I G H T H E D I T I O N

Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric

he Use of Reason in Everyday Life

OWARD KAHANE / NANCY CAVENDER

Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric

The Use of Reason in Everyday Life

EIGHTH EDITION

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I do not pretend to know what many ignorant men are sure of.

— Clarence Darrow

To know that we know what we know, and that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge.

— Henry David Thoreau

We have met the enemy and he is us.

— Walt Kelly's "Pogo"

Education is not simply the world of abstract verbalized knowledge.

— Aldous Huxley

Many people would sooner die than think. In fact, they do.

— Bertrand Russell

You can fool too many of the people too much of the time.

— James Thurber

PREFACE

The purpose of this eighth edition of *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric*, as of the previous seven, is to help students improve their ability to reason well about problems they encounter in everyday life and about issues that are debated in the social/political arena. The intent is not to move to students to the right or left on the political spectrum but rather to help them move *up* on the scale measuring rational sophistication.

The text contains examples and exercise items drawn from a broad range of sources—television programs, advertisements, literary works, political speeches, newspaper columns, and so on. Students get to sharpen their ability to think critically by reasoning about important topics and issues—abortion, astrology, capitalism, corruption, drugs, diets, doublespeak—instead of examples concerning sophomores dating seniors or all Greeks being mortal. It quotes from the writings, comments, and testimony of Aristotle, Molefi Kete Asante, Woody Allen, Muhammed Ali, Saint Augustine, Candice Bergen, Joyce Brothers, Ambrose Bierce, Winston Churchill, Ray Charles, Linda Chavez, William Shakespeare, O. J. Simpson, Adlai Stevenson, and hundreds of others. Examples are drawn from astrological predictions, Budweiser commercials, Clinton political doings, syndicated columnists, canned letters sent by members of Congress in response to constituent queries, works of literature, and hundreds of other sources. Instead of the made-to-order cartoons that appear in some other texts, *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* contains drawings by the likes of David Levine, Edward Sorel, Tom Toles, George Booth, Jules Feiffer, and many others, and comic strips featuring *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Andy Capp*, *Doonesbury*, *Beetle Bailey*, *Dennis the Menace*, and others to illustrate points in a lively and interesting manner. The trademark of *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* always has been, and still is, ease of comprehension and the presentation of up-to-date and interesting material. Textbooks need not be dull!

New to the Eighth Edition

The principal changes in this edition are these:

1. Hundreds of old examples have been replaced by more up-to-date items culled from the (sadly) thousands of new candidates.
2. Hundreds of old exercise items have been replaced by new ones.
3. Although much of the text again has been rewritten to improve organization, style, and flow, the general subject matter covered by this new edition has not changed. Several substantive changes have been made, however, including the following:
   a. The material concerning background beliefs and world views that constituted part of Chapter 1 has been expanded into a new chapter (Chapter 2). The point of this change is to emphasize the strong influence that background beliefs have on our ability to reason successfully about most of the problems encountered in everyday life and to stress the need to develop a large and accurate stock of background beliefs regularly checked for accuracy.
   b. Several examples have been added from important literary works—for example, by Conrad and Forster—as a way of nicely illustrating how world views influence reasoning in daily life.
   c. The chapter on evaluating and constructing extended argumentative works (essays) has been divided into two separate chapters, so that these two different (even if related) skills can be addressed separately. The material on constructing effective argumentative essays has been sharply increased.
   d. A section on new marketing wrinkles has been added to the chapter on advertising (Chapter 10), the point being to better educate students concerning the ways advertisers attempt to manipulate consumers—all of us—and thus to help students to become more savvy consumers.
   e. A new section on recent media developments has been added to the chapter on managing the news (Chapter 11), including a discussion about the import of the increasing concentration of mass media ownership in the hands of a very few megacorporations.
   f. A new section on how politics affects the selection of public school textbooks has been added to the textbook chapter (Chapter 12), the point being to improve the explanation as to how politics affects the content, tone, accuracy, and slant of public school textbooks.
   g. Several new sections have been added to the Appendix, including one dealing with the concepts of cause and effect and one on the nature of scientific method. Note also that the section on gambling fallacies and the calculation of probabilities has been moved to the Appendix.

Organization of the Text

The thought that sparked the original organization of material in *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* way back in 1969–1970 was that student reasoning about everyday topics could be improved by acquainting them with a few basic principles of good reasoning and, in particular, by enlightening them concerning common ways in which people are taken in by fallacious arguments and reasoning in everyday life. But a close examina-

tion of the ways in which reasoning in fact goes wrong in everyday life showed that it does so in a majority of cases first because of a lack of sufficient (or sufficiently accurate) background information; second, because of all of the psychological impediments (wishful thinking, rationalization, prejudice, superstition, provincialism, and so on) that stand in the way of cogent reasoning; and third, because of a poor understanding of the nature and quality of the various information sources.

Taking account of this insight has resulted in a book that divides into eight parts, as follows:

1. *Good and Bad Reasoning*: Chapter 1 introduces students to some basic ideas about good and bad reasoning, including some rudimentary remarks about deduction and induction and the three overarching fallacy categories.
2. *Background Beliefs*: Chapter 2 discusses the importance of background beliefs and world views for cogent reasoning.
3. *Fallacious Reasoning*: Chapters 3, 4, and 5 discuss fallacious reasoning, concentrating on how to avoid fallacies by becoming familiar with the types most frequently encountered in everyday life. The point is to help students increase their ability to spot fallacious reasoning by discussing the most common types of fallacious argument and by providing students with examples drawn from everyday life on which to practice.
4. *Impediments to Cogent Reasoning*: Chapter 6 talks about wishful thinking, rationalization, provincialism, denial, and so on, and how to overcome them. It explains the attractiveness and mistaken nature of belief in the paranormal and other pseudosciences. (Some instructors pass over this chapter on the grounds that the topic is more appropriately taught in psychology classes, not in classes primarily concerned with critical reasoning. But the reality here is that many students do not take the relevant psychology classes and that those who do often are provided with a purely theoretical account divorced from the students' own reasoning in everyday life, not with a "how-to" discussion designed to help them overcome these obstacles to rational thought.)
5. *Language*: Chapter 7 discusses the ways in which language itself can be used to manipulate, for instance, via doubletalk or long-winded locutions. (This chapter also contains a section, not common in critical thinking texts, on the linguistic revolution that has tremendously reduced the use of sexist, racist, and other pejorative locutions in everyday discourse, and it also has a few things to say about the use of politically correct (PC) locutions.)
6. *Evaluating and Writing Cogent Essays*: Chapter 8 deals with the evaluation of extended argumentative passages—essays, editorials, political speeches, and so on. Chapter 9 addresses the writing of these kinds of argumentative passages. (Instructors are urged not to pass over Chapter 9 and are urged to have students write *at least* two argumentative papers during the semester. Writing is very likely the best way in which we all can learn to sharpen our ability to reason well.)
7. *Important Sources of Information*: Chapter 10 discusses advertising (singling out political ads for special scrutiny) as an information source; Chapter 11 the media (television, newspapers, radio, books, and magazines), in particular, the mass media; and Chapter 12 public school textbooks. (For many people,

these are the most important sources of information about how the world works. Instructors are urged not to pass over the chapter on the media too quickly: In this day and age, so much that happens in our lives depends on our being able to assess accurately what the media—in particular, the mass media—tell us.)

8. *More on Cogent Reasoning*: Additional material on deduction and induction, cause and effect, scientific method, and so on is provided in the Appendix, including a few words about syllogisms and about a common misconception concerning the difference between deductive and inductive reasoning.

Note also that a section at the back of the book provides answers to selected exercise items. It should be remembered, however, that most of the execise items in this text are drawn from everyday life, where shades of gray outnumber blacks and whites. The answers provided thus constitute author responses rather than definitive pronouncements. Similar remarks apply to the answers to the remaining exercise items provided in the *Instructor's Manual* designed to accompany *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric*.

The Unique Nature of *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric*

This book is unique among critical reasoning texts in bringing together all of these apparently diverse elements, in particular, in stressing the importance of bringing to bear good background information when dealing with everyday problems and in so extensively discussing the most important information sources. In this complicated modern world, all of us are laypersons most of the time with respect to most topics; the ability to deal effectively with the "expert" information available to us via the media—to separate wheat from chaff—thus is crucial to our ability to reason well about everyday problems, whether of a personal or of a social/political nature.

Although the text contains much discussion of theory, this is *not* a treatise on the theory of cogent and fallacious reasoning. Rather, it is designed to help students learn *how* to reason well and *how* to avoid fallacious reasoning. That is why so many examples and exercise items have been included—arranged so as to increase student sophistication as they progress through the book—and why exercises and examples have been drawn primarily from everyday life. Learning how to reason well and how to evaluate the rhetoric of others is a skill that, like most others, requires practice, in this case practice on the genuine article—actual examples drawn from everyday life.

This text provides students with more than the usual supply of exercise items (many hundreds in fact), but perhaps the most important are those requiring them to do things on their own: find examples from the mass media; write letters to elected officials; do research on specified topics. (The *Instructor's Manual*, available to adopters of the text, suggests several other kinds of student activities—for example, classroom debates on issues of the day—that dovetail nicely with the spirit of the text.)

A true critical reasoning course, or textbook, is unthinkable in a closed or authoritarian society and antithetical to the indoctrination practiced in that kind of culture. The authors of this text take very seriously the admonition that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Citizens who think for themselves, rather than uncritically ingesting what their leaders and others with power tell them, are the absolutely necessary ingredient of a society that is to remain free.

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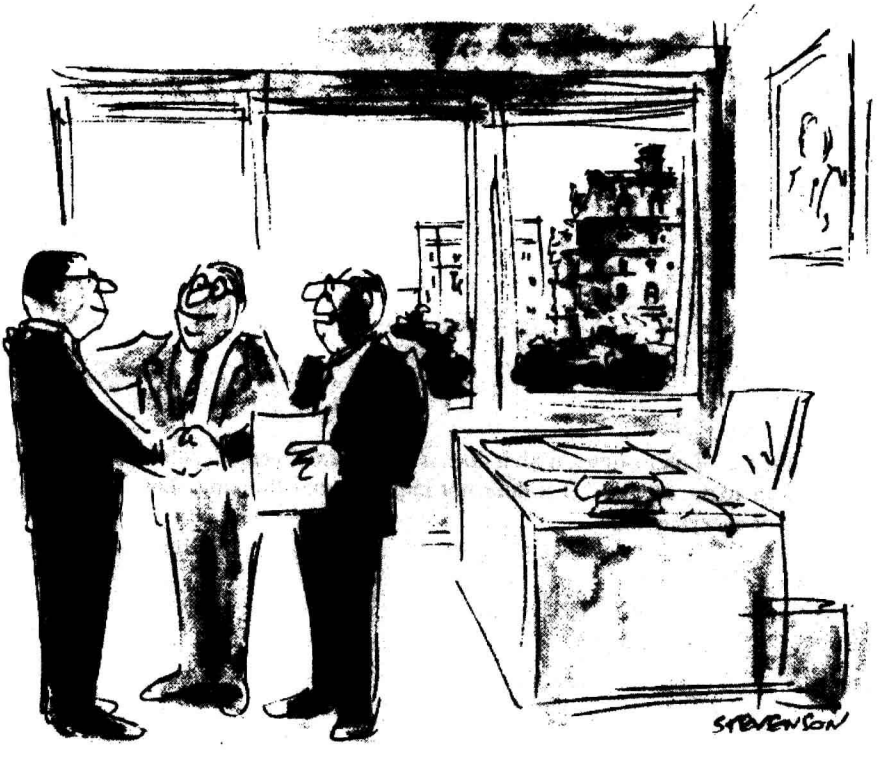
What is the use of philosophy, if all it does is enable you to talk . . . about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., and if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life?

— Ludwig Wittgenstein



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"Congratulations, Dave! I don't think I've read a more beautifully evasive and subtly misleading public statement in all my years in government."

Cartoon commentary on the state of contemporary rhetoric.

CONTENTS

It's much easier to do and die than it is to reason why.

— H. A. Studdert Kennedy

Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted . . . but to weigh and consider.

— Francis Bacon

You can lead a man up to the university, but you can't make him think.

— Finley Peter Dunne

You can lead me to college . . . but you can't make me think.

— Sweatshirt update seen at Duke University

Chapter 1

Good and Bad Reasoning

There is much truth to the old saying that life is just one problem after another. That's why problem solving is one of life's major preoccupations. **Reasoning** is the essential ingredient in problem solving. When confronted with a problem, those of us who are rational reason from what we already know, or have good reason to believe, or can find out, to new beliefs useful in solving that problem. The trick, of course, is to reason well. This book is about good reasoning—about how to reason well in everyday life—whether dealing with personal problems or those of a social or political nature.

Fortunately, no one is an island. We all have available to us a great deal of knowledge others have gained through experience and good reasoning—accurate information and well-intended advice available to anyone who reaches out for it. Unfortunately, not all information is created equal. Charlatans and fools can speak as loudly as saints or Nobel prize winners. The trick when evaluating the mountain of verbiage we all are exposed to is to separate the nourishing wheat from the expendable chaff. One way to become good at doing this is to think a bit about what makes reasoning good (cogent), as opposed to bad (fallacious).

1. Reasoning and Arguments

Here is a simple example of reasoning about the nature/nurture issue:

> Identical twins sometimes have different IQ test scores. Yet these twins inherit exactly the same genes. So environment must play some part in determining a person's IQ.

Logicians call this kind of reasoning an **argument**. In this case, the argument consists of three statements:

1. Identical twins often have different IQ test scores.
2. Identical twins inherit the same genes.
3. So environment must play some part in determining IQ.

The first two statements in this argument give *reasons* for accepting the third. In logic talk, they are said to be **premises** of the argument; and the third statement, which asserts the *claim* made by the argument, is called the argument's **conclusion**.

In everyday life, few of us bother to label premises or conclusions. We usually don't even bother to distinguish one argument from another. But we do sometimes give clues. Words such as *because*, *since*, and *for* usually indicate that what follows is a premise of an argument. Terms like *therefore*, *thus*, *consequently*, and *so* generally signal conclusions. Similarly, expressions such as "It has been observed that . . . ," "In support of this . . . ," and "The relevant data are . . ." are used to introduce premises, while expressions such as "The point of all of this is . . . ," "The implication is . . . ," and "It follows that . . ." are used to signal conclusions. Here is a simple example:

> *Since* it's always wrong to kill a human being (premise), *it follows that* capital punishment is wrong (conclusion), *because* capital punishment takes the life of (kills) a human being (premise).

Put into textbook form, the argument looks like this:

1. It's always wrong to kill a human being.
2. Capital punishment takes the life of (kills) a human being.

∴3. Capital punishment is wrong.*

Of course, an argument may have any number of premises and may be surrounded by or embedded in other arguments or extraneous material.

In addition to using transitional words like *since*, *because*, and *therefore*, we sometimes employ sentence order—the last sentence in a series stating an argument's conclusion—and occasionally even express a conclusion in the form of a question. During the 1992 presidential election, for example, a Democratic party spokesperson gave all sorts of reasons for believing that, if elected, Bill Clinton would push Congress into passing a health care reform bill and then stated his conclusion in the form of a rhetorical question: "Can anyone doubt, then, that Bill Clinton will succeed in reforming health care in America?"

We should also note that, in daily life, premises and even the conclusions of arguments sometimes are omitted as understood. Life is short, and we don't always bother to spell out matters that are obvious or not at issue or can be taken for granted. In the IQ example given earlier, for instance, the premise that IQ differences must be due either to genetic or to environmental factors was omitted as generally understood. When assessing arguments, we should by all means add omitted premises of this kind when they are relevant.

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*The symbol "∴" often is used as shorthand for the word *therefore* and thus indicates that a conclusion follows.

EXERCISE 1-1

Identify the premises and conclusions in the following arguments (the last five are from student exams—modestly edited):*

Example:

Argument

The barometer is falling sharply, so the weather is going to change.

Argument Structure

Premise: The barometer is falling sharply.

Implied Premise: Whenever the barometer falls sharply, the weather changes.

Conclusion: The weather is going to change.

1. Thomas Szasz: Since there are no mental diseases, there can be no treatments for them.

2. *Chicago Daily News:* If marriages were really falling apart, divorced persons wouldn't be as eager as they are to find another partner as speedily as possible.

3. *The Economist:* It is difficult to gauge the pain felt by animals because pain is subjective and animals cannot talk.

*4. William Shakespeare: Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all.

5. Aristotle: The Earth has a spherical shape. For the night sky looks different in the northern and the southern parts of the earth, and that would be the case if the earth were spherical in shape.

*6. Marijuana has many medical benefits. It is significantly less harmful than many legal drugs. It should be legalized.

7. We should not judge Dr. Kevorkian guilty of murder. Murder should be defined so that it is committed only when you take the lives of people against their will or help those who are healthy to commit suicide. Dr. Kevorkian helped terminally ill patients who wanted to die rather than to suffer needlessly.

8. America is a society that values its freedoms. Censorship clearly has no place in a society that values its freedoms. It curtails independent thought, and it discourages people from examining societal problems.

*9. No, I was not prepared to take this critical thinking class. How can you expect me to understand the material when I never heard of most of the people and events you talk about in class? And that textbook is just way over my head, talking about people and events I've never heard of. What *did* happen at Watergate and who *is* Frank Lloyd Wright anyway? Have I proved my point? I was not prepared!

10. Yes, without a doubt the author of our textbook is prejudiced. You can tell because he uses all those examples against Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon,

*Starred (*) items are answered in a section at the back of the book.