IFL: Logicbite 7

Before going formal

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The first Interlude in *IFL* reviews where we've been in the headline terms. Then it equally briefly announces what we are going to be exploring next, namely standard propositional logic (the logic of 'and', 'or', 'not' and 'if'). These two pages don't really need introduction or further explanation here!

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But let me stand back from details and just comment very briskly on the way the early parts of *IFL* are structured.

Symbolic logic textbooks for philosophers all sooner or later launch into a treatment of formal propositional logic. And the majority get there pretty quickly – e.g. Lemmon, Teller in just a handful of pages, Mates in fifteen, Nick Smith in a more expansive twenty. At the other extreme, we find e.g. Hurley's *A Concise Introduction to Logic* which has two hundred pages on what he calls 'informal logic' – covering most of the things we've been talking about in the early chapters of *IFL* but also looking at various kinds of fallacies in informal argumentation – and then there is another hundred pages on Aristotelian logic before the book at last turns to propositional logic. *IFL* very unusually sits between the extremes, with some sixty pages of general discussion of notions like validity, form, proof, and counterexample, before getting formal.

The danger, I suppose, is that I've fallen between two stools! On the one hand, I've been going far too slowly for those who want to get on with learning 'real logic' with its 'P's and 'Q's and '$\wedge$'s and '$\rightarrow$'s and '$\forall$'s. On the other hand, I've rushed by too quickly for those who want e.g. more on strategies for the evaluation of everyday arguments presented in informal prose, more about argumentative traps for the unwary and the fallacies we can fall into.

Well, no book is going to satisfy everyone! My central concern, as the title suggests, is with formal logic. But I do have a rationale for the unusually slow start. For I do want to spend enough time not just introducing the pre-formal notions of validity etc., but also saying something about what makes these notions rather problematic. For just one example, we say (in a slogan) that that validity is necessary truth-preservation: but what kind of necessity is in play here? The pre-formal notions give rise, then, to some interesting questions and puzzles (questions and puzzles that *matter* because we are of course want to know what is involved in evaluating real pre-formal arguments). And exploring the pre-formal notions and their problems sets us up to appreciate the formal turn. We get to see that the formal logician's notions of validity, form, proof, and counterexample, and proposition do have their roots in their pre-formal close cousins – so we can use the informal notions (and their problems) in motivating their formal analogues, but then in the other direction we can use the formal versions to throw needed light on how best to refine the informal notions. To provide a frame for our formal work in this way takes a little while, more than the very brisk remarks in some texts. Or so say I!

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In the first edition of *IFL*, the chapters up to and including the first Interlude covered 53 pages. In revising them for the second edition, I set out to make them snappier, and annoyingly find that they now take us to page 60! But that's partly because I previously talk about the difference between deductive validity (wide sense) and logical validity (narrow sense), the topic of the new Chapter 6. Still, when a little more water has gone under the bridge, I'll return to these early chapters again and *try* to cut them down again here and there. But overall, I think I'll stick with the longer-than-usual pre-formal preliminaries.