during World War II? The ability to question subjectivities presented as the objective truth makes debate uniquely empowering for individuals disenfranchised by the current system. It teaches students to interrogate their own institutionalized neglect and the systemic unhindered oppression of others. It is one of the few venues in which we are able to question authority.

Thank you to all those who gave me the gift of resistance. I once read "the cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don't listen to it, you will never know what justice is." This profound statement captures the essence my argument and perhaps is the reason why educational reform is not yet emancipatory: Debate allows students to take control of their educational destiny and at once make it a site of resistance. It allows those saddled with the baggage of poverty, racism, and sexism to construct their personal strategy for liberation. The Urban Debate League provides a space for us to learn what justice is because it forces us to learn from those disproportionately affected by injustice.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Nicholas F. Burnett, Editor

Review Essay: Debunking, Critical Thinking, and Teaching Argumentation

David Snowball

Debunking is a dangerous business: the intellectual world's equivalent of a bomb disposal operation. It requires a clear sense of our own limitations, a certain respect for the object to be disarmed, and exquisite care in operation. A sense of confidence in our ability does help. A childish sense of outrage, and the attendant urge to kick at things, does not. Done well, it is an invaluable service to the community. Done poorly, it further craters the intellectual landscape.

It is rarely done well. Why? At least three reasons come to mind:

First, we tend to approach these projects in a spirit of high dudgeon. We only attempt to debunk beliefs that have achieved something of a popular currency; there would, otherwise, be no reason to approach them. And there's nothing that arouses an academic's missionary ire quite like the sight of more intellectual clap-track being slurped up by a credulous mass. While these feelings are understandable, they hardly encourage intellectual detachment and self-skepticism.

Second, we tend to approach projects that require us to work beyond the scope of our expertise. The odd notions which catch the public's fancy often spill beyond the borders of any single discipline (a skeptical discussion of creationism, for instance, requires conversations in biology, geology, and history). In our attempts to respond to these notions, as scholars we often venture beyond our intellectual homes and into areas where our understanding is fragmentary and impressionistic.

Third, we tend to compromise our intellectual standards to reach our prospective audience. Having already observed that the public is incapable of clear thought (a distant echo of Aristotle's notion that rhetoric addresses listeners who "are not able to see many things all together" and who, thus, cannot be reached by dialectic reason or scientific demonstration), we tend to popularize our arguments by cutting corners and leaving out "the hard stuff."

Plato offers one of the great examples of the treachery of debunking. We know that he was maddened, especially in his youth, by the pernicious influence of sophistic rhetoricians. The essence of his critique is well known: rhetoricians dupe the masses into accepting things based on mere appearance, rather than on reality. His longest and most scornful assault on rhetoric is contained in *Gorgias*, a dialogue in which Socrates skillfully exposes the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the blowhard Gorgias of Leontini. But at what

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price did Plato achieve this victory? In *Phaedrus*, Plato denounces writing: "No work, whether in verse or in prose, has ever been written or recited that is worthy of serious attention . . . [they are] delivered for the sake of mere persuasion, which give no opportunity for questioning or exposition." He heaps special scorn upon those who spend "hours twisting phrases this way or that, pasting in this and pruning that." And yet, in *Gorgias*, Plato surrendered to each and every one of these temptations. So far as we know, the Gorgean dialogue never took place. It is a detestable fabrication in which Plato pretends to a dialectical exchange while presenting a purely rhetorical diatribe. His faux Gorgias accepts premises which are convenient to Plato's argument but utterly alien to Gorgias' actual beliefs. Gorgias is assigned pompous pronouncements which Socrates is allowed skewer with a sarcastic phrase or well-chosen question. The price of Plato's "victory" is the surrender of all of his own intellectual standards in the pursuit of a popular victory.

Nonetheless, the urge to debunk is almost irresistible. The amount of bunk available to us seems unprecedented. The Internet and the World Wide Web give every crank with a computer the means to share his or her fevered imagination with tens of millions of browsers. (There are, by way of example, several dozen websites devoted to Holocaust denial with the Institute for Historical Review's site alone reporting 7,700 hits per week.) And the broadcast media's determined attempts to blend together every conceivable combination of fact, speculation, and pseudoscientific drivel ("Unsolved Mysteries," "Sightings," and "In Search of . . ." all come to mind) make it harder and harder for educators to instill anything like a sense of skepticism and critical perspective.

And just as the tide of bunk has been rising, so to has the tide of debunking. Magazines of various quality, USENET newsgroups devoted to conspiracy theories and urban myths, local skeptics' organizations and books that promise to expose the charlatans are increasingly common. Some of these books seem merely to collate intriguing little case studies while others proceed from a critical framework to the analysis of bits of bunk. All, to a greater or lesser degree, fall victim to Plato's mistake.

As we try to move the study of argumentation away from a tight focus on forms, whether syllogisms or stock issues, and toward a model that emphasizes various dimensions of critical thinking, such books will play an ever-larger role in our classes. While the traditional model offered by intercollegiate debate remains useful, it no longer holds the unquestioned dominance of a generation ago. Whether in response to the needs of students who did not respond well to formal debate, or to demands for relevance arising in other parts of the academy, more and more courses situate the study of argumentation outside of the debate context. Courses in which students trace and respond to arguments used in actual public controversies offer a way to broaden the array of approaches available for teaching students to argue more effectively. This review looks at three recent, widely disparate works, each of which is a potential supplemental text for a course in critical thinking or applied argumentation.

The *Demon-Haunted World* is the quintessential Carl Sagan book. Sagan argues that the popular embrace of pseudoscience threatens our civilization's existence: "I don't know

to what extent ignorance of science and mathematics contributed to the decline of ancient Athens, but I know that the consequences of scientific illiteracy are far more dangerous in our time than in any that has come before. It's perilous and foolhardy for the average citizen to remain ignorant" (7).

In this book, as a self-described "popularizer," Sagan sets out to extol the glories of scientific inquiry and to debunk a wide array of pseudoscientific beliefs. Sagan acknowledges the failings of individual scientists, himself included, but is unabashed about the four great virtues of science:

> Science can be the golden road out of poverty and backwardness for emerging nations. . . . [It] alerts us to the perils introduced by our world-altering technologies . . . [it] teaches us about the deepest issues of the origins, natures and facts -- of our species, of life, of our planet, of the Universe. . . . The values of science and the values of democracy are concordant, in many cases indistinguishable. (37)

His method is to provide a long series of independent chapters, most of which contain a few words about science, a few well-aimed shots at pseudoscience, and a sort of moral to the story. His targets include channeling, astrology, faith healing, satanism, extraterrestrial visits and abductions, crop circles, the Roswell incident, faces on the surface of Mars, and UFOs generally.

The strengths of the work, which has received largely reverential reviews, are easy to summarize. The writing is clear, engaging and conversational. Sagan has an outstanding command of the studies on various pseudoscientific beliefs and uses it to deliver short, devastating critiques. By way of example, he notes that the famous "face" on the surface of Mars was actually created by a faulty radio transmission: "a strategically placed 'nostril' -- one that adds much to the impression of a face -- is in fact a black dot corresponding to lost data in the transmission from Mars to Earth" (55). He further notes that there are no other "constructed" objects visible anywhere near the face and that the face itself occupies one square kilometer on a planet of 150 million square kilometers (and one frame of film in a series of 100,000 frames).

Finally, Sagan writes with a contagious, deeply felt passion. His mission is not to extol science for the sake of extolling science, but to extol science for the sake of preserving Western civilization. In pursuit of that end, he casts a wide net: quotations from Clement of Alexandria and from Nietzsche, from Epictetus and from 17th century exposes of witch hunters. He offers detailed criticisms of our media, politicians and schools. The book is a clarion call to reform the way that we teach about, and think about, science. Sagan contends that as long as we teach science as a collection of facts to be memorized -- as just one more set of authoritative declarations -- we will be held hostage to pseudoscience. Only when educators help students, from preschool through graduate school, understand the methods which are at the heart of science will we reclaim our freedom.

The faults in the work are equally easy to identify. There are three worthy of special notice. First, the work is utterly disorganized. There is no pattern to the order of the chapters and sometimes little pattern within them. Sagan's homage to logic is a chapter

entitled "The Fine Art of Baloney Detection." Since it presents an analytic framework for assessing pseudoscience, it would seem logical to place it at the beginning of the work. Instead, it is the twelfth of twenty-five chapters. It offers a quick list of fallacies (*ad hominem* argument, special pleading, slippery slopes), but devotes only a sentence or two to each. And none of the case studies in the book (including the ones in that very chapter) actually apply any of these techniques to the hoaxes in question.

Second, the very breadth of the work makes it impossible to maintain high standards of scholarship throughout. There are no footnotes. Statistics appear without attribution. Each chapter is supported only by a reading list of between two and a dozen sources. Sagan makes confident pronouncements that just beg for a critical reading: "Surveys suggest that some 95% of Americans are 'scientifically illiterate.' That's just the same fraction as those African Americans . . . who were illiterate just before the Civil War" (6). "The last scientifically literate President may have been Thomas Jefferson" (7). "[Jefferson] almost more than anyone else, was responsible for the spread of democracy throughout the world" (425). "Jefferson [was] a leading theoretician [of democracy]" (426). "[Jefferson] advocated freedom of speech, in part so that even wildly unpopular views could be expressed" (427). These statements beg, variously, for a definition of terms and methods and a more careful reading of historical scholarship.

Third, Sagan has trouble confronting the limitations of the scientific method as practiced by the scientific establishment. His sanguine faith in the self-correcting nature of science brooks no fundamental questioning of the process. The work of a generation of social scientists, who have demonstrated the breath-taking chasm between what scientists profess and what they do, is completely absent. He is happily willing to note, and then quickly discount, the flaws of the scientists: "Scientists make mistakes. Accordingly, it is the job of the scientist to recognize our weaknesses . . . to be ruthlessly self-critical. Science is a collective enterprise with the error-correction machinery often running smoothly" (254). Given the reports of Sagan's own willingness to bend science to the needs of the moment -- for example, "adjusting" solar output in a climate model to make the nuclear winter hypothesis work out -- these absences are telling.

For all its flaws, this is a powerful book. It provides a worthwhile model for those who are trying to reconstruct the notion of a "public intellectual" and to reconnect our inquiries with some underlying set of values. It would, in particular, make an outstanding addition to a core reading list for all first year students in college (and for a fair number of their elders).

Why People Believe Weird Things is a very different book, though on the same subject. Unlike the distinguished Dr. Sagan, Michael Shermer is a relative outsider to academe: he is the publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and an occasional teacher (his book jacket notes that he teaches the history of science in the Cultural Studies Program at Occidental College, while Skeptic's website occasionally makes him an Assistant Professor in the Department of Cultural Studies -- which doesn't exist -- and occasionally notes that he teaches only occasionally). Like Sagan's book, which begins with a tribute to his own teachers, this book begins autobiographically. Shermer notes that he is a competitive bicyclist who naively

latched on to an enormous array of nostrums: diets based on cayenne peppers and garlic, mud baths to leach away toxins, megavitamins, therapeutic enemas, Rolfing and Electro-Acuscopy. He converted to skepticism on a cross-country bike race when he found that four huge handfuls of vitamins and minerals each day was producing nothing but "the most expensive and colorful urine in America" (15). He has, since that day, become an activist on the model of James "The Amazing" Randi. He helps set up local skeptics' groups, lectures on the college circuit, debates Holocaust deniers, and serves as the token doubter on television programs.

Like Sagan, Shermer sets out to debunk pseudoscience. Unlike Sagan, he extends his inquiry into pseudohistory. He notes that humans need to find order and meaning in their environments and that we have developed an enormous array of devices -- from sorting through entrails to sorting through testable hypotheses -- to create it. His task is to help people separate the functional from the dysfunctional systems of explanation:

> This book is about people who share similar beliefs and hopes yet pursue them by very dissimilar methods. It is about the distinction between science and pseudoscience, history and pseudohistory, and the difference it makes . . . the book deals with controversies not necessarily on the margins of society which may have pernicious social consequences: creation-science and biblical literalism, Holocaust denial and the freedom of speech, race and IQ, political extremism and the radical right, modern witch crazes prompted by moral panics and mass hysteria . . . (6).

The book is organized around five broad sections, each of which contains three or four chapters. The first is Science and Skepticism, which provides both his intellectual framework and a decent discussion of twenty-five fallacies (from "scientific language does not make a science" to *Reductio ad Absurdum*). Pseudoscience and Superstition takes on a variety of topics from near-death experiences to alien abduction. Evolution and Creationism reviews the backgrounds of the creationists and provides answers to their most common claims. History and Pseudohistory focuses primarily on Holocaust deniers and, to a lesser extent, to genetic determinism. His final section returns to two larger questions: How much can science accomplish? Why do people believe weird things? Each chapter attempts to provide both specific refutation and general principles that we might draw from the experience. The writing is serviceable and accessible to a general audience, with only minor lapses into annoying babble. However, it lacks Sagan's passion.

Prime among the book's strengths is Shermer's willingness to limit his focus to a manageable number of topics. He devotes, for example, three chapters and fifty pages to his discussion of creationism. One chapter describes the creationists' belief system and discusses its underlying sociology, including its parallels to Holocaust denial. A second chapter examines and responds to twenty-five creationist arguments. The third chapter discusses the way that courts reasoned to a rejection of creation-science laws. Holocaust denial receives similar coverage. Even the subjects he touches more briefly (for example, the Roswell incident) still receive considerably more discussion than Sagan offers.

A second strength is Shermer's willingness to document many of his claims. He averages three or four references per page and provides a rich, fifteen page bibliography. Those references both increase Shermer's credibility and provide valuable assistance for instructors who might want to use the shorter chapters as a jumping-off point for more extensive development.

There are, balanced against this, three weaknesses. The first, and most annoying, is that Shermer does an awfully poor job of explaining why people believe weird things. His explanations are brief and uninspired: "The analyses in this book explain in three tiers why people believe weird things: (1) because hope springs eternal; (2) because thinking can go wrong in general ways; (3) because thinking can go wrong in particular ways" (8). His concluding chapter is hardly more useful: "More than any other, the reason people believe weird things is because they want to. It feels good. It is comforting. It is consoling" (275). He adds three additional possibilities in the following pages: some weird things offer immediate gratification (psychic hotlines), some offer simple explanations for complex phenomena, some "offer simple, immediate, and consoling canons of morality and meaning" (276). In addition to the banality of these suggestions, they do not even explain all of the phenomena highlighted in the book (e.g., Holocaust denial).

Second, the book does not really offer any fundamentally new insights. Befitting its origins as a series of articles for *Skeptic* magazine, the book's strengths are in reportage and in putting a human face on the adherents of these weird beliefs. When he is reporting on his interactions with those adherents, Shermer offers interesting information that is not easily available from other sources. When he returns to the task of examining the arguments, the analysis is mostly competent reporting.

Finally, like Sagan, Shermer has reified science. Science does things, more than scientists do. "Science leads us toward rationalism: basing conclusions on logic . . . science helps us avoid dogmatism: basing conclusions on authority" (20) or "It is important to recognize the fallibility of science and the scientific method. But within this fallibility lies its greatest strength: self-correction" (21). He gives no evidence of having considered either the rhetorical or sociological perspectives on scientists. He briefly quotes Thomas Kuhn, but has no real heart for the question: Why do scientists believe weird things?

Given an instructor who recognizes Shermer's gaps and who has a grasp of those issues, Shermer's book would make a good text for a course in public argument.

Theodore Schick's, *How to Think About Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age,* is the most overtly textbookish of the three. That's understandable, given that Dr. Schick is the only full-time academic among these authors: a Professor of Philosophy at Muhlenberg College where he teaches courses in ethics and epistemology. He has self-consciously crafted a book for logic and critical thinking classes. He notes that it is written for people who would like answers to questions about UFOs, astrology, and creationism: "But this is not primarily a book of such answers, though several will be offered. This book is about how to find the answers for yourself -- how to test the truth or reality of some of the most

influential, mysterious, provocative, bewildering puzzles we can ever experience. It's about how to think clearly and critically . . ." (2).

Schick's organization differs radically from Sagan's and Shermer's. Where they focused on case studies Schick focuses on eight themes such as the possibility of the impossible (which addresses the question cum claim, "well, it's not impossible, is it?") to science and its pretenders. Each chapter works through the criteria for assessing a claim and then illustrates the applicable of the criteria to a particular case. In the case of "science and its pretenders," Schick introduces a four-step form of the scientific method and offers five criteria for judging a scientific claim. The criteria are testability, fruitfulness, scope, simplicity and conservatism -- "other things being equal, the best hypothesis is the one that is the most conservative, that is, the one that fits best with established beliefs" (210). With considerable precise, Schick then tests both evolution and creationism against these criteria. He concludes:

> Creationism can be considered as good a theory as evolution only if it meets the criteria of adequacy as well as evolution does, but it doesn't. With respect to each criterion of adequacy . . . creationism actually does much worse than evolution. Consequently, the creationists' claim that creationism is as good a theory as evolution is totally unfounded (218).

The book concludes with a chapter designed to set up student discussions and an appendix discussing the informal fallacies. Each chapter is enlivened by a series of small sidebar stories and marginal quotations. The references are present but unobtrusive and there is a suggested reading list with each chapter. The writing is precise, if dry.

The great strength of Schick's book is its focus on clearly enunciated and continually reinforced principles. Where the discussion of logical principles is secondary to story telling for Sagan and Shermer, it is primary for Schick. He outlines a large array of useful notions (from the placebo effect to the various forms of relativism) and takes students through the process of systematically assessing conflicted claims.

The great weakness of Schick's book is that it is a textbook. It is not meant to be light reading, and is not. On reason and evidence, for example, he writes: "Reasons confer probability on propositions. The better the reasons, the more likely it is that the proposition they support is true. But having reasons that make a proposition only somewhat more likely than its denial is not enough to justify our claim to know it" (99).

His statement is correct, precise and unlikely to engage an audience. Used judiciously, Schick's fine reasoning would provide an excellent tool for a course that is already rich in primary sources and examples.

Aristotle cautioned that argument must be grounded in "the regular subjects of debate," and not in "any haphazard materials, such as the fancies of crazy people." As desirable as that might be, we live in a world where such fancies masquerade as science and history. Our task is to prepare students to recognize, analyze, and respond to fanciful claims. Each of these books offers to aid us in that task: Sagan by passionately tying scientific inquiry to freedom, Shermer by dissecting fantasies in some depth, and Schick by providing succinct

analytic frameworks. Each provides formidable resources for training students to reason through a world in which the Weekly World News passes for journalism.

Books Reviewed

The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark. By Carl Sagan. New York: Ballantine, 1996; pp. 457, $25.95 paper. ISBN 0-394-53512-X.

Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition and Other Confusions of Our Time. By Michael Shermer. New York: Freeman, 1997; pp. 352, $18.36 paper. ISBN 0-716-73090-1

How to Think About Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age. By Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1995; pp. 299, $19.95 paper. ISBN 1-559-34254-4.

Arguing in Communities. By Gary Layne Hatch. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1996; pp. 495, $32.95. ISBN 1-559-34382-6.

The Structure of Argument 2nd edition. By Annette T. Rottenberg. Boston: Bedford Books, 1996; pp. 407 pages, $17.95 paper. ISBN 0-312-13412-6.

The readers of this journal comprise one of the very types of discourse communities to which Gary Layne Hatch refers in his textbook, *Arguing in Communities*. As a group defined by its shared interest in making principles of argumentation more meaningful and accessible to multiple audiences, members of this community will likely find Hatch's book refreshing in its orientation and unique in its blending of classical with contemporary theorizing about argumentation.

The premise of the text is that arguments take place in virtually all discursive situations, and in order to understand, appreciate and respond to such arguments one must examine the discourse of a particular community in its every day context. Hatch indicts approaches which feature the dissection of arguments and their analysis as a form of academic gamesmanship; he claims that such approaches remove arguments from their natural environment, divorcing them from their real world contexts. He attempts, therefore, to present the study of argument as a vital part of every day life, reasoning that if arguments can be improved, so, too, can communities.

To that end, Hatch divides the text into two parts. The first offers a discussion of the ways in which communities argue as a means of rational persuasion. Aristotle's modes of proof are featured prominently in this section. In addition, Hatch incorporates social theorist Frans van Eemerent's model of argument structure, while also making connections to Stephen Toulmin's model for reasoning. The first section of the text seeks to offer a broad perspective for understanding argument by illustrating how to identify, record, and evaluate the persuasive efforts of those involved in the conversations of a given community. Part Two of the text has as its focal point a discussion of types of claims. Grounded in classical stasis theory, this section covers claims about existence, causality, language, values, and actions. Hatch reasons that once students can understand what is at issue in a given disagreement and what types of claims are made, they may better comprehend how to evaluate and respond to those claims as they interact within a community.

Although this text is designed for courses in argumentative writing, it has much to commend it for those who are not teachers of composition. The emphasis in the text is on understanding the conventions of different discourse communities, and it matters not whether students write about or speak about what they learn as they explore these sites of discourse. Some of the features of the text which illustrate its applicability in any type of argument class are the following: a description of how ethos and pathos are integrated with logical appeals, advice on how to adapt arguments to the needs of different audiences, an overview of research both in the library and beyond, examples of MLA and APA documentation for various sources (including on-line material), an exercise using folklore to encourage students to "do research" in the stories told by their family and friends, readings related to on-line and virtual communities (along with a list of e-mail discussion lists), over sixty reading selections which illustrate the concepts discussed and provide contrasting views on specific issues, a well-developed chapter on fallacies, and a glossary of terms which offers a convenient resource to access the language of argument analysis.

All in all, this textbook should please those who appreciate a firm grounding in classical treatments of argumentation yet who also seek to account for more contemporary theorizing about public influence. Hatch negotiates the interplay between the two orientations quite well. Ultimately, he succeeds in illustrating how to examine arguments in their "native habitats" rather than as "zoological specimens" on display outside of their natural surroundings.

A textbook with a similar goal is Annette T. Rottenberg's *The Structure of Argument.* Also intended for argumentative writing courses (and much more oriented in that direction than Hatch's book), Rottenberg's text answers the challenge faced by any teacher trying to help students understand arguments in context. Rottenberg offers an indictment similar Hatch's, namely that "traditional methods of teaching argument through mastery of the formal processes of reasoning cannot account for the complexity of arguments in practice" (iii). She seeks, then, to present readers with an approach to critical thinking which examines how arguers organize and develop their claims in context.

To do so, Rottenberg also uses a variation of the Toulmin model. She attempts to simplify some of Toulmin's concepts and to augment them with attention to motivational appeals and an audience-centered approach. With respect to motivational appeals, Rottenberg rejects attempts to separate logic and emotion, opting instead to legitimize the examination of the wants and needs of an audience in the argument process. As for her audience-centered approach, she asserts that the purity of one's logic is not as important as winning the adherence of the listener, so she emphasizes the ways in which successful arguers can persuade an audience to accept a claim.

The book is organized into two sections. Part One offers two introductory chapters and six chapters covering the principle elements of argumentation: claims, definitions, support, warrants, language and thought, and induction, deduction, and logical fallacies. These six chapters conclude with short debates on popular topics: drug legalization, teenage pregnancy, animal rights, capital punishment, smoking, and alien abduction. Part One also provides fifty-two samples of arguments culled from speeches, editorials, advertisements, interviews, and news stories. These selections augment the text by illustrating principles of argument discussed in each chapter. Since they are reproduced from current publications and cover a wide range of subject matter, they reinforce the ubiquitous nature of argument. Part two emphasizes writing and researching arguments. It includes two annotated student papers, one using MLA style and the other using APA style.

Those familiar with Rottenberg's work will recognize that this edition of *The Structure of Argument* is actually an abridged version of her longer book, *Elements of Argument.* Missing from the shorter work are two anthologies: "Opposing Viewpoints, which includes seventy selections on eight currently controversial topics, and a chronologically arranged selection of eleven classic arguments, such as Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'" (v-vi). *The Structure of Argument* is best suited for those who do not want to work with the eighty-one additional readings, or who want to take advantage of the brief version by using it in conjunction with one or more additional texts.

The feature which most commends Annette T. Rottenberg's *The Structure of Argument* is its varied sampling of readings, advertisements, and debates. The authors' treatment of the Toulmin model is also quite useful. By comparison, however, Gary Layne Hatch's *Arguing in Communities* provides a more conceptually rich treatment of argumentation and is better suited for courses whose primary orientation is not composition. Both texts are fine illustrations of the attempt to locate the subject of argumentation in every day human affairs.

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The Argument Culture: Moving From Debate to Dialogue. By Deborah Tannen. New York: Random House, 1998.

Professor Tannen's sixteenth book examines and questions the tendency in the United States to approach any task or accomplishment with a programmed, vituperative posture. Tannen's goal is not to dispense with debate or "organic" opposition to legitimate conflicts, but rather to question the knee-jerk, warlike stance or agonism that pervades the enclaves she has chosen: the press, politics, education, litigation, gender roles, and electronic communication.

Tannen's point can be summarized with her assertion: "Smashing heads does not open minds" (26). The argument culture, and its corollary, the culture of critique, thrive in the fertile ground of sports and war metaphors, which by their nature are constituted as win-lose, two-sided, us-versus-them opposition. At one point, Tannen describes a journalistic critique which misreads the First Amendment as requiring the publishing or airing of divergent views -- no matter how outrageous or untrue. For example, in an attempt to provide balance and hear from "the other side," Holocaust deniers have been given unwarranted credibility. Television talk shows, too, are cast often in two-sided formats. The problem with bifurcating discussions is that many issues have more that one "side" and points of consensus and dialogue are overlooked in the rancor. An additional reason bipolarity is privileged is that two-sided discussions lend themselves to combative fights, which have become the hallmark of modern journalism. If there is not a fight or a scandal, there rarely is a story.

Propelled by the zeal of reporting the Watergate scandal, investigative journalism has metamorphosed into a key feature of "the search-and-destroy culture of critique" (55). According to Tannen, as producers and editors find they need to continuously up the ante by covering Nanny-gate, Travel-gate, FBI-gate, or the latest malfeasance. The public becomes the loser because this fetish for attack supplants other information required to make reasoned decisions. More tragically, Tannen asserts that this automatic aggression by the press corps played a role in news events prior to Admiral Boorda's suicide. The timing of a story raising questions about Boorda's entitlement to wear a "V" on a medal gave him little preparation for dealing with the embarrassment. Tannen notes that news organization accounts of Boorda's suicide argued the Admiral had "thin skin." Less dramatic, but equally troubling, is her depiction of political appointees who have withdrawn from public service because of the vicious media coverage during confirmation hearings. Add to this the combative opposition between the two major political parties, as evidenced by the fourteen incumbent senators who refused to seek reelection in 1996, and we see the destructive forces of the argument culture.

Though Tannen goes on to examine the argument culture and its roots in other contexts, particularly notable is her focus on technology because, she asserts, it has brought not only a broadening of communication, but also it has enhanced aggression. As technology has advanced, less of our communication is face-to-face. When families first bought radios,

everyone gathered around them to listen. The same was true of television. Now it is not uncommon for every family member to have a personal TV set, thereby separating family members even more. With the advent of the Internet and electronic mail, it is too easy to forward messages and "fire off" a hasty, heated reply. This "faceless communication" fosters isolation, separation, and anomie. Without a living, breathing human being in front of us, arguments are more likely to be agonizing. And, it is here that academic argumentation and debate should flourish, for it features people negotiating face-to-face disagreements rather than warring camps sniping through a computer screen. Every student of communication should read this book.

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