également le faire.

Keywords: bad fit example, ethical perspectives, first-order argumentative practice, public theorizing.

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We were arguing, and she was angry. Furious. With me. She slammed her phone on the kitchen table. We both gasped, and she turned it over. Not broken. We looked at each other, and her eyes narrowed. "You're not going to use this as an example in one of your stupid fucking essays, are you?!?"

1. The good news

An aspiration of argumentation theory is that, in describing our public and private deliberations, we will identify paths to their improvement. We seem duty-bound to care for these things, as rational creatures have as their intrinsic directedness, their nature, care for their reason's workings. And further, we should care for the quality of those deliberations because of what they are over – we want the deliberations to be good because we want the proper result to be correct decisions and true conclusions. Finally, we should care for those deliberations and those processes, because it is in those coordinations with others that we share and create intellectual bonds with our fellows. Reasoning well together isn't just about the truth coming out, but it's about enacting reason together and creating cultures and connections based on that activity. This is the case for both public and private critical conversation. Political argument, run well, not only yields, by hypothesis, better policy results, but also cultures of shared reasons and appreciation for our common rationality.[1] And it goes the same for our private exchanges, too, in one-on-one dialogues, intimate conversations, kitchen table deliberations.[2] Reasoning well together yields better results, and it establishes and reinforces recognition, acceptance, love.

With argumentation theory, we are out to theorize the norms of those public and private critical conversations with an eye to

[1] Robert Talisse and I have been framing a version of this thought for political life, and we've given cases for it as *civic friendship* in our 2019 and 2020.
[2] See Stevens (2019) and Casey and Stevens (forthcoming) for a variety of ethical norms bearing on argument initiation, particularly tied to the role-related duties we take up in opening the argument. Further ethical norms expand the range of concern once we see that argument is a site for significant escalations of adversariality in cases of disagreement.

improving them. We start with our first-order practices of reason-giving, and we semantically ascend to a second-order, where we articulate rules, responsibilities, semantics, syntaxes, and so on. The hope, again, is that after our shared second-order reflections, we will return to our first-order practices with plans for their improvement.[3] So, we argumentation theorists and informal logicians come together to polish insights and critically discuss how we can think about and improve our first-order critical discussions. We go from debates about immigration to discussions of how burdens of proof are distributed, from an argument about getting another cat to finer points about how asserting the consequent can be a heuristic, and exchanges with neighbors about building projects to puzzles about identifying logical form. The point, again, is that in our scholarly reflection on argumentative practices, we are crafting insights and tools for their improvement. The good news is that our work is relevant; attention in argumentation theory and informal logic matters.

2. The problem of bad fit

To locate the problem I want to address, let's focus on the looping between two levels: first-order argumentative practice and the second-order reflection on that practice. The second-order reflective practice I'm focusing on is the public scholarship done by informal logicians, argumentation theorists, social epistemologists, and the like. In this domain, we aren't only privately thinking about issues on the first order, but we have developed second-order vocabularies with which we have semantically ascended to view the events on the first order through a distinctly abstract lens of explicitness, explanation, and justification of the norms running that first-order practice. And the purpose of that explicitification is to share details

[3] The hope for the positive loop is something I've tried to theorize clearly, but I also worry about pathological loops, too. See Aikin (2020) and Aikin and Talisse (2019) for accounts of the looping and its potential both for beneficial output and pathology. The basic program requires a distinction between a meta-language of reflection and a first-order language of reasoning, which is theorized by Finocchiaro (2013) and later developed by Aikin and Casey (2022).

of those first order practices that are common enough to need comment and correction.

The particular first-order practices I'm focusing on are those of private conversations. Lovers' spats, misunderstandings between friends, a neighborly but badly run dispute, a student's sophomoric mistake. The question is whether the publicity of our scholarly deliberations about those private exchanges is a bad fit.

There are many analogous cases with artists who make their art about their lives, or they draw from their personal experiences with people in their lives to inspire their art. The pop singer Taylor Swift writes songs all about her break-ups, full of touching, but also troubling, details about her exes. "We are never getting back together" is not just a public declaration that she won't return to the relationship, but a laundry list of reasons why. The comedian Mike Birbiglia uses fights with his wife as fodder for his standup routine, and the number of 'dad comics' who tell embarrassing stories about their children for professional advancement is staggering. Joan Didion wrote *Blue Nights* in the wake of her daughter's death from cancer, reporting details of their intimate conversations in her final hours. Rachel Zucker's memoir, *MOTHERs,* details her troubled relationship with her own mother, who asked her not to publish it, and her follow-up book, *The Poetics of Wrongness*, surveys her feelings of guilt after not respecting her mother's wishes. Truman Capote used stories of women in his New York social circle to write *Answered Prayers.* And philosophers, too, have used people in their lives as players in their intellectual dramas. Plato arguably shares so many dumb things his peers and other Athenians said in conversation with Socrates to construct his dialogues.

Examples in the literature on fallacy theory and informal logic abound. I've used my kids and the dumb things they've said as props to show a fine point of logic. And others, too, have taken examples from their children, from them arguing from false dilemmas about homework, to not being aware of the political stakes of an offhand comment (and getting 'cancelled' by their middle school friends). I've used my wife as the fall guy in some of my work – from her unfairly straw-manning one of my vacation ideas to her fatalism in parenting. Others report discussions of who walks the dog, whether to get a dishwasher, failed reasoning about whether jokes about

Ovaltine are funny, and how sometimes they give the silent treatment when things don't go their way. Michael Gilbert (1994) asks whether argumentation theorists must quarrel with their spouses, and I sometimes wonder whether if they didn't, would they have as much to say?

We use our colleagues as case studies in critical failure. In my work, Professor Arglebargle both gives and receives a good deal of argumentatively bad performances, and I'll admit that there's a large portion of my pet peeves with my colleagues showing there. And others in the literature review professors who get surprisingly defensive when asked simple questions about their research, and other colleagues who adopt problematic pedagogical approaches. And then there are our stories about students. I've told many a tale about Brady, the hungover sophomore, who makes silly but informative errors. And others in the literature tell tales of the *ad misericordium* being deployed in office hours in pursuit of higher grades, and there are tales of student overconfidence in logic yielding predictably satisfying results when revealed to be incompetent. There are just too many cases of us using people in our lives as props, fall guys, case studies in error, and informative clowns in the service of our shared, public, theoretical reflection. And the question is whether this public theorizing is a bad fit with those private moments.

There are a few ways to capture this general worry about *bad fit*. The first line of flight into the idea is the instrumentalization of one's intimate relations. Seeing your conversations with friends as something valuable beyond the relationship complicates the relationship and how one takes those moments. That's the case with many things in life, but when your work is about relationships, things get weird. Taking Taylor Swift as a caricature, perhaps, we might imagine her staying in a bad relationship for a little longer, because she needs more material for her next album. The same might go for us, as I for sure have conversations with some people expecting them to drop some fallacy gold. Thanksgiving dinner, with our opinionated uncles there ready to go, seems ripe for this mixed motive, and there are many comedians who have family members who furnish them with material too rich to ignore. Add to all this our publishing lives are important to us, and professional development

and advancement provides ground for mixed motives with proportions out of whack. This bad mix of motives cheapens the relationship. And so, with the instrumentalization problem, we, in treating our personal lives as resources for professional advancement, occasion alienation from those lives.[4]

Hard on the heels of the instrumentalization problem is that of betrayal. Our private conversations are unguarded, often first drafts of thought we might not put out for public consumption. And they are proffered with the expectation that they won't be shared beyond those confines. These conversations stay in the room. And the trouble is that unique errors occur in these contexts – one speaks too boldly, shares so much as to repulse, expects ready agreement, or rehearses petty grudges. These are errors we all make, and they deserve our reflection, but the privacy of the dialogue and the expectation of privacy is contravened by publicly shared scholarly reflection on them. Our fellows' errors were with us only (and made expecting discretion), so our sharing and reflecting upon them breaks that trust.

Last, there is the fact that once we've made a habit of telling-all in our published work, the people in our lives will have some inkling of that looping. There are too many stories of people behaving differently around novelists with the expectation that their conversation will end up in the next book. And so, with the case of the slammed phone with which I opened the essay – *in situ*, the fact that one publicly theorizes about arguments as shared private exchanges before has a pathological looping effect on our first-order conversations. It has the potential to ruin the relationship in its being a looming betrayal in the background and distant judging promised, but when foregrounded it makes exchanges too self-conscious to be

[4] A heuristic for this thought is the trouble Epicurus has with friendship – namely, that Epicureans must think of friends instrumentally, but the only way to reap those goods of friendship is to see the relationship as intrinsically valuable. This requires a kind of double vision in the relationship, which many (including me) think is unstable. Another version of this trouble is that with the conflicted attitudes Stoic practitioners must have with their philosophical advancement – where they should be proud of themselves for philosophical achievement, but his pride stands in the way of proper advancement. This is what I've elsewhere termed 'progressors temptation' (Aikin and Stephens 2023).

the kind of things worth investing in. The relationship becomes a set of mirrors instead of the things to be valued and reflected upon. Call this the ruin problem.[5]

There is one other, but orthogonal, worry about telling personal stories in one's public scholarship – the worry of my-side bias in how we represent these exchanges. For sure, most of my stories have my views and contributions represented in the best lights, with the others conveniently looking silly, incurious, or bumbling. My versions are clearly self-serving in the details, and there's not much my discussants can say to correct the record. Or if they do, there is the likelihood that the same bias will infect their representations. (What might a rebuttal to a T.Swift breakup song sound like, and who could do it well enough to make it worthwhile?)[6]

If we set some normative ethical perspectives on this question, I think we get some consilience on the unruly problem of bad fits. From a consequentialist perspective, there are clear bads in the betrayals and in the ruin results. And even instrumentalizing the relationship has a diminishing effect on the goods one gets out of it. From the perspective of duty, we fail responsibilities of confidentiality and trust with those who are in close relationships with us. Taking the deontological perspective, there are lines we don't cross when we talk about those whom we love.

Virtue dictates that we just not be that kind of person who airs dirty laundry for professional advancement. What kind of friend, parent, or colleague does that? And then there is the question of care and how we've failed to respect the relationship. Taking the attitude that we can bring argumentation scholars into our kitchen table conversations makes them no longer kitchen table conversations.

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[5] I've theorized the ruin problem in a Stoic context elsewhere (Aikin and Stephens 2023), with the thought that were a Stoic to share the Stoic value system with those in their lives, that explicitness would ruin the relationship. Most people would recoil from a Stoic who says they love them, if they know what Stoic love turns out to be.

[6] I wonder whether some of this challenge might also be put as a form of grandstanding – taking others' errors to task for the sake of forwarding oneself. See Tosi and Warmke (2020) for an account of how moral grandstanding is a moral wrong, and see Alsip Vollbrecht (2023) for how intellectual grandstanding negatively influences argument. Ferkany (2021) also asks whether particular interventions are even effective.

The point of this overview of the rough terrain around the problem of bad fit here is simply to show that there are some *prima facie* reasons to think it's problematic to include juicy details from our personal lives in our public scholarship, particularly when it makes others in our lives look bad. The key with all these modest reasons is that they can be defeated or overcome by other, weightier reasons, or they can be undercut by other reasons that might weaken them. But the lesson is simply to capture the ethical puzzle of the problem of bad fits – there is something morally curious about it. And it seems that just as people who see themselves represented in art in ways they don't like have reason to complain, so might our friends, colleagues, students, and loved ones be irritated by our use of them as fodder for our academic reflections.

3. Some approaches

My overall view is that there are only imperfect responses to the problem of bad fits. Some are more satisfactory than others. Here, my objective is to review a number of approaches and heuristics with the problem. They all (except, maybe one) have considerations that count in their favor, and they all have costs. That's the messy nature of the business, of course, and perhaps it's not a surprise. We get this problem because the good life is challenging, and perhaps tragic intersections of trajectories of value emerge in our aspirations for completeness. Not all our values are parallel, nor do they converge on one big thing. In fact, it may be that to properly value some good things, we must forswear other good things. (The life of sobriety is my closest-to-home example these days, but there certainly are more.) That's just my speculation at this point, but for what it's worth, I think the life of reason and value isn't just stacking and matching. We don't just need good judgment, but we need to know how to make tragic choices.

The strongest reply to the problem of bad fits is to deny that the problem exists. The response depends on the thought that there are no ownership rights to what one says, and to universals as errors, in particular. Universals are no individual's possession. Further, the strong reply can build out on the perceptions of harm. Perhaps, given the positive possibilities of looping in reflection back on practice,

those are benefits that outweigh the harms our friends may feel in our betrayals. Again, let's use T.Swift as a model – can't the goods of her breakup songs, in putting to words the anguish and exhilaration of escaping a bad boyfriend, outweigh the bads of how he feels when he discovers the song's about him? The same, so the reasoning runs, for our students, friends and lovers: yes, we hurt their feelings with this public scholarly reflection and have a pathological loop with the relationship, but it's for a greater good – the explicitification and correction of first-order practice.

To the strong reply, my response is a really more a recoil of philosophical disgust. In a way, the strong reply's appeal is in dismissing whatever vague intuitions drive the problem of bad fits. And whatever ground is given to those intuitions is taken back by the promise of improvement in the looping and other goods of the explicitification. But I'm not so sure about this form of response. First, the goods of compensation are a mere promise, and the bads of betrayal are real. Further the goods of explicitification are dependent upon uptake, and what kinds of uptake do we really expect? For sure, returning to T.Swift on the analogy, we can see the goods amplified by the fact that she's a mega pop star. She's lucky to have those numbers to work out. The same, I think, goes for the scholarly justification – the best reason why one could betray one's spouse in one's publications would come down to one's h-index of citations. That simply seems to be the wrong kind of answer.

Here's another line of criticism of the strong reply. If the point of explicitification is improvement of valuable first-order practices and relationships, then the justification for ruining them seems insipid. The objective is to reside more comfortably in our first-order practices, but this justificatory strategy makes that objective impossible. The strong reply seems like it just wears the ruin problem as a badge of honor. That seems perverse.

A more modest reply to the bad fits problem is to focus on consent in these cases. We should include cases from our personal lives only if consent is given by the participants represented. So, we should, after Thanksgiving, ask our uncles if we can use our exchange as an example in our upcoming papers, get an OK from our spouses to include their critical misstep, ask our kids and students for their permission to tell embarrassing stories about them.

One could modify the modest reply by holding that all communication with writers has a background of *tacit consent* – in agreeing to talk with you, your familiars also agree to your telling stories about them. Joan Didion famously quipped that "writers are always selling someone out," so she thought that the people in her life had fair warning.

As I see it, the modest reply to the bad fit problem, by putting primacy on consent, is to mitigate the betrayal edge to the problem. It can't be a betrayal if you've given the green light for the representation. So far, that seems right. But centering betrayal as the prime edge of the problem seems to concede both instrumentalization and ruinous looping. Having the question, "Can I use this conversation in a coming paper?" hanging in the background looks more like a trigger for ruin, even if it were to mitigate betrayal.

Further, the modest reply is too demanding, as there are cases wherein getting consent is not possible. Some people we reflect upon are dead. Or we may not have the means to contact them now – we may not remember their full names, in the cases of students and old acquaintances. For example, one case of straw manning in my own work was from an informal exchange with a classmate of mine and a teacher in the 90's – I can't remember who the classmate was, and the professor passed away 10 years ago, so I can't ask either for consent to include them in the case. So, consent is hard to get from the dead and distant. This is why the modified modest version works as it does, and why Joan Didion's tell-all about her late daughter has the ethical permission is purportedly does.

Again, my thought is that all these considerations magnify ruinous looping, but even were they not to, it's all highly instrumental comportments toward one's familiars. Maybe that's permissible in a sense, but that seems monstrous, too.

The weak reply to the bad fits problem is to say that the problem is hard, so doesn't admit of ready-made solutions. But there are better and worse management approaches to the issue. I'll briefly review three rules here.

Rule 1. Don't write to get even. Score-settling is a bad motivation for writing. For sure, there are errors to correct, but writing with the *lex talionis* in your heart makes the real lesson of the case less about

the error to be corrected than extracting the pound of flesh. It's bad motivation, and it magnifies the ruin problem. Moreover, it's too easily made into a playground of my-side bias. The more you portray offenders as offensive and yourself as innocent and pure, the more vengeful you'll be.

Rule 2. Write to preserve humanity. The hope of positive looping between first-order practices and second-order reflection is that we preserve what's valuable in our relations and fix our missteps with each other. We are all fallible creatures, and so long as we theorize our errors in ways that preserve the spirit of grace we extend to each other as fallible creatures, we can preserve our relations. Or at least save the hope of it. Seeing errors not only as failures but as cases that seemed to a mind at the time as what's right is the key. Fallacy theory, by my lights, requires that we straddle two perspectives on errors of reasoning – they must be incorrect, but seem correct. We need to toggle back-and-forth between these perspectives, and doing so invites understanding and forgiveness. Those, I think, are pro-social and bond-strengthening orientations for our theorizing.[7]

Rule 3. Anonymize. One way to mitigate the harm of betrayal is to make our example cases harder to recognize as particular individuals. So, a name change, perhaps a role swap, social position switch. (That all depends, of course, on whether the example requires essentially that the role is set for one of the participants.) Or maybe you write things so that *it's you* who makes the error. That certainly fixes the my-side bias version of the problem – you see yourself in the errors you criticize. All that makes it harder for our familiars to see themselves in the representations. And this may reduce the likelihood of a looping problem – if the critical eye is (at least represented) as inward, others won't be as leery. For sure, people seem to be less likely to see themselves as committing the errors, once they've been de-identified. Of course, that possibility

[7] One version of this commitment is to foreground *argument repair,* so that criticism of arguments and argument-exchanges is not just done for the purpose of saying someone is wrong but for the sake of laying the ground for saying that we, collectively, have done something right. See Aikin and Talisse (2019), Linker (2014), Hundleby (2013) and Epstein (2002) for models. One further thought is that this work is a way of performatively honoring those relations, as in Henning (2018).

isn't eliminated, since it's clear that the freely-roaming eye of the theorist will light on any theoretically interesting item in its field. Any reasonable interlocutor will recognize this (if but eventually).

The persistent problem is that of instrumentalization, and in a way, anonymizing foregrounds that fact. We have now a tool for extracting and generalizing content from our lives.

The maximally concessive reply is to admit that we are theoretical pirates, that our content extraction from our lives is morally inexcusable. The confessional poet John Murillo concedes that he exploits the lives of others for his work. "It's unethical, but it's what we do.... Ours is a dirty business.... What is the alternative?"[8] The use of the lives of others, and their moments of vulnerability shared in ours, is not something we have a right to. Murillo asks what the alternative could be. Insofar as we see that the theoretical relevance of our work to lived experience is essential to the project, we are in a tragic position.

The maximally concessive reply is, perhaps, too concessive. First, because we don't have to use others in our lives *purely* as means. We have the tight focus on the micro-conversations with them both because we share fellowship and because we are theoretically interested in the phenomenon. It's the kind of failure of ethics in the relevant sense only if it's purely instrumental. Second, the concession seems hasty, since the whole point of the reflection is in honoring the lives reflected upon. If the relationship with the lives is purely for the sake of professional advancement, then, yes, we have the problem. But insofar as the reflection on those lives is also for highlighting the values and challenges that yield the stumbles worth considering, then it's not exploitation.

The lesson of the concessive view is that one can and should see how using examples form our lives can create a conflict of interest, and one should be wary of oneself in that conflict. We can rationalize our way out of the pinch too easily and fail to respect our family members, lovers, and colleagues, for the sake of making a point. I think, though, the fatalism of the failure is too easy – the fact, again,

[8] Referenced in Zucker (2023 ,83). The interview is available on SoundCloud, with the key phrases after 52 minutes.

that there are ways to manage the tension better than others shows we can mitigate the harms.

4. The curse of rational relevance

Remember my opening argument – that argumentation theory is relevant because it bears on moments in our lives wherein rational deliberation carries personal significance. We encounter curious moments in our shared lives, and we reflect upon them with hopes of understanding and improving them.[9] In so doing, and in our scholarly work in particular, we make explicit norms of those practices in public fashion by magnifying particular moments of friction or failure. Individual agents, speakers, arguers provide these rich missteps, and we reflect on and chatter about these cases. The edge of the bad fit problem is that the reflection, as scholarship (or art) is very public though a good number of those exchanges are private. A bad life, with unhappy exchanges, failed connections, and substantive alienations may be robust for very good theory (or art). But does the justification for this thought work the other way around when we return from theory? Does good theory make for good life?

I've certainly had too many moments where I find that for all my theoretical savvy, I'm still pretty mediocre at just straight-up arguing with people. In fact, I'll say that the one thing that makes me better at arguing with people is just knowing lots of stuff about the issue, not about mastering the norms of argumentative exchange. This is because the reasoning on the first order is spontaneous – I follow the natural materiality of the cases and evidence.

One reason why theoretical savvy, at least with argument, has limited utility is that, in argument, going meta- too often comes across as just strategic abuse. Crying argumentative foul about an error of reasoning when arguing with my pals about soccer, for example, comes across like pulling rank. Or paying attention to a technicality and losing sight of the bigger points being made.

[9] In this regard, I consider this work to be following and expanding upon Robert Brandom's observation that logic is our instrument of semantic self-consciousness (1994). I believe that, in this case, it's logic as argumentation theory, and it's not merely semantic self-consciousness, but our relational rationality that we become conscious of.

Moreover, as I become more attuned to rules of fairness in argument and how I, given belief- and my-side-bias, will weight things too heavily on my own side, I will open myself to argumentative free-riding by my interlocutors. I'll catch myself mid-fallacy and not argue that way. But because I'm committed to argument repair, I fix the fallacies of my disagreeing interlocutors. I got better at argument, but in so doing, I lose more of them. All this makes argumentative skill and reflective attentiveness a kind of burdened virtue, one that makes us less likely to get our way and speak up effectively for ourselves. In a world of vice, we have excellent theories of the norms, but it turns those who understand and follow them into doormats.

And now think of how one must comport oneself to that life, given this tragic insight. The curse of rational relevance is a new ruin problem, but now from the theorist's side. Recall that the ruin problem originally was that our familiar's knowledge of our theorizing alienates them from the relationship. The curse of rational relevance is that the theorist's theorizing and knowledge of the theory put into practice now will ruin the relationship, but now from the theorist's side. Agreeing with friends about some injustice or new outrage loses its charm when seen through the lens of belief-bias. A hard conversation with your children, and all the silly errors they make, now becomes a moment to see that critical thinking, too often and even in the best of circumstances, must start at zero for all. Talking with your colleagues reveals exquisite new (and theoretically interesting but practically vexing) meta-argumentative fallacies. For all our sophistication, we seem to be only better at rationalizing. And the relationships we'd been in it all to salvage now seem themselves to be expanses of interrelated problems. Natural spontaneity and connection all now seem in need of reflective revision and planning. The aspiration of looping back to correct and improve reveals the lives we hoped to save as heaps of pathologies.

Alienation from the imperfect familiar awaits us on our return arc of the loop from practice, to theory, back to practice. This is not a reason to forgo the journey, but it was certainly a reason why in Plato's *Republic*, those released from the cave had to be chastised when they resisted returning. Justice calls them back, and even in the perfect city, they nevertheless miscalculate the nuptial number and

thereby send the city on a trajectory to deep imperfection. Of course, the tools of our wisdom will be even less effective than those of the Kalliopolis, and there are occasions for their abuse. That, itself, is theoretically interesting, and so we reflect on that curious loop, but, perhaps, with clearer expectations of what results will come out of all this work.

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