

CHAPTER 5

ASKING QUESTIONS

Chapter Outline:

1. Logic and Argumentation
2. Doubt
3. Inquiry
4. Hypothesis
5. Formal Evaluation

Chapter Objectives:

In this chapter you will develop the skill of “asking questions.” Asking questions involves both *doubt* and *inquiry*, and here you will learn about both. You will read a sample of the writings of American philosopher Charles S. Peirce. You will think about the kinds of questions you ask when you resolve your doubts. You will examine *when*, *who*, *why*, and *how deep* to question. You will be introduced to different forms of reasoning and a few examples of the logical evaluation of fallacies. In the Journal Assignments, you will get a chance to explore your own questions and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the sources of wisdom that surround you. After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- summarize the basic rules of wise inquiry.
- compare Descartes’ “systematic” approach to doubt to C.S. Peirce’s treatment of the role of “living doubt” in human experience.
- distinguish between the three primary forms of reasoning.
- identify a few fallacies, given clear examples

I am convinced. We ask questions constantly. Seldom, however, do we really *ask* about asking questions. There is an art to asking questions. There is a wisdom of asking questions. Those who know how to ask questions--the right questions - at the right time - in the right way--these are the wise ones.

As we are beginning to learn, the love of wisdom is nourished with the skills of wisdom. In the last chapter we learned about the skill of paying attention: the art of being still, letting what is “be” before us, noticing things. In this chapter we will look at a second skill, the skill of asking questions. As we have said above, a wise person knows how to ask questions.

We all know the foolish extremes. One the one hand there is simply, “Don’t ask.” For one reason or another, the asking feels too dangerous. We hear a voice saying, “don’t go there.” Or we are lazy; the asking might mean a lot of work. And so we decide to live without the questioning. On the other hand there is the wild and sudden overthrow of everything. We don’t account for the dangers of doubt. We open up bigger questions than we know how to answer. And we don’t know how to look for help. We demand “all or nothing” from our questioning. And we end up throwing everything we believe out the window. Or perhaps someone close to us, from whom we have received values or beliefs, has hurt us (or perhaps someone symbolizing those values or beliefs has hurt others in such a way as to affect us). And so in anger we reject those values or beliefs. Our questions are less a careful searching than an effort to show somebody wrong. The wrong questions are asked in the wrong way (and perhaps too fast or too many or above our reasoning capacity), and again, we leave our old beliefs and values behind without giving them a fair chance.

Somewhere between these extremes--different, I think, for different people at different times--is the skill of asking questions. We will explore the skill of asking questions by following the process of asking questions under four headings: doubt, inquiry, hypothesis, and formal evaluation.

Logic and Argumentation

But before we discuss doubt, we must briefly address another topic first. You see, in the discussion of philosophy, the process of asking of questions is intimately connected with another process: the process of logical reasoning, or *argumentation*. Philosophical argumentation has nothing to do with getting mad and yelling at someone over some difficulty (at least we hope not). Rather it has to do with the formal evaluation of evidence for things. And there are a number of specialized terms connected with argumentation that you should be familiar with at the start of this chapter:

An *argument* is a set of claims or *propositions*, one of which is supported by others. I “claim” for example that it will rain tomorrow. You ask me, “How do you know that?” I say, “because the weather report said that there was a 90 percent chance of rain tomorrow.” My claim that it will rain is supported by the claim that experts in weather see a high chance of rain for the day. One proposition supports another. This is a philosophical argument [Remember in Shankara’s discussion of the unity of the self he made “appeals” in order to defend “theses”]. My use of a number of claims to describe of the weather (it is cloudy, wind is blowing, barometer rising) would *not* be an argument unless my claims were used to *support* the idea that it will rain tomorrow. Get it?

An argument has two basic components: the *premises* and the *conclusion*. The *conclusion* is the claim which is meant to be supported by reasons (“It’s going to rain tomorrow”). The *premises* are the reasons offered to support a given conclusion (“The weather report said 90% chance”). Philosophers often list the premises and conclusions of an argument in a chart like this:

- **Premise 1** - The weather report said 90% chance of rain tomorrow.
- **Premise 2** - The weather report around here is usually trustworthy.
- **Conclusion** - It will probably rain tomorrow.

This whole argument (both premises and conclusion) is often called a *syllogism*.

A *valid* argument is one where true premises lead necessarily to a true conclusion.

Consider the following example:

- **Premise 1** - All humans are mortal.
- **Premise 2** - Socrates is human.
- **Conclusion** - Therefore Socrates is mortal.

This is a valid argument. The conclusion follows from the premises. It is also a true argument in that, based on the true premises, the conclusion is true. Yet consider this example:

- **Premise 1** - All humans are green.
- **Premise 2** - Socrates is human.
- **Conclusion** - Socrates is green.

This also is a *valid* argument (the form of the argument is fine). But it is not a *true* argument, because the first premise is false. Good argumentation is meant to argue from true premises, through valid procedures, to a true conclusion.

This whole process of logical reasoning is called *inference*. We “infer” from one state of affairs the likelihood of another state of affairs. There are a number of different forms of inference. Some examine patterns and suggest a new way of looking at things (*hypothesis*). Some focus on the validity of general claims (*deduction*). And others gather particular evidence to support a general claim (*induction*). You will learn more about these forms later in the chapter.

But now we are ready to explore doubt.

Doubt

For some, doubt is something very “bad.” This is especially the case among religious people. We hear that “doubt is the opposite of faith and is the same thing as unbelief. . . . doubt is something to be ashamed of, because it is dishonest to believe if you have doubts.”¹ But this is

1. Os Guinness, *In Two Minds: The Problem of Doubt and How to Resolve It* (Downers Grove,

simply wrong thinking. “The shame is not that people have doubts but that we are ashamed of them. Our problem is not that we have the wrong answers to particular doubts but that we do not have the right attitude to doubt in general.”² It is time we doubted our attitude about doubt and reconstructed our doubts from a more positive perspective (religious and non-religious alike).

First, let's recall our reading of Descartes. How does he approach the whole subject of doubt? Go back and skim Descartes' *Meditation* once again. How does doubt function in the “general upheaval of [Descartes'] former beliefs”? He uses the mere presence of doubt as a criteria for the rejection of a belief, for Descartes is trying to establish a philosophy from absolutely indubitable foundations. Note again his statement that “reason already persuades me that I ought no less carefully to withhold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those which appear to me manifestly to be false, if I am able to find in each one some reason to doubt, this will suffice to justify my rejecting the whole.” If he can doubt it at all (as, for example, whether his understanding of the laws of mathematics might be deceptions caused by an evil demon), then Descartes rejects this belief as a potential foundation for philosophy.

Now let's compare Descartes' thoroughgoing approach to doubt with that of another philosophical writing, “The Fixation of Belief,” written by the founder of American pragmatist philosophy Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914). Peirce originally published this as an article for *Popular Science Monthly*. The Introduction to this essay summarizes it, stating that in this essay, Peirce “develops his thesis that thought is a form of inquiry, and belief the cessation of doubt.” You will read the first four sections of the article in this chapter. You will read the final section in the next chapter.

Read it once through, just to get a sense of where it is going (skim). As you skim, skip all my comments in between the different sections (each section is identified with different Roman

IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 24,51.

2. Os Guinness, *In Two Minds: The Problem of Doubt and How to Resolve It* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 61–62.

numerals). Peirce talks a lot about the process of reasoning and you will have to remember what terms like "premise" and such mean. Peirce will also give a number of examples from scientific history. You don't have to understand the background of all his scientific illustrations. Just get the main point. Make sure and look up the words you don't know in a dictionary. Here are a few you might like to know about:

ratiocination - process of reasoning

drawing inferences - concluding one thing from the fact of another (I wake up and draw the inference, from the light pouring in my room, that I have overslept)

transubstantiation - the changing of bread into the body of Christ in Roman Catholic worship

grandiloquence - a pompous or lofty manner of speaking or writing

sanguine - optimistic and happy-spirited

masculine intellect - a sexist way of describing a very self-controlled mind, not prone to distraction

Assassins - these were early Muslim "suicide" squads

After looking up words, try to go back and understand each sentences in light of what you know now that you have looked the words up. Then, read the article once again, *slowly*, studying each section and my summary comments following each section. You will see that Peirce gradually works his way from an exploration of human reasoning and its weaknesses toward an account of thought, doubt, and inquiry. We will examine his final section, which presents four methods of fixing belief, in our next chapter.

The Fixation of Belief³

I

Few persons care to study logic, because everybody conceives himself to be proficient enough in the art of reasoning already. But I observe that this satisfaction is limited to one's own ratiocination, and does not extend to that of other men.

We come to the full possession of our power of drawing inferences, the last of all our faculties; for it is not so much a natural gift as a long and difficult art. The history of its practice would make a grand subject for a book. The medieval schoolman, following the Romans, made logic the earliest of a boy's studies after grammar, as being very easy. So it was as they understood it. Its fundamental principle, according to them, was, that all knowledge rests either on authority or reason; but that whatever is deduced by reason depends ultimately on a premiss derived from authority. Accordingly, as soon as a boy was perfect in the syllogistic procedure, his intellectual kit of tools was held to be complete.

To Roger Bacon, that remarkable mind who in the middle of the thirteenth century was almost a scientific man, the schoolmen's conception of reasoning appeared only an obstacle to truth. He saw that experience alone teaches anything -- a proposition which to us seems easy to understand, because a distinct conception of experience has been handed down to us from former generations; which to him likewise seemed perfectly clear, because its difficulties had not yet unfolded themselves. Of all kinds of experience, the best, he thought, was interior illumination, which teaches many things about Nature which the external senses could never discover, such as the transubstantiation of bread.

*Four centuries later, the more celebrated Bacon, in the first book of his *Novum Organum*, gave his clear account of experience as something which must be open to verification and reexamination. But, superior as Lord Bacon's conception is to earlier notions, a modern reader who is not in awe of his grandiloquence is chiefly struck by the inadequacy of his view of scientific procedure. That we have only to make some crude experiments, to draw up briefs of the results in certain blank forms, to go through these by rule, checking off everything disproved and setting down the alternatives, and that thus in a few years physical science would be finished up -- what an idea! "He wrote on science like a Lord Chancellor," indeed, as Harvey, a genuine man of science said.*

The early scientists, Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Galileo, Harvey, and Gilbert, had

3. <http://www.peirce.org/writings/p107.html>. See also Charles S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Volume 1 (1867-1893) (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 1992), 109-123.

methods more like those of their modern brethren. Kepler undertook to draw a curve through the places of Mars; and to state the times occupied by the planet in describing the different parts of that curve; but perhaps his greatest service to science was in impressing on men's minds that this was the thing to be done if they wished to improve astronomy; that they were not to content themselves with inquiring whether one system of epicycles was better than another but that they were to sit down to the figures and find out what the curve, in truth, was. He accomplished this by his incomparable energy and courage, blundering along in the most inconceivable way (to us), from one irrational hypothesis to another, until, after trying twenty-two of these, he fell, by the mere exhaustion of his invention, upon the orbit which a mind well furnished with the weapons of modern logic would have tried almost at the outset.

In the same way, every work of science great enough to be well remembered for a few generations affords some exemplification of the defective state of the art of reasoning of the time when it was written; and each chief step in science has been a lesson in logic. It was so when Lavoisier and his contemporaries took up the study of Chemistry. The old chemist's maxim had been, "Lege, lege, lege, labora, ora, et relege." Lavoisier's method was not to read and pray, but to dream that some long and complicated chemical process would have a certain effect, to put it into practice with dull patience, after its inevitable failure, to dream that with some modification it would have another result, and to end by publishing the last dream as a fact: his way was to carry his mind into his laboratory, and literally to make of his alembics and cucurbits instruments of thought, giving a new conception of reasoning as something which was to be done with one's eyes open, in manipulating real things instead of words and fancies.

The Darwinian controversy is, in large part, a question of logic. Mr. Darwin proposed to apply the statistical method to biology. The same thing has been done in a widely different branch of science, the theory of gases. Though unable to say what the movements of any particular molecule of gas would be on a certain hypothesis regarding the constitution of this class of bodies, Clausius and Maxwell were yet able, eight years before the publication of Darwin's immortal work, by the application of the doctrine of probabilities, to predict that in the long run such and such a proportion of the molecules would, under given circumstances, acquire such and such velocities; that there would take place, every second, such and such a relative number of collisions, etc.; and from these propositions were able to deduce certain properties of gases, especially in regard to their heat-relations. In like manner, Darwin, while unable to say what the operation of variation and natural selection in any individual case will be, demonstrates that in the long run they will, or would, adapt animals to their circumstances. Whether or not existing animal forms are due to such action, or what position the theory ought to take, forms the subject of a discussion in which questions of fact and questions of logic are curiously interlaced.

I. [On Reasoning and the Limits of Reasoning] (titles are my own)

Peirce states his challenge right from the start, few people study logic because they think they can reason just fine, but actually we are limited in our reasoning.

He makes his point in the next paragraph as well, that reasoning “is not so much a natural gift as a long and difficult art.” Then he illustrates his thesis concerning the limits of human reasoning with examples from the history of reasoning

- the simplicity of the medieval approach to logic
- Roger Bacon’s (misguided or shallow) understanding of experience
- “the more celebrated” Bacon (Francis Bacon - you read his *Novum Organum* last chapter) and his “crude” understanding of experimentation
- other early scientists - who, again, by sheer perseverance rather than by a refined method of reasoning stumbled upon significant discoveries

Again, he repeats his point, “every work of science great enough to be remembered for a few generations affords some exemplification of the defective state of the art of reasoning of the time when it was written; and each chief step in science has been a lesson in logic.” He then gives examples of steps in the progress in science which involve advances in reasoning:

- Lavoisier’s chemical experiments which used reason and experimentation together.
- Charles Darwin who applied statistical analysis (previously used for the study of gases) for the study of biological forms.

In both cases, progress in reasoning takes place when “questions of fact and questions of logic are curiously interlaced.” Peirce then moves on to discuss the limits of human reasoning.

II

The object of reasoning is to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know. Consequently, reasoning is good if it be such as to give a true conclusion from true premisses, and not otherwise. Thus, the question of validity is purely one of fact and not of thinking. A being the facts stated in the premisses and B being that concluded, the question is, whether these facts are really so related that if A were B would generally be. If so, the inference is valid; if not, not. It is not in the least the question whether,

when the premisses are accepted by the mind, we feel an impulse to accept the conclusion also. It is true that we do generally reason correctly by nature. But that is an accident; the true conclusion would remain true if we had no impulse to accept it; and the false one would remain false, though we could not resist the tendency to believe in it.

We are, doubtless, in the main logical animals, but we are not perfectly so. Most of us, for example, are naturally more sanguine and hopeful than logic would justify. We seem to be so constituted that in the absence of any facts to go upon we are happy and self-satisfied; so that the effect of experience is continually to contract our hopes and aspirations. Yet a lifetime of the application of this corrective does not usually eradicate our sanguine disposition. Where hope is unchecked by any experience, it is likely that our optimism is extravagant. Logicality in regard to practical matters (if this be understood, not in the old sense, but as consisting in a wise union of security with fruitfulness of reasoning) is the most useful quality an animal can possess, and might, therefore, result from the action of natural selection; but outside of these it is probably of more advantage to the animal to have his mind filled with pleasing and encouraging visions, independently of their truth; and thus, upon unpractical subjects, natural selection might occasion a fallacious tendency of thought.

That which determines us, from given premisses, to draw one inference rather than another, is some habit of mind, whether it be constitutional or acquired. The habit is good or otherwise, according as it produces true conclusions from true premisses or not; and an inference is regarded as valid or not, without reference to the truth or falsity of its conclusion specially, but according as the habit which determines it is such as to produce true conclusions in general or not. The particular habit of mind which governs this or that inference may be formulated in a proposition whose truth depends on the validity of the inferences which the habit determines; and such a formula is called a guiding principle of inference. Suppose, for example, that we observe that a rotating disk of copper quickly comes to rest when placed between the poles of a magnet, and we infer that this will happen with every disk of copper. The guiding principle is, that what is true of one piece of copper is true of another. Such a guiding principle with regard to copper would be much safer than with regard to many other substances -- brass, for example.

A book might be written to signalize all the most important of these guiding principles of reasoning. It would probably be, we must confess, of no service to a person whose thought is directed wholly to practical subjects, and whose activity moves along thoroughly-beaten paths. The problems that present themselves to such a mind are matters of routine which he has learned once for all to handle in learning his business. But let a man venture into an unfamiliar field, or where his results are not continually checked by experience, and all history shows that the most masculine intellect will oftentimes lose his orientation and waste his efforts in directions which

bring him no nearer to his goal, or even carry him entirely astray. He is like a ship in the open sea, with no one on board who understands the rules of navigation. And in such a case some general study of the guiding principles of reasoning would be sure to be found useful.

The subject could hardly be treated, however, without being first limited; since almost any fact may serve as a guiding principle. But it so happens that there exists a division among facts, such that in one class are all those which are absolutely essential as guiding principles, while in the others are all which have any other interest as objects of research. This division is between those which are necessarily taken for granted in asking why a certain conclusion is thought to follow from certain premisses, and those which are not implied in such a question. A moment's thought will show that a variety of facts are already assumed when the logical question is first asked. It is implied, for instance, that there are such states of mind as doubt and belief -- that a passage from one to the other is possible, the object of thought remaining the same, and that this transition is subject to some rules by which all minds are alike bound. As these are facts which we must already know before we can have any clear conception of reasoning at all, it cannot be supposed to be any longer of much interest to inquire into their truth or falsity. On the other hand, it is easy to believe that those rules of reasoning which are deduced from the very idea of the process are the ones which are the most essential; and, indeed, that so long as it conforms to these it will, at least, not lead to false conclusions from true premisses. In point of fact, the importance of what may be deduced from the assumptions involved in the logical question turns out to be greater than might be supposed, and this for reasons which it is difficult to exhibit at the outset. The only one which I shall here mention is, that conceptions which are really products of logical reflection, without being readily seen to be so, mingle with our ordinary thoughts, and are frequently the causes of great confusion. This is the case, for example, with the conception of quality. A quality, as such, is never an object of observation. We can see that a thing is blue or green, but the quality of being blue and the quality of being green are not things which we see; they are products of logical reflections. The truth is, that common-sense, or thought as it first emerges above the level of the narrowly practical, is deeply imbued with that bad logical quality to which the epithet metaphysical is commonly applied; and nothing can clear it up but a severe course of logic.

II. [On Good and Bad Reasoning]

Peirce first tells us what reasoning is about: "The object of reasoning is to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know." Thus, "reasoning is good if it be such as to give a true conclusion from true premises, and not

otherwise.” Again, he emphasizes the point made in the first section, that we are “in the main logical animals, but not perfectly so.” What is it that guides our reasoning processes?

Ask yourself about your own reasoning. When you “succeed” in reasoning, when you “fail”: how is it that you *do* reasoning? Peirce draws attention to two significant concepts in this section. Think about each of these:

- habit of mind
- guiding principle of inference

Perhaps some may have no interest or need to explore the guiding principles of their fields of interest. But for some, who may feel “at sea” in their thinking, Peirce proposes to treat the guiding principles of reasoning in this essay.

In the middle of his last paragraph, he suggests three of these guiding principles which are “already assumed” in reasoning, principles which he will examine in the rest of the article.

- (a) that there are such states of mind as doubt and belief
- (b) that a passage from one to the other is possible
- that this transition is subject to some rules which all minds are bound by

He closes this section with an example of the need for guiding our reasoning according to rules. And this, in turn, brings him to a discussion of the character of doubt and belief.

III

We generally know when we wish to ask a question and when we wish to pronounce a judgment, for there is a dissimilarity between the sensation of doubting and that of believing.

But this is not all which distinguishes doubt from belief. There is a practical difference. Our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions. The Assassins, or followers of the Old Man of the Mountain, used to rush into death at his least command, because they believed that obedience to him would insure everlasting felicity. Had they doubted this, they would not have acted as they did. So it is with every belief, according to its degree. The feeling of believing is a more or less sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions. Doubt never has such an effect.

Nor must we overlook a third point of difference. Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else. On the contrary, we cling tenaciously, not merely to believing, but to believing just what we do believe.

Thus, both doubt and belief have positive effects upon us, though very different ones.

Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises. Doubt has not the least such active effect, but stimulates us to inquiry until it is destroyed. This reminds us of the irritation of a nerve and the reflex action produced thereby; while for the analogue of belief, in the nervous system, we must look to what are called nervous associations -- for example, to that habit of the nerves in consequence of which the smell of a peach will make the mouth water.

III. [On Doubt and Belief]

In this section, Peirce treats the first assumption (a), that there are such states as doubt and belief. You might think of Peirce here as offering some comments on human being as being-in-tension-between-doubt-and-belief. He distinguishes the states of doubt and belief threefold. Think about your own experience of doubt and belief as you reflect on his points:

- they are sensed differently,
- belief establishes a habit of thought which guides action,
- doubt is a kind of dis-satisfaction which we struggle to resolve, while belief is a settled satisfaction to which we cling.
- both doubt and belief have their own role in human experience.

Now Peirce is ready to discuss the process of inquiry.

IV

The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle inquiry, though it must be admitted that this is sometimes not a very apt designation.

The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. It is certainly best for us that our beliefs should be such as may truly guide our actions so as to satisfy our desires; and this reflection will make us reject every belief which does not seem to have been so formed as to insure this result. But it will only do so by creating a doubt in the place of that belief. With the doubt, therefore, the struggle begins, and with the cessation of doubt it ends. Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as a firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied, whether the belief be true or false. And it is clear that nothing out of the sphere of our knowledge can be our object, for nothing which does not affect the mind can be the motive for mental effort. The most that can be maintained is, that we seek for a belief that we shall think to be true. But we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say

so.

That the settlement of opinion is the sole end of inquiry is a very important proposition. It sweeps away, at once, various vague and erroneous conceptions of proof. A few of these may be noticed here.

1. Some philosophers have imagined that to start an inquiry it was only necessary to utter a question whether orally or by setting it down upon paper, and have even recommended us to begin our studies with questioning everything! But the mere putting of a proposition into the interrogative form does not stimulate the mind to any struggle after belief. There must be a real and living doubt, and without this all discussion is idle.

2. It is a very common idea that a demonstration must rest on some ultimate and absolutely indubitable propositions. These, according to one school, are first principles of a general nature; according to another, are first sensations. But, in point of fact, an inquiry, to have that completely satisfactory result called demonstration, has only to start with propositions perfectly free from all actual doubt. If the premisses are not in fact doubted at all, they cannot be more satisfactory than they are.

3. Some people seem to love to argue a point after all the world is fully convinced of it. But no further advance can be made. When doubt ceases, mental action on the subject comes to an end; and, if it did go on, it would be without a purpose.

IV. [On Inquiry]

Here Peirce treats his second assumption (b), that a passage from doubt to belief is possible. He calls that process *inquiry*. Again, think about your own inquiry, or that of others. What do you do when you *inquire* about something? Peirce describes this process:

- First - as an “irritation” that stimulates a “struggle,”
- Second - that the irritation ends--and the object of inquiry is realized--with the settlement of opinion.

Furthermore, even though we may think that the objective is the establishment of a *true* opinion, in matter of fact we simply inquire until we have a satisfactory answer for our own dissatisfaction.

Having reached this stage in his presentation, Peirce then can make a few comments by way of responses to others' approaches to doubt and reasoning:

1. his response to Descartes' approach to total doubt - Most humans don't comprehensively undertake to doubt everything. Rather, we operate on "living doubt," not some contrived complete doubt.
2. his response to Descartes' need for complete indubitability - Most human beings don't need Cartesian "indubitability." Rather, we operate on principles that are free from "actual doubt" and move from there.
3. his response to the idea that proof needs to be complete - when doubt ends, we fix belief.

As you can see, Descartes and Peirce approach doubt differently. Descartes seeks for a single indubitable starting point from which everything can be solidly attached. Peirce sees doubt as a part of ordinary, dis-satisfied, life, a doubt which is resolved in the process of life itself.

Both Peirce and Descartes suggest that doubt is complex, involving much more than a mere intellectual "question." Think about it. Some doubt is systematic, a process of evaluating one's beliefs in light of the least ambiguity. But there is also the doubt that does not really know *what* it believes. And there is the doubt that does not know *why* it believes. And there is the doubt that believes but is afraid or unwilling to *commit*. And so on. And, as Peirce indicates, our doubt drives us into inquiry.

Inquiry

Wisdom is not about the end of inquiry (for example, when we "know the answers"). No, indeed, the wise one is the one who keeps her mind open. The more you know, the more you know you don't know. There is a kind of humility present in the wise use of inquiry. Wise inquiry is not just about our knowledge (or lack of knowledge) about this or that. It is also about *us*. Think about something you have questioned lately. Examine that questioning closely. Sit with it for a while. Can you see that it has something to do with the "out there," *and* with the "in here"?

Think of different kinds of inquiry. Compare, for example, “wondering about” with a “concern about.” What kinds of inquiry are common to you? When?

While we will (and we must) address the role of what is often labeled “logic” in philosophy--the clarification of arguments, claims and such through formal reasoning--we must keep in mind that the skill of asking questions is much more than the application of logical rules. As you can see, the recognition of the character of the “irritation” that signals doubt and leads to inquiry is more than a rigid following of rules of argument. And yet both the intuitive perception of the irritation and the careful adherence to logical rules are necessary parts of human reasoning. Perhaps we might speak of other “logics” not usually considered in traditional philosophy. These other rules deal not with *how* we ask questions, but *when* and *who* and *why* and *how deep*. They guide us not to truth as a finished product; rather they guide us along an appropriate path of truth: the right amount of the right truth for the right person at the right time, protecting the process of inquiry from derailing.

First there are rules regarding *when* we ask questions. The wise Morpheus, in the movie “The Matrix,” tells the inquiring Neo, “Let me tell you why you’re here. You’re here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain, but you’ve felt it your entire life--like there’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is, but it’s there like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad.”⁴ We ask questions not just when we *don’t* know something. We ask questions when we both *know and don’t know* something. True, there is a pure wonder, born of absolute emptiness or novelty. But wonder is generally a matter of paying attention, of appreciating, or of the shock of reality. Asking questions is a different matter. Both knowing and not-knowing are involved. Hence, there is timing in the asking of questions. If we ask questions too early, we do not know enough to ask. If we ask too late, perhaps we know too much (or at least we think we do), and the language of our questions may not communicate the freshness of our inquiry. Consequently our answer may bring us nothing new.

4. Warner Brothers in Association with Village Roadshow Pictures, “The Matrix,” 1999.

Then there is the issue of *who* to question. On the one hand there is the popular bumper sticker which simply says “Question Authority.” On the other hand there is the wisdom of Confucius and others who call us to respect those who have come before us, upon whose shoulders we stand. Questions of authority can sometimes be the hardest, when we suspect that all is not as it seems, not as we have been told. And yet our fears, expectations, hurts and more are buried deep in the middle of the questioning of authority. René Descartes, whose first *Meditation* we read in the previous chapter, gave himself four “moral rules” to guide him as he undertook his comprehensive intellectual overhaul:

- to obey the laws and customs of my country, retaining the religion in which I had been brought up
- to be as firm and determined in my actions, acting resolutely in response to all my decisions
- always to seek to conquer *myself* rather than fortune, to change my desires rather than the established order
- to make a review of the various occupations possible in this life, in order to choose the best⁵

Descartes’ “moral rules” gave him the boundaries he needed to undertake a complete overhaul of his philosophical beliefs. What kind of boundaries will you need to safely ask questions? Learn to sense the delicate balance between questioning others and questioning oneself. Perhaps this, too, is a matter of “when” to ask questions. There is a season when we are ready to question others. There are also seasons when it is better to place more emphasis on questioning ourselves.

While it is not directly related to *who we question*, it is appropriate here to mention another “who” in our questioning, namely those who help us to question. Generally we are lying to ourselves when we state that we can ask questions entirely alone, when we think that we are

5. See René Descartes, “Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences,” in *Philosophical Essays*, tr Laurence Lafleur, The Library of Liberal Arts (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1964), 18–21.

not a part of others. There are times when we need to ask with a certain distance from the response of some. But trusted others may be able to tell us, perhaps better than we ourselves, when it is best to question others or question ourselves. The Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible states, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (Proverbs 12:15). For some questions, little support is needed. For other questions, a good support system may be a matter of life and death.

Next we must consider *why* we ask questions. The kinds of questions we might ask are related to why we ask. Are we asking about the dynamics of change (exploring “chaotic systems” for example, or perhaps more specifically examining patterns of institutional disintegration) simply because we are fascinated with the ins and outs of change, or rather is it because we are managers of a corporation which might be on the verge of disintegration itself? The kinds of questions we ask, the type of energy we put into the questioning process, and the shape of the “hunches” that move us toward resolution, will all reflect the conditions that give rise to the questioning itself. There is the personal “why,” why are *we* asking this question here and now? There is the social “why,” why does this question, worded this way appear here in this culture at this point in history? Perhaps there is a bigger “why,” why has this question (or one like it) been a question for people in many places and times? Reflecting on why we ask questions serves to guide us through the process of questioning itself.

And then there is the *how deep* issue. Earlier we learned that human experience is lived at various degrees of depth. There is a world of difference between inquiring about a shallow-level thought and reconsidering one’s entire world view. As we learned, to ask questions about one’s world view is to threaten one’s core emotional concerns and one’s lifestyle. Because of this, questioning simply has to be conducted differently at different levels of depth. And yet so often we fail to realize this. We glibly attack a central belief and are surprised when we feel lost at sea. Go back to the chart summarizing the depths of human experience (Figure 2.3) and ask yourself, “What would it mean to ask a question about this or that segment of human experience?” “What

would I need to address that kind of question?" What kinds of questions have I been asking lately? Where do they fit on the chart?

Questions to Ask About Our Questions⁶

1. What is the question?
2. Why am I asking it? What motivates this question?
3. What have been my previous beliefs and assumptions about this?
4. What other beliefs, habits, concerns and such are at stake in asking this question?
5. Is this question avoidable (personally, academically . . .)?
6. How much time do I have/want to put into this question?
7. Is my approach to this question achievable (am I looking for absolute certainty, do I have the knowledge, equipment to address this issue . . .)?
8. What kinds of resources do I need to address this question (literature, experiences, relationships . . .)?
9. What will I do if I can't answer this question in a satisfactory manner (if, for example, I run into other questions or am stalemated)? What will this mean for my living, my commitments, my relationships?
10. What might it mean if I *do* resolve this question in a satisfactory manner? How might a resolution in this or that way change my emotional life, my habits or lifestyle, other beliefs?

Now ask the question again, in light of your reflections on your process.

[Perhaps you want to explore your own doubts and questions further. Why not play with Journal Assignment 5.1 My Questions]

6. Adapted from contemporary philosopher, Terese M. Howard, Unpublished manuscript, 2006.

Hypothesis

The process of asking questions begins with doubt. It leads us through a season of “paying attention again”: looking in places where that which we know about the question might illumine that which we don’t know, opening ourselves up to new ways of thinking about things, re-examining data we had previously assumed, comparing this over here with that over there. We reflect on the phenomena of human experience and consider what must be the case for experience to appear as it does. We take note of this pattern and that pattern and search for patterns within the patterns.

And then it happens. Awake in the middle of the night, we “get an idea.” Perhaps *this* is why things are the way they are. Perhaps *this* is really the nature of such and such. Whether the question is about the cake you tried to cook last night, the way your brother treats you, or the possibilities of life after death, our inquiry often leads to an idea, a *hypothesis*.

Good ideas, as we all know, often seem to come out of nowhere. We cannot “make” them happen. Stress and other factors inhibit creative ideas. There are, however, conditions within which creativity (and insightful hypotheses) are more likely to arise:⁷

- expertise - when you are more familiar with the subject in general, you are more likely to come up with creative ideas related to that subject
- imaginative thinking skills - creativity often employs the use of imagination
- a venturesome personality - someone who is willing to face the risks of new ideas is more likely to entertain them
- the intrinsic motivation - if you are motivated by interest, enjoyment, love of the subject (rather than external pressures, for example) creative ideas are more likely
- a creative environment - a physical and social environment that supports creativity breeds creativity

7. See, for example, the list in the chapter on “Thinking, Language, and Intelligence” in David Myers *Exploring Psychology* (NY: Worth Publishers, various editions).

Furthermore, the process from question to hypothesis to confirmation is not simply a matter of “intellect.” Feelings are involved as well. Think, for example, of how it *feels* to raise an important question. Now think of how it feels to get a hunch about that question . . .; but then the hunch doesn’t pan out . . .; and then a new idea . . .; and it brings you closer to an answer. . . . Finally you solve the problem . . .; how does this solution feel? And, in the end, a hypothesis is *not* the answer. Remember this. The unwise might discover a hypothesis and immediately take it for eternal truth. The wise take a good idea for what it is, simply a good idea, waiting to be tested.

And this, in turn, brings us to the consideration of “logic.” Logic, in the broad sense, deals with the structure of human thought and reasoning. Charles Peirce writes, “the object of reasoning is to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know.” Let’s say, for example, we have just bought a few goats. Now we already know that bitterweed is toxic to sheep. And we know that goats are similar to sheep. We reason, therefore, that it might not be a good idea to release our goats on pasture that is high in bitterweed. It may not be *certain* knowledge at this point, but we have used our existing knowledge to give us an insight that may be of considerable value. The reasoning process itself is valuable when, as Peirce states in the next sentence, “it be such as to give a true conclusion from true premises, and not otherwise.” Elsewhere Peirce divides the primary forms of reasoning into three types: deduction, induction, and hypothesis.⁸ Let’s look at each of these more closely.

Hypothesis reasons from known general *rules* and particular *results* (or characteristics) to a new insight regarding a particular *case*. For example:

8. Peirce outlines these divisions in a number of places, with differing names at times (in particular “hypothesis” is often called “retroduction,” or “abduction.” See, for example, Peirce’s sixth and seventh “Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism” published in Charles S. Peirce, *The Essential Peirce*, ed. the Peirce Edition Project [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998], II.208–43. My summary is adapted from Kelly A. Parker, *The Continuity of Peirce’s Thought* [Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998], 6.

1st premise. RULE - Bitterweed is toxic to sheep

2nd premise. RESULT - My goat is similar to a sheep in characteristics x, y, z

Conclusion CASE - Perhaps bitterweed is toxic to my goat as well.

Deduction reasons from a known *rule* and a known *case* to a new *result* or consequence.

For example

1st P - RULE: "All animals are mortal"

2nd P - CASE: "goats are animals"

C - RESULT: "goats are mortal"

Induction reasons from known *cases* and *results* to a new *rule*. For example

1. - CASE: goats come in many types (Nubian, Alpine, LaMancha . . .)

2. - RESULT: Nubian, Alpine, La Mancha and three other types of goats have
died when fed bitterweed.

3. - RULE: *All* goats will (probably) die when fed bitterweed

As you can see, every form of reasoning makes its own particular contribution to our understanding of things. Hypothesis is the weakest form of reasoning. It only gives us an attractive hypothesis. A hypothesis must be clarified through deduction and tested through induction. But the fact of the matter is, hypothesis is very important. It is the most common form of reasoning and without it we would know nothing, for hypothesis suggests the claims (the ideas or conclusions) to be evaluated through other forms of reasoning.

Formal Evaluation

We must be careful how we reason, for reckless reasoning can get us into trouble. Part of the skill of asking questions is knowing how to clarify and evaluate things once we think we have got a good idea. For example we might conjecture the following hypothesis:

1. RULE - Bitterweed is toxic to sheep
2. RESULT - My chicken is similar to a sheep in characteristics a, b, c
 - a. - both are white
 - b. - both have legs
 - c. - both are mortal

C. CASE - Perhaps bitterweed is toxic to my chicken as well.

What is the problem here? The problem is that the characteristics of similarity between my chicken and sheep are not *relevant* to the question at hand (except perhaps both being mortal). Both premises are *true* (bitterweed is toxic to sheep, my chicken is indeed similar to the sheep in those aspects), but the argument does not lead to a likely hypothesis. If we were to have identified relevant similarities in digestion, body chemistry and such then it would have been a different story. The problem here is in the reasoning process itself.

Whether we realize it or not, humans frequently succumb to faulty reasoning. Wisdom lies in rising above political rhetoric and advertising schemes to a clearer discernment of the errors in reasoning surrounding life. Common errors in reasoning are called *fallacies*. Thus, in an effort to further develop our skills of asking questions, we will close this chapter with a few examples of common fallacies, adapted from Conway and Munson's *The Elements of Reasoning*.⁹

1. Appeal to Ignorance - The **appeal to ignorance** consists in arguing that because a claim has not been demonstrated to be wrong, the claim is right. for instance: "Of course I believe in ESP, No one has ever shown it does not exist, and that's good enough for me." To establish a claim by argument, we must present reasons *for* it. Not having a case against a claim is different from having reasons for it.

The fallacy is also committed in arguing that because a claim has not been demonstrated to be correct, it is wrong: "No one has ever proved that we could actually feed the hungry of the world. So it isn't possible."

9. Excerpts taken from David A. Conway and Ronald Munson, *The Elements of Reasoning* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1990), 133–52.

2. Appeal to Inappropriate Authority - We base much of what we believe on the evidence of authority, and citing an authority is a legitimate way of justifying a belief. The implication is that the authority is in a position to provide compelling evidence, even though we are not. A fallacy, however, is committed when the authority cited is not an authority in the proper area. The expertise of the authority is thus irrelevant to the claim and provides no support for it.

For example, Aldus Huxley, the author of the well-known novel *Brave New World*, was convinced that nearsightedness can be corrected by eye exercises (the Bates method) and glasses are unnecessary. He wrote a book advocating this position, and because of his eminence as a novelist, other writers frequently cited him to establish that the Bates method could cure nearsightedness. Those who appealed to Huxley's authority in support of the claim were committing the fallacy of appealing to inappropriate authority. What authority does Tom Cruise have to speak to the medical and psychological issues of depression after childbirth?

3. Appeal to Popular Belief - This fallacy consists in asserting that a claim is correct just because people generally believe that it is (everybody's doing it). Such an inference is in error because we have no reason to take what most people believe as a reliable indicator of what is actually the case. For example, we might argue that "People the world over have always believed that God exists. It has to be true." Not only is it false that all people everywhere have believed that God exists (however we might define "god"?), just because people have believed this does not make it necessarily the case (though the fact that a number of people believe something might contribute to the formation of an attractive hypothesis).

4. False Cause - This fallacy involves concluding that because one event occurred before another, the first was the cause of the second. Consider the husband who, after a few beers, has a heated argument with his wife, leaves the house and drives off a cliff, committing suicide. Was the beer the cause of the suicide? Was his marital dispute? Attributing "cause" is a very complicated affair. Too often we jump to easy and highly visible "causes."

5. Hasty Generalization - The fallacy of **hasty generalization** consists in generalizing on the basis of an inadequate set of cases. As a sample from a larger population, the cases are too few or too unrepresentative to constitute adequate evidence. We hear a highly publicized story of a bear mauling a camper and we conclude that it is unsafe to camp near public forests. We employ a couple of needy people in order to give them a chance to work their way up and they turn out to be poor workers and they use us for their own advantage. We conclude that the poor

are all lazy and shiftless.

6. False Dilemma - The **false dilemma** fallacy consists in giving arguments that present alternatives as exhaustive and exclusive then they are not. “Either we cut spending or we will have to face increases in the deficit” is a false dilemma because it ignores such possibilities as, for example, raising taxes. The Lover says to his date, “If you loved me, you would . . .” Are there other possibilities for legitimately expressing love? The advertisement shows pictures of beautiful women and luxurious environments associated with an automobile. The implication is that either we buy the car or we won’t have the luxury and the women.

7. Against the Person - This fallacy consists in rejecting a conclusion by offering as grounds for this rejection some characteristic(s) of a person supporting it. “I won’t support health insurance reform. Bill Clinton advocated health insurance reform and we all know how he treated Monica Lewinsky. Now really, in what sense does Bill Clinton’s affair inform a wise analysis of the state of health insurance in this country? “You believe in God? You have got to be kidding. Only knee-jerk conservatives believe in God.” Surprise. Sometimes knee-jerk conservatives are right. There is a difference between a careful assessment of significant sources for wisdom (which *does* reject people based on character traits), and supports for and against particular arguments based on the character of some who might support or oppose the argument.

8. Pooh-Pooh - To **pooh-pooh** an argument is to dismiss it with ridicule as not worthy of serious consideration. “We don’t have to waste time dealing with Mrs. Thompson’s claims about women not being promoted to executive positions. She’s just giving us more of the usual feminist claptrap.” Pooh-poohing is a refusal to examine an argument seriously and evaluate it fairly. As such, the fallacy is an attempt to obtain by guile what should be earned by careful analysis.

9. Straw Person - This fallacy consists in misrepresenting an opponent’s claim or argument so that it is easier to criticize or so appears so obviously implausible that no criticism is needed. One way of constructing a straw person is to reduce a complex argument to a caricatured, simplistic claim, which then becomes nearly unnecessary to refute. For example, instead of representing the nuanced and varied positions of contemporary evolutionary theory, an opponent might represent the theory by saying that, “the theory of evolution boils down to the idea that human beings descended from apes.” This statement reflects the views of almost no serious evolutionary scientist. Yet the opponent who criticizes this position may convince some people that she has refuted evolutionary theory.

10. Definitional Dodge - the **definitional dodge** redefines a crucial term in a claim in order to avoid acknowledging the point of the claim. Mom tells the child at the public pool, “Stop running, dear, you might slip and hurt yourself.” The child responds, “Oh, I wasn’t *running*, I was just walking fast.” Or, to use another kind of example of manipulating definitions, by calling it a “war” against terrorism, those who support it can link aggression with other obviously legitimate wars. Likewise those who oppose it can show the similarities between the “war on terrorism” and other horrors of war they want to showcase.

[for a fun exercise in noticing the fallacies surrounding your own life try JA 5.2
Exploring Fallacies]

One of the important skills of wisdom is the skill of asking questions. The wise know when to ask, who to ask, why to ask, and how deep to ask. The wise know their own circumstances (and their own heart) and know what kinds of environments are needed for what kinds of questions. They know where they must go, where they can go and where they can’t go (at least for now). The wise asker-of-questions sees that inquiry is more than an intellectual exercise. Depending on the question, it may involve a re-adjustment of life.

The art of asking questions begins with an awareness of doubt, an irritating dissatisfaction that initiates a struggle for resolution. The wise know their doubt and do not ignore it. Appropriate doubt must have a chance to grow; the struggle must have a chance to be clarified and expressed. When expressed, we call this struggle the process of “inquiry.” When a sufficiently satisfactory resolution has been discovered, our doubt usually ends and inquiry usually ceases. Asking questions often leads to the discovery of a good idea and the positing of an “hypothesis” (not *the answer*). Hypotheses, in turn, are evaluated by further tests, one of which is the clarification of our reasoning by assessing it for fallacies and the like.

Thus, by taking care to develop good skills of asking questions, we increase the likelihood of responding to the fruits of careful evaluation.. We become lovers of wisdom, authentic philosophers.

Journal Assignment 5.1 My Questions

At times, our questions can consume us. Then again, we can simply ignore questioning altogether, living in a very safe, but very shallow world. In between these extremes is the art of asking questions: the right questions, at the right time, in the right way. This exercise is designed to allow you to explore your own questions and your own process of asking questions. Simply read and reflect on these questions. Spend some time with those questions that stimulate your own process right now and write your reflections as needed.

Doubt

Asking questions begins with an awareness of doubt, so let's begin with your doubt(s). First, ask yourself, "What do I feel about doubt in general?" "What was I taught (if anything) about doubting and what do I think about it now?" What is your general mood in life at this point in time? Are you re-considering everything you believe (like Descartes), or are you facing one or two general "living doubts" (like Peirce)? Are you in kind-of a "doubting" stage of life in general, a "transitional" stage, or a "settled" stage in life? What is your level of dis-satisfaction overall toward things?

Now let's look at your doubts more specifically. Are there any particular dis-satisfactions that have been irritating you lately? What have you doubted recently? What questions have you begun to ask? What is this doubt, this question, *about*? What does the doubt *feel* like? How do what you know and what you don't know relate in this issue? Can you draw a picture that summarizes this doubt in an image? Where is this doubt pushing you?

What kind of a doubt is this? Is this a doubt from not knowing *what* you believe? Is it from not knowing *why* you believe? Is it not knowing *who* to believe? Are there hurts related to this doubt? How do your circumstances affect the character of this doubt? Where are you strong? Where are you tender and vulnerable?

Questions

Now its time to do some thinking about how you ask questions. Now that you know something about your doubt, how are you going to address this doubt? See if you can take one doubt as a case in point.

First of all, consider the *when* of your questioning. Is this the right time for your question? Examine what you know and what you don't know. Consider your personal and academic strengths and weaknesses at this point in time. What kinds of questions are you capable of addressing right now? Ask your friends, is this the right time for this question?

Next, consider the *who(s)* of your questioning. Are you primarily questioning others or yourself? What kinds of questions are you pointing at this (or these) "whos"? How does it feel like to question the "who" of your questioning?

Why are you questioning? Why are you questioning at all? Why not ignore it? Why is this a particular question for you right here and now? Why does this question come up in culture today? Why have people in general thought of this question? What do you learn about your question by asking why?

Finally consider the *how deep* issue. Is this a minor question about some topic that does not promise to shake anything up or is this a life-threatening question? What habits, world views, emotional concerns, relationships . . . are at stake in this issue?

Having looked at the *when*, the *who* the *why* and the *how deep* of your question, perhaps you might want to consider your process of questioning again. What kinds of resources and support might you need to ask this question successfully? You might want to ask yourself some of the questions about questions listed in the chapter. Review these questions and see if they help you to strategize your own asking process:

Formal Evaluation

Finally, you might want to evaluate the assumptions and claims embedded in your own questioning to make sure that you are not falling prey to misguided reasoning. As you look at your doubts and questions, do you see any fallacies developing?

Having considered all this, see if you can articulate a personal strategy for asking questions (or asking *this* question) at this point in your life. What have you learned that can help you with particular questions? What have you learned that can foster the skill of asking questions in general?

Journal Assignment 5.2 Exploring Fallacies

As we have learned, whether we are smart or not, errors can creep into our reasoning. We see a notable example of some claim and conclude (without any real evidence) that every instance will fit this claim (**hasty generalization**). We hear the advice of a well-known public figure and simply believe what she may have to say about something even though she is an **inappropriate authority** on the topic. And so on. One way we learn not to be caught in the traps of fallacies is to practice recognizing them. The following is an exercise to give you some practice in recognizing fallacies.

The exercise is really quite simple. You just live for a week with pen and paper nearby. You read the editorials or letters to the editor in the newspaper and see if you notice any fallacies. You watch television commercials and identify explicit or implicit fallacies in their efforts to convince you to buy their products. You listen to the conversation at work or at home and examine their reasoning (being, of course, careful not to be *too* open about your discoveries :)

Then you simply write down your findings, recording specific fallacies and what was in error about them.

For example, you might write something like the following:

September 17, casual conversation during break at work

Woman - Did you hear about the layoff? I hear they're cutting lots of jobs.

[not necessarily exact words. You only need to summarize the content of the conversation]

Man - Yea, its because of that new site manager. He gets hired one day and the

very next day heads begin to roll. I can tell I'm not going to like him.

Fallacy - **false cause**. Just because the new manager was hired right *before* the layoffs, does not necessarily mean that he is the *cause* of the layoffs. He could have been hired simply as a hatchet-man for higher-level authorities, who in a more significant way are the *cause* of the layoffs.

September 18, watching news analysis on television

TV analyst - The Pope is making a big mistake trying to meddle in Muslim politics. He has no right to be pontificating on the nature of Islam. Who does he think he is anyway?

Fallacy - I think that this may be some kind of reverse of the **inappropriate authority** fallacy. The commentator claims that the Pope is an inappropriate authority on Muslim politics. But when you come to think of it, the Catholic Church has had centuries of experience dealing with Islam in both religious and political contexts. Maybe the Pope is a more appropriate authority than the commentator!