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# Current ISSUES and Enduring QUESTIONS

*A Guide to Critical  
Thinking and Argument,  
with Readings*

F O U R T H E D I T I O N

SYLVAN BARNET & HUGO BEDAU

**USED** **USE**

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# CURRENT ISSUES AND ENDURING QUESTIONS

## A Guide to Critical Thinking and Argument, with Readings

Fourth Edition

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Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press



BOSTON

## **For Bedford Books**

*President and Publisher:* Charles H. Christensen

*General Manager and Associate Publisher:* Joan E. Feinberg

*Managing Editor:* Elizabeth M. Schaaf

*Developmental Editor:* Stephen A. Scipione

*Editorial Assistant:* Mark Reimold

*Production Editor:* Heidi Hood

*Production Assistant:* Pauline Chin

*Copyeditor:* Nancy Bell Scott

*Cover Design:* Diane Levy

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 95-76720

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

0 9 8 7 6  
f e d c

*For information, write:* St. Martin's Press, Inc.  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

*Editorial Offices:* Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press  
75 Arlington Street, Boston, MA 02116

ISBN: 0-312-11505-9

## **Acknowledgments**

Floyd Abrams, "Save Free Speech," from the *New York Times*, November 23, 1993.

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Jonathan H. Adler, "Little Green Lies: The Environmental Miseducation of America's Children," from *Policy Review*, Summer 1992. Reprinted by permission.

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Derek Bok, "Protecting Freedom of Expression on the Campus" (editors' title), from "Protecting Freedom of Expression at Harvard," in the *Boston Globe*, May 25, 1991. Reprinted by permission of the author.

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# Preface

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This book is a text—a book about reading other people’s arguments and writing your own arguments—and it is also an anthology—a collection of more than a hundred essays, ranging from Plato to the present, with a strong emphasis on contemporary arguments. In a moment we will be a little more specific about what sorts of essays we include, but first we want to mention our chief assumptions about the aims of a course that might use *Current Issues and Enduring Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking and Argument, with Readings*.

Probably most students and instructors would agree that, *as critical readers*, students should be able to

1. summarize accurately an argument they have read;
2. locate the thesis of an argument;
3. locate the assumptions, stated and unstated;
4. analyze and evaluate the strength of the evidence and the soundness of the reasoning offered in support of the thesis;
5. analyze, evaluate, and account for discrepancies among various readings on a topic (for example, explain why certain facts are used or not used, why two sources might differently interpret the same facts).

Probably, too, students and instructors would agree that, *as thoughtful writers*, students should be able to

1. imagine an audience, and write effectively for it (by such means as using the appropriate tone and providing the appropriate amount of detail);
2. present information in an orderly and coherent way;

3. incorporate sources into their own writing, not simply by quoting extensively or by paraphrasing, but also by having digested materials so that they can present it in their own words;
4. properly document all borrowings—not merely quotations and paraphrases but also borrowed ideas;
5. do all these things in the course of developing a thoughtful argument of their own.

**Part One** • In Part One (Chapters 1–6) we offer a short course in methods of thinking about arguments and in methods of writing arguments. By “thinking” we mean serious analytic thought; by “writing” we mean the use of effective, respectable techniques, not gimmicks such as the notorious note a politician scribbled in the margin of the text of his speech: “Argument weak; shout here.” For a delightfully wry account of the use of gimmicks, we recommend that you consult “The Art of Controversy,” in *The Will to Live*, by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer reminds his reader that a Greek or Latin quotation (however irrelevant) can be impressive to the uninformed, and that one can win almost any argument by loftily saying, “That’s all very well in theory, but it won’t do in practice.”

We offer lots of advice about setting forth an argument, but we do not offer instruction in one-upmanship. Rather, we discuss responsible ways of arguing persuasively. We know, however, that before one can write a persuasive argument one must clarify one’s own ideas—and that includes arguing with oneself—in order to find out what one really thinks about a problem. Therefore we devote Chapter 1 to critical thinking, Chapters 2 and 3 to critical reading, and Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to critical writing. These chapters are not all lecturing: They include twenty-two arguments (three are by students) for analysis and discussion.

All of the essays in the book are accompanied by questions. This is not surprising, given the emphasis we place on asking oneself questions in order to get ideas for writing. Among the chief questions that writers should ask, we suggest, are such matters as “What is X?” and “What is the value of X?” (pp. 1–9). By asking such questions—for instance (to look only at these two types of questions), “Is the fetus a person?” or “Is Arthur Miller a better playwright than Tennessee Williams?”—a writer probably will find ideas coming, at least after a few moments of head-scratching. The device of developing an argument by identifying issues is of course nothing new; indeed, it goes back to an ancient method of argument used by classical rhetoricians, who proceeded by identifying a *stasis* (an issue) and then asked questions about it: Did X do such-and-such? If so, was the action bad? If bad, how bad? And so on.

In keeping with our emphasis on writing as well as reading, we raise issues not only of what can roughly be called the “content” of the essays but also of what can (equally roughly) be called the “style”—that is, the ways in which the arguments are set forth. Content and style, of course, cannot

finally be kept apart. As Cardinal Newman said, "Thought and meaning are inseparable from each other. . . . *Style is thinking out into language.*" In our questions we sometimes ask the student to evaluate the effectiveness of the opening paragraph, or to explain a shift in tone from one paragraph to the next, or to characterize the persona of the author as revealed in the whole essay. In short, the book is not designed as an introduction to some powerful ideas (though in fact it is that, too); it is designed as an aid to writing thoughtful, effective arguments on important political, social, scientific, ethical, and religious issues.

The essays reprinted in this book also illustrate different styles of argument that arise, at least in part, from the different disciplinary backgrounds of the various authors. Essays by journalists, lawyers, social scientists, policy analysts, philosophers, critics, activists, and other writers—including undergraduates—will be found in these pages. The authors develop and present their views in arguments that have distinctive features reflecting their special training and concerns. The differences in argumentative styles found in these essays foreshadow the differences students will encounter in the readings assigned in many of their other courses.

Part One, then, is a preliminary (but we hope substantial) discussion of such topics as *getting ideas*, *using sources*, *evaluating kinds of evidence*, and *organizing material*, as well as an introduction to some ways of thinking.

**Part Two** • Part Two, *Readings: Current Issues*, begins with one chapter that includes nine debates (pairs of opposing arguments) on such topics as bilingual education, gun control, and prayer in school. The bulk of the section is devoted to nine additional chapters, in each of which several voices speak, on such topics as AIDS, the legalization of drugs, the environment, immigration, multiculturalism, and sexual harassment. (In effect, these chapters, which range from three essays to seven essays, are mini-casebooks, suitable for controlled research papers.)

**Part Three** • Part Three, *Readings: Enduring Questions*, extends the arguments to such topics as "What Is the Ideal Society?" and "What Are the Grounds of Religious Faith?" Here the reader encounters classical writers such as St. Paul, Machiavelli, Jefferson, and Mill, as well as such contemporary writers as Irving Kristol, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Mitsuye Yamada.

Of the contemporary selections in the book (drawn chiefly from such sources as *Ms.*, *The Nation*, *National Review*, the *New York Times*), many are very short—scarcely longer than the five-hundred-word essays that students are often asked to write.

**Part Four** • Part Four, *Further Perspectives*, begins with "A Literary Critic's View: Arguing about Literature." These pages should help students to see what sorts of things literary critics argue about and *how* they

argue, so the students can then apply what they have learned to the literary readings that appear among the *Enduring Questions*, where we include three stories, seven poems, and a one-act play.

The second chapter in Part Four is a summary of the philosopher Stephen Toulmin's method for analyzing arguments. This summary will assist those who wish to apply Toulmin's methods to the readings in our book. The third chapter, a more rigorous analysis of deduction, induction, and fallacies than is usually found in textbooks designed for composition courses, reexamines from a logician's point of view material already treated briefly in Chapter 3. The fourth chapter, again on logic, is Max Shulman's amusing story, "Love Is a Fallacy." The fifth chapter, an essay by psychotherapist Carl R. Rogers, complements the discussion of audience, organization, and tone in Chapter 5.

The Instructor's Edition includes the appendix, "Resources for Teaching," containing detailed suggestions about ways in which the essays may be approached, and many additional suggestions for writing.

***New to the Fourth Edition*** • In preparing the fourth edition we were greatly aided by suggestions from instructors who were using the third edition. In line with their recommendations, we have amplified the first chapter, a discussion of critical thinking, which examines the roles of imagination, analysis, and evaluation. Also new to Part One are nine of the twenty-two essays, including a new research paper on televising trials. Among the other new essays are "Just Take Away Their Guns" and "Five Myths about Immigration."

In Part Two we have included (in the nine paired debates) new essays on prayer in school and on sex education. In the chapters with more than two essays on a topic, we have added two new topics, "Immigration" and "Television Violence," and we have made many substitutions in the sections that we have retained from the previous edition.

In Part Three, *Readings: Enduring Questions*, we now include eleven works of literature.

In Part Four, "A Literary Critic's View: Arguing about Literature" is new.

There can be no argument about the urgency of the topics that we have added, but there can be lots of argument about the merits of the positions offered in the selections. That's where the users of the book, students and instructors alike, come in.

**Note:** For instructors who do not require a text with a large number of essays, a shorter edition of this book, *Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing*, is also available. The shorter version contains the first six chapters of the present book (all of the material on critical thinking, reading, and writing) with twenty-eight essays, including three pairs of debates. It also contains five chapters of Part Four, with (1) material on arguing about literature; (2) the material on Toulmin; (3) additional material on deduction;

induction, and fallacies; (4) Max Shulman's "Love Is a Fallacy"; and (5) Carl R. Roger's essay on communication.

**Acknowledgments** • Finally, it is our pleasant duty to thank those who have strengthened the book by their advice: Roy M. Anker, Calvin College; Robert Baird, University of Illinois; Claudia Basha, Victor Valley College; Mark Bedau; Frank Beesley, University of Nebraska at Lincoln; Donavin Bennes, University of North Dakota; Laurie J. Bergamini, State University of New York at Plattsburgh; Jeffrey Berger, Community College of Philadelphia; B. J. Bowman, Radford University; Anthony Boyle, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Moana Boyle, Ricks College; Beverly M. Braud, Southwest Texas State University; Edward Brooks, Bergen Community College; Duane Bruce, University of Hartford; Jacintha Burke, King's College; Janet Carter, Bridgewater State College; Brandon Cesmat, Palomar College; Claire Chantell, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Jo Chern, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay; Barbara G. Clark, Adams State College; Denise Clark, Santa Clara University; James Clarke, Washington State University; Lorna Clymer, University of California at Santa Barbara; Sherill Cobb, Collin County Community College; Bobbie Cohen, Florida University; Paul Cohen, Southwest Texas State University; Minnie A. Collins, Seattle Central Community College; Marie Conte, California State University-Dominguez Hills; Genevieve Coogan, Houston Northwest Community College; Dr. Michael E. Cooley, Berry College; Susan Carolyn Cowan, University of Southern California; Linda Daigle, Houston Central Community College; Anne D'Arcy, California State University-Hayward; Fara Darland, Scottsdale Community College; Kent R. DeVault, Central Washington University; Robert Denham, Roanoke College; Allen DiWederburg, Clockamas Community College; Carl Dockery, Tri-County Community College; Paula Doctor, Muskegon Community College; Alberta M. Dougan, Southeast Missouri State University; Elizabeth Elclepp, Rancho Santiago Community College; Diane El-Rouaiheb, University of Louisville; Hal Enger, San Diego Mesa College; Dianne Fallon, State University of New York at Binghamton; Amy Farmer, University of Illinois; John Finnegan, West Liberty State College; Jane Fischer, Southwest State University; Anne Marie Frank, Elmhurst College; Amy Freed, Virginia Polytechnic Institute; Michael J. Galgano, James Madison University; Joseph E. Geist, Central Methodist College; Sheryl Gobble, San Diego City College; Stuart Goodman, Duke University; Mary Anne F. Grabarek, Durham Technical Community College; Tim Gracyk, Santa Clara University; Becky C. Graham, Livingston University; Rebecca Graham, University of Minnesota-Morris; Richard Grande, Pennsylvania State University; Mark A. Graves, Bowling Green State University; Verge Hagopian, Orange Coast College; Dennis R. Hall, University of Louisville; William M. Hamlin, Idaho State University; Donald Heidt, College of the Canyons; Charles Heimler, California State University at Hayward; Janet Ruth Heller, Grand Valley State University; John C. Herold, Elon College;



Edwin L. Hetfield, Jr., Onondaga Community College; Katherine Hoffman, Roanoke College; Pau-San Hoh, Marist College; Cathy Hope, Tarleton State University; Diane W. Howard, Valdosta State University; Barbara Hunter, Wright College; Joan Hutchison, Oakland Community College; Dr. Brian D. Ingraffia, Biola University; Shelly Jaffray, Rancho Santiago Community College; Alison Jasper, California Polytechnic State University; Janet Juhnke, Kansas Wesleyan University; Diane M. Kammerer, Anoka-Ramsey Community College; Priscilla Kelly, Slippery Rock University; Mary Jane Kinnebrew, San Jacinto College Central; Geoffrey Klinger, University of Iowa; Bobbie Knable, Tufts University; Prudence Kohl, Baldwin-Wallace College; Elaine W. Kromhout, Indian River Community College; Brother Christopher Lambert, Quincy College; Richard L. Larson, Lehman College; John Lawing, Regent University; J. N. Lee, Portland State University; Charles Lefcourt, State University of New York at Buffalo; Elizabeth Lewis, Manhattanville College; L. M. Lewis, University of Texas at Brownsville; Alex Liddie, Trenton State College; Miriam Lilley, College of the Canyons; John Little, James Madison University; Martin Litz, Raymond Walters College; Warren H. Loveless, Indiana State University; Christopher Lukasik, University of Washington; Tom Lynch, California State University at Hayward; Carter Lyons, James Madison University; Marcia MacLennan, Kansas Wesleyan University; Kelli Maloy, West Virginia University; Ruth E. Manson, South Dakota State University; Diane Marlett, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay; Brian Massey, Winthrop College; Alice Maudsley, Cleveland State University; James May, Pennsylvania State University; Nelly McFeely, California State University and Merritt College; Ted McFerrin, Collin County Community College; Natalie McKnight, Boston University; Dan C. Miller, University of Northern Colorado; Peggy A. Moore, College of Siskiyous; Mary Munsil, University of Southern California; Cris Newport, New Hampshire Technical Institute; Melanie Ohler; Leonard Orr, Washington State University; Roswell Park, State University of New York at Buffalo; Scott Payne, University of Louisville; Robert Peltier, Trinity College; Nancy P. Pope, Washington University; Constance Putnam; Jan Rainbird, California State University at Fullerton; Sally Lynn Raines, West Virginia University; Elaine Reed, Kutztown University; M. Resnick, State University of New York at Farmingdale; Dan Richards; Susan Roberson, Auburn University; Helen M. Robinette, Glassboro State College; Linda Rosekraus, State University of New York, College at Cortland; Jennifer O. Rosti, Roanoke College; Julie H. Rubio, University of Southern California at Long Beach; Rebecca Sabounchi, University of Texas; Suzette Schlapkohl, Scottsdale Community College; Henry Schwarzschild; Andrew J. Smyth, St. Louis University; Lynn Steiner, Cuesta College; Skaidrite Stelzer, University of Toledo; Elisabeth Stephens, University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Ed Stieve, Nova College; Barbara W. Stewart, Long Beach City College; Suba Subbarao, Oakland Community College; Catherine Sutton, University of Louisville; Richard C. Taylor, East Carolina University; Diane Thompson,

Harrisburg Area Community College; Eve Thompson, College of the Siskiyons; Linda Toonen, University of Wisconsin at Green Bay; David Tumpelman, Monroe Community College; Pauline Uchmanowicz, University of Rhode Island; Lynn A. Walkiewicz, Cazenovia College; Kathleen Walsh, Central Oregon Community College; Nancy Weingart, John Carroll University; Stephen White; Phyllis C. Whitesoll, Franklin and Marshall College; Allen D. Widerburg, Clackamas Community College; Marilyn Wienk, Elmira College; Stephen Wilhoit, University of Dayton; Michelle L. Zath, Berry College; Bruce D. Zessin, University of Wisconsin at Waukesha.

We are also indebted to the people at Bedford Books, especially Charles H. Christensen, Joan E. Feinberg, Stephen A. Scipione, Elizabeth M. Schaaf, Heidi Hood, and Mark Reimold, who offered many valuable (and invaluable) suggestions. Intelligent, informed, firm yet courteous, they really know how to think, and how to argue.

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