

ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMAL LOGIC AND CRITICAL THINKING (AILACT) *NEWSLETTER*

December 2023

Contents

1. From the Editor
2. From the President
3. AILACT @APA
4. Essay Prize
5. Membership Form

From the Editor

Festive Greetings, AILACT members!

In this issue you'll find a statement from the President, a Membership form for 2024, updates on the 2024 AILACT @APA session talks, and the 2023 Essay Prize winner and honorable mentions.

Any news or items of interest to the AILACT readership can be sent to me by April 1st for inclusion in the next Newsletter.

Best,
Pat Bondy
patrick.bondy@wichita.edu

From the President

Dear Members,

The Board of Directors met twice since my last report in the August *Newsletter*, and I am very pleased to say that we have made significant progress on our projects. **So there's lots of news!**

INQUIRY: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines: I'm thrilled to announce that the journal is returning to its original home. Dr. Jamie Grinberg, Professor of Educational Foundations, at Montclair State University, will be the new Managing Editor; and the Philosophy Documentation

Center will continue to host the journal's online access. Dr. Grinberg is currently working with Tom Brommage, the former editor, on a smooth and rapid resurrection of the journal. *INQUIRY* and AILACT have always had a close working relationship, and now that will only strengthen in the future.

It will be great to see this unique and important journal available again—and not just to subscribers but to *everyone*. ***INQUIRY* will be open access, including its archive!** This will be a wonderful *free* resource to everyone in critical thinking, informal logic, and argumentation theory.

Kudos and our sincere thanks go to Frank Fair, for his extensive work corresponding with professors and administrators at four universities who expressed interest in hosting the journal, and for his continued assistance to Dr. Grinberg.

The AILACT Speakers Forum: We completed our Fall program, with Adrian Kestigian presenting “Systematizing Intellectual Empathy” and Steve Oswald presenting “An Experimental Approach to Some Rhetorical Effects of Insinuation.” Thank you to these speakers, and to our earlier speakers, Sharon Bailin and Mark Battersby, for their fascinating discussions. All of these events are archived on the AILACT YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@ailactvideos>. Our Spring line-up is in place and is not to be missed. These events will be announced on our Website and via AILACTD-L in January. Thank you Dona Warren, for being such a wonderful host of our Forum.

Election of Officers: The deadline for the nominations of officers is passed and we have our candidates, one for each position; so they are all elected by acclamation, as ruled by our Constitution. Lilian Bermejo-Luque finished her term as Past-President *ex officio* and declined to be considered for a term as a Board Member at Large. Maurice Finocchiaro and Jean Goodwin also declined to remain on the Board. Thank you to all of them for their years of service: Lilian, for being our past president; Maurice, for being on the Board and the Nominating Committee; and Jean, for being on the Board and for being a jury member for the AILACT Essay Prize. I hope that we can count on you all for your informal assistance in the future.

We therefore have two new Board Members at Large: David Hitchcock (McMaster University)—David was our very first President, so he is indeed the Critical Thinker Who Came in from the Cold. And Jamie Grinberg (Montclair State University and Managing Editor of *INQUIRY*)—in keeping with the close relations being forged between the journal and AILACT.

Remaining in office for the 2024-5 term are: Dona Warren, Vice-President; Don Hatcher, Treasurer; Board Members at Large John Casey, Frank Fair, Dima Mohammed, Yun Xie, and Mark Weinstein; and yours truly, Kevin Possin, as President.

We have recent vacancies on our Nominating and our Appointments Committees. These committees serve very important functions in finding members to work on the Association's projects. So please consider volunteering.

Thoughts on the 2022-3 Term: We held a total of 9 Board Meetings and had a productive term, with the following accomplishments:

Creating The AILACT Speakers Forum, with an AILACT YouTube Channel for archiving its events
Finding a new home for *INQUIRY*
Holding a Membership/Donor drive
Hosting the AILACT Essay Prize, with Gilbert Plumer graciously administering it after the death of Derek Allen
Simplifying the AILACT Website, with Dona Warren acting as our Webmaster
Editing the AILACTD-L Listserv and maintaining consistent access to it on behalf of James Freeman
Creating an AILACT email account
Continuing our regular meetings at the three APA Divisional Conferences—kudos to our Divisional Program Directors

I do think we've done pretty well. I hope you agree. And I hope you continue to help, with your membership renewals and suggestions, and by volunteering in any way you can.

Thank you!

And kudos to Pat Bondy, for doing such a wonderful job on our *Newsletter*!

A Point of Personal Privilege: These are depressing times. And critical thinking has never been more important in addressing the crucial issues of these times. The current situation in Gaza is just one example that confronts us. It is a cluster f*ck of egregious ethical atrocities: terrorism, the taking of hostages, the use of human shields, the goal of genocide, the weaponization of sexual assault, the siege of a large urban area, and the knowing killing of thousands of civilians while rationalizing it with the pathetically bankrupt Double Effect Argument.

I can only hope that we in the fields of critical thinking, informal logic, and normative argumentation theory have the courage to critically and explicitly address these issues, for example, in the classroom, in the media, and at our professional gatherings. If we don't, the misinformed angry mob surely will.

I fully appreciate what a challenge that is. One will almost certainly be accosted with ad hominem, epithets, or even physical threats, for expressing even the most cogent of arguments and criticisms. But if critical thinking is rightfully construed as a form of *applied* logic and *applied* epistemology, then it is up to all of us to indeed apply it where and when it matters most. And if we have a moral duty, along with our epistemic duty, to pursue the goals of critical thinking—viz., to seek the truth and avoid error—then doubly so with this issue.

I thank you for your consideration.

Best wishes to you all in the new year—for peace, health, and happiness,

Kevin

AILACT @ APA**Eastern Division**

AILACT Group Session APA Eastern Division Meeting January 2024 New York City
Organized by Jeff Buechner

Wednesday January 17, 2024 11 AM-12:50 PM G11D
Sheraton New York, Times Square; 811 7th Avenue, NY, NY 10019 (between 52nd and 53rd St)

The Uses and Limitations of ChatGPT in Critical Thinking, Argumentation and Elementary Logical Reasoning

ChatGPT is now routinely used throughout the world, in, e.g., business, medicine, and scientific research. However, in academia it has created a problem—student cheating. Some faculty have not thought about how to use ChatGPT productively in their classes, but, instead, have given much thought to the problem of how to prevent their students from using it to cheat. Our session will not examine the cheating problem. Instead, we will examine how ChatGPT can be productively used (and what are its limitations) in research work in and in teaching critical thinking, argumentation, and elementary logical reasoning.

The format for the AILACT Group Session: three speakers and a discussant. Each speaker will present a talk; the discussant will comment on talks both as they are given and during discussion.

Chair: Lloyd Carr Professor Emeritus Rivier University

Invited Speaker: Ned Hall (Norman E. Vuilleumier Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University)
“Interfacing ChatGPT with Harvard’s Argument Diagramming Software”

Invited Speaker: Nathan Bice (AI Software Engineer, Rockstar Games)
“Meta-representation in ChatGPT and its use in Critical Thinking”

Speaker: Jeff Buechner (Associate Professor Rutgers University-Newark and Affiliated Research Scholar, The Saul Kripke Center, CUNY, The Graduate Center)
“Negative Uses of ChatGPT in Teaching Scientific Method, Principles of Argumentation and the Connections Between the Two”

Invited Discussant: Adam Elga (Professor, Princeton University)

Central Division

Please join us for the 2024 AILACT Group Session on the topic of “Artificial Intelligence and Critical Reasoning” at the APA-Central.

Place: Astor Crown Plaza in New Orleans, LA.

Time: Friday February 23rd, 2024 from 7 – 10 PM

A Zoom link will be available for those who might be interested in the session but cannot join us in person. Please email me at brommage@shsu.edu for more information.

Chair: Thomas Brommage (Sam Houston State University)

Michael B. Horton (Harper College) “Beating LLMs at Our Own Game”

Abstract: After the initial panic and excitement of seeing what LLMs can do subside, we are left with a familiar pedagogical question that we ask about any new technology: how must learning and assessment change in light of this technology? In our case, how must learning and assessment change in light of the abilities of automated content generators? This paper explores that question in two ways: first, it asks what critical thinking learning outcomes best fit with teaching and learning in the age of Bard and ChatGPT, among other LLMs. And, second, it asks what practices can help students achieve those learning outcomes. This paper broadly appeals to two aspects of critical thinking: metacognition, or thinking about one's own thinking, as well as the sense of ownership and authenticity that comes from accepting beliefs critically. The proposal is that a modified version of Turing's test for intelligent behavior can best satisfy the key aims of critical thinking. The gist of the modified version of Turing's test involves articulating criteria for determining when a sample of text goes beyond what an LLM is (currently) capable of achieving. In other words, the test begins with two samples, one from a student and one from an LLM, and asks whether the student sample displays metacognition of the appropriate sort and displays critical engagement with a topic or source material measurably better than the content generated by an LLM. This paper proposes several dimensions along which these criteria can be measured.

Deivide Garcia da S. Oliveira (Federal University of Reconcavo of Bahia) “How Feyerabend's Philosophy Is Relevant for Fostering Critical Thinking in an AI-Driven World”

Abstract: Critical thinking is a central theme across diverse academic disciplines, provoking discussions on its definition, cultivation, application, and value. In this context, we focus on Feyerabend's contributions to reflect on critical thinking and its relevance in the era of AI. Thus, our objective is twofold. First, we aim to introduce Feyerabend's stance on critical thinking. Our argument posits that Feyerabend's view on critical thinking hinges on nine constituents of his philosophical thought (Feyerabend, 1962, 1978, 1993, 1999 [1975]). *To sum up, they are i-proliferation of alternatives; ii-external standards of evaluation; iii-skeptical reasoning; iv-knowledge; v-humanitarian goal; vi-imagination; vii-education; viii-tenacity and ix-counterinduction.* According to Feyerabend, critical thinking will advocate for the pursuit of “the free development of the individual” (Feyerabend, 1993, p. 24), of his consciousness, fighting dogmatic thinking and indoctrination (Feyerabend, 1981 [1962], 1993, 1999 [1962]). However, an

essential question arises: Why should one embrace pluralism, criticizing their own views or the accepted knowledge when there seems to be no immediate reason, or way, to do so? Feyerabend asserts that knowledge and scientific theories have changed in the past and are still constantly changing. Therefore, part of what constitutes and fosters critical thinking is a sense of permanent curiosity and inquiry, something that educational institutions do not prioritize, but should. Thus, critical thinking has to do with learning how to take a distance from our own views, an insatiable thirst for the abundance of the ever-changing world (Athanasopoulos, 1994, p. 23; Feyerabend, 1962, p. 69; 1999; Oliveira, 2021).

The second part of our aim links Feyerabend's stance on critical thinking to the challenges posed by AI, such as making critical thinking harder to achieve. Feyerabend contends that critical thinking encompasses the capacity to question, imagine alternatives, and explore their underpinnings. Nevertheless, as we know, these capacities can be gradually limited by algorithmic constraints, such as the weight given to some choices and outcomes, the proliferation of automated decisions, and the narrowing of alternatives—features like these lead AIs to curtail the existing alternatives and the potential for creating new ones. According to Nowotny, through AI, the “motivation as well as the ability to stretch the boundaries of imagination is curtailed. To rely purely on the efficiency of prediction obscures the need for understanding why and how.” (Nowotny, 2021, p. 20). Nowotny reminds us that any AI that aims to be considered intelligent must not only be able to explain how things are but why they should not be, i.e., “it must be able to reason in a counterfactual way.” (Nowotny, 2021, p. 22). Counterfactual reasoning is crucial for critical thinking. Therefore, by curtailing alternatives and the capacity to challenge established knowledge and ideas, part of what AI does is damage human critical thinking, something Feyerabend would likely perceive as a threat to human consciousness and the exploration of the world's boundless possibilities. (Feyerabend, 1999). In summary, Feyerabend's work offers valuable insights on critical thinking, which is vital in the face of AI's potential to impair it.

João Carlos Salles (Federal University of Bahia) “The Dialogue's Context: Lessons from Charles L. Hamblin on Critical Thinking and Artificial Intelligence”

One general question challenges us: Is Critical Thinking a powerful instrument of intellectual formation that expands the dimension of logic and contributes to scientific investigation and rational decision-making, or can it also promote a deeper philosophical questioning about the conditions themselves of an authentic dialogue? If Critical Thinking were recognized only for its effectiveness in situations of deliberation and understanding, it would already be precious; however, if it has a limited scope, there is a significant risk of reducing it to a mere instrument whose value would be determined exclusively by its results. Reflection, however, can go much deeper, as with the seminal work of Charles Leonard Hamblin (1922-1985). The concern with the context of a dialogue is central to Hamblin, being present even in his most elementary text on logic, which takes the form of a programmed and progressive dialogue with the student (*Elementary Formal Logic*. London: Methuen, 1967). Similar attention reaches, however, higher levels of sophistication. In our presentation, we intend to recover the internal relations between Hamblin's well-known reflection on fallacies (*Fallacies*. London: Methuen, 1970) and his little-known reflection on imperatives (*Imperatives*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), associating both with his philosophical considerations on the context of authentic dialogues, which can even be expressed in mathematical models (“Mathematical models of dialogue.” *Theoria*, 37: 1971). Hamblin had the audacity, in a very Wittgensteinian bias, to subordinate the syntactic and semantic dimensions

of language to its pragmatic dimension so that fallacies and imperatives depend on a pragmatic context and presuppose the sharing of assumptions – in the case of fallacies, for example, the prior acceptance of prejudices about who enunciates; in the case of imperatives, the prior acceptance of those who have the authority to give an order. In particular, artificial intelligence was a constant theme for Hamblin – who created a programming language in 1957 (GEORGE – for General Order Generator). Finally, in *Linguistics and the Parts of the Mind: Or How to Build a Machine Worth Talking To* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), a text published decades after his death, we can find an innovative and premonitory perspective of the current days. Hamblin then set himself the challenge of thinking about the characteristics of a machine with which it was worth dialoguing. With this, in Hamblin’s lineage, Critical Thinking starts to involve the decantation of an innovative proposal of rationality, directly facing the theme of artificial intelligence, through which philosophical questions about the intrinsic connections between language and thought can be reformulated. Having established Hamblin’s contribution, we will conclude by showing whether Hamblin’s expectation is fulfilled or, on the contrary, frustrated with the current artificial intelligence tools in what would be “a new age of automated content generators.” In this way, meeting (of course, critically) the most current technological interest and offering a specific answer to our general question, Critical Thinking becomes central to philosophical reflection since such a conclusion, negative or positive, will only confirm the depth of the debate it aroused.

I hope to see you there!

Pacific Division

AILACT @APA Pacific will plan to take a one-year hiatus. Check back for updates next year, folks!

Essay Prize

The 2023 AILACT Essay Prize goes to Blake Scott, for his essay, “What Makes an Argument Strong? Contrastivism in the New Rhetoric.” Congratulations, Blake!

Honorable mention goes to Yanlin Liao and Zihan Niu, for their essay, “On the Legitimacy Problem of Visual Arguments.” Congratulations to you both!

2024 AILACT MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

AILACT (the Association for Informal Logic & Critical Thinking) was formed in 1983 to promote research on, and teaching and testing of, informal logic and critical thinking at all levels; to increase the extent and quality of such research, teaching, and testing; and to facilitate discussion among its members. AILACT sponsors sessions at each APA divisional meeting and other meetings; has a Web site, <http://ailact.wordpress.com/> that provides a wide variety of information about AILACT, informal logic, and critical thinking, and posts papers and other members' materials; has an e-mail discussion list for discussion of topics of interest to members; and holds an annual essay prize competition.

- I would like to become a member of AILACT (US\$10 or equivalent)
- I would like to renew my membership (US\$10 or equivalent)
- I would (also) like to make a tax-deductible donation to AILACT (a 501c3 organization)
- I am a student and would like to become a member of AILACT (Fees waived)

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Institutional affiliation (if any): _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Payment Options: **Check:** Make checks (US or Canadian only) payable to AILACT

Credit Card Payment: Please deduct US \$_____ from

Credit Card: Visa MasterCard

Account Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

PayPal: log in to your account and send the payment to Don Hatcher's email address (dhatcher@bakeru.edu). PayPal will indicate that your payment is to AILACT.

Mail to: Donald Hatcher, AILACT Treasurer, Department of Humanities, Baker University, Baldwin City, KS 66006 USA. Email: dhatcher@bakeru.edu

As a member, your email address will be added to the AILACTD-L discussion list, used to send the AILACT *Newsletter* and announcements and to post items for discussion and responses. Members can unsubscribe at any time.