

2. The Practical Teaching of Argument

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Summary: *A Practical Study of Argument* has been in continuous use for 31 years. This is an impressive legacy. Its longevity invites us to contemplate the evolution of teaching reasoning. Concerns that were barely discussed in the 1980s now present significant challenges to the tradition of reasoning as a generic practice available to all. Govier rose to the emerging challenges by presenting reasoning as an engagement with community and with students as members of the community. Yet even the well-designed progress she made may not be sufficient to meet challenges we face now in teaching reasoning.

1. Introduction

Textbooks for reasoning and critical thinking never hit the giddy heights of print runs in the 10,000 copy range. They sit in a publisher's "B list:" print runs of 4-6000 copies dropped into a highly competitive market, in the hope that after their normal four year life span they will have sold well enough to earn a second edition. (The "C list" is the specialist scholarly text with a print run of about 2000 copies, not expected to live into a second edition.)

As a result, the critical thinking textbook market is competitive. The people who teach the courses gener-ally start with whichever textbook they themselves learned from. When they find that they or their students struggle too much, they cast about for other options. Into that window of opportunity fly all the new and different approaches out there, all the publisher's samples sent as options for a beginning reasoning course. Eventually, some of us who teach the course for years write our own texts, perhaps even joining the crowd of published texts.

Against that background of competition and instability, Trudy Govier's text *A Practical Study of Argument* stands as one remarkable example of innovation

and longevity. Its second edition came out in 1988. I remember my first look at it, and my enthusiasm for its originality. It reached its 7th edition in 2009; an enhanced version of this edition kept it current for 2013. This remarkable longevity tells us that Govier's approach and the book itself have become a tradition. When it first appeared, everybody teaching these courses was breaking new ground: there were no such courses when we were undergraduates. People teaching from it now may have been the ones learning from it in the 1980s and 1990s.

What can we learn from this development of Govier's text from innovation to tradition? Earlier in this volume, Takuzo Konishi discusses Govier's role within the critical thinking movement, including the influence of her text on her own development and on the field. Its solid grounding in educational concerns and theory make it a practical way to teach argument. However, it is a greater challenge now than in the 1980s to teach reasoning as a stand-alone course.

In the spirit of constructive and collegial scholarship that Govier herself consistently exhibits, I shall extend Konishi's reflections to consider how her text handles the challenges, using the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th editions to trace changes from 1988 to 2009. (I was unable to locate copies of the first edition from 1985 or the 6th edition from 2004.) I will investigate why we teach courses in reasoning, who takes them, what is involved in learning, and how reasoning courses fit into academic and social practices. The results will show we are at a turning point: even an approach as well-considered as Govier's, focusing on the practical aspects of reasoning in daily life, may not be sufficient to meet current instructional needs arising from recognition of students' diversity.

2. The teaching of reason: Why do we do it?

I have lived through the same period of the development of reasoning instruction as Govier has. When we began, it was considered a fairly straightforward matter to improve people's reasoning. Everyone could reason more accurately and reliably, and it should be easy to show them how. If we taught the structure of argument, showed learners the difference between valid inferences and fallacious reasoning, and showed them why it matters to reason correctly, they would improve their own reasoning and their judgment of the reasoning of others.

This optimistic perspective is reflected in the original courses and texts. Introduced either as a replacement for logic courses or as a new course, a "reasoning" course has often come to be considered foundational. Students could (and should) take the course early in their programs, because it covered what they could (and should) learn easily and then apply elsewhere: the basic human skill of logical reasoning. People who developed texts and courses were either dissatisfied with their students' progress in formal logic courses or recognized the wider appeal of a less formal approach to reasoned argument. Konishi, earlier in this volume, speaks of this approach to the development of reasoning theory as "pedagogy-led:" the teaching drives the theory. Konishi describes why the steps Govier took away from symbolic logic strengthened the position of reasoning courses as a separate practice.

There was an economic incentive to follow her lead. The place of reasoning courses in a post-secondary education is connected to changes in wider academic and social preferences. As general reasoning courses became more popular from the 1960s to the 1990s their development was congruent with institutional and departmental economic objectives. Enrollments would be assured if a "reasoning requirement" was judged important to further study or employment. I was a graduate student

at Simon Fraser University in the late 1970s when its reasoning course, Philosophy 001, was successfully repositioned from a 30-student elective course to a required course routinely registering 200 students. The Department had persuaded programs such as Business and Economics that it could deliver the reasoning skills their students seemed to lack or not acquire easily in their current required courses, and that a single generic course could suffice to let students apply reasoning wherever needed.

Since the 1990s, the apparent value of having a “reasoning requirement” has waxed and waned depending on educational or economic concerns. The number of reasoning courses has been influenced by factors far outside any instructor’s control, in how the post-secondary sector and education in general position themselves between theory and government funding priorities. (These concerns will be seen clearly in Laura Pinto’s paper, in this volume.) My institution has seen four waves of discussion related to its Bachelor of Arts degree requirements. The arguments have sometimes been purely economic: can we fit a burgeoning number of students into a limited number of sections of a course, or, conversely, will we lose students if we constrain their options by requiring courses they would not freely choose to take? Sometimes the arguments have been educational: does a reasoning requirement make sense as a foundational course if students often delay taking it until their final year? Does a stand-alone course add anything to what students already learn within discipline-specific courses?

Each institutional review of curriculum reimagines the purpose a reasoning course might serve. Who needs to learn it? Can the learning be applied across disciplines and outside the academy? Is reasoning an individual skill or a social practice? Is reasoning as taught in academic courses useful in a global economy? Since the early 1980s when Govier’s text first appeared, the answers to these questions have changed.

The original purpose of a reasoning course was to build the same logical reasoning ability practiced in mathematics, symbolic logic, or Latin. Converting arguments from persuasive rhetorical language into objective inferences should help us avoid being swayed by the language itself. Then we could settle disputes across significant differences of opinion. Logical thinking was something a normal human brain should have developed by adulthood. During the period that general reasoning courses were first developed, these claims appeared to be strongly supported. Jean Piaget's cross-cultural studies seemed to show that between the ages of 11 and adulthood at about age 18, people naturally began to do abstract thinking, "including the ability to employ adult logic/deductive and inductive reasoning" (Herman 2012, 26).

Does this justification of reasoning courses as improvement of core abilities of human minds stand up today? In the next section, I will consider some of the evidence that has made it less likely that "the ability to employ adult logic/deductive and inductive reasoning" is either a natural or an easily acquired practice.

3. The teaching of reason: How easy is it to learn?

One built-in difficulty for teaching reasoning is that fallacies are so seductive. About the same time as the initial rise of general reasoning courses, psychology began to report studies which indicated that human logical ability is fragile: unreliable at best and stubbornly resistant to correction at worst. Johnson-Laird (1983) was a leader in establishing empirically that some forms of syllogism and some constructions of "if/then" inference, such as "unless", were far harder to get right than others, even though there was no logical difference between them. Studies of persistent inability to recognize the logical equivalence of different questions about statistical

reasoning won Daniel Kahneman the Nobel Prize in 2002 for his research with Amos Tversky.¹⁴

The studies, however, had little impact on the teaching of reasoning. Reasoning theorists contended that these studies were flawed because the people tested typically had not had the advantage of direct instruction in symbolic logic or general reasoning. For many years, my colleagues in this field and I held out the hope that any problems were due to lack of good instruction, which surely we could provide! This hope remains alive and well but it is not clear that good instruction works.

Empirical studies of the extent to which direct instruction in reasoning reduces the commission of fallacies are difficult because it is hard to limit the variables to the instruction received. There is no strong evidence that instruction works, only some small encouragement. For example, in “On the road toward formal reasoning: Reasoning with factual causal and contrary-to-fact causal premises during early adolescence” (2014), Markovits reports that instruction can make a difference to the ability to hypothesize and think counterfactually. With limited empirical evidence, we should be wary of assuming that instruction will remedy inaccurate reasoning.

Govier appears neither to ignore the studies nor to concede much to them. In her extensive coverage of fallacies, none are singled out as less easy to recognize or avoid. For example, from the 4th edition (1997) onwards, she discusses “confirmation bias”, one of the common errors. Govier assumes that the error can be avoided by following standard practices of argument. This is unlikely; such errors are extremely persistent, possibly even built

¹⁴ Tversky died in 1996, so could not qualify for the award. For a description of their research and its implications see Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, 2011. There are now many popular overviews of these studies including Tavris and Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* (2008).

into how reasoning is normally done by the brain (Kahneman 2011) and attempts to educate biases away can even backfire and reinforce those very biases (Beaulac and Kenyon 2014).

As we aim to improve reasoning, we are looking for the “sweet spot” where the learning we want to introduce is both accessible and interesting to the learner. The influential education theorist Vygotsky called this “the zone of proximal development”, described by Wass and Golding (2014) as “the range of tasks that individuals can complete with assistance, but cannot complete on their own” (674). To make reasoning accessible, Govier made changes in each edition to better meet student needs and to reflect her own scholarly work in argumentation.

In all editions she addresses three learning problems usually experienced by students. The first is finding and interpreting arguments: a comprehension task that Govier, like others, deals with by carefully defining arguments and by using “standardization”: the conversion of prose arguments into a linear sequence of distinct claims leading up to a conclusion. The second problem is acquiring confidence in argument analysis, dealt with by explicit discussion of why analysis is important, and by including a wide variety of examples. The third problem is the ability to use argument skills after the course is over – the problem of “transfer”.

Govier deals with the first and second problems by making changes to address comprehension and confidence. The 2nd edition (1988) includes simpler exercises and a review of key terms. The 3rd edition (1990) uses shorter paragraphs for easier reading; examples include a wider variety of content and a wider range of difficulty. Chapter summaries are added to consolidate understanding. The 4th edition (1997) adds diagrams to reveal the structure of arguments, and increases the explanation of several key topics; the book is 50 pages longer than its predecessor. In the 7th edition, the discussion of good argument precedes the chapter on

language “for pedagogical reasons” (though the reasons are not given), and emotional aspects of language are introduced before definitions, “in deference to student interest and instructor preference.” Govier also makes changes for theoretical reasons. In the 2nd edition (1988) she uses “cogent” to replace “sound”, answering concerns raised by instructors about her non-standard use of “sound”. She refers instructors to her books, *Problems in Argument Analysis and Evaluation* (1988), and *The Philosophy of Argument* (POA) for discussion of theory, and as adoption of Govier’s approach became more common, her theoretical approach became a standard.

While her changes were no doubt appreciated by instructors and students, they do not entirely resolve student difficulties in learning. More explanation and more practice may be the best we can do for individual comprehension and confidence, but we still have the third problem: skill transfer. We assume that students who have learned from us will carry forward their new competencies to perform better in new tasks. However, to the fascination of psychologists and the dismay of instructors, good performance in the classroom or on a single subject is no guarantee of good performance in the world at large. This problem was recognized even in the early days of reasoning courses. Scriven (1977) noted, “the evidence from educational psychology seems entirely overwhelming with respect to one point, namely that so-called ‘transfer of learning’ or ‘generalization’ always turns out to be less than educators had previously supposed” (xiv-xv). Extensive studies in psychology offered various causes of and solutions for the problem.¹⁵

If transfer does not easily happen, reasoning courses are on shaky ground. Can students learn to apply reasoning skills and standards wherever they encounter arguments? From the 3rd edition forward, Govier

¹⁵ See for example, “Learning and interactivity in solving a transformation problem,” Guthrie et al. (2015), which mentions many of the earlier studies.

addresses this concern by including longer essays for reflection and analysis, so students at least could make a practical connection with reasoning in other post-secondary courses.

Trying to design for comprehension and transfer of skill beyond the course leads into the wider issue of what is accessible to post-secondary learners. In teaching reasoning, we are teaching something we presume to be accessible to everyone, and of interest to anyone who has not yet considered the study of argument as a subject in its own right. These assumptions bear questioning.

4. The teaching of reason: Who is ready to learn?

One assumption in the “pedagogy-led” approach is that students aged between 18 and 25 can be treated as young adults with some existing competence in abstract thinking. This assumption traces back to the popularity of Piaget’s “stage theory” of human development, mentioned earlier: the claim that abstract reasoning ability begins in early adolescence and is typically complete by adulthood. While this is still a plausible claim, the difficulty is that the boundary of “adulthood” has changed.

Mental development continues over a much longer period than previously thought. Those aged between 18 and 25 may not have the abstract thinking capabilities we expect. Recent studies of adolescent development indicate that the brain is still in stages of adolescence until the age of 23, perhaps even 25.¹⁶ Introductory reasoning courses

¹⁶ Fortunately, the studies are not entirely discouraging. In “Reasoning and self-awareness from adolescence to middle age: Organization and development as a function of education” (2009), Demetriou and Bakracevic studied the performance of four age groups, 13–15, 23–25, 33–35, and 43–45, on tasks involving spatial, propositional, or social reasoning. Performance in spatial and propositional reasoning stabilized in early adulthood, which Demetriou and Bakracevic define as the 23-25 age range.

are typically offered to learners below this threshold of adulthood. Even if 18-23 year-olds have not yet matured into good propositional reasoners, they are also expected to master discipline-specific applications of reasoning. This raises a question that has nagged reasoning instruction since the 1980s: why offer a general reasoning course if students can't or don't learn reasoning as a general skill? How useful is it, if they will eventually get what they need when they have to learn to reason within the disciplines they major in?

5. The teaching of reason: How generic is it?

General reasoning courses maintain the proud claim of transcending disciplinary boundaries. From a “core skills” perspective, access to specialized areas is considered to be possible only through first acquiring basic literacy and numeracy – and reasoning competence.

From the mid-1970s until the late 1990s, writing and reasoning were seen as practices common to all disciplines. “Good writing” in any field would be writing so clear that even people outside that field would understand and appreciate it. “Good reasoning”, as befits a practice to be used in academia and in public life, should be of such clarity and accessibility as to be persuasive to members of the public.

In the 21st century, the possibility of such generic reasoning is questioned. The challenge is not new: in 1981, John McPeck argued in *Critical Thinking and Education* that there was no reasoning independent of disciplines. Each discipline had specific, distinctive standards of evidence and traditions of formulating arguments. Thinking must always have some subject matter, and the subject matter would inevitably shape what counted as

Social reasoning performance, however, continued to improve into middle age.

good reasoning in that subject. It was not possible to “reason well” generically, only to “reason well about history” or “reason well about English.”

This argument remained unpopular through the 1990s, as many post-secondary institutions developed Writing Centres and Writing Across the Curriculum movements to teach and judge writing as “good writing” independent of discipline. Nevertheless, the academic paradigm shifted to see nuances that made writing different in each academic discipline. McPeck was ahead of his time.

In the face of this gradual change, Govier’s approach remained firmly based in discipline-independent reasoning. Yet she also creates at least a partial framework for confronting trends to discipline-specific instruction. As Konishi points out in this volume, Govier made a deliberate step away from deductive logic and the inductive-deductive distinction into a broader presentation that included analogical and conductive reasoning. This positions her very nicely to acknowledge the possibility of different standards for different purposes, while affirming that we also have to be able to discuss these standards beyond their boundaries.

This step is important because Govier presents reasoning not simply as one step in gaining the competence to master a discipline, but as a step towards functioning beyond the academy. She consistently uses her studies of political and moral philosophy to make her reasoning text engage with social concerns. Her readers are citizens in the making, preparing for a lifetime of participating in their community. Govier herself never seems to treat this approach as a radical challenge to other texts or theorists, yet elements of this approach challenge the common view that reasoning is a matter of an individual’s independent competence.

6. Reasoning as individual or social practice

The design of reasoning instruction usually presents good reasoning as personal, independent, systematic thinking – as indicated so nicely in the title of Johnson and Blair’s classic text, *Logical Self-Defense* (1979; 1983). Throughout the 1980s reasoning was usually presented as the way to help individuals avoid being deceived or manipulated, and resist unwarranted pressure to conform. Johnson and Blair specifically appealed to the needs of “the consumer in our society” and for the consumer as citizen to be equally cautious about “areas of social, political, and economic persuasion” (1983, xiii).

This principle of independence is not so strong in Govier’s text. She does ground argument in principles of individual rational thought, but gradually weaves in a growing concern for relationships. This is consistent with her concern that humans should learn to flourish in community, a concern explored by other papers in this volume: Pinto considers the importance of relationships over impersonal objectivity in teaching; Radzik discusses how relationships help us deal reasonably with wrongdoing; Little and Verwoerd speak of the need to “humanize” others before reconciliation is possible.

In the 5th edition (PSA 1999) Govier begins to step away from treating argument analysis as a question of individual objectivity, and connects argument evaluation to interpersonal relationships. Learners are addressed as members of a community, rather than just as individuals whose intellectual development requires skilled independent analysis of arguments. Interpretation of arguments becomes a matter of co-operative and respectful community practice, not just individual objectivity in constructing interpretation. These concerns also motivate her monograph on argumentation theory, *The Philosophy of Argument*, published the same year.

Other changes in this edition also position argument as requiring management of relationships. Emotion and its possibly distracting role in evaluation are

considered, and the importance of the dialectical context of argument is explained. The “principle of charity” is presented not as an ethical principle, a matter of individual integrity, but as a co-operative principle, an expected part of communication in general.

Govier presumes neither that all communities engage in argument, nor that argument is a practice we should all master. Reasoning draws on the fact that we do interact across boundaries of discipline, social identity, and culture. To handle these possibly difficult interactions, Govier appeals directly to the need for a general respect for others. To those who ignore an argument by failing to notice it or to comprehend and assess it, Govier says, “You are failing to respect the other person by leaving out his or her reasoning for thinking as he or she does, and you are depriving yourself of an opportunity to think, reflect, and possibly change your mind” (PSA 2001, 87).

This wording did not appear in earlier editions, which moved directly from defining arguments to standards for evaluation. For example, the 3rd edition (1992) had a section on “The challenge of argument,” but it described a refusal to engage another person’s argument only as “talking at cross-purposes,” and counts the behaviour just as “a common way of avoiding the challenge of argument.” Respect as key to reasoning was introduced in the 4th edition (1997), at the same time that Govier worked on *Social Trust and Human Communities* (STHC) and *Dilemmas of Trust* (Dilemmas). This suggests that she now saw good relationships as an important context for argument evaluation. In the 7th edition (2009) her wording speaks even more directly to maintaining relationships: failing to attend to the argument “displays a kind of disrespect for the reasoning and thinking of the other person” (104). Still, Govier retains a concern for individual objectivity and our obligations to ourselves: “There is a sense in which we are also cheating ourselves if we do this: we deprive ourselves of an opportunity to reflect on reasons for and against our beliefs” (104).

The same concern for relationships runs through Govier's wider body of work. In her work on ethics Govier deals explicitly with the need to establish at least a minimum social connection before engaging in argument. In the chapter "Restoring Trust" in *Dilemmas of Trust*, she lists preconditions for argument: finding ways to learn to listen, understanding others before challenging them, and ways to exhibit trustworthiness oneself so as to deserve being listened to (1998, 165).

Govier's approach to reasoning welcomes learners into a reflective community in which the most experienced members still question their practice. The text positions her as a voice of experience, yet still actively thinking through what is involved in argument. Govier's voice in the text is as you'd hear it in person and as you see it in her scholarly books. She is no-nonsense yet compassionate, focused on how individuals and communities can flourish. In *A Practical Study of Argument* she speaks to what matters to each of us whether we or not we are expert reasoners:

What we think is important: it can be a matter of life and death. Even if something is a "matter of opinion," that is no reason to think hastily about it. We should seek well-founded and sensible opinions, grounded in factual accuracy and coherent and plausible background theories. (PSA 2001, 3)

This is closely comparable to the tone and style in her books for scholars, both in her work on reasoning theory and in her work on social relationships, for example, in this excerpt from *Forgiveness and Revenge*:

To respect each other as persons, we must mutually acknowledge our worth, feelings, goals, capacities and human dignity, and we must honour human dignity and worth appropriately, taking into account the capacity for reason and reasoned choices – and also human feelings, beliefs, values, interests and

goals. To fail to do this is to violate a fundamental moral norm. (FR, 168)

For Govier, reason is a practice that deserves our time and attention throughout our lives. It helps us find our way through personal decisions and work collectively through difficult debates. The more we can persist in respectful and objective questioning, the more we have a chance of resolving deep differences of opinion.

Although promising, this approach to reasoning also creates some significant difficulties. Govier's attention to welcoming a diversity of perspectives suggests an egalitarian approach to disagreement. In an egalitarian model, any differences between us in terms of our lived experience will be relevant only in so far as the experiences provide us with support for our arguments. The difficulty here is whether we ever can be equal in this way. It depends so much on who is to become part of the reasoning community, especially in a classroom where the students and teacher do not meet on equal grounds. The next section will show that it is painfully easy to alienate people we most hoped to include.

7. Reasoning as social practice: What is a community?

In the spirit of Govier's entire body of work, we can see the teaching of reasoning as an ongoing exploration of how good citizens can deal fairly with one another. Whoever our students are, we hope their education will help them to become good citizens of their local, national, and global communities. Reason could help us understand and resolve differences of opinion in a community; however, people begin with different beliefs and principles from which they generate their arguments. Does reasoning, as a social practice, deal effectively with diversity in its participants?

Even if logic is a natural human brain function, it may be shaped by cultural traditions. Students are not just groups with commonalities of age or academic background, but distinct individuals with a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Reasoning might aim to transcend differences between people, but it would be unwise to expect logic to be practiced or valued in the same way across all cultures. An influential study done by A.R. Luria in the 1930s uncovered what appeared to be radically illogical thinking by Uzbek peasants who had no Russian schooling (*Cognitive Development*, 1976) and did not hesitate to propose that the solution was to give them this schooling. By the 1970s, when Cole and Scribner were doing work in Liberia and Bloom was doing studies in China (see Cole and Scribner 1974, Bloom 1981, Au 1984), it was more controversial to use the frequency of “wrong” answers as evidence of illogical thinking. Ever since, it has been debatable whether the reasoning done in Western academies can be required on a global scale or in culturally diverse local communities (Linker 2011).

The concern is cultural imperialism. In a debate closely related to whether reasoning is a general human skill, writing theorists question whether scholars of all cultures must adopt Western academic writing styles in order to present or publish their papers. Scholars come to North American institutions from around the world for higher education; peer-reviewed Western journals are the gold standard for credibility. Yet China, which has experienced dramatic changes of scholarly culture from Confucianism to Maoism to the current entrepreneurial model, and India, which still struggles with the educational legacy of British colonialism, are at best reluctant to accept that Western standards should be required for participation in global scholarship.¹⁷ In Canada, the same concern is

¹⁷ See, for example, Flowerdew and Li (2009), “English or Chinese? The trade-off between local and international publication among Chinese academics in the Humanities and Social Sciences;” Liu (2012), “Exploring the impacts of cultural globalization on cultural

raised by indigenous scholars, who find that the standardized models of reasoning practiced in academic research are alien to their preferences and traditions. They have developed a less universalist, more narrative and personal form of argument; this methodology is at odds with the traditions of reasoning as we currently teach it (e.g. Wilson 2008).

Govier's steadfastly systematic approach and her promotion of a respectful stance towards fellow-citizens may not be enough to meet current needs in working with the diversity in our classrooms and communities. Texts like Govier's imply that reasoning, done systematically, carefully, and politely, is the best form of argument practice and will create a "safe" space within which to discuss any topic. Is this enough to build the social trust that is such an important objective of Govier's long career? That is not so clear.

As indicated by the discussion of academic scholarship practices, there is a significant risk of alienating people we want to include. The same risk has also received attention from a feminist perspective, by authors including Phyllis Rooney (2010) and Catherine Hundleby (2013), who question the alleged generality of reasoning standards and practices.

Rooney argues in "Philosophy, Adversarial Argumentation, and Embattled Reason" (2010) that philosophy – the discipline from which informal logic emerged – has tended to assume an adversarial stance and a misleading metaphor of battles to describe debate or disagreement. Hundleby argues in "Aggression, Politeness, and Abstract Adversaries" (2013) that Govier's emphasis on respect does not go far enough to ensure reasoning will be able to engage diverse members of a community. For Govier, adversarial argument is a key component of reasoning, because opposition is important

awareness/values and English writing in Chinese context;" Wu (2014), "Let's see where your Chinese students come from: a qualitative descriptive study of writing in the disciplines in China."

to test views when resolving social issues. Yet even when politely expressed, adversarial argument is still a method of challenging, probing, and resisting. Hundleby notes that this probing and challenging upholds a standard which favours the social practices of Euro-American white males. Such adversarial practices limit or repress women, people of other gender identities, ethnicities and social classes, and children. Consequently, although reason may be intended as a tool to handle differences of opinion, it can also create more difficult problems.

Can we persist in systematic questioning if that is unfair to people for whom dispassionate or persistent questioning is exactly the wrong way to handle disagreement? Western post-secondary education teaches particular patterns of speech and writing, including adversarial tone and format, as “academic.” However, these patterns are not common to all students. They cause difficulties not only in reasoning courses. In “Making stance explicit for second language writers in the disciplines: what faculty need to know about the language of stance-taking” (2014), Z. Lancaster notes it is often difficult for second-language speakers to understand why or how to write in ways that will be academic: “recognized by readers as appropriate and authoritative – i.e., assertive, knowledgeable, critically distant, and aligned with a specific disciplinary culture” (269-270). Students’ inability to use “critically distant” expressions can appear to instructors as an inability to reason well.

If critical stances and questioning methods are not familiar or comfortable to students, then unfamiliarity and discomfort can arise even in the examples we choose to illustrate lessons on how to reason. In an equitable classroom, examples should have a reasonable chance of being intelligible and interesting to all students, but this is hard to achieve.

Some texts “meet the students where they are,” using examples that should already be familiar from their current lives. Some texts “meet them in the classroom,”

with examples that highlight only the logical content being taught. Some texts, including Govier's, "meet them where we want them to be," by using examples they will encounter in academic life or future civic life. All of these options are defensible, and all are problematic.

Meeting students where they are means using language and examples we hope will resonate with them. This is risky. For example, B.N. Moore and R.Parker (8th ed., 2007) start with a discussion of the unreasonableness of deciding to open a tanning salon in the sun-baked Sacramento Valley. Presumably, tanning is familiar to many students, so they will understand why the business is obviously a bad idea in a sunny area. However, it may puzzle other students who don't understand why white people like to tan. Others, who know it costs money to use a tanning salon, may feel excluded because the example concerns people who can afford to start businesses or spend money on luxuries. Choosing to connect to students' own experiences requires a considerable repertoire of examples to draw everyone in.

Some texts offer examples that are constructed for a classroom environment, placing the focus not on familiar content but on logical structure. For example, the classic truth of symbolic logic, "It is raining or it is not raining," is not a conversational remark and does not expect to connect to any learner's interest in the weather. This approach also has its problems. For example, John Woods, Andrew Irvine and Douglas Walton (2004) use as their first example: "Archimedes must be either a hero or a martyr. After all, anyone who dies in battle is one or the other and, as we know, Archimedes perished during the capture of Syracuse." This approach illustrates the assumption that logic is comprehensible to anyone who can understand the words, even if they are not among the "we" who already knew Archimedes died at the battle of Syracuse. Comprehension, however, is not so easily achieved. Archimedes may be unfamiliar to many students, and the example also slips in the phrase "as we

know.” Who are “we”? The phrase welcomes all learners who have previously heard of Archimedes or Syracuse. However, it simultaneously alienates those who have never heard of Archimedes: even if they follow the logic of the example, they recognize they are not among the welcomed “we.” An indigenous person, an immigrant to Canada from outside Europe, or any learner who understands the impact of colonization on Canada, will recognize that examples like this comes from the anglophone Canadian tradition. Must they assimilate to this tradition to learn in this classroom? That would be an unfair expectation for the diverse student population from a nation that does not require assimilation to a single tradition.

Using examples of the “logical” type requires at least a willingness to stop and explain references in enough detail to bring them to life for everyone in the room. It also requires care in expression: “we” must not divide students from each other or from the teacher.

The third approach, meeting students where we would like them to be, means using examples we want them to care about, such as voting, climate change, or the plight of refugees. Govier takes this approach, which I will call a “community” approach for its emphasis on issues of citizenship and social connections or concerns. She consistently goes beyond illustrating the logical connections between sentences to challenge popular opinions. The first example in the 2nd edition is:

There are three factors which show that a free enterprise ideal does not fit our economic system at this time. First of all, unionization protects labor from vulnerability to market conditions. Secondly, government supports and regulates industry. Thirdly, protective tariffs work selectively to isolate some domestic products from foreign completion. (1988, 2)

Here, while framing the example in the same “logical” language as Woods, Irvine, and Walton, Govier challenges a popular economic theory practiced in the 1980s by Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Brian Mulroney as leaders of Britain, the US, and Canada. She uses a logical framework to show why that popular theory could be considered unsatisfactory. This would have met the students of the 1980s where she wanted them to be: even if students paid no attention to the news, she makes sure they begin to see that reason examines and challenges claims that shape their society.

In the 3rd and 4th editions (1992, 1; and 1995, 1) the first example is not a civic issue but a medical one. “Eating more than one egg a day is dangerous because eggs contain cholesterol and cholesterol can cause strokes and heart attacks.” This example comes closer to the approach of meeting the students where they are. Even students who don’t read or view the news might be expected to be interested in issues related to their personal health. Nevertheless, Govier is still challenging dietary advice that was accepted wisdom at the time.

In the 5th edition Govier returns to public concerns. The first example is:

“War is a legitimate instrument of foreign policy whenever the survival of the nation is at stake, because the purpose of foreign policy is to preserve the nation.” (PSA 2001, 1)

The next examples use similarly broad public concerns. The second example is, “There are no international police. It takes police to thoroughly enforce the law. Therefore, international law cannot be thoroughly enforced.” The third concludes: “National goals for Canada should be more than economic” (based on a short argument which manages to work in links to the Magna Carta, the Gettysburg Address, and the motto of the French Revolution). All three of these examples put citizenship first: we are in Canada, as part of an international

community – just at the time that Canada was engaged in Afghanistan, terrorism increased, and the US moved into war with Iraq. As with her economic example, Govier challenges prevailing views by considering a defence of war at a time when the country was uncomfortable participating in wars. For the 7th edition, the first example is

Marijuana should not be legalized. That's because sustained use of marijuana worsens a person's memory, and nothing that adversely affects one's mental abilities should be legalized. (PSA 2009, 1)

This example picks a topic that might engage students both personally and as citizens. They might consume marijuana and certainly will have opinions on whether marijuana should be legalized. However, just as she did in the 1980s, Govier makes sure the conclusion is the opposite of popular opinion. In 1988, her dispassionately-expressed example would have been uncontroversial: many people opposed legalization. By 2009 public opinion had swung towards legalization and Canada had already legalized marijuana for medical use; opposing legalization had become the more controversial position.

A community approach like Govier's, like the logical approach, builds in a need to explain examples to students unfamiliar with the topic, which can be time-consuming and challenging depending on how much background knowledge the students have. However, of the three approaches, it also allows the widest range of examples to be used, provided the explanations draw students in together to share new information and concerns. My reason for choosing the word "community" as a descriptor is because it emphasizes that the choice of examples and the explanation of those examples should increase the sense of community between students instead of reinforcing any "us" and "them" distinction.

Choosing suitable examples raises a concern beyond differences linked to gender identity, ethnic

background, or socio-economic class: students' current emotional states. For every student who is deeply engaged by a discussion of euthanasia or abortion, there may be a student currently dealing with a critically-ill relative or who has herself had an abortion. Arguments on an objectively controversial topic have a very different tone and colour for anyone whose personal experience makes him or her relive the emotional turmoil and the questioning of beliefs that accompany life-changing events. Students in such a position may need options such as private discussions outside class, or freedom to leave the room before discussion begins.

The overall problem of choosing inclusive examples can seem to be an insurmountable obstacle to teaching: how could we possibly teach reasoning in a way which is individualized to each of our student's needs? Can we be ethically obliged to limit our discussion topics to those that will not trigger individual distress? Is that even possible?

8. Learning from teaching

There are two principles I want to carry away from this close inspection of a text over its gradual evolution. The first is to maintain a reasoned response: to review my understandings of teaching through cogent argument. If this text or any other no longer sits well with the learners entrusted to me, I must find a new path between where they are and where they need to be as good citizens in a mutually respectful community. This means that I must be prepared to learn what they know and what they care about, and find examples and explanations that can bridge their interests and what I know to be important in the local, national, and global communities they inhabit.

The second is to maintain a compassionate stance: to do more than just respect others as we engage in argument about reasoning. In the wider social context, we

must share responsibility for working at the challenge of building relationships and practices to accommodate the full diversity of people with whom we share the world.

When I think back on my own experience, I realize I have changed my teaching practice incrementally, as I learned more about diversity. First, I learned to be explicit about reasoning as a practice and why I expect students to participate in class. Students from Asia would simply drop my class if I didn't make it clear that I was sufficiently expert in my field to be worth listening to, and that in my expert judgment, participation was required in order to learn. However, I also permit students to stay silent rather than contribute in class: some Canadian women whose parents were born in India would drop the class if I required them to speak, as would students with anxiety disorders.

I avoid examples involving economic privilege. One text had an example about buying cars; I dropped it because many students I have taught are too poor to own cars. I minimize examples connected to European history; as a child in Africa I resented learning only the history of foreign countries. I explain key differences between US and Canadian laws and traditions; students often don't know there is a difference.

I learned never to assume which student would be willing to contribute on which topic. I once invited a student who was a social worker to give an informed opinion on drug treatment issues; this made a young man in the class angry. As he explained later, he knew far more than she did because he was a former addict.

I am careful now about emotional issues. I issue a general caution that some topics trigger too much emotion to be comfortable to practice on, and respect students' discretion to choose or avoid some topics. I do not assume what will be a "trigger" issue; instead, I say that anything mentioned in a reasoning class could hit close to home for someone, so respectful expression is always required. It is not always the teacher who triggers a problem: one student

burst into tears over a topic she herself had selected and was relieved when I suggested a less distressing alternative. Conversely, I asked another student if she wanted to change her project, on arguments about euthanasia, since her mother was fatally ill, but she seemed to find it valuable to have this avenue to think about the decisions she and her sisters were facing.

I draw on experience as a Writing Centre volunteer and on curriculum committees to discuss specific differences students will see between my reasoning class and what happens in other disciplines. The more I can explain where they may need to modify their practices in other contexts, the more comfortable they are trying new techniques and accepting there may not be a clear, universal set of rules for reasoning.

Finally, I have adopted what has become general practice at my institution: an acknowledgment at the start of a course that our work takes place on unceded Sto:Lo territory and that it is a privilege to be permitted to teach here. This acknowledgment goes far beyond recognition of unresolved indigenous land claims. It indicates not only that the different traditions and expectations of people in our region can factor into assessing arguments, but also that we are in an environment which can question prevailing practices, including the practice of reason. I am also careful to include my personal experience where it is relevant to examples I have chosen, as I have done throughout this paper. Including personal detail shows that I am speaking from my lived experience, which is essential to indigenous tradition, and opens up narrative voice as another way to work with reasoning.

Do all these changes add up to a satisfactory way to teach a diverse group of students to reason using shared standards? I am sure they do not. Thirty years of trial and error only shows me that I have had to pick myself up over and over again after making mistakes. But that is what a reasoner does: she finds reasonable responses, not just to

arguments but to challenges to practice or changes in relationships.

9. Conclusion

A Practical Study of Argument deserves its place as a classic text. It has brought thousands of students to an acceptable level of performance using a well-grounded theory of argument evaluation. It gives us Govier's personal voice and her engagement with the challenges of practical reasoning. An instructor just learning to teach reasoning can start here with confidence that the approach is theoretically sound and introduces topics of civic and philosophical interest. A course taught from this text will walk a practical line between the abstractions of reasoning theory and the concerns of a diverse society.

However, the practicality of teaching argument also requires us to continue to shape our teaching to our students' needs. As fellow members of our communities, students will become concerned with how a community can sustain itself. To sustain a community of people who can reason together, we need to explore when reasoning practice can still be presented as universal, and when approaches should be modified so that culturally diverse and feminist concerns are welcomed, and the style of reasoning is accessible to a range of different students.

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