

VINCENT RYAN RUGGIERO

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BEYOND FEELINGS
A Guide to Critical Thinking

SEVENTH EDITION

Beyond Feelings

A Guide to Critical Thinking

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Vincent Ryan Ruggiero

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Higher Education

*To the memory of Howard Trumble,
whose quiet practice of the skills
detailed in this book was an inspiration
to me, to his family, and to all who knew him*

BEYOND FEELINGS

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Preface

When the first edition of this book appeared in 1975, the dominant intellectual focus was still subjectivity, *feelings*. That focus, the legacy of the 1960s, was originally a necessary reaction to the rationalism and behaviorism that preceded it. It declared, in effect, "People are not robots. They are more than the sum total of their physiology. They have hopes, dreams, emotions. No two humans are alike—each has a special perspective, a unique way of perceiving the world. And any view of humanity that ignores this subjective side is a distortion."

Yet, despite its value, the focus on feelings went too far. Like many other movements, what began as a reaction against an extreme view became an extreme view itself. The result of that extremism was the neglect of thinking. This book was designed to answer that neglect. The introduction to the first edition explained its rationale as follows:

The emphasis on subjectivity served to correct a dangerous oversimplification. But it is the kind of reaction that cannot be sustained for long without causing an even worse situation—the neglect of thinking. Worse for two reasons. First, because we live in an age of manipulation. Armies of hucksters and demagogues stand ready with the rich resources of psychology to play upon our emotions and subconscious needs to persuade us that superficial is profound, harmful is beneficial, evil is virtuous. And feelings are especially vulnerable to such manipulation.

Secondly, because in virtually every important area of modern life—law, medicine, government, education, science, business, and community affairs—we are beset with serious problems and complex issues that demand careful gathering and weighing of facts and informed opinions, thoughtful consideration of various conclusions or actions, and judicious selection of the best conclusion or most appropriate action. . . .

[Today's college student] has been conditioned not to undervalue subjectivity, but to overvalue it. And so he does not need to have his feelings indulged. Rather, he needs to be taught how to sort out his feelings, decide to what extent they have been shaped by external influences, and evaluate them carefully when they conflict among themselves or with the feelings of others. In short, he needs to be taught to think critically.*

*In 1975, "he" was still accepted as a reference to both sexes.

There is an unfortunate tendency among many to view feeling and thought as mutually exclusive, to force a choice between them. If we focus on one, then in their view we must reject the other. But this is mistaken. Feeling and thought are perfectly complementary. Feeling, being more spontaneous, is an excellent beginning to the development of conclusions. And thought, being more deliberate, provides a way to identify the best and most appropriate feeling. Both are natural.

Thinking, however, is less automatic than feeling. To do it well demands a systematic approach and guided practice.

The general attitude toward thinking has changed considerably since the mid-1970s. The view that critical thinking is an important skill to which education should give prominence is no longer a minority view. Hundreds of voices have joined the chorus calling for the addition of critical thinking objectives to existing courses and even the creation of special courses in thinking. There is little disagreement that the challenges of the new millennium demand minds that can move beyond feelings to clear, impartial, critical problem solving and decision making.

Features of This Edition

This edition of *Beyond Feelings* retains the basic organization of previous editions. The first section explains the psychological, philosophical, and social context in which critical thinking takes place and describes the habits and attitudes that enhance such thinking. The second section helps students recognize and overcome common errors in thinking. The third section provides a step-by-step strategy for dealing with issues.

Within the overall design, however, I have made a number of changes, most in response to the helpful suggestions of reviewers.

- The Introduction encourages students not to be bound by the chapter sequence but to read ahead whenever doing so will help them examine issues and complete their assignments more effectively.
- Chapter 1 contains an expanded discussion of the process of manipulation that often occurs in today's mass culture.
- Chapter 2 includes two new sections: "Critical Thinking and Discussion" and "Avoiding Plagiarism."
- Several of the thinking errors discussed in Part II have been further clarified and illustrated, notably "Unwarranted Assumptions" in Chapter 9.
- The section on the Internet in Chapter 17 has been expanded.
- A new kind of application, "A Difference of Opinion," has been added to each of the first thirteen chapters. In each case a current controversy is briefly described. Then students are invited to research it in the library and/or on the Internet, apply their critical

thinking to their findings, and prepare a written or oral report (as their instructor specifies).

As in the past, I have attempted to follow George Orwell's sage advice: "Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent." This is not always easy. When logicians are taught terms such as *argumentum ad hominem*, *non sequitur*, and "affirming the consequent," they naturally want to use them. Arguments for doing so urge themselves upon us: for example, "These are the most precise terms. Don't join the ranks of the coddlers and deprive students of them." In weak moments I succumb to this appeal. (Until this edition, for example, I included the term *enthymeme*. *Mea culpa* . . . there I go again.) But is the precision of such terms the real reason for my wanting to use them? Is it not possible that we professors enjoy parading our knowledge, or that we are reluctant to spare our students the struggle we were forced to undergo ("We suffered, so they should too")? It seems to me that modern culture already provides too many impediments to critical thinking for us to add more.

Is it possible to carry this plain language commitment too far? Yes, and some will think I have done so in avoiding the term *inferences* and speaking instead of conclusions. But I respectfully disagree. Lexicographers point out that the distinction between these terms is extremely subtle, so it seems more reasonable not to devote time to it. Also, I avoid using the term *values* whenever possible for a somewhat different reason. The word *value* is so associated with relativism that its use in this context can undermine the crucial idea that arguments differ in quality. For many students, the word *value* triggers the thought, "Everyone has a right to his or her values; mine are right for me, and though they may need 'clarification' from time to time, they are never to be questioned." This thought impedes critical thinking.

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Introduction

Beyond Feelings is designed to introduce you to the subject of critical thinking. The subject may be new to you because it has not been emphasized in most elementary and secondary schools. In fact, until fairly recently, it was not taught in most colleges. For the past four decades, the dominant emphasis has been on subjectivity rather than objectivity, on feeling rather than on thought.

Over the past twenty years, however, a number of studies of America's schools have criticized the neglect of critical thinking, and a growing number of educators and leaders in business, industry, and the professions have urged the development of new courses and teaching materials to overcome that neglect.

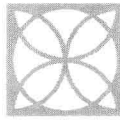
It is no exaggeration to say that critical thinking is one of the most important subjects you will study in college regardless of your academic major. The quality of your schoolwork, your efforts in your career, your contributions to community life, your conduct of personal affairs—all will depend on your ability to solve problems and make decisions.

The book has three main sections. The first, "The Context," will help you understand such important concepts as *individuality*, *thinking*, *truth*, *knowledge*, *opinion*, *evidence*, and *argument* and to overcome attitudes and ideas that obstruct critical thinking. The second section, "The Pitfalls," will teach you to recognize and avoid the most common errors in thinking. The third section, "A Strategy," will help you acquire the various skills used in addressing problems and issues. This section includes tips on identifying and overcoming your personal intellectual weaknesses as well as techniques for becoming more observant, clarifying issues, conducting inquiries, evaluating evidence, analyzing other people's views, and making sound judgments.

At the end of each chapter, you will find a number of applications to challenge your critical thinking and exercise your skills. These applications cover problems and issues both timely and timeless.

Students sometimes get the idea that a textbook must be read page by page and that reading ahead violates some unwritten rule. This notion is mistaken. Students' background knowledge varies widely; what one student knows very well, another knows only vaguely, and a third is totally unfamiliar with. Any time you need or want to look ahead to an explanation in a later chapter, by all means do so. Let's say you make a statement and a friend says, "That's relativism, pure and simple." If you aren't sure exactly what she means, go to the index, look up "relativism," proceed to the appropriate page, and find out.

Looking ahead is especially prudent in the case of concepts and procedures relevant to the end-of-chapter applications. One such concept is plagiarism. If you are not completely clear on what constitutes plagiarism, why it is unacceptable in college, and how to avoid it, take a few minutes right now to learn. Look for the heading "Avoiding Plagiarism" toward the end of the Chapter 2. Similarly, if you are not as skilled as you would like to be doing library or Internet research, it would be a good idea to read Chapter 17 now. Doing so could save you a great deal of time and effort completing homework assignments.



PART ONE

The Context

Anyone who wishes to master an activity must first understand its tools and rules. This is as true of critical thinking as it is of golf, carpentry, flying a plane, or brain surgery. In critical thinking, however, the tools are not material objects but concepts, and the rules govern mental rather than physical performance.

This first section explores seven important concepts—*individuality*, *critical thinking*, *truth*, *knowledge*, *opinion*, *evidence*, and *argument*—with a separate chapter devoted to each. Most of these concepts are so familiar that you may be inclined to wonder whether there is any point to examining them. The answer is yes, for three reasons. First, much of what is commonly believed about these concepts is mistaken. Second, whoever examines them carefully is always rewarded with fresh insights. Third, the more thorough your knowledge of these concepts, the more proficient you can be in your thinking.



CHAPTER 1

Who Are You?

Suppose someone asked, “Who are you?” It would be simple enough to respond with your name. But if the person wanted to know the entire story about who you are, the question would be more difficult to answer. You’d obviously have to give the details of your height, age, and weight. You’d also have to include all your sentiments and preferences, even the secret ones you’d never shared with anyone—your affection for your loved ones; your desire to please the people you associate with; your dislike of your older sister’s husband; your allegiance to your favorite beverage, brand of clothing, and music.

Your attitudes couldn’t be overlooked either—your impatience when an issue gets complex, your aversion to certain courses, your fear of high places and dogs and speaking in public. The list would go on. To be complete, it would have to include all your characteristics—not only the physical but also the emotional and intellectual.

To provide all that information would be quite a chore. But suppose the questioner was still curious and asked, “How did you get the way you are?” If your patience were not yet exhausted, chances are you’d answer something like this: “I’m this way because I choose to be, because I’ve considered other sentiments and preferences and attitudes and have made my selections. The ones I have chosen fit my style and personality best.” That answer is natural enough, and in part it’s true. But in a larger sense, it’s not true. The impact of the world on all of us is much greater than most of us realize.

The Influence of Time and Place

Not only are you a member of a particular species, *Homo sapiens*, but also you exist at a particular moment in the history of that species. Life today is quite different from life thirty years ago, and very different from life in A.D. 1500 or

10,000 B.C. The world's state of progress differs, as does its knowledge and beliefs and values. The opportunities for learning and working and relaxing are not the same, so people's daily thoughts and actions vary.

Variations in place and circumstance also can make a difference. If you're from a large city, the odds are you look at many things differently from someone in the country. A person raised for eighteen years in New York City or Los Angeles who goes to college in a town of three thousand will find the experience difficult. So will a person raised on an isolated farm, but probably for opposite reasons!

If you are an American sports enthusiast, you're probably interested in football, baseball, or basketball. But if you were Asian, you'd be much more familiar with and excited about Ping-Pong or badminton; and if you were English, cricket. If one of your parents were an automobile mechanic, you undoubtedly would know more about cars than the average person. If your other parent were a teacher, you'd tend to have a somewhat different perspective on school and teachers compared with other students.

In much the same way, all the details about the members of your family very likely have some bearing on who you are. Their religion, race, national origin, political affiliation, economic level, and attitudes toward one another all have made some contribution to your identity.

Of course, you may have rejected your parents' beliefs and values. Still, whether you accepted or rejected what your parents tried to teach you, your present views grew out of those teachings. In forming your views you were responding to your upbringing. Given different parents with a different culture and values—growing up, say, in Istanbul rather than Dubuque—your response would necessarily be different. You would, in that sense, not be the same person.

The Influence of Mass Culture

In centuries past, family and teachers were the dominant, and sometimes the only, influence on children. Today, however, the influence exerted by mass culture (the broadcast media, newspapers, magazines, and popular music) often is greater.

By age eighteen the average teenager has spent 11,000 hours in the classroom and 22,000 hours in front of the television set. He or she has done perhaps 13,000 school lessons yet has watched more than 750,000 commercials. By age thirty-five the same person has had fewer than 20,000 school lessons yet has watched approximately 45,000 hours of television and seen close to 2 million commercials.

What effects does mass culture have on us? To answer, we need only consider the formats and devices commonly used in the media. Modern

advertising typically bombards the public with slogans and testimonials by celebrities. This approach is designed to appeal to emotions and create artificial needs for products and services. As a result, many people develop the habit of responding emotionally, impulsively, and gullibly to such appeals. They also tend to acquire values very different from those taught in the home and the school. Ads often portray play as more fulfilling than work, self-gratification as more desirable than self-control, and materialism as more meaningful than idealism.

Television programmers use frequent scene shifts and sensory appeals such as car crashes, violence, and sexual encounters to keep audience interest from diminishing. Then they add frequent commercial interruptions. This author has analyzed the attention shifts that television viewers are subjected to. In a dramatic program, for example, attention shifts might include camera angle changes;* shifts in story line from one set of characters (or subplot) to another, or from a present scene to a past one (flashback) or to fantasy; and shifts to “newsbreaks,” to commercial breaks, from one commercial to another, and back to the program. Also included might be shifts of attention that occur *within* commercials. I found as many as 78 shifts per hour, excluding the shifts within commercials. The number of shifts within commercials ranged from 6 to 54 and averaged approximately 17 per fifteen-second commercial. The total number of attention shifts came out to over 800 per hour, or over 14 per minute.**

This manipulation has prevented many people from developing a mature attention span. They expect the classroom and the workplace to provide the same constant excitement they get from television. That, of course, is an impossible demand, and when it isn't met they call their teachers boring and their work unfulfilling. Because people seldom have the patience to read books that require them to think, many publishers have replaced serious books with light fare written by celebrities.

Even when writers of serious books do manage to become published authors, they are often directed to give short, dramatic answers during promotional interviews, sometimes at the expense of accuracy. A man who coaches writers for talk shows offered one client this advice: “If I ask you whether the budget deficit is a good thing or a bad thing, you should not say, ‘Well, it stimulates the economy but it passes on a burden.’ You have to say, ‘It’s a great idea!’ Or, ‘It’s a terrible idea!’ It doesn’t matter

*This is typically accomplished by using two or more cameras and switching from one camera to another.

**There are about eleven minutes of commercials per hour, the exact time varying by network and program. Thus, at a rate of 4 per minute, the total number of commercials per hour is 44. This calculates, therefore, to 78 shifts outside commercials plus 748 shifts within commercials (17 shifts per commercial times 44 commercials per hour) for a total of 826.