ARGUING

On Argument as Journey 228

On the Theater of the Mind 235

On Curiosity at Work in the Academy 241

Argument at Work: Sonia Sotomayor and Principled Openness 251

In college, it often seems that *writing* and *arguing* are treated as synonyms. Teachers ask their students to write arguments that present interesting claims supported by evidence. But how do good, thoughtful arguments come into being? Does the act of writing move a preformulated argument from your brain to the screen? Or is an argument created through the act of writing? The distinction matters: if argument comes first, then writing is simply transcription. If writing comes first, then the argument emerges through the process of engaging with and responding to writing—one's own and the writing of others.

While it would certainly be more convenient if writing simply recorded our already-formulated thoughts, we know as writers and as teachers of writing that the best arguments emerge over time—after one has read, thought, reflected, drafted, revised, started over, and reconsidered. Thus, in this section we invite you to think of an argument as a compelling idea that emerges over the course of an intellectual journey. We also invite you to imagine your mental life as a drama in which there's action, excitement, and passion that can motivate your writing. And we show how three influential scholarly arguments are driven by curiosity. The emphasis throughout is on producing writing that matters.

On Argument as Journey

When professors assign papers in college classes, they typically expect their students to hand in essays that make an argument. What they mean by "an argument," however, isn't always clear to the students. Many of our students arrive in our classes believing that writing an argument is like participating in a debate: they pick a side (their thesis); they gather evidence to support the side they've chosen; and they write as if trying to show that they are right and the other side is wrong. Winning, or getting a good grade, is the goal—not thoughtfulness, not discovery, not learning.

There are contexts within which this type of writing is entirely appropriate: a legal brief, for example, or a letter of complaint. But if you listen to pundits on cable news, follow congressional debates, or read the comment sections of online news sources, you'll see that such oppositional argumentation has become the norm in contemporary culture. In these venues, pushing ideas to their extremes, stirring up the emotions of one's allies and enemies, and scoring points with a pithy phrase or sound bite are more common than the reasoned exchange of ideas.

Because we have not found that practicing argument-as-debate leads to good academic writing—or to good journalism or good literary nonfiction—we propose, in its place, practicing argument as journey. What's the difference? In practicing argument as journey, you begin with the goal of answering a question or solving a problem (that's your destination); you ponder possible trajectories; you do research and rethink your plan; you learn more and more; you write, make mistakes, and head off in new and unanticipated directions; you make discoveries; you define a clearer purpose and path; you figure out how you want to answer your central question or solve your problem. Finally, the finished essay takes your readers on a journey to new ideas.

We'd like to walk you through an extended example of the argument as journey by looking at Elizabeth Kolbert's *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*, a book about global climate change. When Kolbert chose this topic, she knew she was stepping into contentious territory. Some people see climate change as an empirically verifiable threat to the

future of life on this planet and others dismiss it as a false claim based in bad or inconclusive science. In the scientific community, the consensus is clear: global warming is a fact and it is caused by human activity—especially our reliance on burning carbon-based fuels such as coal, oil, wood, and natural gas. There is no such consensus in politics. Indeed as the scientific community has made it harder to deny that global warming is a fact, nonscientists of every stripe have shifted their doubt to the role humans play in changing the earth's climate. Given this political context, the project of writing about climate change poses a real challenge for Kolbert: if the National Academy of Sciences, which has been issuing warnings about impending environmental disaster since 1979, hasn't been able to convince people of the reality and danger of climate change and that humans have caused it, what could Kolbert—or any writer, for that matter—possibly say that would change readers' minds?

We admire *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* both because Kolbert sets out to see for herself the effects of climate change on the environment and because she takes her readers with her on a journey that is both physical and metaphysical. She seeks to examine evidence of climate change and also to contemplate why we have been so reluctant to acknowledge and act on signs of impending disaster. She begins by traveling above the Arctic Circle because the signs of warming are so striking there.

Kolbert visits the Alaskan village of Shishmaref, on an island off the coast of the Seward Peninsula, where native villagers once drove snowmobiles twenty miles out on the ice to hunt seals. By the time she gets there, the ice around the island is so soft that using snowmobiles is no longer safe, so the hunters use boats. The village, only twenty-two feet above sea level, has become so vulnerable to storm surges that the residents have decided to give up their way of life and relocate. Farther inland, near Fairbanks, Kolbert sees the effects of melting permafrost. Areas of ground that have been frozen since the beginning of the last glacial cycle are now threatened by thaw. Where the permafrost has been disturbed by the construction of buildings or roads, the land is especially vulnerable to warming; in some neighborhoods, foundations are degrading and houses are collapsing.

Kolbert then visits Iceland during the summer-melt season and meets members of the Icelandic Glaciological Society, who regularly

survey the size of the country's three hundred or so glaciers. Though glaciers in Iceland continued to grow in the 1970s and 1980s, even as North American glaciers were shrinking, in the 1990s they, too, began to retreat. There have been glaciers on Iceland for two million years, Kolbert writes, but climate models predict that by the end of the next century there will be no more ice left to measure in Iceland.

Kolbert also travels to a research station on the Greenland ice sheet where scientists study ice cores drilled from the glacier. "A hundred and thirty-eight feet down," Kolbert writes, "there is snow that fell during the time of the American Civil War; 2,500 feet down, snow from the time of the Peloponnesian Wars, and, 5,350 feet down, snow from the days when the cave painters of Lascaux were slaughtering bison. At the very bottom, 10,000 feet down, there is snow that fell on central Greenland before the start of the last ice age, more than a hundred thousand years ago." Today, however, scientists at the research station are observing and measuring the gradual contraction of this massive glacier, which contains eight percent of the world's fresh water supply. If the Greenland ice sheet melts—and it is shrinking by twelve cubic miles each year—the consequences will be more than the loss of the history it contains. The ice sheet, Kolbert reports, contains enough water to raise sea levels around the world by twenty-three feet.

As Kolbert describes her physical journey, she also takes her readers on a journey through the science of climate change. Chapter by chapter, she carefully and clearly tells her readers how science explains the role humans have played in bringing about current warming trends and what these changes indicate about the future of the planet. After her account of Shishmaref, for instance, Kolbert summarizes the first major study of global warming, completed in 1979 by the National Academy of Sciences. A panel evaluated early studies on the effects of adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere and concluded that continued increases in carbon dioxide would cause climate changes. They knew then that there was "no reason to believe that these changes [would] be negligible." If we had taken their warning seriously thirty years ago, we might have lessened the impact of climate change.

Later Kolbert explains why we should be concerned about the melting of perennial sea ice, which, unlike seasonal ice that forms and melts each year, remains frozen year-round. Back in 1979, perennial sea

ice covered 1.7 billion acres—about the size of the continental United States. By the time Kolbert was writing her book in 2005, that area had shrunk by 250 million acres, an area about the combined size of Texas, New York, and Georgia. Why does this matter? Ice reflects sunlight away from the earth, while the dark open water of the ocean absorbs its heat. The more the perennial ice melts, exposing open ocean water, the more heat gets retained by the ocean, which then melts even more ice: the system feeds on itself, and the pace of warming speeds up. Small changes in the average temperature of ocean water, in other words, can lead to big changes in climate.

Having explained the science of the greenhouse effect and how industrialization—with its coal-burning factories, railroads, and power stations—started the process of global warming, Kolbert moves in her third chapter to discuss a contemporary symposium on climate change she attended in Iceland. None of the scientists at the symposium doubt that humans are responsible for warming the Earth's atmosphere. So Kolbert's journey through the science leads her and her readers to a *certainty* that too many politicians willingly deny: human consumption of carbon-based fuels has dramatically raised the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the consequences are changing life on earth.

Kolbert's journey does not end when she leaves the Arctic. She goes to England to see how climate change threatens the survival of butterflies and toads—and up to a quarter of the Earth's species. She learns how droughts long-ago caused the disappearance of ancient civilizations. She visits the Netherlands, where existing dikes will not hold back rising seawaters, so companies are manufacturing floating "amphibious" homes. She also travels to Burlington, Vermont, where a grassroots campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by ten percent affirms the possibilities of local action, and also its limits. After all, whatever the residents of this small city accomplish is quickly offset by the rest of the world's continued expansion of energy use. Kolbert closes her book by arguing that humans have launched the planet into a new geological era. We should recognize, she says, that the Holocene, the epoch that began at the end of the Pleistocene about 11,700 years ago, is now over. We are in the dawn of the "Anthropocene," a "new age . . . defined by one creature—man—who [has] become so dominant that he [is] capable of altering the planet on a geological scale."

It's obvious throughout *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* that Kolbert thinks we must end our destructive addiction to fossil fuels, but she knows this argument has been made before to little effect. So she doesn't use her book to tell us what to do. Instead, the journey she takes us on makes the argument that the problem is so far along and so deeply entrenched in human behavior that it may not be solvable. When Kolbert arrives at the conclusion that we have entered the Anthropocene, it's clear that her readers have to choose what to do now. Denial, disbelief, or despair is always an option, but if we have been affected by reading Kolbert's book, we may at least be willing to accept responsibility for the problem we've created, and we may decide that trying to halt the pace or lessen the effect of the catastrophe is surely better than doing nothing at all. Indeed, if we're capable of causing disaster on a global scale, we may also be smart, creative, and lucky enough to come up with ways to ameliorate the consequences of this disaster. If we're truly lucky, we may even manage to delay the end of the Anthropocene era.

Practice Session One

Reading

We've just described how Elizabeth Kolbert takes a physical journey that she then transforms into an intellectual journey for her readers. Now we'd like you to choose one of the three readings included in this book and follow the author's intellectual journey. After you've read through the piece once, set aside at least 40 minutes to review it and take more detailed notes about how the journey unfolds. Pay attention to the sources—the people and texts the author cites. Step back and look at the decisions the author made about how to organize the text.

Then draw a map of the journey. When did it move straight ahead? When did you encounter turns of thought? Did the author send you off on digressions? Did they still feel like digressions after you'd followed them to their conclusions?

Reflecting

Spend at least 30 minutes writing reflectively about your own journey as a reader of the essay you selected. After reading and then reviewing the article, how far have you traveled intellectually? Were there places where your own

thinking diverged from the path the author provided? Did reading the piece allow you to think about its central problem or question in a new way? Did it change your mind?

Practice Session Two

Research Essay

After reading our description of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*, you now have a sense of Kolbert's view of the environmental challenges we face. The world we know will change radically during our lifetimes and, as a consequence of our collective choices and actions, may eventually become a planet that is uninhabitable by humans. The facts are menacing and disturbing, and they raise an important question: Can we construct rational hope in the face of climate change, and if so, how?

To compose an essay that offers a thoughtful answer to this question, you will first need to do additional reading. If you go out to the Web, you will find more on climate change than any single person could read in a lifetime. How do you separate what's worth considering from what's not? How do you determine what's compelling? We'd like you to spend at least 60 minutes searching online for a fact or a set of facts about climate change that you find both powerful and worthy of further consideration.

Write up a discussion of the facts you've uncovered. What makes the facts you're presenting more convincing than other facts regarding climate change? In completing your write-up, you are likely to need to do more reading, since facts only become convincing when placed in context.

Speculative Essay

Thinking seriously about climate change inevitably affects one's sense of the future. Given the evidence you've uncovered in your limited research, would you say that it is possible to construct a rational hope about the future? What compelling evidence would you point to that either supports or undermines the grounds for rational hope? In composing your response, stick to evidence that you find persuasive: this isn't an invitation to trade in generalities about "human nature"; it's an opportunity to consider the relationship between evidence, reason, and the future. Take your reader on a journey that reveals your mind at work on this problem.

EXPLORE

Writers we admire often begin their work with a question about why an event occurred, how an idea came into being, or how a problem might be resolved; then they lead their readers through facts, analysis, and ideas to arrive at their own answers. The list below offers examples of such complex journeys. Brian Cathcart guides us through a London murder case while pondering race and injustice. Ta-Nehisi Coates considers the evolution of racism in the United States, from slavery to Jim Crow and from segregation to racist housing policies, asking whether a discussion about financial reparations might bring about necessary change. Joan Didion reflects on how a set of fixed political opinions led to the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Venkatesh Rao invites readers to consider how having resources to waste serves creativity. And Rebecca Solnit walks us through the collapsed city of Detroit where she finds hope in how nature quickly reclaims the landscape.

Cathcart, Brian. "The Case of Stephen Lawrence." *Granta.* 6 Jan. 2012. Web.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." *Atlantic.* 21 May 2014. Web.

Didion, Joan. "Fixed Opinions, or the Hinge of History." *New York Review of Books.* 16 Jan. 2003. Web.

Rao, Venkatesh. "Waste, Creativity, and Godwin's Corollary for Technology." *Ribbonfarm.* 23 Aug. 2012. Web.

Solnit, Rebecca. "Detroit Arcadia." *Harper's Magazine.* July 2007. Web.

On the Theater of the Mind

If you do a search on the phrase "theater of the mind," you'll find it has been used in two ways. Starting in 1956, "theater of the mind" was used by those wishing to argue that listening to radio dramas required more brainpower than watching dramas on the newer medium of television. Radio dramas, the argument went, are superior to television dramas because they take place not in the sound studio where the voice actors and sound effects people convene, but in the imaginations of the listening audience. The phrase is now used more generally to describe what happens when words, whether read or heard, and/or images, whether seen or described, create a dramatic scene in the mind of the beholder. And so one could say that advertising, which has long made the programming on radio and television possible, is convened in the theater of the mind, where it continuously prods audiences to imagine the better life that comes from consumption. Indeed, this search exercise itself demonstrates just how much advertising dominates the theater of the mind: the top search results for this phrase are not links to definitions or discussions of the debate over whether radio is superior to television or vice versa; they are for the sixth studio album by the hip-hop artist Ludacris, which happens to be named . . . *Theater of the Mind*.

We'd like to hijack the phrase "theater of the mind" and use it for an entirely different purpose. We grant that words and images can create a virtual theater *in* the mind. What we're interested in, though, is considering what becomes possible when you think of the flow of thoughts in your mind as participating in an open-ended drama that quietly plays out as you think through and about the ideas that are most important to you. It's a drama not just *in* your mind but *of* your mind. And you can use your writing to make the theater of your mind available for others to experience. Indeed, we'd say that this is one way to define the practice of creativity. When you write, you also shape an experience in the minds of your readers; your words stage the unfolding of an idea or an argument or a narrative.

When scientific and philosophic treatises were presented as dialogues, it was easier to see that there are dramatic, comedic, and even

tragic aspects to the exchange of ideas. Galileo's use of the telescope, for example, shows how a new technology can generate new information that, under the right circumstances, triggers an internal dialogue—in the theater of the mind—that in turn leads to a whole new way of thinking and seeing.

In 1609, with the aid of one of the world's first telescopes, Galileo began to collect evidence suggesting that the earth was not at the center of what we now call the solar system. He first published his results as a scientific treatise in 1610. In 1632, in his book *The Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, Galileo presented his argument for a sun-centered model of the universe as a dialogue between three fictional characters: Salviati, a scholar whose research supports the idea that the sun is at the center of the universe; Simplicio, who believes that the earth is at the center of the universe, an idea initially presented by Aristotle and Ptolemy more than a thousand years earlier; and Sagredo, an intelligent bystander who asks questions as Salviati and Simplicio debate the merits of the two diametrically opposed models. Galileo used the form of the dialogue to make his own thinking process accessible to the greatest number of readers, most of whom were not involved in studying the heavens. He staged what would otherwise be an arcane discussion about measuring the movements of celestial bodies as a dialogue for a general audience, one that serves up humor and insults along with explanations of the significance of his discovery of craters on the moon. With his dialogue, Galileo made it possible for his readers to imagine that the sun was at the center of the universe regardless of what the Bible said or what the Church held. While Galileo's 1610 treatise presented the same fundamental threat to the Catholic Church's worldview, it was the publication of *The Dialogue* that led to Galileo's trial for heresy in 1633, where he was forced to recant his argument for the heliocentric universe and was then sentenced to house arrest for the remainder of his life.

Were you expecting a happier ending?

Our second example comes from ancient Greece. Plato, Socrates's prolific student, presented his teacher's philosophical reflections as a series of dialogues. Here, too, one finds the exchange of ideas depicted not as the dispassionate, orderly laying out of the steps that lead to some deep truth but as a wayward back-and-forth between Socrates, who is forever searching after the Good, and one or more interlocutors,

who are inevitably shown to know much less than they claim to know. In *The Republic*, the Platonic dialogue that explores whether or not the State has the power to produce good, law-abiding citizens, Socrates tells a story about the difference between the world as it is seen by average people and the world as it is seen by those who seek the truth.

Socrates asks his listeners to imagine a cave in which prisoners are chained to the ground, their gaze fixed on the cave wall before them. Behind them there is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners is a pathway traveled by people carrying life-size cutouts of various objects. The fire casts shadows of the objects on the wall, and the prisoners, because they can't turn their heads, take these moving shadows to be reality. This, Socrates would have his listeners believe, is how unthinking people experience life: they mistake shadows for reality; they are prisoners to illusions.

Continuing his story, Socrates imagines a prisoner who breaks free of his chains, turns and sees the fire and the cutouts, and then walks from the cave into the sunlight. The former prisoner now sees things as they are, and he returns to the cave to tell the prisoners what he has seen. For Socrates, the freed prisoner is akin to the philosopher, and the return to the cave is the beginning of the philosopher's educational mission, which Socrates defines as turning the prisoners toward the light of the fire.

> Then education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately.

With Socrates's allegory of the cave, we get a nested set of theaters of the mind: there's the theater in the prisoner's mind, which is inhabited by shadows; there's the theater in the philosopher's mind, where one encounters reality; and there's Plato's theater of the mind, which stages this moment when Socrates uses a story to illustrate his view of education as the process of turning from the illusory to the real.

What we find compelling about the Allegory of the Cave and *The Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* is that they make visible what would otherwise go unnoticed—namely, that there is a drama to the life of the mind that gets expressed in the movement from confusion to clarity, a drama that gets felt in the weight and heft of the process of changing one's mind. While the dramas that played out in the theater of Galileo's mind and the theater of Socrates's mind proved to be of global significance, we all experience a true change of mind, like a genuine change of heart, as life changing, even though the significance of the change extends no further than our own worldview.

Writing plays a central role in the theater of the mind because it makes it possible for us to see our own thoughts and then to reflect on what happens when we move those thoughts out into the world. As it happens this is why Socrates so distrusted writing: unlike an embodied dialogue between a teacher and a student, with writing there's no one there but ourselves to test the veracity of our thoughts as we express them. Despite Socrates's argument against writing, his student Plato wrote a series of dialogues featuring Socrates that have been read, discussed, and argued over for the past two thousand years. Why? Because the questions Socrates poses in Plato's dialogues cut to the very essence of what it means to be human. Indeed, for Socrates, it is the ongoing engagement with the theater of one's mind, where questions about how to live a good life are posed and reposed, that separates us from all the other animals. This sentiment, succinctly captured in Socrates's oft-quoted declaration in *The Apology* that "the unexamined life is not worth living," is, we would argue, more accurately rendered as "a life lived without ongoing self-examination is not a human life." The drama of the theater of the mind commences as soon as the question "What do I think?" is given serious consideration.

Practice Session One

Reflecting

There's a quick way to test how the idea of the theater of the mind, as we've defined it, can be of use to you: write a description of the most dramatic moment you've experienced in the realm of thought. In the theater of the

mind, one deals with ideas—friendship, citizenship, truth, faith, integrity, or success, for example—and the drama is in the development of a revised understanding of the idea at the center of one's self-examination. We are not asking you to write a story about how winning an award improved your self-confidence or how an act of shoplifting led to feelings of guilt. The assignment is to focus squarely on the redefinition of an *idea* and to lead your readers through your thought process to show them why the shift in definition *matters*.

Practice Session Two

Reading

There's a maxim in argumentation that goes like this: tell them what you're going to say; say it; tell them that you said it. This is argumentation through repetition. In the context of the current discussion, we'd say that this kind of argumentation contains no drama; there's nothing for the reader to do in the theater of the mind other than accept or reject the point that is being argued.

This is not the case for any of the readings we've included at the end of this volume. Choose one of the readings and observe, as you read, how the writer tries to create a theater of the mind for the readers, encouraging them to think in new ways about the topic at hand.

Set aside at least 30 minutes to take notes about places where the writer dramatizes the evolution of ideas, perhaps by refining the argument, shifting directions, or introducing new and surprising information.

Writing

After you've read and reviewed the article, draft an essay that describes how the writer moves your thinking along from the beginning of the article to the end. Is there a drama to this movement? What has the writer done to get you to shift your thinking? Does he or she succeed?

Revising

And now for the real challenge: revise the essay you wrote in the previous exercise so that it compellingly demonstrates your experience reading the piece you've chosen and contending with its implications. In other words, create for your reader the drama of your engagement with the writer's ideas.

EXPLORE

One of the pleasures of reading and writing is exploring the theater of other people's minds. In the *Invisibilia* podcast "The Secret History of Thoughts," you can hear the "ghost boy," who spent thirteen years in a vegetative state, describe what it was like to live entirely inside his mind. Leslie Jamison discusses how her experiences as a medical actor—i.e., playing sick for doctors in training—transformed her understanding of empathy. Cheryl Strayed offers advice to a beginning writer, Elissa Bassist, about how to overcome the internal fears that prevent getting down to work. In an interview two years later, Strayed speaks with Bassist, who has completed the book she feared she would never write.

Bassist, Elissa, and Cheryl Strayed. "How to Write Like a Mother#^@%&." *Creative Nonfiction*. #47, Winter 2013. Web.

Jamison, Leslie. "The Empathy Exams: A Medical Actor Writes Her Own Script." *The Believer.* Feb. 2014. Web.

"The Secret History of Thoughts." *NPR Invisibilia.* 9 Jan. 2015. Podcast.

Strayed, Cheryl. "Write Like a Motherfucker." *The Rumpus*. 19 Aug. 2010. Web.

On Curiosity at Work in the Academy

Throughout this book, we've included short entries about "Curiosity at Work"—examples of how curiosity inspires creative thought and expression. In these brief essays, we emphasize the work of contemporary nonfiction writers because they do such a good job of posing compelling questions about the world. If you're a student learning to write for school, however, you may be wondering how to connect what this book teaches you about writers' habits of mind to the kinds of papers you are asked to write for classes in particular academic disciplines. We think the best way to address that connection is to show you examples of curiosity at work in academic writing so you can see how academic articles and books emerge from the very habits of mind we've been discussing.

Academic writing differs from journalistic writing and general nonfiction in important ways. Scholarly articles and books explicitly join conversations taking place in particular branches of knowledge, and they focus on questions that are of interest to others in the same discipline; philosophers ask different kinds of questions than psychologists or anthropologists or historians ask. The various fields of study also differ from each other in their methods of research, the kinds of evidence used, and the traditions that govern how arguments, ideas, evidence, and sources are presented.

Despite these differences, academic writing has much in common with nonfiction written by generalists. Each of the three academic works we discuss below begins with the author expressing curiosity about a difficult problem, puzzle, or paradox that can be addressed through research. While the authors present their work according to the conventions of their respective academic fields, they are all motivated by a desire to advance understanding about complex issues. Reviewing these examples will make it easier for you to see three of the main moves academics make in launching their writing projects. Each writer identifies an important problem, puzzle, or paradox; joins an ongoing discussion about the problem, puzzle, or paradox; and establishes the key words in that conversation. This description may suggest that we think

academic writing follows a formula. But we'd say that these writers *begin* with curiosity. The conventions become useful later as the writers shape what they've discovered for an audience of specialized readers.

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One of the most influential articles in the field of political theory is Michael Walzer's "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," which appeared in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* in 1973. (The full article can easily be found online.) In the introduction to his essay, Walzer immediately signals that he's joining an ongoing conversation. His first paragraph explains that he's interested in a disagreement about moral dilemmas that has already been addressed by three fellow philosophers—Thomas Nagel, Richard B. Brandt, and R. M. Hare. They disagree about "whether or not a man can ever face, or ever has to face, a moral dilemma, a situation where he must choose between two courses of action *both of which it would be wrong for him to undertake*" (emphasis added). More specifically, they're concerned about whether it's possible for a leader to govern "innocently." In other words, can a political leader resolve moral dilemmas without ever having to choose a course of action that is immoral?

Nagel thinks that, because dilemmas arise in which each possible course of action is morally wrong, a leader cannot govern innocently. Brandt argues that logical reasoning can be used to resolve such dilemmas and thus a leader can remain innocent. Hare agrees, arguing dilemmas of this kind can and should be resolved at a higher level of moral discourse.

Walzer is not satisfied with any of these answers. In the third paragraph of his article, he writes:

> My own answer is no, I don't think I could govern innocently; nor do most of us believe that those who govern us are innocent—as I shall argue below—even the best of them. But this does not mean that it isn't possible to do the right thing while governing. It means that a particular act of government (in a political party or in the state) may be exactly the right thing to do in utilitarian terms and yet leave the man who does it guilty of a moral wrong. The innocent man, afterwards, is no longer innocent. If on the other hand

> he remains innocent . . . , he not only fails to do the right thing (in utilitarian terms), he may also fail to measure up to the duties of his office (which imposes on him a considerable responsibility for consequences and outcomes).

If you have trouble understanding what Walzer is saying the first time through, try reading this passage again, slowly, and look up the terms that are unfamiliar to you. If you look up *utilitarianism*, for example, you'll find that it is the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. A utilitarian evaluates choices on the basis of how useful they are; the *right* choice to a utilitarian is one that is beneficial for more people.

With this definition in mind, you might assume that calculating the greatest good for the greatest number is a straightforward business, but Walzer thinks that making a utilitarian decision could be simultaneously the right course of action and a morally wrong one. For example, suppose a political leader could serve the greater good of his or her country by sacrificing the lives of bystanders to kill the head of a terrorist organization. Even if the political leader makes the "right" utilitarian choice to kill bystanders for the greater good of the country, she or he has still committed the immoral act of killing innocent people and now has dirty hands. If the leader refuses to commit this immoral act on behalf of the greater good and lets the terrorist live, then the leader has put his or her own citizens at risk. With this choice, the leader commits a different moral wrong and also has dirty hands.

Six pages into the article, Walzer fully lays out the paradox that leaders "who act for us and in our name are often killers, or seem to become killers too quickly and too easily." Even "good and decent people" who choose politics as a vocation, he writes,

> are then required to learn the lesson Machiavelli first set out to teach: "how not to be good." Some of them are incapable of learning; many more profess to be incapable. But they will not succeed unless they learn, for they have joined the terrible competition for power and glory; they have chosen to work and struggle as Machiavelli says, among "so many who are not good." They can do no good themselves unless they win the struggle, which they are unlikely to do unless they are willing and able to use the necessary means. So we

> are suspicious even of the best of winners. It is not a sign of our perversity if we think them only more clever than the rest. They have not won, after all, because they were good, or not only because of that, but also because they were not good. No one succeeds in politics without getting his hands dirty. This is conventional wisdom again, and again I don't mean to insist that it is true without qualification. I repeat it only to disclose the moral dilemma inherent in the convention. For sometimes it is right to try to succeed, and then it must also be right to get one's hands dirty. But one's hands get dirty from doing what it is wrong to do. And how can it be wrong to do what is right? Or, how can we get our hands dirty by doing what we ought to do?

As this last paragraph shows, Waltzer doesn't rush to resolve the moral puzzle that fascinates him. Rather than being satisfied with the conclusion that successful leaders must have dirty hands, he continues to generate more and more questions: If having dirty hands is inevitable, when should dirty-handed leaders be held accountable? Does holding leaders accountable then dirty the hands of citizens in turn? Does everyone end up with dirty hands? Walzer concludes his essay without having answered any of these questions definitively. And yet, forty years after it was written, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands" is still being cited by scholars and taught in politics classes. Why? For two reasons: because Walzer's article presents the complex puzzle of "doing bad to do good" with remarkable clarity; and because Walzer's way of engaging with this puzzle is so lively and original that readers from across the political spectrum feel invited to join with him as he wrestles with the unsolvable challenge of leadership.

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Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* begins by making the same series of moves we saw Walzer's "Political Action" make above: in the introduction to *Orientalism*, Said joins an ongoing conversation about culture; he works to unsettle key terms; and he argues that we should understand a complicated puzzle in a new way. The introduction opens

with Said staging his response to the following: "On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975–1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that 'it had once seemed to belong to . . . the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval.'" The jounalist saw only what his own country had lost. The distortions of this view of Beirut inspired Said to write a book about how the East has been seen through Western eyes.

We'd like you to read the first two paragraphs of *Orientalism* and observe how Said's curiosity about the journalist's sentence leads him to intellectually creative thoughts. It will help you understand Said's project if you know that Chateaubriand and Nerval were nineteenth-century French writers who wrote extensively about their travels to the Middle East and, more specifically, about their time in Beirut.

> On a visit to Beirut during the terrible civil war of 1975–1976 a French journalist wrote regretfully of the gutted downtown area that "it had once seemed to belong to . . . the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval." He was right about the place, of course, especially so far as a European was concerned. The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. Now it was disappearing; in a sense it had happened, its time was over. Perhaps it seemed irrelevant that Orientals themselves had something at stake in the process, that even in the time of Chateaubriand and Nerval Orientals had lived there, and that now it was they who were suffering; the main thing for the European visitor was a European representation of the Orient and its contemporary fate, both of which had a privileged communal significance for the journalist and his French readers.
>
> Americans will not feel quite the same about the Orient, which for them is much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly). Unlike the Americans, the French and the British—less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and

> Swiss—have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling *Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. . . .

You may need to read this passage more than once and look up terms that are unfamiliar to you to understand Said's project. You could look carefully, for instance, at what Said does with the term "the Orient." For over a century, the term seemed to be culturally neutral, but Said draws our attention to how it is deeply embedded in a Western cultural perspective that casts the East as both in service to and inferior to the West. The ways the West perceives the East, he says, have far-reaching effects. The European idea of "the Orient" is embedded in the European languages, patterns of thought, and institutional structures. If we return to the journalist's description of the "gutted downtown" of Beirut that "had once seemed to belong to . . . the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval," we can now see what Said wants us to see—namely, the nostalgia of a Frenchman who cannot appreciate Beirut as an Eastern city and who regrets that it no longer reflects the influence of its French colonizers. With this brief example, Said takes the first step in his journey to establish that the idea of "the Orient" is a European invention. His intellectual journey ultimately inspired a generation of scholars to document the ways that European and Americans have represented Middle Eastern, African, and Asian societies and cultures over time.

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The two examples of academic writing we've offered so far are both focused on abstract concepts, "Orientalism" and "the problem of dirty hands," and they both address how ideas and narratives shape the way we think about politics, power, culture, and cultural difference. Our third example, from the field of sociology, is less abstract, though it too examines the power of cultural narratives. "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: The Origins of a Moral Panic," by Elizabeth M. Armstrong and Ernest L. Abel, examines the growing concern in the 1990s about fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) as a public health issue. The writers of this article are very direct: they begin by defining fetal alcohol syndrome and then quickly cite six articles to demonstrate that they are entering an ongoing scholarly conversation about the prevalence and danger of fetal alcohol syndrome. Although their prose is unadorned, they make clear in their introduction that they've uncovered an unexpected and serious problem.

> Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is a pattern of anomalies occurring in children born to alcoholic women (Jones and Smith, 1973). The main features of this pattern are pre- and/or postnatal growth retardation, characteristic facial abnormalities, and central nervous system dysfunction, including mental retardation (Stratton *et al.*, 1996). Despite the pervasiveness of alcohol and drunkenness in human history (Abel, 1997), FAS went largely unrecognized until 1973, when it was characterized as a "tragic disorder" by Jones and Smith, the Seattle physicians who discovered it (Jones and Smith, 1973). By the 1990s, FAS had been transformed in the United States from an unrecognized condition to a moral panic characterized as a "major public health concern" (e.g. Stratton *et al.*, 1996) and a "national health priority" (Egeland *et al.*, 1998). In this paper, we trace this evolution, paying special attention to the ways in which this moral panic has inflated fear and anxiety about the syndrome beyond levels warranted by evidence of its prevalence or impact. To acknowledge that the current level of concern about FAS is exaggerated is not to suggest that the syndrome does not exist. One of us

> (E. L. A.) has spent his entire professional career researching and writing about FAS and continues to be actively engaged in its prevention.

Armstrong and Abel are curious about a paradox in the history of fetal alcohol syndrome: although the syndrome was unknown before 1973, in the space of twenty years, fetal alcohol syndrome went from being invisible to being the focus of a "moral panic." They want to understand how and why the syndrome became an urgent "public health priority."

In the pages that follow the introduction, the authors reinterpret evidence that was available to everyone at the time and yet was routinely oversimplified and misunderstood by others caught up in the moral panic. They point out, for example, that highly visible prevention efforts, such as the placement of warning labels on alcohol bottles, "are doomed to fail" because all pregnant women are not, in fact, equally at risk of giving birth to children with fetal alcohol syndrome. If, as the authors say, "a small proportion of women of child-bearing age, especially those who are most disadvantaged by poverty, bear the greatest burden of risk for FAS," then the real public health concern should be identifying and helping those women who are most at risk.

This is what it means to be creative as an academic: you show your readers how to understand a problem in a new way. Armstrong and Abel have recast a seemingly intractable public health crisis so that new ways of responding to it become imaginable.

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These three examples of curiosity at work in the academy offer just a glimpse of how academics share their curiosity about the ways of the world with others. Academic writing poses special challenges to readers who are new to a topic or a field of study, but if you know to look for the problem, question, puzzle, or paradox that the writer is grappling with, if you can spot where the writer is joining an ongoing conversation with other scholars, and if you figure out how to define key terms and concepts, you'll be able to get your bearings, even if the language and subject matter at first seem entirely unfamiliar.

Practice Session One

Reading

Above we've presented examples of two kinds of curiosity-driven scholarly projects: Armstrong and Abel seek to resolve a puzzle, and Walzer and Said explore the complexity of an abstraction. For this exercise, we want you to think about other roles that curiosity can play in scholarly writing.

Begin by selecting a scholarly essay to read. You can work with one of the five articles listed in the Explore section (p. 250), or your teacher may suggest other readings. You may even be able to read an article written by one of your teachers.

Read the essay you've chosen from beginning to end, marking key moments in the argument. Then read the essay again; most academic articles need to be read more than once to be fully understood. As you reread, pay attention to how the scholar organizes ideas, works with sources, presents major points, and addresses readers. Take notes in the margins about the key moments you marked.

After you've read and reread the article with care, take at least 30 minutes to write out answers to the following questions: How did the scholar introduce his or her topic? Where did the writing draw you in? Are there parts of the essay that confused you, or sections where you didn't know enough about the topic or the sources to follow the argument? What parts of the article were particularly clear? Were there passages that prompted you to think new thoughts?

Writing

Write an essay that reflects on how curiosity gets announced and pursued in the article you've read. Make certain to quote specific passages where you feel the focus of the scholar's curiosity is made clear. What is the status of that curiosity at the end of the article? Have the author's questions been resolved, or have they led to other questions?

Practice Session Two

Reading

All of your teachers will have other examples of academic writing they admire. Ask some of them to recommend a few favorite academic articles, chapters, or books. Choose one and read it with an eye toward understanding the curiosity that drives the scholar's project, following the steps in the Reading section

of Practice Session One: read, reread, take notes, reflect, and write. Why do you think your teacher recommended that piece of writing? Can you offer an explanation for why it has been influential?

EXPLORE

Zora Neale Hurston once wrote, "research is formalized curiosity." Although some academic prose seems dry and airless, many scholarly writers put their passion and curiosity on display. Hurston's fellow anthropologist, Ruth Behar, challenges her field to recognize ethnography as an art that engages the imagination. Douglas Hofstadter wonders about the importance of analogy in thinking, and proposes that analogy *is* cognition. Anne Harrington also examines how scientists think about thinking; she questions the assumption that neuroscience alone can account for "moral choice, existential passion, and social contracts." David Bartholomae and Shirley Brice Heath both raise questions about how teachers evaluate learning. Bartholomae insists that we rethink our assumptions about how college students learn to write academic essays, and Heath points out how strange it is that teachers judge academic ability with formulaic essays when, by design, these essays curtail "creativity, the pursuit of alternative answers, and the power of collaborative thinking in academic life."

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems.* Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford, 1985. 134–65. Print.

Behar, Ruth. "Ethnography in a Time of Blurred Genres." *Anthropology and Humanism* 32.2 (2007). 145–55. Web.

Harrington, Anne. "How to House a Mind Inside a Brain: Lessons from History." *EMBO Reports* 8, no. S1 (2007). Web.

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Hofstadter, Douglas R. "Analogy as the Core of Cognition." Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts. Web.

Argument at Work: Sonia Sotomayor and Principled Openness

On August 8, 2009, Sonia Sotomayor, who was born and raised in a working-class Puerto Rican family in the Bronx, was sworn in as the first Latina member of the United States Supreme Court. Since then, Sotomayor has written a coming-of-age memoir, *My Beloved World* (simultaneously published in Spanish as *Mi mundo adorado*), in which she describes her early years living in public housing with an alcoholic father and a distant mother, her studies at Princeton University and Yale Law School, and the steps early in her career that put her on a path to the Supreme Court.

Sotomayor credits many mentors and friends for contributing to her success, but her memoir also makes it clear that her success is due to her intellectual habits of mind, which were evident before she graduated from Cardinal Spellman High School. As a member of that school's forensics club, Sotomayor discovered that she loved vigorous argument. She enjoyed arguing not because she was always certain of her position but because she took pleasure in the sport of rhetorical sparring and in testing her ideas against challenges.

She recalls that her manner of using argument as a tool for learning—as opposed to sticking to her original position no matter what new information and ideas she encountered—didn't always inspire the affection or admiration of her competitors. At a forensics meet during her junior year of high school, she encountered an especially hostile opponent who accused her of never being willing to take a strong stand and of thinking too much about how her position depended on context. Sotomayor thought it was valuable to be open to persuasion, but her fellow debater found it a mark of weakness because Sotomayor's position on an issue was never predictable. She accused Sotomayor of being without principles.

Sotomayor writes in her memoir's epilogue that she grappled with that accusation for decades. She concedes that she would be at fault if she truly lacked principles and had no moral center. She counts among

her core values "integrity, fairness, and the avoidance of cruelty." At the same time, she reasons, "if you held to principle so passionately, so inflexibly, indifferent to the particulars of circumstance—the full range of what human beings, with all their flaws and foibles, might endure or create—if you enthroned principle above even reason, weren't you then abdicating the responsibilities of a thinking person?" Her practice as a Supreme Court justice is built on this habitual questioning and curiosity, on an openness to individual difference and a willingness to learn. She concludes: "Concern for individuals, the imperative of treating them with dignity and respect for their ideas and needs, regardless of one's own views—these too are surely principles and as worthy as any of being deemed inviolable. To remain open to understandings—perhaps even to principles—as yet not determined is the least that learning requires, its barest threshold."