do this or don't believe this, something terrible will happen

c. strawperson—distorting or exaggerating an opponent's ideas to make one's own seem stronger. . .

f. deductive reasoning—idea that since a and b are true, c is true also

g. slanters—to persuade through inflammatory language and exaggerated language instead of reason

h. generalization—using statistics or facts to generalize about a population, place or idea

The following activity will help to sharpen your skills in recognizing deceptive reasoning.

Obviously, this exercise will not only not sharpen a student's skills, but will seriously dull them. It is impossible to imagine what understanding of logical principles could include deduction and generalization on a list of common fallacies. To make matters even worse, of the twelve examples given on the next page, only two are arguments.

These "critical thinking" supplements to the chapters are so bad that they raise the question of whether these texts have any place in a critical thinking course. I think that properly used they can still be a fruitful source of long arguments. I sternly warn my students to ignore the editors' titles, ignore the editors' brief summaries of the articles, and to ignore the "critical thinking" supplements. For the most part, this advice is followed, and we successfully use these texts despite their serious shortcomings. ☐

*Review by G. A. SPANGLER, California State University, Long Beach.*

There has been, and perhaps always will be, serious controversy about how much, if any, formal logic ought to be covered in an undergraduate critical thinking class. This text emphasizes informal logic but relies on the basic concept of deductive entailment. It includes chapters on elementary propositional and categorical logic, but it can be used as a text in a course that is exclusively informal.

The heart of the book, on which this review shall focus, is a series of chapters on extended argument analysis making use of what Govier calls the "ARG" conditions, a mnemonic device whose letters stand for conditions fulfilled by cogent arguments. A cogent argument is one whose premises are acceptable, relevant to the conclusion and such as to provide adequate grounds for drawing the conclusion.

*A Practical Study of Argument* opens with the novel idea that an argument is directed at showing some claim to be acceptable. What is new here, at least in a textbook context, is the substitution of "acceptability" for "truth." This substitution is discussed mainly in connection with premises (Govier argues in a note to instructors later in the book that the truth of premises is neither necessary nor sufficient for them to provide a basis for cogent argumentation), but the point of arguing is understood to be the establishment of the rational acceptability of some claim. Guidelines for determining whether premises are rationally acceptable are spelled out in a separate chapter and the theory behind her approach is explained in an Appendix.

From the initial account of the nature and importance of arguments the book proceeds in stages to the ultimate goal of evaluating fairly complex arguments for cogency (a change from "soundness" in the first edition). Govier's strategy is to exercise and sharpen the skills necessary for analyzing complex arguments in steps, beginning with the relatively simple skill of distinguishing arguments from non-arguments and working up to diagramming the structure of fairly complex, extended arguments embedded in texts.

A chapter is devoted to each of the major phases of this process, while less important topics are relegated to sub-topical sections. After arguments are distinguished from non-arguments and skills are developed for seeing the differences between arguments and explanations, Govier develops conventions for expressing arguments in a standard formate or canonical form. A chapter added in the second edition next takes up definition, ambiguity, vagueness, emotionally charged language and euphemism. Then a set of sufficient conditions is presented for premise acceptability and unacceptability followed by a chapter on premise relevance together with a section on commonly-committed fallacies of relevance. (The treatment of fallacies is not taken up in a separate chapter. Each of the major kinds of fallacy is discussed in its appropriate context). Finally, a technique is developed for diagramming the structure of complex arguments.

The rest of the book considers some of the standard issues found in informal logic texts: elementary propositional and categorical logic, analogies and causal reasoning. A chapter called "Philosophical Connections" covers so-called "good reasons" arguments and problems about induction while a chapter on reasoning in the social sciences aims at putting the layperson in a better position to assess the results of social scientific studies. There is certainly more than enough material in this textbook to oc-

cupy a class for a semester, and perhaps enough for a full-year course. More importantly, this is a well-written and carefully-thought-out book from which students of all abilities can profit.

The second edition was published this year (1988) and contains many improvements. While its exercises are difficult compared to those in the half dozen or so other texts I have used, they have been supplemented in the new edition by some simpler exercises at the beginning of each problem set. Culled from a variety of sources, the exercises are (with the exception of some philosophical examples, alas!) fairly well-received by the range of students one gets in a critical thinking class. Unfortunately, such sample problems for exercising skills must often be excised from their contexts, and the less sophisticated one is as a reader the more difficult it is to fill in an appropriate context of audience, circumstance and arguer's objectives. From research done by teachers of composition (not to mention common sense) there is reason to believe that knowing one's audience and the purposes of writing make it easier for a student to compose a text. Perhaps the same can be said for analyzing one. In any event Govier often does preface an exercise problem with a sentence or two of "background" information. This is sound pedagogical practice of which there should be more. There is currently no solutions manual available for use with the book.

Govier is the author of a book, *Problems in Argument Analysis and Evaluation* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Foris Publications, 1987) and numerous articles treating issues in the theory of informal logic. Her time and effort on theory pay rich dividends in her text, leading to illuminating accounts of many of the most troublesome problems in informal logic. She is careful, for instance, to show why ambiguity and vagueness are not properties of words but of their uses and she has sound advice to offer about the problem of missing premises,

which is given extensive examination. A large part of extended argument analysis is a matter of ferreting out missing premises and, though undergraduates have a hard time with it, this important topic should not be ignored or brushed over lightly. Often the most important and controversial elements in an argument are submerged so that they can't be detected in a superficial reading of a text. Before an argument can be successfully evaluated for cogency, its stated premises must be supplemented with those hidden from easy view. Govier's strategy is to advise caution and conservatism: her slogan is "no supplementation without justification."

There is, of course, no algorithm for determining whether a premise is rationally acceptable or not, but a chapter on premise acceptability offers sound guidance in the form of sufficient conditions for deciding whether it is rational to accept something put forward to support a conclusion. Six such conditions are given for premise acceptability: the premise is defended in a cogent subargument; it is necessarily true; it is a matter of common knowledge; it is a matter of reliable testimony from the person arguing; it is backed up by an appropriate authority; it does not really have to be accepted at all since it is used only as a supposition either to get a conditional conclusion or in a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. Each condition is discussed in detail sufficient for handling tricky cases, and special attention is devoted to arguments from authority. In cases where there is controversy students can be advised to construct an argument for themselves to justify taking a premise to be acceptable. Thus, in the case of authority, Govier notes that "one might reasonably think to oneself" as follows:

1. Jones has asserted premise P.
2. P falls within area of knowledge K.
3. Jones is a recognized expert regarding K.
Therefore,
4. P is acceptable.

But such arguments are legitimate only if further conditions are met delimiting the scope of such authority:

1. P falls within K, where K is a recognized body of knowledge.
2. The person whose authority is cited is an expert on K.
3. The experts on K agree about P.
4. The person whose authority is cited does not have a vested interest in P's being true, nor has he been dishonest about matters related to P in the past.

If this appears too much like a recipe, it should be noted that these schema occur in the context of clear expository writing about arguments from authority containing apposite illustrations from settings in which authority is frequently abused.

The same point can be made about Govier's treatment of the problem of missing premises: some guidelines are offered, but nothing like an algorithm, and then the use of those guidelines is demonstrated through examples.

Several features of Govier's book are novel and warrant fuller discussion. Among these are the substitution of acceptability for truth and her approach to the problem of missing premises.

In a footnote to instructors Govier writes as follows about the acceptability condition:

The term *acceptable* has been used instead of *true* to express a condition of premise adequacy for cogent arguments. We are aware that this shift is very significant. It has been made because we believe that the truth of premises is neither sufficient nor necessary for them to provide a basis for cogent argumentation. Truth is not sufficient because there are many premises that are true but whose truth is not known either to the audience or the arguer. An argument based on such premises would not be epistemically adequate. People would not be in a position to determine the adequacy of the premises; the premises' truth, in such a case, is irrelevant to the issue of the practical or epistemic value of the

argument. The truth of the premises is not necessary because an argument can lead from acceptance to acceptance and be of immense practical value, and because of such argument types as the *reductio ad absurdum.* Those who maintain that the truth of premises is a necessary condition for the cogency of arguments are forced into choosisng between a rather dogmatic dismissal of skeptical/fallibilist arguments that have not attained the goal of truth and an admission that there are singularly few sound arguments available. Neither alternative is satisfactory. (p. 76)

"Fair enough," one might say, for this book is meant to be, after all, a *practical* study of arguments and Govier's displacement of the time-honored notion of truth-conditions has a practical point. On the other hand one might react with the pedagogical worry that one's students, made infamous in the popular press and elsewhere for their alleged affinity for relativism, will immediately take "acceptable" to mean "I accept it." Of course, "acceptability" in this technical sense does not amount to my or anyone's merely having come to believe something. For one thing, when I accept a proposition for the sake of argument I need not believe it; often, in such cases, I disbelieve it. This point has the consequence that not all of the propositions I accept in an argument are acceptable and creates a technical difficulty, for (in the book's sense) to say that a premise is acceptable is to say that "it is reasonable for those to whom the argument is addressed to believe these premises" (p. 62). The crucial issue then is determining when a premise is acceptable in this sense. Govier devotes a chapter to this key element in argument analysis.

There we discover a set of sufficient conditions (listed above) for premise acceptability, each of which is explained in detail. The technical difficulty just noted is handled by noting that in a *reductio* argument "some or all of the premises are never really accepted. They are 'supposed' and then rejected on the grounds that they lead to unacceptable consequences" (p. 84). Although this move makes "accept" ambiguous between *believe* and *suppose*, it is not a serious defect because in some special arguments like *reductios* we do undertake something analogous to believing a premise. What really matters here is whether the conditions of acceptability Govier sets out are adequate for improving student skills in deciding when it is rational to accept a premise.

One of the conditions said to be sufficient for acceptability is that the premise be a matter of common knowledge, i.e., "if the premise states something that is known to virtually everyone . . ." or "if a premise is very widely believed, and there is no widely known evidence against it. . ." (p. 79). It might be objected that "common knowledge" is too vague to be useful as a guide for determining acceptability. (Indeed, this objection has been raised. See Betsy Decyk's review of Govier in the *APA Newsleter on Teaching Philosophy,* Summer 1987, pp. 15-16). The expression, "common knowledge," is familiar to students, but some guidance in the use of this criterion for acceptability is necessary in order for it to be of practical use. Part of the difficulty has to do with "common," while "knowledge" presents problems of its own.

As Govier notes (p. 80) knowledge that is common at one time and place will not be at another: it is temporally and culturally relative, and so one's audience and the circumstances of arguing have to be taken into account in putting forth a premise for acceptance on this ground. And what is put forward as common knowledge can always be challenged, just as can a premise put forward as a necessary truth (a point, perhaps, deserving of more attention in the text). Part of the job of philosophers, in particular, and critical thinkers in general is to call into question beliefs that have gone unchallenged; but unless

something is taken for granted arguments will be merely silly and a waste of time. While this textbook offers no explicit guidance about when to question what is regarded as common knowledge, what is needed is not a formula but some examples and exercises to indicate the kinds of case which can and cannot fruitfully be questions. While the text goes some way toward satisfying this end, many instructors will want to supplement the text with discussions of examples believed to be helpful in developing a feeling for when it is appropriate to question conventional belief.

Another way of getting at this difficulty is by stressing the point that not all so-called "common knowledge" is really knowledge at all, but is belief—belief about which one has to ask, "Has it resisted or has it merely escaped criticism?" Large issues in epistemology loom here about the nature of truth and the possibility of distinguishing between the empirical and the conceptual, issues which an introductory text of this sort understandably avoids. But one can certainly take the occasion as ripe for raising the issue of epistemological relativism and skepticism generally, for these matters should be discussed in a critical thinking course, at least in one taught by philosophers.

Govier's ARG conditions are meant to be useful in evaluating four important kinds of argument: those whose premises purport to deductively entail their conclusions; those based on analogy; empirical generalizations and conductive arguments. The ARG conditions are useful because they provide the student with a structure for evaluating and constructing arguments. Together with other materials in the book, they help to develop skills which many teachers will regard as central to critical thinking. But as Govier observes early on in her book about the skill of spotting arguments, a critical thinker has to develop a "sense of context, tone, and natural logical order." Something of the

sort can be said for appraising and constructing arguments as well, and a text can go only so far towards developing this sense. My experience in using this book has been that its clear and precise prose, and especially the care and dexterity with which its author handles troublesome issues, allows it to serve not only as a helpful guide but as a salutary model of clear thinking. The second edition eliminates the inevitable infelicities found in a first editon but also does a much better job than the first of coping with the nasty problem of missing premises (though my students still wince when they grasp this nettle). Govier's conservative strategy involves setting out conditions under which an argument's premises may be supplemented by someone evaluating the argument for cogency who notices a logical gap in the argument which could be filled by adding a premise. The additional premise must be one or the other of two types. It must be something the arguer accepts, evidence for which acceptance can be found either in the wording actually used in the argument or in the awareness that the additional premise expresses a matter of common knowledge. Or it must be something the arguer would have to accept, given the direction of his or her reasoning in the argument. While not a perfect solution to the problem of missing premises, whatever that might be, it is the best I have seen.

Perhaps the least helpful section of the argument-analysis core of the book is the procedure for diagramming arguments which appears at Chapter Seven. Arguments are divided into three groups, according to whether their conclusions are given the support of a single premise, a set of premises each of which provides independent support, or (as in *modus ponens*) a set of premises whose support is interdependent. Obviously, seeing that arguments have different kinds of structure can be beneficial, especially insofar as it reveals various sorts of vulnerability. But I am not convinced that the time it takes teaching

students the skill of diagramming complex arguments is worth the dividends such mastery pays in practical results. Time is better spent, I think, on the excellent chapter on analogy, which has been enlarged in this new edition. Besides, I have found that students are enthusiastic about working on analogical arguments while reacting with the kind of boredom to diagramming arguments I felt in 7th grade English about diagramming sentences (though there are interesting exceptions now as there were then!).

Because I spend nearly as much time discussing arguments taken from sources outside the text as I do on the exercises Govier provides throughout the book, in a fifteen week semester I get through roughly half the book, including the chapter on propositional logic. Students rate the book highly in their evaluations of the course and I believe the new edition improves what was already an excellent text.          □