

## 9

# COMPARING AND SYNTHESIZING SOURCES

Once you start comparing the statements of different authors, you may discover many problems in fitting sources together. Books may cover the same subject but have different focuses and different purposes. Authors may disagree over ideas, facts, and basic viewpoints. Large gaps of knowledge may exist, not covered by the available sources. In this chapter, we will study ways of fitting parts together and evaluating differences between authors. Two types of essay, *the synthesis of sources* and *the evaluative comparison of sources*, will help you develop the skills of bringing sources together.

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## Knowledge Is Messy

A library presents an imposing vision: books neatly arranged according to reference numbers on endless rows of shelves. Initially, the wall-to-wall books make you feel that any fact you want to know must be in one of them and that the ideas in these books should fit together as neatly as the books fit together on the shelves. You have a comforting feeling that all knowledge in books interlocks to provide a smooth carpet of learning—everywhere even and firm under foot, no matter where you tread.

When you actually start to look for specific information or try to find agreement between the books on a particular topic, you are more likely to feel that you have stepped into the Bad Lands of the Dakotas or the swamps of Florida. You cannot always find what you are looking for; what you do find may be contradictory or confusing. On the positive side, you may uncover some wonderful surprises—ideas and information that you had no idea existed.

If you stop to consider why and how books are written, the unevenness of ground may not be so surprising. Each writer makes a particular statement, based on personal thinking and perceptions, to address a specific problem. Although authors may share common knowledge and familiarity with statements made by others, each individual uses these background materials and ideas in a unique way. As we saw in Chapter 6, a writer constructs the conversation he or she is participating in from his or her own individual vantage point. Moreover, each writer shapes a text around specific purposes, as we have examined in Chapter 7. Every author does build on what has been previously written but each builds in an individual way to achieve specific effects with different readers. Knowledge in disciplines and professions has been organized to some degree so that writers in these fields may agree on many matters about the prior conversation. Through intense conversation, a discipline may achieve consensus on certain facts, principles, and procedures of investigation, as we see in Part 3. Yet even in highly codified fields, different approaches, significant disagreements, and varying points of view provide enough room for each author to speak as an individual, arguing a novel position.

If you read only one book, follow only one author's perspective in a complex conversation, the issues may seem simple, for that single author has constructed a personal sense of all that has been said. As we examined in Chapter 6, a writer's controlling voice creates overall harmony out of the many voices that have spoken on any given subject. However, once you read a second and third book and move beyond the controlling wisdom of one author, you will have to make sense of the diverse statements you find. To write your own informed statement on a subject that other writers have addressed, you will have to sort out agreement from disagreement, fact from opinion, reliable information from unreliable. You will need to see how all the parts of the written conversation fit together into a picture you are satisfied with. You will become an author whose controlling voice brings the other voices together into a coherent written statement. You thus become an authority yourself, for you are an author too.

In this chapter we examine how to find the points of connection between diverse statements and how to create one overall structure that reveals those connections. This bringing together is the task of *synthesis*. All professions that use data or knowledge constantly require synthesis; that is, putting information from a number of sources into one usable, coherent form, whether to give a picture of a company's financial stability or to write a newspaper story.

In this chapter we also examine how to identify when texts truly disagree, how to locate their exact points of disagreement, and how to evaluate their disagreements to judge which side states a better case. This is the task of *evaluative comparison*. Whatever career you enter, whenever you are engaged in any serious problem and find important disagreements between sources, you will

need to do this kind of detailed comparative work. Business executives field conflicting reports and proposals, police officers and social workers receive conflicting accounts of events, and academics encounter conflicting opinions about scholarly knowledge. All must weigh the alternatives.

### **Agreements, Disagreements, and Disjunctions**

A group of people united by a common situation and a choice between two alternatives are likely to be divided. That is, some will make one choice and others will choose its alternative. On election day, people vote for candidates running against each other for one office. In court, attorneys for the prosecution and for the defense are likely to make directly opposing claims. Members of a jury come to a verdict of guilty or not guilty. In such well-defined situations, choices are clearly identified; opposing sides are clearly drawn. In debates, in legislative deliberations, and in scientific controversies, issues become joined, as lawyers say. Once issues are joined, people migrate to one side or the other, opponents formulate their positions, points of disagreement are identified, and arguments become focused. The joining of the issue in itself organizes the discussion.

However, when issues are not formally joined within a specific group of people gathered together over a common problem, focused agreement or disagreement is far less probable. Although general topics, ideas, and information may be similar, every person is likely to address the subject slightly differently. Each individual is usually trying to convince others that he or she is right rather than that anyone else is wrong. The fact that one person is right may not necessarily mean that the other is not. All the parties may be right. They all may be wrong. Even when people appear to be in disagreement, scrutiny of their arguments may reveal differences only in focus and purpose rather than any real contradictions between their substantive positions. In library research you need to find a way to make various materials fit together with one focus. There are likely to be gaps or disjunctions between what each source addresses. For example, while researching changes in family structure in America over the past twenty years, you may come across a psychological study of the effects of divorce on children in the Midwest during the 1970s, a news magazine's editorial decrying society's loss of family values, a news report on unmarried couples living together in California, and a personal account of related stepfamilies in Boston resulting from the marriage of divorcees with children. The four sources do address family structure in America over twenty years, but they appear to have little information in common. Even though some of the writers seem to accept change, and others resist it, it might be very hard for you to say that any writer disagrees with any other on a specific point. How can a researcher possibly make one coherent statement using such diverse sources, each of which takes such a different approach? But if you step back and think about these four articles for a moment, you may discover common threads among them. For example, all four texts indicate that there have been significant changes in American family arrangements and that individuals have reacted in a variety of ways to them. All the texts show that changing family patterns have been a matter of public concern. They also reveal how major regions across the country have been subject to these changes. Other similarities may emerge with more thought.

Further research would probably turn up more tightly related sources, but your basic problem will remain the same: to fit other writers' statements together so as to develop your own statement and ideas about your subject. Out of all the voices in your research you must construct a coherent conversation that you control in your own text. Simply linking quotations and summaries from the different sources end to end will not do. By thinking through what you

learn from your reading and seeing how each source helps you to understand part of an issue, you will see how to appropriate these voices to your own purposes as a writer.

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## Writing a Synthesis of Sources

The purpose of the *essay of synthesis* is to combine what a number of sources have to say into a coherent overview of the subject. In preparing the synthesis, you have to compare and analyze a number of sources in order to choose between conflicting statements, but the paper presents your final understanding of the subject—not your gropings. If, for example, you wanted to synthesize all that was known about the astronomy of the Aztecs of ancient Mexico, you would have to draw on facts, ideas, and interpretations from a number of different sources about the Aztecs, premodern astronomy, architecture of sun temples, and mythology. Your main focus, however, would be what you discovered about Aztec astronomy—and not the differences among your sources.

In the past, writing the essay of synthesis might have struck you as an easy task, much like the library report you may have done in junior high school. But by now you are much more aware of the problems of fitting multiple sources together in a coherent, consistent way. Not only do sources conflict, but also they often omit just the information you are seeking. You become very significant at this point. Only you can make the connections between the information provided in different sources. Only you can search out additional sources to fill in the gaps. Only you can assemble the pieces into an intelligent whole. The sources remain, quite separate until you bring them together.

In particular, the essay of synthesis will present you with five separate tasks: (1) framing a subject, (2) gathering material from varied sources, (3) fitting the parts together, (4) achieving a synthesis, and (5) unifying the style of presentation.

### Framing a Subject

To frame a subject on which there is enough—but not too much—source material, you must find a question, issue, or subject on which a number of people have written, presenting facts and interpretations. But the number of sources should not be so great as to create a confusion of material. In other words, you have to find a limited topic that forms the center for a cluster of writing.

One place to look for such topics is within the structure of different academic disciplines. Each academic discipline is defined by a series of research questions that focus the attention of researchers in that field. For example, in anthropology much investigation centers on determining social roles within different societies. By selecting one type of society and one social role—such as the role of the shaman in American Indian tribes—you can define a cluster of research materials with which to work.

Sometimes a dispute over a controversial theory may excite interest and lead to a flurry of new publications in support of one theory or the other. For example, much geological writing in the late 1960s argued for or against the controversial idea of continental drift. At other times a discovery or an invention may affect the work of many scholars and scientists, exciting them to write on the meaning of the discovery or the consequences of the invention. A major new discovery may have widespread consequences for an entire discipline. Such, for example, was the enormous effect of the discovery of the structure of DNA on all biological studies. Thus, within

academic subjects, you can look for clusters of sources around topics defined by the structure of the field, around controversial theories, or around discoveries and inventions.

In more popular writing, such as newspapers, general-circulation magazines, and general nonfiction books, you can often find clusters of interest around social problems (juvenile delinquency in the 1950s or inflation in the 1970s), major historical figures and events (Abraham Lincoln or Pearl Harbor), social institutions (changes in the nuclear family), trends and fads (toga parties), or matters of political and public debate (the merits of national health insurance). In such areas of public interest and excitement, the different pieces of writing may not fit together in such clear-cut ways as they do in more organized academic disciplines. By sorting out the ways in which these different sources do relate to one another, you will find out much about the different attitudes behind the public interest.

### Gathering Material from Varied Sources

Since you are trying to gather a composite view of the subject, you need to go beyond the most obvious sources for your topic and draw on the information and insights of a number of different viewpoints. If, for example, you are interested in what TV programming was like in the mid-1960s, you will get only a very limited view if you rely totally on the program descriptions in *TV Guide*. However, in an article in an old issue of *TV Guide* you may find mention of criticism of TV programming quality. If you follow that lead up by finding out who these critics were and what their complaints were, you might discover the large public debate set off by Newton Minnow's remark that TV programming was a "vast wasteland." And you might also find out about the movement that resulted in the Public Broadcast System. *One source will lend you to another* until you get many different ways of looking at a single topic.

### Fitting the Parts Together

If you find conflicting statements among sources, you need to judge which is the most reliable, according to the methods and criteria presented later in this chapter. A more frequent problem results when sources do not have any easily compared points—either of agreement or of disagreement. So it will be up to you to discover their correspondences. You may have to point out the relationship between the broad theoretical statement of one writer and the details of a case study by another. Or you may have to make explicit an indirect connection between two separate sources. Or you may have to identify a pattern that shows the similarity between the viewpoints of two articles.

The connection between facts and interpretations is discussed throughout this chapter. In the final writing of your synthesis, you must explain these connections to your readers. To make the connection clear to someone who may not have recognized it before, use transitions between sections. A transitional phrase or sentence, describing the connection between one idea and the next, can tie together seemingly diverse material, fill in gaps, and put the facts and ideas in sensible relationship. A careful writer will help the reader follow all the steps of his or her presentation.

### Achieving a Synthesis

At this stage, you must add up all the information to discover significant patterns and to come to conclusions. These patterns and conclusions will be the shaping forces behind your organization of the final synthesis. You cannot simply rely on the patterns and the conclusions of your sources, for the limited purpose of each source determines the organization and ideas of

that piece of writing. You are combining material from several sources—and you may well be broadening the scope of the subject—so your own conclusions and organization will necessarily take on a new shape.

Informal and formal outlines are, as always, useful as attempts to make coherent sense of all your journal notes and annotations. By trying different outlines, you can see in which way the information fits together best. As you approach a satisfactory outline integrating the ideas and information from the sources, you will be able to formulate an overview of the subject. A direct statement describing this overview—tying together the various parts of your synthesis—can serve as a thesis statement for your paper.

For example, if you were reviewing for an economics course several analyses of how the end of the Cold War would affect the economy of the United States, simply summarizing the articles one after another would do little to show how they fit together or what they add up to. At the very least, organizing the articles according to those saying the economy would be helped and those saying it would be hurt could lead you to see the various reasons proposed by each side. It would be even better to note which articles focus on the contraction of the defense industry, which focus on the impact of unemployment of the military, which focus on readjustment of research and industry, which focus on the effect of improved world relations and international economic competition, and so on. Thus you will be able to observe how different analyses reveal different aspects of the economy. Or you may find interesting patterns of organization based on the political attitudes of the authors and what role each of them sees for government involvement in the readjustment. Or there could be patterns based on when each of the projections was made in relation to the changing state of the economy and international relations. Each way of attempting a synthesis of the articles will reveal new patterns and offer more ideas.

### Unifying the Style

Unifying the writing style while remaining true to the sources will be your final task. Because the sources you use have their own separate purposes, the material in each may be presented in very different ways—from numerical statistics to anecdotes to highly detailed analyses. When you bring together such varying material, you must present all materials in a way that is consistent with the overall design of your paper, the *synthesis*. For example, if you are collecting information on the effects of the Supreme Court's Bakke decision, you may be drawing on a wide variety of materials: statistical charts of college enrollments by ethnic background, direct comments on the decision by college admissions officers, general policy statements by college boards of trustees, straight news reports, and analyses by journalists. You must bring together all these different kinds of writing into a single readable whole. Instead of copying an entire statistical table—with much unnecessary material—you must pull out the most relevant statistics and explain their bearing on your topic. You cannot simply string together the statements of college officials; you must rather bring out the official positions and hidden attitudes behind them. In other words, you must translate the separate kinds of language used in the various sources into a uniform style appropriate to your synthesis.

Even though you will often need to rephrase and rearrange the material from the original sources, you must be careful not to distort the original meanings. When you pull out only selected statistics and explain their meaning, you must be careful not to leave out other important statistics that might give rise to conflicting interpretations. In summarizing the argument of a newspaper column, you should not leave out so much of the context that the article appears to say something it could not possibly have meant. Chapter 11 gives more specific advice on how to present the ideas of other writers as part of your own coherent

argument—without distorting the original meanings. That chapter also covers the various methods for documenting the sources of your information. In a synthesis you must document your sources fully and carefully so that the reader can judge the credibility of your material.

### A STUDENT EXAMPLE FOR DISCUSSION

Each time you have to synthesize material from a number of sources—whether as a separate essay of synthesis or as part of a larger project—the tasks just described will appear in varying forms. Each time you will have to find different ways to handle them, so the advice we have given should, serve as only the most general of guidelines. The following sample paper, entitled "Walt Disney Company and the Selling of American Popular Culture," shows the way one student solved these problems in one particular case.

Katherine Ellis's assignment was to follow one object, artifact, or figure of American popular culture in articles published in newspapers and magazines during three recent months and then to synthesize all the material to create the picture that an educated reader would have at the end of that time period. Because everyone in the class was working on different subjects, the students' papers combined to form a general picture of recent popular culture. After gaining a good sense of the role of popular culture in contemporary American life during this period, through doing their individual research and reading one another's papers, for their major research papers the students were to focus on a specific issue raised by their popular culture object, artifact, or figure (see Chapter 10).

Because Katherine was interested in Disney films she began by looking into the Walt Disney Company, which produces and distributes them. Since November 1992 marked the release of a new Disney animated film, *Aladdin*, she decided to research that month, the preceding month, and the following month. As she looked into news stories about the Walt Disney Company during this period, she found that Disney's contribution to American popular culture was more vast than she had anticipated. The release of *Aladdin* quickly led to questions about the way Walt Disney promotes its many entertainment products and about how these products are received by the general public. The articles Katherine found showed that Disney's success was due not only to the appeal of the products and images it offered, due also to the corporate policies behind them.

The issues raised by this subject so interested Katherine that she went on to explore them more fully in her main research paper, entitled "Exporting American Culture: Disneyland in Japan and France," which analyzed the factors contributing to Disney's initial success in exporting its products and images to Japan and Europe. In the smaller synthesis paper, however, she covered a broader topic and pieced together the basic facts as they first appeared in the newspapers and magazines. Her thinking and analysis showed how the different aspects of the Disney entertainment empire appearing in different articles fit together coherently. In this smaller paper she did not try to analyze or evaluate the factors contributing to Disney's success. Instead, by carefully synthesizing the articles, she explored her subject deeply and gained a strong sense of how Walt Disney Company makes a business of selling American popular-culture to the American public.

This synthesis paper showed the other students in Katherine's class that particular American popular-culture objects, artifacts, and figures raise questions about related issues of interest to consumers of popular culture. Katherine's first subject, Disney films, naturally evolved into a synthesis paper on the connections between popular culture and big business. Other students' topics, however, led them to different issues. For example, a student who explored the return of disco music discovered a connection between popular culture and the way Americans view the

past—in this instance, the 1970s. Another student, who researched the Statue of Liberty, found that the news articles surrounding this artifact often discussed immigration policy in the United States. Still another student, writing about the Grand Canyon as an element of American popular culture, found this subject linked to discussions about the environment and the conservation of natural resources.

The parenthetical references and the list of works cited in Katherine's paper followed the recommendations of the Modern Language Association (see Chapter 11, pages 212-216).

### Sample Essay of Synthesis

#### Walt Disney Company and the Selling of American Popular Culture: More than a Mickey Mouse Business

Most Americans associate Disney with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, but Disney's influence on American popular culture can be seen in a broad range of products, images, and enterprises it produces and sells, from movies and television shows to full scale theme parks and resorts. Disney is big business: a line on the stock exchange listing and a multi-faceted corporate structure. Its influence on American popular culture is due in part to how well it does its business. In 1992, Walt Disney Company was expanding its markets and increasing its profit more than ever before. Disney, which is known for its animated feature-length films and its theme parks, continued to build on this proven base to expand its entertainment empire.

In late 1992, Disney films continued to provide a strong base for the company's success. In early November, Walt Disney Company prepared the public for the release of its new animated feature film, Aladdin, with a media advertising blitz. Building on the unprecedented success of its last feature-length animated film, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin promised to be another huge hit (Sharkey H1). Reviews offered high praise for its artistic and technical merits as well as for its entertainment value (Salamon A12; Ansen 76-77; Corliss 74-76).

Box office receipts showed that the general public agreed with the critics. Over the Thanksgiving holiday, Disney's Aladdin combined with Fox's Home Alone 2 to break the previous box-office sales record for that period by over twenty percent. In its five day national opening, Aladdin took in over twenty-five million dollars, a higher gross than any of Disney's previous animated films and a remarkable sum of money given the number of half-price tickets sold to children (King B4). The film's popularity quickly led to the marketing of its characters—for example, in late December, Disney licensed the use of Princess Jasmine in Spanish language ads (Gellane D1)—which brought in additional revenues and further promoted the film.

Aladdin was not the only successful Disney film during this period. Walt Disney Company's Sister Act and Beauty and the Beast, released earlier in the United States, were among the most popular and profitable American films showing in Europe (Groves 47-48). In the video market, Disney led the shift from rentals to sales in videocassettes (Turner A1). In late October, Disney announced plans to re-release its classic animated feature film Pinocchio on home video ("Walt Disney to ... " B8) and in early December, Beauty and the Beast was at the top of the list in video sales ("Disney's 'Beauty' ... " C3).

In late 1992 Walt Disney also continued to broaden and expand its theme parks, in spite of setbacks abroad. Euro Disneyland, which opened in April 1992, continued to be a disappointment both in terms of popularity and profits. The park's operating company, Euro Disney S.C.A, reported a thirty-five million dollar loss for its first fiscal year (Gumbel B4). Euro Disney announced plans to reduce prices in order to boost sagging attendance ("Disney Defers ... 54). In mid-November, stock in Euro Disney was considered "overvalued" and European financial analysts were urging "all but the most risk tolerant" to sell (Eichenwald D1).

Despite losses from its European operations, Walt Disney Company nevertheless continued to make profits, posting a twenty-eight percent increase in net income (816.7

million dollars) and a twenty-three percent increase in revenues (7.5 billion dollars) during the fiscal year ending September 30, 1992 (Gumbel B4; Bates D1; "Disney Reports ... " 8). In fact, the company's huge profits prompted its two top executive officers, Michael Eisner and Frank Wells, to sell over five million shares on the New York Stock Exchange. This stock (valued at 185 million dollars) represented about one percent of Disney's outstanding stock, an amount large enough to drag Disney stock prices down almost two dollars per share and trigger an eleven point decline in the Dow Jones industrial average (Farm C1).

Disney's success prompted expansion plans. Walt Disney Company announced plans to build "Disney Sea," an ocean theme amusement park and marine life park, adjacent to Tokyo Disneyland (Gumbel B4). It also announced plans to build a three billion dollar expansion of its original park in Anaheim ("Good News ..." B6). Disney also took steps to further expand its film, video, and television empire. In early November Walt Disney Company completed a deal with Joe Roth, who released the blockbuster Home Alone during his three years as Chairman of Twentieth Century Fox, to start his own production company at Walt Disney Studios (Citron A1). It also signed a contract to produce movies for ABC ("Disney to Roll ..." 27) and signed box-office draw Julia Roberts to a contract (Goldman B7).

Walt Disney Company also negotiated agreements with three other major corporations during this three month period. Disney and McDonald's Corporation Signed an agreement to team up for a "Happy Meals" promotion tied to Dinosaurs, an ABC comedy series produced by Walt Disney Television, and made plans for another promotion in the summer of 1993 to tie in with the theatrical re-release of Snow White ("Disney, McD's ..." 8). In another attempt to combine expansion with promotion of preexisting products, Walt Disney Company signed a licensing agreement with Penguin Books to create a line of moderately priced children's books based on Disney stories ("Pearson's Penguin Agrees ..." B8). Finally, in conjunction with Blockbuster Entertainment Corporation, at a cost of fifty million dollars, Walt Disney Company gained conditional approval from the National Hockey League to bring a new expansion franchise to Anaheim, California ("A Shot on Goal ..." B7)—a strange new twist of "Disney on Ice"?

Walt Disney Company's success as a business is unquestionably linked to the appeal of its products, images, and enterprises. The reverse is also true: the appeal of its products, images, and enterprises is unquestionably linked to its success as a business. The combination of the two account for Disney's ability to successfully sell new products—be it a MacDonald's Happy Meal with a "baby Mickey" toy inside or an ice hockey franchise in the middle of Sun City—and at the same time to continue to successfully sell the old. If Disney offers it, it must be good. It must be as "American as apple pie and baseball." In fact, when Bill Clinton won the Presidential election, I almost expected someone to greet him with the Disney question: "Well, Bill. You've just been elected to the Presidency of the United States of America. What are you going to do now?" I think we're hooked.

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### WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Choose a word that is currently used as slang. Look it up in three different dictionaries including a dictionary of slang, if one is available. Then write a 150-to-200-word synthesis incorporating all information that seems relevant to the current usage of the word.
2. Write an *essay of synthesis* of about 800 words characterizing the social trends or one major story mentioned in print during one week out of the last fifty years. Use material from newspapers, news magazines, and at least one other kind of periodical. All members of the class should choose weeks or events within the same year so that they will be informed readers of one another's papers.
3. Choose a minor historical event or a short period in the life of a famous person. Find what four reputable sources say on the subject and write a narrative combining the information. Imagine your reader to be a high school student with a strong interest in history.
4. Choose a news story that is currently breaking. Taking your information from several newspapers and magazines, write a narrative of the events as they might appear in a year-end summary of major news events. Direct your paper to a college-educated audience.
5. Imagine you are working for your city's mayor. The mayor, who is away for a week's vacation on a tropical island far from any news of your community, expects to find a report waiting on local issues the first day back at work. Using accounts in local newspapers, write a SOO-word synthesis of events concerning one problem that has affected the community in your mayor's absence.

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## Disagreements: Joining the Issue

Having seen how much work you must do to establish a significant connection among different sources, it should not surprise you that to identify and define a genuine disagreement requires even more work. Occasionally one article will directly confront another, a letter to an editor may directly challenge an author's statement, or a pair of writers will debate a specific claim in print. However, more often, you must identify actual points of difference between two authors who are each pursuing separate lines of argument without paying any particular

attention to the claims of the other. You must join the issue between the two and construct precisely what the difference between them consists of. You must sharply define what the exact point at issue is, and what each author has to say on it. Only then can you begin to evaluate the logic and validity of each author's claim.

If you treat disagreement in a sweeping, general manner, it may seem that authors are more opposed to each other than they turn out to be, after the specific arguments are examined. If we reduce all issues to general questions—Is abortion right? Should the United States have engaged in the Vietnam War? Was Franklin Delano Roosevelt a good president?—most people will take one side or the other and categorize others as either sharing or opposing their view. Posing broad yes-or-no questions will dichotomize people into those for an issue and those against it. Having committed themselves to one side, people are likely to reject arguments that generally support the opposite view. But if you review the detailed reasoning that led someone to adopt a position and listen to the actual arguments used to support the decision, you may find that opponents do not disagree on much, if on anything at all, beyond a yes—or-no general preference.

It is commonly known that dire opponents who sit down together and thrash out their arguments often find that they share many points of agreement. Both supporters and opponents of legalized abortion, for example, when not locked into superficial confrontation, may well agree on the great harm caused by illegal abortions and the social costs and suffering caused by unwanted children. They may each also recognize the emotional and moral consequences of legalized abortion as well as the temptations it creates for thoughtlessness and abuse. No doubt, if the two parties search long enough, they will find serious differences between them, perhaps over the exercise of individual rights, the use of religious teachings, or the best way to care for children and families in our society. When viewed in a considered and careful way, issues usually become more discussable. The clear thinking that results offers some hope of resolution, workable compromise, or, at least, mutual understanding.

## Identifying Disagreements

While reading several sources about one subject or while researching a topic, you may be tempted either to overlook disagreements that don't announce themselves with flags and cannons or to emphasize differences between texts once you notice any diverging tendencies. In order to make intelligent judgments about disagreements you must identify points of disagreement accurately and define exactly what a disagreement consists of.

To identify differences between sources precisely, you first need to determine whether texts are addressing the same subject. This means determining not just that they have the same general topic but that they cover the same part of the topic; only then can they answer one question from similar perspectives.

For example, there are many books about capital punishment. Some discuss the death penalty in different countries during different periods in history. Others present U.S. statistical studies based on current death-row sentences. Others offer biographical accounts of individual prisoners on death row. Many more explore the legal, social, moral, and political consequences of capital punishment. Some of these books favor the penalty of death. Others oppose it. Still others do not take a stand on the issue. Only a few books will directly join a specific issue using comparable data to allow a careful evaluation of alternative answers to a question such as whether the death penalty has served as a deterrent to crime in the United States during the past decade. Even statistical studies may not prove helpful, because each study focuses on different states, different periods of time, and different prison populations, each with a number of complicating factors. No sharply defined contrast has emerged from such statistical studies to

point to a clear resolution of the issue. Once you determine that two texts address the same issue and answer the same question, you are able to decide whether their answers are compatible or mutually exclusive. Different answers often exist side by side. The statement "Gun control reduces the total number of guns available to criminals" is not incompatible with "Gun control also reduces the number of guns available to honest citizens to defend themselves." On the other hand, the second statement directly contradicts the statement "Gun control will not affect the number of guns available to criminals." Statements that make absolute or strong claims, using words like *a/I*, *never*, *a/ways*, and *only*, are likely to conflict with other claims on the subject. Weaker claims that make concessions with words like *in part*, *along with*, *one of several*, and *sometimes* are more likely to be compatible with other statements.

### Levels of Disagreement

After you have found two disagreeing sources, you need to identify at what level their disagreement occurs. Is the disagreement over what the facts are? Is it over the meaning of the facts? Or is it over the value, consequence, or implications of the facts? Each level of disagreement can be understood and evaluated in a different way.

### Factual Differences

Facts are accounts people give of events. Different people may give different accounts. The accounts may vary for a number of reasons: imperfect memories or observations, differences in focus of attention, different styles of expression, different mental attitudes and perceptual frameworks, interests, or even lying. One eyewitness to an alleged robbery says the suspect was carrying a gun. Another reports only a suspicious-looking hand in the suspect's pocket. The victim says a gun was pointed directly at him. The suspect says he carried no weapon and made no threat, but that he did reach into his pocket to get change in order to make a purchase. Everyone reports the same incident by telling a different story. Unfortunately, there is no way to know for sure what actually happened, because to each person the event was experienced—it happened—differently. Even videotapes of the incident will be biased for the same reasons. The camera operator will have a particular angle of observation and focus. The camera will record only certain actions. The operator might experiment with clever camerawork, perhaps editing the footage to support a special story. If the robbery itself occurs right in front of police officers trained to be accurate observers, the officers will still only provide their personal accounts of the event.

### Criteria for Evaluating Sources or Witness

- Generally, the closer the witness was in time and place to the original events, the better. If the writer was not there, he or she may cite reliable sources who were.
- The more the writer or primary witness knows about the subject or events he or she is describing, the better he or she will know what to look for, what to report, and what to conclude.
- The fewer biases and prejudices writers or witnesses have about the matters they are reporting on, the more likely they are to give an undistorted account.

In judging accounts, we can only judge which data and witnesses seem more solid or more reliable. As in a court of law, we *must* judge witnesses' accounts on the basis of the evidence they offer and on the characters of the witnesses. Some reports seem more reliable because they are supported by detailed observations that might correspond with documentary records. Such records, however, are only another account written and prepared by someone closer to the events when they occurred. The relevance and meaning of physical evidence such as a gun or threads found on a gun must still be established through interpretive accounts. Thus these accounts seem fuller and more consistent combined with other accounts. And more reliable witnesses are those who are in a better position to observe and understand the events than others or who have a greater reputation for trustworthiness or have less reason to distort their accounts. As a researcher, judge the teller and the tale.

### Criteria for Evaluating Evidence

- The more specific and complete the evidence is, the more likely it is to present a clear and precise picture.
- The more internally consistent the evidence is, the more likely the report is to be accurate. Internal consistency means that one part of the evidence does not contradict another part and that all parts support the single interpretation. Be cautious: in some cases, evidence that is too consistent may mean oversimplification or fudging of observations.
- The more evidence was recorded at the time of the events reported, the fewer problems with distorted memory will occur.
- The more the evidence is tied to matters of public record—such as contemporary newspaper accounts, government documents, or widely acknowledged facts—the more credible the evidence is.
- The less indication of bias, fraudulent, or false statements there is, the more reliable the evidence.

Criteria for determining the reliability of witnesses and the validity of data vary from situation to situation and discipline to discipline, as discussed in Part 3. Courts of law have extensive rules of evidence that define what kinds of testimony are appropriate, what kind of supporting evidence is admissible, and how a witness's credibility may properly be established or broken. Judges constantly must evaluate the admissibility of testimony and physical evidence according to these rules of evidence. In academic disciplines as well, editors, referees (who evaluate manuscripts for publication), and readers constantly make judgments about the quality of authors' statements and their supporting evidence according to the criteria of their disciplines. What counts as valid testimony and evidence for a psychologist will not likely count for a physicist, a philosopher, or a literary scholar. The guidelines that follow provide a starting point for your evaluation of conflicting evidence.

At times you may not be able to make a clear-cut choice between two conflicting reports of fact: the witnesses and the evidence may be equally good—or equally poor—on both sides, or you may lack enough background information to judge. In such cases, all you can do is acknowledge the conflict and suggest what the *implications* of either report being true' might be. Tracing the logical implications of each report may give you an indirect indication of which side is more likely to be true. At least you will learn the consequences of favoring one report over the other.

## Meaning Differences

Every writer presents a framework of meaning or ideas, which is used to interpret the consequences or relationships of facts as well as to develop conclusions. These frameworks of meaning may be built on all the information presented or may come from another source of interest or beliefs. For example, consider the earlier example of a robbery. One witness sees a man with his hand pushed deep in a jacket pocket approach another person on the street. He hears the comment, "Hand it over!" and sees money change hands. The witness frames these events in the context of a robbery, thereby assigning specific meaning to each observation. The hand in the pocket becomes a weapon; the words spoken are the criminal act itself; and the money is now "loot." If the same witness noticed a television camera crew filming the scene, the witness would assign these observations a different meaning. On the other hand, if, based on no new personal observations, the witness believed that every person on the street was involved with drug deals or loan sharking or elaborately staged practical jokes, he would assign different meanings to the same set of observations.

When two authors give contradictory meanings or develop opposing ideas about one topic or set of events, you can understand and evaluate their differences only by identifying where the differences in meaning come from. Do they come from the authors' accepting contradictory facts or paying attention to different categories of facts? Do the differences come from applying different reasoning to facts they generally agree on? Do the authors approach the subject with such fundamentally different prior beliefs that they see all the events in an entirely different way?

If the differences are based on contradictions about what the facts were, by determining the facts you may resolve the conflict in meaning. If beyond a reasonable doubt solid evidence and unshakable witnesses establish that the suspect did indeed have a gun in his pocket, you can rule out all other interpretations and meanings that present the incident of robbery as a legal business transaction or cinematic event.

If differences in meaning result from the writers' paying attention to different sets of facts, consider which writer examines the more appropriate and comprehensive set of facts. Since there are usually more facts available than anyone person can make coherent, concise use of writers and witnesses must select the facts they consider most relevant. Even when two authors agree on specifics, they will likely make different selections from the data available and put an individual emphasis on them. Given the issues and context of the discussion, as a researcher you can make reasonable judgments about which source pays attention to the more appropriate facts. In the robbery scene, the witness who describes the physical manner and appearance of the suspect and omits mentioning a camera crew obviously has missed an important clue to the pattern of events. On the other hand, if the witness is a film critic attending the shooting of a robbery scene, the presence of the camera crew may be assumed in the witness's report of the incident, so it would be perfectly appropriate for the observer to emphasize the suspect's appearance in any account of the event.

If writers' disagreement on interpretations or understanding of the subject is based on different choices of the facts, you may never agree totally with either source. That is, you may put together the partial view each source presents with a more comprehensive synthesis that takes into account data chosen by both authors. The suspect in the robbery is not a criminal but is a terrible actor. Or the members of the camera crew are accomplices in a daring public mugging.

## Differences in Point of View and in Fundamental Beliefs

Differences of interpretation may arise not out of differences in facts but differences in ways of looking at or thinking about the facts. A psychologist, using a clinical perspective, may

interpret the robbery suspect's behavior as random 'psychotic hostility not directed at anyone in particular; the victim happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. A prosecuting attorney interprets actions through a framework of legal responsibility. An urban anthropologist may see robbery-as part of a culture of violence to which the suspect and victim belong.

Differences of interpretive framework are much harder to resolve than differences in fact or meaning. Ultimately, you must judge the validity of the source's entire framework to see whether one author's point of view is more valid for your purposes than another's. Sometimes you can judge which interpretive framework is more appropriate to the subject and question under discussion. In court the lawyer's and judge's framework of legal responsibility is most significant, but in a rehabilitation program a psychologist's frame of reference carries more weight. When a psychologist offers testimony as expert witness during a trial, it is to answer specific questions defined by the legal framework. In a clinical setting, a lawyer's judicial expertise offers little aid.

Differences of interpretation or patterns of meaning may come from fundamental differences in belief, which influence how people evaluate events and how they think about the world. A Marxist will interpret political situations differently than an Adam Smith capitalist; a Zen Buddhist will weigh moral issues differently than a Baptist. Differences about such basics as religion, morality, national loyalties, life goals, and personal commitments are notoriously difficult to evaluate and to resolve. At least as a researcher you can attempt to understand what these differences consist of in your sources. You may then be able to see whose assumptions and beliefs are closer to the ones you hold. Even more important, you will come to see how people with different beliefs may perceive the same events or data differently.

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## Writing an Essay of Evaluative Comparison

In examining two sources that cover the same subject, you need to do two separate tasks: first, identify the specific agreements and disagreements between the sources; second, analyze the patterns of agreement and disagreement. The first task will let you know how much difference exists, and the second will help you resolve these differences. In preparing an *essay of evaluative comparison*, the first step has to be completed before the second step is begun, because you must know the differences precisely and explicitly in order to analyze them. In your final version of the paper, the results of the two tasks may be intermixed as part of an overall evaluation of both sources.

### Selecting Two Passages

Unless two passages are handed to you by your instructor, you must select the pieces of writing that you will compare and analyze. Finding them is no easy task. The passages should be short enough to allow detailed discussion. Often well-matched passages of only a few paragraphs provide enough material for a five-to ten-page comparison. The passages should have more than a vague similarity: they should cover exactly the same issues within exactly the same limits and make directly comparable statements.

Sometimes you can find short, self-contained selections in two versions of a news story published in newspapers or in weekly news magazines. Or you might excerpt matched selections from longer works. On the other hand, magazines and anthologies sometimes present statements already matched to present opposing or multiple views on a single issue. The sample essay of evaluative comparison that follows on pages 155-157 considers two such matched opinions on the subject of active euthanasia. These two views, for and against legalization of medical

assistance in the death of the terminally ill, were originally published on facing pages of a monthly law journal and are reprinted on page 74 of this book.

When you are working with excerpts, your decisions on where to begin and end each selection are crucial. Try to match the subjects, the limits, and the authors' claims in the two passages. Even when you are working with pieces already matched as opposing, do not assume that they will argue clearly and directly with each other. Close examination may indicate that the authors see the issue in such different ways that their arguments do not confront each other directly. This is to some degree true of the pair of arguments compared in the sample essay by student Kevin Nichols, and part of the work of the essay is to identify that difference of basic assumptions and perceptions. It is often useful to select for comparison passages that you come across during research for a paper or another project for one of your courses. Then the conflict will be real to you—one whose resolution will clarify issues of interest.

### **Making Apt Comparisons**

Having chosen two selections, you should try to understand each as fully as possible in its own terms. To do this, you may use any or all of the techniques presented earlier—reading journal, paraphrase, and so on. If you are working with selections from longer works, it usually helps to become familiar with the surrounding contexts as well.

Then identify the specific areas of correspondence between the two passages. For each claim or statement made in the first selection, take note of any corresponding claims in the second. You may keep track of these correspondences "by numbering comparable claims of both writers with the same number or by annotating ("see line 24 of other"). Or you may want to compile a comparative chart of correspondences.

As you collect these correspondences, you will already be noticing patterns of agreement and disagreement. Once you have all of them collected, you can organize the various agreements and disagreements according to the categories of difference presented earlier in this chapter: fact, meaning, point of view, and fundamental beliefs.

As you sort out the agreements and disagreements, you may see patterns start to emerge. For example, the two authors may agree that specific events took place but may disagree on the dates and order of the events. Or you may find absolute agreement on facts and total disagreement on conclusions. Or you may notice crucial issues on which the two writers turn to entirely different types of evidence. As patterns emerge, you will also gain more insight into the major differences between the writers regarding their purposes and their conclusions. The patterns you discover—of similarities and differences between the sources—will become the core of your essay.

If the pattern is one of basic similarity, you might consider whether shared assumptions, common sources of information, or common purposes lie behind the similarity. If there is a mixed pattern of agreement and disagreement, you might try to determine whether the similarities or dissimilarities dominate—or whether the dissimilarities seem random and minor.

If many major disagreements leave you confused about where the truth lies, you should try to determine which writer presents the more credible or persuasive case. In each instance, you will have to decide what the appropriate criteria are for judging the kind of dispute before you; these criteria were discussed earlier.

In the special case of two writers consciously arguing with each other (that is, each knows and discusses the other's views), you may also consider how effectively they argue against each other. Does each one answer the other's objections adequately? Does each successfully confront the other's main points? Or do they each write past the other, avoiding direct confrontations or missing the other's main objections? You should explore these issues in journal entries, notes,

outlines, or through other informal means until you come to some firm conclusions. At that point you are ready to begin writing the rough draft of the final paper.

### The Final Essay

The final paper should begin by clearly identifying title, author, and publication information for the two passages being compared. If you are using excerpts of longer pieces, identify precisely where your excerpts begin and end. If the readers of your paper are not likely to be familiar with the material you are discussing, you would do well to include copies of both selections in their entirety as an appendix to the essay. The *introduction* to the paper should present, in general terms, the overall pattern that will emerge in your comparison and possibly what you intend to prove about the relative value of the two selections. In other words, indicate to the reader at the outset where the comparison leads and what kind of analysis you will pursue.

**The Body** The body of the paper should present the substance of the agreements and disagreements. Expose the patterns and analyze the examples you have found. You need not discuss all the details from both selections, but you must use enough specific examples to support your general characterizations. You may refer to details in the two originals by quotation, paraphrase, summary, or line number if you have included copies of the originals. Whatever method you use, accuracy and fairness in representing the originals are particularly important because you will be setting details from two separate sources against each other. If too much gets changed between the originals and the discussion, you may wind up comparing products of your own imagination rather than actual sources. Notice that, in the sample essay that follows, the information from the sources is integrated into the comparative discussion. Chapter 11 contains a complete discussion of appropriate and accurate reference.

**Organization** The development and organization of the evaluative comparison will, of course, depend on what you need to say and the kind of sources you are comparing. You may want to present the whole pattern of agreement and disagreement initially, halting only to fill in representative details, then follow with a detailed analysis of underlying causes of the pattern. That is, before going through a point-by-point comparison, you can present an overall view of how the two articles fundamentally differ. Or you may want to analyze and evaluate each disagreement as you come to it, slowly building an awareness of points of contrast into an overall picture of two distinct approaches.

If your two sources describe a series of events, you may want to discuss the points of comparison chronologically, showing how two different stories unfold. Or you may find that you can produce a clearer comparison by separating differences of evidence from differences of interpretation. If the sources describe opposing positions on a hotly debated issue, you may want to organize your comparison around specific points that both texts consider. For example, in his evaluative comparison of Smith's and Kamisar's articles, Kevin Nichols organizes his body paragraphs around differences in the ways the two texts present the consequences of legalization for physicians, patients, and society as a whole. Because there are many ways to organize an essay of evaluative comparison, you should derive your organization from the patterns you have come to identify in the particular sources you use.

**Comparative Focus** Take care to stay focused on the *comparison between the two sources*. Don't fall into the error of simply summarizing each of the two separate pieces or of just recounting facts covered in the two sources (as you might do in a synthesis). Remember that in

this kind of analysis your main purpose is to analyze the relationship between the two pieces of writing. Two techniques of sentence style can remind you—and your readers—of this purpose.

First, whenever you refer to details from one source, refer to the author or the title of that source, and do not continue the example for more than a few lines without repeating the reference. For example, by repeating Yale Kamisar's name as author through the second paragraph of his essay, Kevin emphasizes that these are only Kamisar's ways of presenting the issue at hand—only Kamisar's claims about negative effects on physicians of legalizing active euthanasia. Kevin is distinguishing Kamisar's ideas from Smith's (which appear in the following paragraph) or from his own.

The second technique is to include many sentences—especially paragraph topic sentences—that directly compare the two sources being discussed. Placing statements side by side within the same sentence helps maintain the comparison throughout the essay. For example, in the sample essay, Kevin begins his fourth paragraph with the following sentence directly comparing Smith's and Kamisar's views on the effects of legalization on physicians: "While Kamisar suggests that the participation of physicians in active euthanasia violates the code of medical ethics, Smith interprets this code as allowing physicians to aid-in-dying without violating their ethical obligations to their patients."

The conclusion of the essay should develop the issues you have raised in the body paragraphs and sum up the results of your analysis. If it seems appropriate, you might sum up the points of comparison, thereby making an overall evaluation of the relative trustworthiness of each source or (as in the sample essay) the relative strength of the arguments the sources present. Alternatively, you might observe how two writers approaching one subject from such different standpoints come to the same conclusions.

### ASTUDENT EXAMPLE FOR DISCUSSION

In the following essay, Kevin Nichols introduces a large topic for comparison—the arguments for and against the legalization of active euthanasia—but he quickly focuses on a more specific aspect of this topic, limiting the actual comparison to two short articles that offer opposing opinions. He narrows his topic even further by focusing on three specific issues addressed in both sources. In examining and evaluating specific differences between the two articles, he notes who seems to have examined more of each issue, and how differences in position derive from different values and assumptions of the two authors. Kevin winds up by observing that the two authors' difference in perspective points to a fundamental disagreement about society and the way to freedom and autonomy.

#### Sample Essay of evaluative Comparison

##### Whose Life Is It, Anyway?

In the United States the debate over the legalization of active euthanasia has been going on for many years. Recently the activities of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, nicknamed "Dr. Death" by the press, have brought this debate to the front pages of newspapers and cover stories of weekly news magazines nationwide. The Hemlock Society has recently sponsored attempts to legalize active euthanasia in California and New Hampshire. Thus far, these attempts have been unsuccessful. In Michigan, in a direct response to Kevorkian's open practice of providing aid-in-dying to patients who request it, the state legislature issued a temporary ban on active euthanasia.

In two short articles printed on facing pages in the April 1993 issue of the American Bar Association Journal, Cheryl K. Smith, staff attorney for the Hemlock Society U.S.A., and Yale

Kamisar, law professor at the University of Michigan, present opposing opinions about the legalization of active euthanasia. Both see the effects on physicians, patients, and society as a whole as critical issues. However, while Smith predicts that the effects of legalizing active euthanasia will be positive, Kamisar fears that these effects will be overwhelmingly negative. While some of their arguments directly conflict and challenge each other, an underlying disagreement of values and assumptions leaves the conflict difficult to resolve.

In the first place, Kamisar and Smith have opposite opinions of the effect of legalization on physicians. Kamisar argues that it will have a negative impact on "the dynamics of the sick room" and erode the trust upon which the physician-patient relationship is based. He is appalled that, should it become legal, it would be viewed as "an acceptable alternative to treatment and would be discussed in polite conversation," and he is especially disturbed by the fact that the physician might be "the first person to broach the subject." Here Kamisar implies that such a discussion would undercut the physician's purpose, in the sick room—to heal and provide "treatment."

While Kamisar suggests that the participation of physicians in active euthanasia violates the code of medical ethics, Smith interprets this code as allowing physicians to aid-in-dying without violating their ethical obligations to their patients. In fact, she argues that "Relief of suffering, always a major goal of medicine, provides the best rationale for legal aid-in-dying for the terminally ill." Smith also acknowledges a point which Kamisar ignores—that physicians are not always able to relieve pain and suffering and that the Hippocratic Oath, which "requires physicians to relieve pain, as well as give no deadly medicine," contains within it an internal inconsistency in these cases. Smith believes that, given the advances in medical technology since the time of Hippocrates, the oath "should be relied upon as a guide" only. In further contrast to Kamisar, she claims that legalizing active euthanasia may strengthen rather than erode the physician-patient relationship because "Patients who are able to discuss sensitive issues such as this are more likely to trust their physicians."

While we can see that Smith seems to have a more complex sense of medical ethics than Kamisar, we see that complexity based on an interactive trust between doctor and patient, in which communication is foremost. Anything that can increase that communication will lead to a more sensitive and appropriate response by the doctor. Kamisar, on the other hand, sees patient trust based on the doctor's authority as a benign care-giver. Increased communication from the doctor about options may seem coercive, an authoritarian suggestion to hasten death.

Second, Kamisar and Smith draw opposite conclusions about the effects of legalizing active euthanasia on patients. Again, Kamisar feels that it would have detrimental effects. He fears that legalization would put undue stress on severely ill patients and perhaps even violate their autonomy: for example, some might feel pressured or obliged to opt for euthanasia "to relieve their relatives of financial pressures or emotional strain" or "feel that to reject euthanasia, once it is a viable alternative and others are 'doing it,' would be selfish or cowardly." Kamisar also believes that legalization will harm some patients by "denying them the possibility of staying alive by default." In other words, he believes that the legalization of active euthanasia implies that a person must have a reasonable "excuse" for living.

Smith, however, feels that legalizing active euthanasia will "benefit patients by preventing abuses and by providing an alternative to uncontrollable pain and unbearable suffering. She believes that legalization will help to guarantee the autonomy of patients by making it easier to regulate the practice, which "is currently occurring outside the law and without any reporting requirements." She also claims that patients will benefit from the open dialogue between physicians and patients made possible by legalization which will "enhance detection of treatable depression, which may decrease emotional suicides, and resolution of other problems such as pain."

Although both Kamisar and Smith seem to put patient autonomy first, they have very different ideas about what process maximizes autonomy. Smith believes open communication and consideration of all alternatives increases autonomy and decreases the psychological pressures on the patient. Kamisar believes that the more the patient must confront and the more options presented, the more the patient will feel pressured. The patient is put in the uncomfortable position of actively having to decide and assert that continuing life is good for himself and for others. Smith, on the other hand, sees that

assertion as liberating, and believes the dialogue leading to that assertion may help relieve depression and other emotional stress that could hasten death.

Finally and most significantly, Kamisar and Smith differ in their views of the effects of legalizing euthanasia on society as a whole. Kamisar sees these effects as resulting in nothing less than the breakdown of the "web of rules"—one of which prohibits killing—which together make up our society's moral code. He fears that legalization will result in "lost distinctions of former significance" concerning the ethics of death and dying and thus argues that "traditional restraints" must be preserved. Kamisar also believes that the breakdown of one rule will lead to the breakdown of others, and as a result. "If we legalize active euthanasia for only the 'terminally ill,' it will not remain limited for very long."

While Kamisar is concerned with the breakdown of our society's moral fiber, Smith is concerned with breakdown of our society's respect for individual autonomy and challenges our society to respond to a problem which "demands a compassionate response." In fact, she believes that "respect for a person's autonomy requires that his or her considered value judgment must be taken seriously even if that judgment is believed to be mistaken." Although she does not directly address the effect of legalization on society, her comments suggest that to refuse patients their right to choose active euthanasia is a denial of individual freedom as well as an act of cruelty. She rejects the notion that legalizing active voluntary euthanasia will inevitably lead to the acceptance of active involuntary euthanasia because her argument for legalization is based squarely on her appeal to individual autonomy: "Of course, the person desiring aid-in-dying must be both competent and fully informed. This implies voluntariness and disclosure of the risks, benefits, reasonable alternatives and probable results."

Once again we see Kamisar believing the best way to preserve freedom and life is through maintaining traditional beliefs and not questioning their authority. If traditional arrangements are questioned too far, they will break apart and we will be left without protections. Smith, on the other hand, sees our protection *only* in our constant discussion of our situation, assertion of our needs and desires, and decisions based on our understanding of each case. The following of strict rules about which we have no choice is for her not a protection, but a loss of freedom.

Although Kamisar and Smith consider the same issues, they draw different conclusions about the effect of legalizing active euthanasia, because of their different beliefs about how freedom and rights are best upheld in society. While Kamisar appeals to "traditional restraints" against killing, Smith appeals to the principle of personal autonomy. Kamisar emphasizes the negative effects of opening up discussion of these difficult matters because people may not feel free to choose, may feel pressured, or may make poor choices. Smith emphasizes the benefits of legalization for the patient because she believes in the power of openness and communication to increase our freedom. One feels society is fragile and will deteriorate if pressed too far. The other feels society is robust and healthy only insofar as we constantly creatively remake it to fit our needs and perceptions. For both the issue of active euthanasia is more than even a matter of individual life or death—it is the life or death of society itself. But that issue is barely begun to be argued here.

#### Sources

Kamisar, Yale. "No: Preserve 'Traditional Restraints.'" *American Bar Association Journal* (Apr. 1993): 43.

Smith, Cheryl. "Yes: A Matter of Choice." *American Bar Association Journal* (Apr. 1993), 42.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write an essay of evaluative comparison of about 500 words, comparing the positions in anyone of the following sets of articles.
  - a. Yale Kamisar's and Cheryl Smith's discussions of active euthanasia on page 74.

- b. The editorial by McPherson and Shapiro on page 80 and one of the letters to the editor on page 79, on national service.
  - c. The closing statements of two of the three presidential candidates in the second 1992 presidential debate, on pages 107-108.
  - d. The two reviews of the book *Equality Transformed*, on page 131.
2. Survey ten people in your class to find out their opinions about a current event or a controversial issue, asking them five specific, uniform questions. Then, in 500 to 750 words, compare and evaluate the responses you received, organizing and classifying responses around either the characteristics of the respondents or the nature of the responses.
3. Drawing on a research project you are currently working on for this or another course, select two passages from different sources covering the same topic. Write an evaluative comparison of about 500 words—or as long as necessary to cover all the pertinent issues. Your audience is classmates doing research in the same area, who will be concerned with the extent of agreement and disagreement between the sources.
4. Find two newspaper or magazine articles or editorials that disagree about a currently controversial issue. Write an evaluative comparison of the articles or of any short passages taken from them.
5. Write an evaluative comparison of the viewpoints expressed in the following two articles concerning a controversial alternative penalty for convicted rapists.

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