BOOK REVIEWS

Reasoning: A Practical Guide
ROBERT C. PINTO AND J. ANTHONY BLAIR
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1993. Pp.x, 294.
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Editor's note: Connie Missimer's review is of the American edition. Also available is a Canadian edition of the same title.

Reasoning: A Practical Guide for Canadian Students.
ROBERT C. PINTO, J. ANTHONY BLAIR, AND KATHERINE E. PARR
Scarborough, Ontario, Prentice Hall, 1993. Pp.xiii, 326.
ISBN 0-13-014366-9

Reviewed by Connie Missimer

Anyone tasked with the joyous labor of teaching informal logic or critical thinking should take a serious look at this text, which fulfills its promise of offering a practical guide. It begins with an anatomy of the reasoning process, then proceeds to various sources for reasoning such as the media, opinion polls, and experimental research.

Part I, Claims, gets students comfortable with the notions of claim, assert, and imply, as well as with the indirect communication forms of innuendo and irony. Then a discussion of the credibility of sources paves the way for the next section, Information and the Media. In that section, the discussion on bias offers a crucial distinction between bias defined as an unfair view and bias as a position out of which a person reasons (the latter for example, "It's my bias that people are more equal than not"). Part I ends with sections on news media and offers a news media checklist of over a dozen questions that, as the authors explain, "an active, critical media comsumer will ask and try to answer" (p.57).

Part II, Inferences, shows students that this process is central to reasoning, and expands the student's vocabulary and understanding of propositions, premisses, grounds and conclusions, with lively examples about pending summer jobs and compact disk players that students will like. There are two very useful tables. One, called Role Indicator Words, offers terms such as "therefore," "although," and "must," with an account of their logical relation to the whole idea which is being expressed. The other, Assertion Qualifiers, points to adverbial phrases such as "certainly," "maybe," and to parenthetical phrases such as "I suspect," "as far as I know," to alert students that a writer is ascribing a belief that he or she holds towards a proposition. The next section shows students how inferences can have the logical properties of compound propositions, entailment, equivalence, incompatability or consistency, or contradiction. Then Evaluating Inferences offers several handy ideas, such as the notion that support for an

inference comes from all the premisses in a group taken together. I particularly liked the authors' point that acceptability is relative to a person's knowledge and so can vary from one person to another, a point which offers a whiff of independence to students' opinions: "When you are evaluating your own inferences, what matters is whether a premiss is (or should be) acceptable to *you*." (pp.104-105). To be sure, the authors stress standards of acceptability, credible sources and reliable methods as well. The next chapter describes in some detail what opinion polls are, how they work, and offers caveats about the types of questions asked and the method of contact with those polled.

My favorite chapter in the book is Reasoning About Causes. It is the one which I would like to try out on a class as the first chapter they would see. It is so simple and profound, the idea that causal reasoning "figures prominently in everyone's daily thinking" (p.149), and students should, I think, prove to be enormously reassured to learn early on that causes of one sort or another are not only their central preoccupation but that of academia, politics, and business as well. The exercises at the end of the chapter illustrate this point by ranging through chemistry, sports, sociology, history, economics, and psychology. I would then take students through the next chapter, Studies, which details two central means of evidence-gathering in causal studies: experimental research and correlational research. A significant section in this chapter points to the distinction between systematic and anecdotal evidence (pp. 183-184).

Once armed with this information, students could more readily see what all the fuss is about over inference, and they could more easily tackle the earlier material on credibility and evaluating the credibility of sources. The salient questions aren't ultimately about who the sources are as much as the type of evidence on which a source relies and how it compares to an alternative causal explanation of the social problem. And, of course, a solution is an hypothesis about what would cause the alleviation of the problem, and students should understand this. It would enable them to see the unity underlying critical thinking across all disciplines.

The last chapter is about deliberation, which the authors define as reasoning about what to do. They argue that deliberating always involves choices among options or alternatives, weighing pros and cons. One might quibble that it is enough to deliberate were a person to give thoughtful and lengthy consideration to only one course of action. Certainly that would satisfy one dictionary definition. Yet I side with the authors in circumscribing the notion of deliberation to include at least one alternative. The etymology of "deliberate" derives from the Latin, *deliberare*, to weigh well, ponder. The prefix *de-* indicates "completely," *librare*, "to weigh," from *libra* , a scale, and a scale implies a standard against which one weighs— in the case of practical decisions, that of other available alternatives. I would only suggest the following of common usage by including within deliberation's sphere reasoning about what one *thinks* as well as does, considering theoretical matters by carefully weighing alternatives.

Most critical thinking texts offer a myriad of terms and much advice. If only there were some way to convey to readers those suggestions which authors find central to virtually every act of critical thinking, as opposed to those which may occasionally be helpful. Minor advice vitiates the import of major points. Perhaps creating two different lists at the end of each chapter would help students navigate through all texts

on critical thinking. For example, in *Reasoning*, the authors have an excellent section on descriptions in news stories as conveying a point of view (p.46-47). An example which comes to mind is that the media (and we) don't use the phrase "Christian terrorist," even of Serbs shelling Sarajevo. On the other hand, the phrase "Islamic fundamentalist terrorist" is commonly applied to violent acts by Muslims. In debating whether this is fair and struggling to define "terrorist," students would be engaged in critical thought about a description. But at bit later, the authors' advice is less central:

> When reportage and analysis are mixed together—as they so often are, especially television news— then it behooves us as viewers to learn the personal points of view of the various reporters, anchorpersons, and networks and to filter these reports through that understanding. (p.54)

Aside from the practical difficulty of following this sort of advice, it carries the danger of an *ad hominem* twist that would detract from critical thinking about a person's claims.

A minor point, but one which the authors might use for student deliberations is that they appear to be of two minds about the media, which holds center stage in Part I. At one point they write, "...the Western media, while 'free' in important respects (in spite of occasional government pressures and attempts by interest groups to manipulate them), tend not to be independent or objective when it comes to the ideology of industrial capitalism and the consumer society." (p.45) Yet ten pages later they ask:

> "Are the news media biased [tend to play up their own point of view and downplay any that disagree]? Perhaps occasionally, but we know of no evidence which shows they are systematically, or even usually, guilty of deliberately misrepresenting the events they report in order to benefit some person or group." (p.55)

Finally, one of the most exciting ideas the authors have is to be found in the introduction, in which they say, "we will be explaining the rationale or theory behind the points we make..." What a great idea, perfect for texts on critical thinking, that authors subject their own claims to some sort of justification, no matter how brief. But it was hard to locate exactly where these authors were engaged in that activity, and the index did not include the terms theory or rationale. Making the theoretical support more explicit in their second edition of *Reasoning* would be very helpful, and enhance this fine text.

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