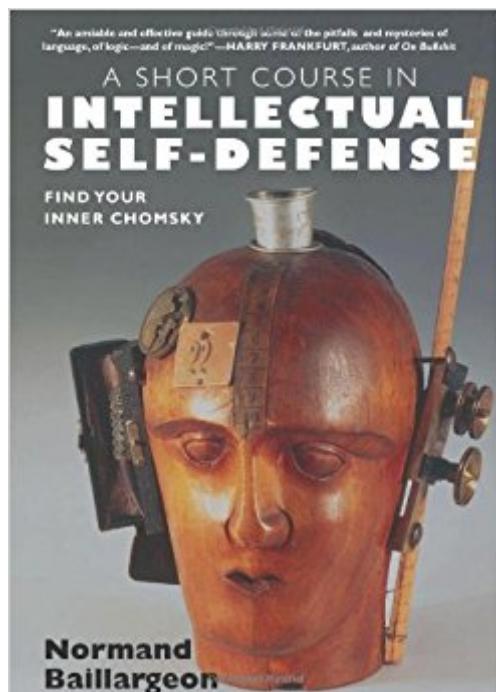


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A Short Course In Intellectual Self-Defense: Find Your Inner Chomsky



Synopsis

What is the relationship between democracy and critical thinking? What must a citizen in a democracy know to make the word democracy meaningful? In *A Short Course in Intellectual Self-Defense*, historian and educator Normand Baillargeon provides readers with the tools to see through the spin and jargon of everyday politics and news reporting in order to decide for themselves what is at stake and how to ask the necessary questions to protect themselves from the manipulations of the government and the media. Whether the issue be the call to what we're told will be a bloodless war, the "debate" around Intelligent Design, or the meaning of a military expenditure, Baillargeon teaches readers to evaluate information and sort fact from official and media spin.

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Customer Reviews

NORMAND BAILLARGEON is Professor of Education Fundamentals at the University of Québec in Montreal, where he teaches on the history of pedagogy and the philosophy of education.

Noam Chomsky famously said that citizens in a democracy ought to equip themselves with a course in intellectual self-defense, so not to be duped by politicians, the media, corporate interests and assorted demagogues. Normand Baillargeon's book does exactly that in a marvelously accessible fashion, managing to engage the reader while teaching the basics of critical thinking, from logical fallacies to ways of critically reading the news. Despite its brevity, the volume manages to cover

basic numeracy and to provide enough understanding of statistics to add invaluable to readers' arsenal of intellectual self-defense weaponry. This and similar books should be a must read for anyone interested in playing a constructive part in the democratic discourse, or simply in avoiding to be made a fool by people who wield bad arguments and deploy questionable data. I will use it as reading material for an introductory level course in critical reasoning this coming Fall.

One of the illuminating things that you discover when you study statistics and logic formally is that peoples' arguments are based on poor reasoning and/or dodgy math (particularly dodgy statistics). This is especially true of much of the arguments of so-called opinion-leaders that are communicated via the media. I suspect that, if you're reading this review, you already have a sense of this as an issue. The great thing about a book like this one is that it can give you the intellectual tools to unpack these arguments to identify their fatal flaws. Part One of the book describes "some indispensable tools for critical thinking" which is really a discussion about how words themselves can be used to try to manipulate you into thinking one way or another about a subject without you realising it. Part One then goes on to explain the basic construction of a logically valid argument and why some arguments are invalid purely by their construction (regardless of the merit of the issue being argued for). This is followed by an explanation of the common fallacies in argumentation and is great stuff because the author explains most of these fallacies very well. After this, Part One deals with math (specifically probability, statistics and graphs, etc) and how it can be used to manipulate people. That said, let me rush to add that this isn't a math textbook so it's not heavy-duty. However, there is enough to give you a grasp of some of the basic issues that will help you to develop a healthy scepticism of the reported results of opinion polls and quasi-scientific research. Part Two of the book is possibly more challenging. Not because the theory is difficult (actually, most of the theory is relatively straight-forward) but because it uses the latest research into human perception, memory and judgement to challenge what you think you see and hear. And, if it does, you'll certainly be more sceptical about what other people tell you that they saw and heard. In the end, you'll find that people just can't be trusted - Not because they're liars but because they're oh so human. Do I think that there is anything wrong with the book? Well, yes - There are a few minor problems (but none that would stop me from buying the book). First, the author can be a little patronising at times (especially in Part One). I doubt that he feels superior necessarily. I just don't think he realises that his audience is reading the book because they're already clever enough to have a sense that something is wrong and they've come to book because they want to do something about it. Second, I'm not sure whether it's the fault of the author or the translator but, unless you know the definition of

words like coda, dissemble, utilitarian, etc, you'll need to keep a dictionary close by (though mostly for Part One of the book, Part Two is much better in this regard). Third, although the author's examples are valid, some can be a little silly. For example, one that he uses throughout the book involves the New York Police Department and a rather silly brand of "billy club" (which I presume is a baton). Couldn't he think of a more inclusive example?!

A very well documented look into the human psyche - and how people think in order to further how to become a better person. Some do not like to read things like this because they find them liberal or conservative - but the fact still remains - all actions by humans fit any of the Critical Thinking flaws documented in this book. It give them to you, and gives you some direction to defend against them.

Fantastic book, the one problem (very minor) is that many of the websites provided at the end are no longer available today.

all though some of the reading and explanations got to be a bit meticulous ... over all this is a great read for our modern times and political climate... this book could almost be summed up in the famous Sherlock Holmes phrase "Make your Theories to fit Facts and not your Facts fit Theories" ... Going into a a depth of study on Critical thinking I for one have not endeavored to enter into in times past this book really does give one some basic tools where by one can make better every day examinations of the evidence of events and ideas presented before them on a daily basis... I highly recommend this book to all... it definitely is a must read...

Great Seller! Book as described, fast shipping, etc.- Buy without worry! ;)

this is a great book and I appreciate that Normand does not go off on a rant for or against a religious system. He may have his own personal opinions, but refrains from being preachy. This book is a gold mine of tools to discern sloppy thinking and the very many ways that we mere mortals are duped and deceived by appeals and arguments. His examples are well stated and I do hope he writes a sequel in the same vein. Many such books tend to 'bash' Christians, but he has refrained from this emphasis. Others are so indifferent to any objective truth that their efforts seem to be on designing a persuasive argument regardless of the merit or honesty behind it. One of my 'keeper' books to be used again and again.

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