

THE PRACTICE OF ARGUMENTATION

This book uses different perspectives on argumentation to show how we create arguments, test them, attack and defend them, and deploy them effectively to justify beliefs and influence others. David Zarefsky uses a range of contemporary examples to show how arguments work and how they can be put together, beginning with simple individual arguments, and proceeding to the construction and analysis of complex cases incorporating different structures. Special attention is given to evaluating evidence and reasoning, the building blocks of argumentation. Zarefsky provides clear guidelines and tests for different kinds of arguments, as well as exercises that show student readers how to apply theories to arguments in everyday and public life. His comprehensive and integrated approach toward argumentation theory and practice will help readers to become more adept at critically examining everyday arguments as well as constructing arguments that will convince others.

DAVID ZAREFSKY is Owen L. Coon Professor Emeritus in the Department of Communication Studies at Northwestern University, where he has taught for more than forty years. Two of his many books won the Winans-Wichelns Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Rhetoric and Public Address, an award of the National Communication Association: *President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (1986) and *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery: In the Crucible of Public Debate* (1990).

THE PRACTICE OF
ARGUMENTATION
Effective Reasoning in Communication

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For my undergraduate students
in “Theories of Argumentation”
Northwestern University
1969–2009

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Preface

Since the late 1950s, there has been an outpouring of scholarly writing on argumentation across a variety of academic disciplines. It has emphasized approaches to reasoning that are neither formal nor deductive but that have a logic of their own and are grounded in the realities of human experience. It both describes and aims to improve the processes by which people seek to justify their acts, beliefs, attitudes, and values, and to influence the thought and action of others. And it recognizes that they do so by engaging in communication with other people. As the title of this book suggests, argumentation is effective reasoning in communication.

Argumentation has emerged as an interdisciplinary field with roots primarily in the traditions of logic, dialectic, and rhetoric. Although scholars recognize and respect the comprehensiveness of their subject, within any given discipline they naturally will be most familiar with their own discipline's insight and perspective. This book, accordingly, reflects my own background and training in rhetoric. It recognizes that beliefs are justified to persons, that arguments are convincing to audiences, and that disagreements are managed by humans. It reflects the ancient assumption that, on matters that are not certain, the exchange of reasons through argumentation is the means by which we reach judgments about what to think, to believe, and to do.

This book attempts to synthesize that rhetorical tradition with the flowering of interdisciplinary scholarship, and to do so in a way that renders the subject accessible to beginners without ignoring or oversimplifying its complexity and subjectivity. It takes the reader from the basic assumptions of an argumentative perspective, to the components of arguments, to the practicalities of case construction, attack and defense, and ultimately back to the question of the personal and social functions of argumentation.

For many years between 1969 and 2009, it was my privilege to teach an undergraduate course called "Theories of Argumentation" at Northwestern

University. I worked with students from the sciences, engineering, history, the social sciences, the humanities, and the performing arts. This book aims to draw together ideas and issues on which we worked in that class. Former students, now scattered in a variety of careers and professions, have indicated that the course was of great value in shaping their approaches to practical reasoning and judgment, not only in their chosen careers but also in their role as citizens. In turn, their willingness to grapple with these ideas has been the greatest stimulus to my own continued commitments to teaching and research. I have benefited immensely from my engagement with students over the years, and it is to them that I dedicate this book.

Professor Hans V. Hansen of the University of Windsor first suggested that I write up my course in a book to make it available to others. He envisioned a series of books on argumentation that would reflect the range of approaches to the subject and could be used by beginning students as well as more advanced readers. I was to represent the rhetorical approach. Regrettably, the series did not develop with the richness that he had anticipated, but it was his insight and vision that inspired the preparation of this work, and I am deeply grateful to him.

Several years ago, I developed an audio and video course for adults called “Argumentation: The Study of Effective Reasoning,” produced commercially by The Teaching Company. The notes, comments, and questions I’ve received from my “students” in that course, as well as from my Northwestern students, have been immensely helpful in refining my thinking and sustaining my interest.

Believing that theories of argumentation should be grounded in actual argumentation practice, I have liberally seeded the text with examples, and have included sets of Exercises at the end of each chapter. Many of the examples, and all of the Exercises, are the work of my editorial consultant, Randall E. Iden. Over the years we have had many conversations about argumentation theory and pedagogy, and he has taught courses in argumentation at Northwestern University and Lake Forest College to audiences of undergraduates and professional master’s degree students. The breadth of his interests and the reach of argumentation into virtually every area of personal and public life are evident in the range of subjects addressed in the examples and Exercises. Professor Iden also suggested the “Extensions” feature in several of the chapters, laying a path to more advanced study. I am very grateful for his many contributions to this project.

Throughout the book I make reference to the work of contemporary scholars, whose major relevant works are listed in the Bibliography. One,

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however, deserves special mention here: Professor Frans van Eemeren of the University of Amsterdam. In addition to his own seminal and prolific work, and his formulation of the pragma-dialectical approach, he has made two remarkable contributions. First, he and a team of coeditors have produced the *Handbook of Argumentation Theory*, an invaluable synthesis and reference work that serves as a guide for scholars around the world. And second, through guest lectures, hosting of conferences, and his own good cheer and unlimited energy, he has assembled an international community of argumentation scholars and encouraged them, in their own ways, to sustain their investigation of this intriguing and rewarding subject.

I am indebted to my daughter-in-law, Emily Zarefsky, for the preparation of the line drawings in Chapters 2–5.

This project was undertaken under somewhat difficult personal circumstances, including especially the serious illness and death of my dear wife Nikki after almost forty-five years of marriage. My preoccupation with these events and my own emotional state undoubtedly delayed the completion of the book. And yet, curiously perhaps, working on this book also served as a form of personal therapy, for it reminded me that scholars, teachers, and students of argumentation are all like an extended family to which I am pleased to belong.

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