

# Book Review

## *Building Arguments* by Drew E. Hinderer

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Hinderer, Drew E. (1992). *Building Arguments*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Pp xii, 1-260. ISBN 0-534-16158-8. Paper.

Drew Hinderer aims for a book that emphasizes the connections between reasoning and writing, which stresses basic logical skills in combination with a sensitivity to rhetorical issues. It is a formula that is by and large quite successful, with the strengths of the book to be found in the attention given to the construction of written arguments.

In addition to some early exercises, the last six of fifteen chapters are given over to matters involved in the successful communication of one's reasoning through written argumentation. Hinderer stresses writing persuasively to one's intended audience (Ch.10) by using appeals to reliable authorities (Ch.11) and compelling analogical reasoning (Ch.12). There is a chapter in which the elements of effective analysis are pulled together in a discussion of fair criticism (Ch.13), and a chapter which concentrates upon writing effective criticism, including counter-proposals and judgement papers (Ch.14). The fifteenth chapter tackles controversial arguments by weighing the merits of some of the reasoning in the Animal Rights debate on experimentation. Peter Singer's charge of speciesism is examined in detail, as well as the positions of two of his critics: John Krasney and Katie McCabe. The final exercise then invites the student to join the

debate with his or her own considered argument.

Such extensive attention to writing is to be welcomed in a Critical Thinking text, especially when reasoning is so often presented as separate from the contexts in which it is communicated. Hinderer pays as much attention to the process of reasoning as he does to the product. And while the producers of arguments may not be singled out as important, the consumers of arguments, the audiences, certainly are. Beginning in chapter two, on the recognition and interpretation of arguments, audience-considerations are kept in the foreground. One of the best examples of this emphasis is to be found in chapter seven, on assumptions. Here Hinderer proposes testing the reliability of one's assumptions by considering (1) whether "[t]he assumption is shared or considered uncontroversial by the audience for the argument," and (2) whether "[t]he assumption is either known to be true or rationally justified on the basis of the best available information and valid reasoning" (95). While Hinderer restricts his application of these conditions to hidden assumptions, readers will be able to judge their usefulness for testing general premise-acceptability. The first condition considers the specific audience at which the argument is directed—their attitudes, beliefs and cognitive fund. It prevents us from demanding support for premises which, while not commonly known, would be recognized by the intended audience. But the second

condition (and Hinderer insists on both tests being applied) requires that the assumption (or premise) conform to the strictures of good logical principles, thus avoiding the unwelcome implication that we should judge as acceptable prejudicial or illogical beliefs on the grounds that the intended audience would accept them.

Other features of the first nine chapters on reasoning skills are not so well-considered, although there is no problem so great as to constitute a reason for not using the text. The first few chapters, while giving much of the standard fare for argument identification and composition, lack a detailed discussion of explanations and their relationships to arguments, and completely eschew mention of indicator words for premises and conclusions, even though these are used in the exercise sets throughout the text. A more significant omission might be seen in the lack of any scheme for setting out arguments in premise and conclusion form with, ideally, a method for diagramming. This would be particularly useful in the early chapters, where students value having some means to organize the material with which they are working. The omission is not entirely explained by Hinderer's emphasis on constructing arguments, because there is still considerable attention given to analyzing others' reasoning. The absence of some standard scheme is recalled every time an example shows up in an exercise set which does not seem to be an argument at all.

In chapter four, on reliable argument forms, twelve pages are devoted to the deductive/inductive distinction. While a little more attention is given to this in a later chapter on sufficiency of evidence (Ch.9), it is arguable that an adequate job just cannot be done in this short a space. Added to this, Hinderer presents the simple disjunction "either  $p$  or  $q$ " under the heading of "dilemma" and repeatedly refers to it by this name, while not dealing at all with the traditional dilemma (with its conditional premises). He cites Kahane's

*Logic and Philosophy* as the source for this (although, on my reading, Kahane retains the "disjunctive syllogism," at least in the early editions that I have consulted). Regardless of its origin, it is a strange usage and stands to confuse students already familiar with some formal logic or who will become so at a later date.

The remaining chapters that have not been mentioned are generally to be recommended, with the possible exception of chapter six. Chapter three is a preliminary look at the functions of language, and chapter five addresses the standard problems of language with a treatment of definition. Then the topic is dropped until chapter eight, when clarity of ideas and expression is discussed. This indicates a point worth mentioning, though the problem is easily remedied: the organization of the chapters is sometimes difficult to fathom. Chapter three, five and eight, for example, may well have benefitted from closer proximity to each other. However, Hinderer makes no pretense to having written an integrated text that must be used in the order given, and he invites instructors to treat each chapter as separate from the others and to change the order as desired.

Changing its place in the book would not strengthen the one chapter about which I have most reservations. This is the sixth chapter, on relevance. Relevance is a difficult subject to treat in introductory courses, but it is an essential one none the less. Hinderer is to be commended for trying to present a positive treatment of relevance (along with a discussion of fallacies of irrelevance), rather than hitting it indirectly through a treatment of irrelevance. His approach, however, never adequately separates considerations of relevance from those of truth.

Relevance is presented as a relationship between reasons and conclusion wherein the truth of the reasons "affects" the truth of the conclusion. The nature of this "affecting" is never made clear by a test or rule of thumb. Instead, when

distinguishing personal relevance from logical relevance, Hinderer advises that the latter exists "if the truth of [a] sentence affects the probability that the conclusion is also true" (77). Hence logical relevance is reliable, whereas personal relevance is not, since it is affected by the individual's beliefs and attitudes. But it is important to emphasize, which Hinderer fails to do, that it is not the truth of the sentence that makes it logically relevant to a conclusion. Its truth in *combination* with its relevance do make for a stronger argument. But truth and relevance need to be assessed separately, otherwise there is the distinct danger that something will be judged relevant because it is widely known to be true. The problem with arguing, say, that "the police should be allowed to treat male adolescents differently because 99% of all crimes are committed by male adolescents" is not that the premise is irrelevant to the conclusion, since it is relevant (if true, it actively increases the probability of the conclusion being true); the problem is that the premise fails to have any basis in fact. The premise is unacceptable, not irrelevant. Students would do better to have this distinction laid out clearly rather than be led through a discussion and examples in which the two are interwoven.

In the context of the entire text, such problems as I have dwelt upon are not so distracting and can be overcome. There is much else to recommend the text to those who conceive of critical thinking as Hinderer does: as an enterprise that forges

good reasoning skills with effective writing. Hinderer's own writing is accessible, as are his many exercise sets. These are generally unattributed, and many have obviously been constructed by the author. I found some of the exercises too superficial, but my students were far more forgiving here and also reacted more positively than I did to Hinderer's somewhat sketchy treatment of some of the fallacies.

*Building Arguments* served me well as a second-text, supplementing one that treated reasoning skills in more depth and developed a scheme for organizing arguments. Beyond a few of the points mentioned here, there is nothing in Hinderer's approach which conflicts wildly with the main texts on the market, which means it could be adopted without instructors altering their basic approach. They would, however, have to be prepared to give a significant amount of attention to the written application of reasoning skills. *Building Arguments* offers the student a straightforward account of the principal elements of argument-construction and then provides a number of scenarios in which such constructions are required. What it lacks in theoretical substance, it makes up for in practical advice and illustration. *Building Arguments* includes a Glossary of the terms used and an index.

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