



# The Use of Reason in Everyday Life

Howard Kahane  
Nancy Cavender



# Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric

The Use of Reason in Everyday Life

TENTH 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 tenth edition of *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* is dedicated to Howard Kahane, who died in 2001 after a long battle with heart disease. Although Howard wrote a number of books, this one was his favorite because he believed passionately in helping people think critically about the world they live in and the decisions they make. His method was to apply logical principles in a practical way to analyze contemporary political and social issues, rather than to focus on the mathematical structure of logic. (This is why there is so little formal logic in the book, although he did write a formal logic text that is still in use.) The approach, now known as "critical thinking," was used by a few philosophy teachers when the first edition appeared in 1971, but Howard's book helped to popularize the movement and was widely imitated.

One of his regrets was letting his editor talk him into the title—which he thought was too high flown and out of keeping with his nuts and bolts approach. He wanted to call it *Crap Detection*—a title that suited his method as well as his style, and in his case, the old adage "the style is the man" was never more apt—right down to the wry quips and parenthetical asides. What you read in the book was what you got in the man, which is why his voice is so strong. (He couldn't stand the mind-numbing rhetoric so common in many textbooks.)

Howard had immense common sense, a droll wit, and the zeal of a missionary for unmasking hypocrisy, exposing political shenanigans (on the left and right), and debunking wrong-headed beliefs. But more than anything else, he thought that an informed and responsible citizenry was the cornerstone of democracy and that it was his job to make people aware of the snares in the system. This is why he took such pains to show how we could be manipulated by the media, the advertisers, the political system, and, unfortunately, our textbooks. And this is why he urged students to analyze and question those in authority—even their teachers. It is a tribute to the man and his ideas that *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric* is still going strong in its fourth decade.



The purpose of this tenth edition of *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric*, as of the previous nine, 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 certainly is not to move 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, the Internet, 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 writings, comments, and testimony of Aristotle, Molefi Kete Asante, Woody Allen, Ambrose Bierce, Winston Churchill, Linda Chavez, Dostoevsky, Rush Limbaugh, Bill Moyers, Geraldo Rivera, Sara, Duchess of York, William Shakespeare, Adlai Stevenson, Alice Walker, Barbara Walters, Oprah Winfrey, and hundreds of others.

Examples are drawn from astrological predictions, Budweiser commercials, Bush and Kerry political doings, syndicated columnists, 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, Jack Ziegler, and many others, and comic strips featuring *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Andy Capp*, *Doonesbury*, *Boondocks*, *Peanuts*, and *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 TENTH 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. For example, political items concerning the Bush administration, the 2004 presidential campaign, and the election of George W. Bush to a second term in office have replaced outdated ones.
2. Dozens of old exercise items have been replaced by new ones.
3. Although some 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. But several changes have been made, including a substantive revision of Chapter 8. The quick appraisal method of analyzing arguments has been dropped, and a more comprehensive analysis of an argument has been added using the critical thinking tools explained throughout the text, including a discussion of the premises and conclusion, overall validity, fallacious reasoning, use of language, and worldviews. The point of this revision is to give students some idea of how they might analyze arguments using what they have learned in previous chapters.

In addition, a new section has been added to Chapter 11, “News as Entertainment,” that discusses the increasing tendency in the media of crafting news items



into Hollywood action stories to shape their message and capture the public's interest. Many new examples have been drawn from the cataclysmic events of the past few years: the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the war on terrorism, the war in Afghanistan, and the Iraq War. And finally, the selected list of periodicals has been restored to the book, by popular demand.

## 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 examination of the ways in which reasoning, in fact, goes wrong in everyday life shows that it does so in a majority of cases first because of a lack of sufficient (or sufficiently accurate) background information; second, because 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, the importance of having good background beliefs, in particular of having well-pruned worldviews, as well as some very rudimentary remarks about deduction and induction and the three overarching fallacy categories employed in chapters 3, 4, and 5.
2. *Deduction and Induction*: Chapter 2 contains more detailed material on deductive and inductive validity and invalidity.
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 everyday life examples on which to practice.
4. *Impediments to Cogent Reasoning*: Chapter 6 discusses 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. In some ways, this is the most important chapter in the book, because these skewers of rational thought so severely infect the thinking of all of us. (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 meaning, for instance, via doubletalk and 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 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. Writing is indeed nature’s way of letting us know how sloppy our thinking often is. But it also is the best way to learn how to sharpen our ability to think straight.)
7. *Important Sources of Information*: Chapter 10 discusses advertising as an information source (singling out political ads for special scrutiny); 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*: The Appendix provides additional material on deduction and induction (including a few words about syllogisms); cause and effect; scientific method; and so on.

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 exercise 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 overcoming natural impediments to cogent reasoning; in 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, textbooks and periodicals—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 a good deal more than the usual supply of exercise items, 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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NANCY CAVENDER  
Mill Valley, California

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.”

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*Cartoon commentary on the state of contemporary rhetoric.*



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*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

*Ignorance of reality provides no protection from it.*

—Harold Gordon

*Reason is logic, or reason is motive, or reason is a way of life.*

—John Le Carré

## 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. Self-interest often clouds the thinking of even the brightest individuals. 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. *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.<sup>1</sup>

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 such as *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 2004 presidential primaries, for example, an enthusiastic Democrat gave her reasons for backing John Kerry. She was sure he had the best chance of defeating George Bush and was doubtful that any other candidate could defeat him. She stated her conclusion in the form of a rhetorical question: "Doesn't it make sense to vote for Kerry?" (But she was wrong.)

---

<sup>1</sup>The symbol ∴ often is used as shorthand for the word *therefore* and thus indicates that a conclusion follows.



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.

## EXERCISE 1-1

Identify the premises and conclusions in the following arguments. (A few are from student exams—modestly edited.)<sup>2</sup>

### 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. Since everyone deserves health care, and more than 40 million Americans don't have medical insurance, the United States should institute national insurance.
2. The Bush administration's argument for the war in Iraq (before shifting justifications): Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction that are a threat to us, and he has links to al Qaeda. The United States should go to war and depose him.

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. The government thinks 18-year-olds are responsible enough to vote and mature enough to fight a war, so why can't they drink alcohol?

7. We're never going to find cures for diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's, and a lot of other diseases unless we use the most promising research available. Stem cell research is the way to go.

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.

<sup>2</sup>Starred (\*) items are answered in a section at the back of the book.