

Logic

Written by Jon Rappoport

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The basic fact is, students in schools are rarely taught how to follow a line of reasoning from beginning to end. Nor do they practice analyzing half-formed, faulty arguments. Who teaches young students, these days, how to distinguish between a polemic and a formal argument?



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Teachers spend little or no time discussing hidden premises or assumptions, which color a subsequent argument. Increasingly, people are “learning” from watching videos. Some videos are well done; many others intentionally omit vital data and make inferences based on shocking images. A focused study of logic can illuminate a range of subjects and disciplines. It can suddenly bring perspective to fields of inquiry that were formerly mysterious and impenetrable.

Logic is the parent of knowledge. It contains the principles and methods common to all investigation. Being able to spot and understand logical flaws and fallacies embedded in an article, essay, or book immediately lifts the intelligence level.

Logic isn't a prison; one isn't forced to obey its rules. But the ability to deploy it, versus not understanding what it is, is like the difference between randomly hammering at a keyboard and typing coherent paragraphs. It's the difference between, “I guess I agree with what he's writing,” and “I know exactly how he's making his argument.”

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In the West, the tradition of logic was codified by Aristotle. Before him, Plato, in the Socratic Dialogues, employed it to confound Socrates' opponents. Reading the Dialogues today, one can see, transparently, where Plato's Socrates made questionable assumptions, which he then successfully foisted on those opponents. It's quite instructive to go back and chart Socrates' clever steps. You see logic and illogic at work.

High schools today don't teach logic for two reasons. The teachers don't understand the subject, and logic as a separate discipline has been deleted because students, armed with it, would become authentically independent. The goal of education rejects independent minds, despite assurances to the contrary.

Logic and critical analysis should be taught in phases, with each phase encompassing more complex passages of text offered for scrutiny. Eventually, students would delve into thorny circumstantial arguments, which make up a great deal of modern investigation and research, and which need to be assessed on the basis of degrees of probable validity and truth.

It's like a climbing a mountain. The lower paths are relatively easy if the map is clear. At higher elevation, more elements come into play, and a greater degree of skill and experience is required.

My college logic teacher introduced his subject to the class this way: "Once you've finished this semester, you'll know what you know, and you'll know what you don't know." The second part of his statement has great value. It enables real research beyond egotistical concerns, beyond self-serving presumptions, and beyond secretly assuming what you're pretending to prove.

We certainly don't live in an age of reason; far from it. Therefore, there's a greater need to learn logic. Among other benefits, it centers the thinking process. In a landscape of controversy, babble, bluster, public relations, covert propaganda, and outright lying, logic provides a dependable compass.

For instance, understanding the scientific method (hypothesis / prediction / verification) would go a long way toward untangling some of the outrageous claims of science, and separating them from the political agendas they serve.

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Beginning in ancient Greece, coming up through the Middle Ages, and into the 19th century, logic was one aspect of education called the Trivium (“the three”). In sequence, a student learned grammar, then logic, then rhetoric. Except in scattered places, where people have consciously instituted a revival of the Trivium, that integrated method of teaching is gone now.

Instead, in primary and middle schools, we have superficial coasting through many academic subjects, minus the necessary exercises and drills to ensure that students grasp material. In other words, we have imposed ADHD.

Logic isn't the be-all and end-all of life. It doesn't define what life is. It's a tool. You either have it or you don't. You can use it or you can't. When you can, you have more power, and whole new vistas, previously unseen, open up to you.

Logic is a tool in your box. When you need to use it, will it be dull or sharp?

Finally, studying logic gives a student an appreciation of consequences. For example, a politician announces a high-flying generalization as a plank of his platform. Two things ought to follow. The student does his best to translate that generality into specific terms which actually mean something. Then he traces what would happen if the plank were, in fact, put into effect; what would the consequences specifically entail? There are always consequences—it's just that most people never see them or think about them, because they haven't the foggiest idea about how to flesh them out and map their implications.

Logic: one of the great contributions to civilization, left to die on the vine.

It needs to be resurrected, in full flower.

After working for 30 years as a reporter, I recognized I was using “three branches” of logic. Each one helps. Each one contributes to investigations. Each one enables a person to spot flaws.

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Branch one is called formal logic, or the logic of implication, or symbolic logic. It began with Aristotle. It offers rules for determining what is valid and what is invalid. In the simplest terms, for example: "If it snows, there are clouds. There are no clouds; therefore, it isn't snowing."

Branch two: the logical fallacies. There are many lists. Some fallacies overlap with others. Example: If I want to defend the existence of man-made global warming, I attack the person who argues that warming is pseudoscience— and I ignore the content of his argument. This fallacy is called ad hominem: "toward the man." Or I find a person making an extreme and ridiculous argument against global warming: "The sun actually exudes very little heat, so warming is impossible." I use that person as my straw man. I imply he represents all people arguing against global warming, and I knock him down. That's the straw man fallacy. It is extremely helpful to study these fallacies and become able to spot them.

Branch three: You ask, "What point is an author trying to make? What is he arguing for? What is his conclusion?" Finding that, consider what evidence he offers for his conclusion. Does the evidence justify the conclusion? Many arguments these days are circumstantial. They involve degrees of probability. They need to be approached on a case-by-case basis.

I've described the three branches in bare-bones terms. There is much more to learn about each one.

If schools taught these three aspects to students, if teachers gave students increasingly complex arguments to analyze, a whole new generation of thinkers would arise. Education would be revolutionized.

Since most schools don't do that job, the task often falls to homeschoolers.

For a teacher, there's nothing quite like seeing the lights go on in a student's mind. The student suddenly understands what using logic means. He can deploy it to take apart information. He no longer wanders from one bit of information to another, selecting what he already agrees with or what strikes his fancy of the moment. He has staying power. He can work on his own. He can find fallacies and explain them. He can assess degrees of probability.

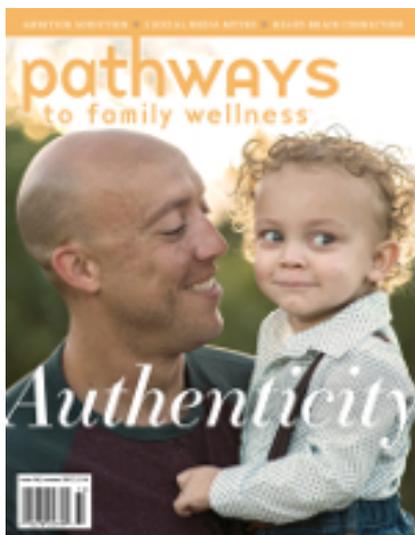
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He's launched.

This is independence. This is power.



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