

On page 96, the author embarks upon a discussion of the nature of arguments. He states that since argumentation is a kind of reasoning process, it is quite natural to think that all components of argumentation are of mental character. He presents a case of spouses discussing the option of adopting a child. The wife tries to convince the husband with several arguments, without success. As the discussion continues, the door suddenly opens and their friend enters the room with a charmingly smiling child in his arms. The husband gives in to adopting a child and thus the problem is solved without words. However, Brutian remarks, this action has no mental character. He explains the situation by means of explicit arguments: the situation involves an enthymematic argument. According to the explanation, we use the thought about the object which we immediately fix in our consciousness without having enough time to express it in words. That is the reason why one may think that the object itself becomes an argument instead of its mental image. This is an extremely interesting idea, but still we are left with the question why exactly we should consider such cases as arguments. Do positive feelings in themselves count as arguments?

In all, Brutian's book raises very interesting new questions about the nature of argumentation. It also introduces the reader to many basic problems of argumentation in an original way. Our main wish, as we said above, is that the important topics would have been treated in a more detailed way. Perhaps Brutian's next book will go into this.

Juhani Pietarinen and Juho Ritola
 Department of Philosophy
 University of Turku
 Turku
 Finland
 jpietari@utu.fi juho.ritola@utu.fi

About Thinking

by **W. Ward Fearnside**

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Reviewed by Maureen Linker

W. Ward Fearnside's text, *About Thinking*, starts with the inscription "To Students for whom the book was written." Any dedicated teacher of informal logic can appreciate the work involved in trying to craft a good logic text with students in mind. Clearly, Fearnside wanted to make that effort but whether he has succeeded is far less obvious. The principal flaw with *About Thinking*

is its failure to make a case for the relevance of logic in the lives of students for whom the book was intended.

The book begins with a chapter on the nature of fallacies divided into three parts; psychological, material, and logical. Students are told that logic has “played a central part in humanity’s rise from savagery” (p. 3), particularly because of logic’s ability to identify mistakes in reasoning. What follows then is a description of the various fallacies in fairly clear, readable terms. Fearnside does offer some insight into the complexity of fallacy identification. For instance, he explains that *ad hominem* appeals are not always fallacies if the question of character is relevant. However, the examples provided to illustrate the various fallacies are not so much in the form of arguments but in anecdotal expressions or historical references. These range from adages such as “The pot shouldn’t call the kettle black” for damning the origin to objections against President Wilson’s proposal that the United States ratify the Covenant and join the League of Nations as a case of appeal to tradition.

The problem with these examples is two-fold. First, students are asked to appreciate these mistakes in reasoning before any substantive discussion is given as to how to identify arguments and the relationship between premises and conclusions. Some introductory material on arguments in ordinary language and ways of distinguishing arguments from expository writing would certainly help to generate students’ intuitions. Second, Fearnside’s examples seem remote and out of date, and some are even offensive. As an example of *tu quoque* Fearnside describes a scenario in which a mother advises her daughter not to marry at 18 even though she herself did. This is embedded in a text with numerous examples of men as political leaders, business experts, and acclaimed scientists. So, in a description of misuse of hypothesis contrary to fact the examples of an engineer who needs to calculate thrust to navigate a spaceship’s safe return is presented alongside the example of a mother who wants to be ethical in warning “Johnny” not to play on the railroad tracks.

And in a discussion of the principle of verifiability Fearnside writes, “If an old hag or a beautiful damsel behaves strangely, is she bewitched?” (p. 54). Throughout the text, the examples given as both illustration and for the purposes of student exercise reify outdated social roles and sexist stereotypes. Perhaps even more shocking is the example given in support of the sway of emotive language use. Quoting Aldous Huxley, Fearnside writes:

Rhythm and cadence are strong forces as Huxley tells us: “No man, however highly civilized, can listen for very long to African drumming or Indian chanting . . . It would be interesting to take a group of the most eminent philosophers from the best universities, shut them up in a hot room with Moroccan dervishes or Haitian Voodooists, and measure, with a stop watch their psychological resistance to the effects of rhythmic sound . . . if exposed long enough to the tom-toms and the singing, every one of our philosophers would end up capering and howling with the savages”. (p.28)

Fearnside seems to construct his text from the perspective of a 19th century man of liberal ethics; pleased with the progress the Western world has made from the days of pre-colonial, irrational savagery. Yet such a perspective is irresponsible and pedagogically counter-productive. Students today face a multicultural world with a constant flow of Internet, advertising, and media pressure. Critical thinking should provide the tools for students to develop an understanding of how to assess this information in a responsible and analytical manner.

Fearnside follows his three fallacy chapters with eight chapters on deduction mostly on categorical and hypothetical syllogisms and enthymemes. Though this return to classical logic certainly has worth, eight chapters devoted to an analysis of the syllogism in a text without any attention to advertising, public policy, or the media seems to ignore the reality of student experience.

The remaining chapters are devoted to language use and evidence. Analytical definition functions as the centerpiece for Fearnside's analysis of language. Once again, very little of this material is devoted to a clear analysis of interpretation, social context and background. The chapters on evidence include one very helpful section on expert opinion and the requirements by which an expert is deemed to be professionally qualified. The author recounts an experience of his own when, after moving to a new town, he had to seek a doctor for his sick wife. Fearnside describes the criteria he used in deciding which doctor to choose, including the medical school attended, dates of admission to practice, type of practice, specialty ratings held, and positions held on staff boards. He describes why these criteria mattered to himself and his wife and what it demonstrated about the nature of expertise. This kind of example and the discussion which follows, offers students the opportunity to see the applications of critical thinking in a real world scenario. More examples like this (not necessarily from the author's own life), but rather more contemporary examples involving problem solving in a social context, would have improved the book tremendously. Fearnside's devotion to navigating students through the traditional elements in logic could provide a useful framework for a critical thinking course if it was coupled with some socially relevant material. Without some real-world examples and carefully constructed analytic exercises designed to get students to see their own biases, the text seems antiquated. A text like Wanda Teays's *Critical Thinking from a Multicultural Perspective* incorporates these more contemporary and social elements but to the exclusion of more traditional material. Some hybrid between Fearnside and Teays would provide a worthy contribution to the text offerings in informal logic.

Maureen Linker

Department of Philosophy, University of Michigan-Dearborn

4901 Evergreen Road, Dearborn, MI 48128

U.S.A.

mlinker@umich.edu