

6 Using the Rogerian Model in Your Arguments

The relationship which I have found helpful is characterized by...an acceptance of [the] other person as a separate person with value in his own right, and by a deep empathic understanding which enables me to see his private world through his eyes.

—Carl Rogers

In Chapter 4 we examined the art of effective argumentation as it has been practiced in Western culture since ancient times. Although Classical argument continues to function as a versatile basis for presenting and defending a point of view, Toulmin argument, as you will recall from Chapter 5, enhanced the dynamics of Classical argument to meet the complexities of contemporary situations by emphasizing the ethical dimensions of evidence (via warrants and their backing) brought to bear on claims. Toulmin argument also embraces the complexity of a claim: In other words, it must often be qualified, even refuted in certain contexts, by the arguer. This last feature might be regarded as a precursor to the method of modern argument we consider in this chapter: Rogerian argument.

Carl Rogers (1902–1987) was a psychologist of the “humanist” school, seeing cooperative interpersonal relationships as the key to a healthy society. As a therapist, Rogers urged self-realization and believed that, to function fully as a person in society, one must be open to new experiences. Rigidity of thought and defensiveness breed intolerance. The more open one is to alternative views, the likelier the possibility of cooperation—a vital asset to cultivate in a world of cultural diversity and conflicting values. One way such openness is cultivated is through cooperative methods of communication.

The Rogerian Model of Argument

From Rogers’s view, the Classical model of argument and even the more flexible Toulmin model tend to divide people into two camps: proponents and opponents, “good guys” versus “bad guys.” The traditional language of argument,

for example, is filled with militaristic metaphors: We *win* or *lose* arguments rather than resolve them. We *attack* someone’s thesis rather than work to build consensus for resolving points of disagreement. We *marshal* evidence as if gathering troops. Even the seemingly neutral term *debate* is of military origin (from *battre*, “to do battle”). For Rogers, this combative approach to argument does more harm than good; it generates ill will and antagonism between discussants rather than cooperation. The Rogerian model is an option to consider when you are addressing an audience that not only has a position on the issue at hand but may be hostile to other perspectives and has deep-seated opinions on the issue.

Finding Common Ground

But, you ask, how can people cooperate or interact harmoniously if they hold diametrically opposed views about an issue? Rogers’s answer is that you find a common ground and start from there. Returning to the rhetorical rhombus (see Figure 1.2), we see the emphasis here on *audience*. A paper in the Rogerian mode assumes that readers firmly hold differing views and therefore will resist hearing others’ positions. Yet no matter how debatable or controversial a view is, one can locate views on the issue on which both can agree. It might take a while to find them, but they are there. Consider the controversy for and against capital punishment, for example:

- Both sides consider human life to be sacred and precious.
- Both sides feel that capital crimes must be deterred as effectively as possible.
- Both sides agree that someone convicted of a capital crime is a threat to society.
- Both sides agree that it is possible for persons to be convicted of crimes they did not commit.

The virtue of finding common ground is that one can isolate and resolve the points of opposition more effectively after identifying the points of agreement because one can reduce any hostility the audience has by demonstrating a true understanding of the audience’s perspective.

It should be pointed out that finding common ground with those who disagree with you may take a good deal of preparation. A common criticism of the Rogerian method is that it is “wishy-washy”—that is, it creates the impression of making too many concessions of one’s principles, of giving in, of not being assertive enough and thereby losing respect. But this criticism is based on inadequate understanding of those challenging views rather than on being conciliatory. Martin Luther King was intimately aware of his challengers’ stances on the issues. He established common ground with them by calling their attention to matters they could not possibly disagree with, such as the biblically sanctioned importance of Christian brotherhood regardless of ethnicity. Bottom line: Do

Carl Rogers (1902–1987) was known for his “humanist,” client-centered approach to therapy. He advocated nonthreatening methods of interpersonal communication.



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your homework! Be fully aware of the foundations of your challengers' views before invoking common ground with them.

The Rogerian model modifies the Classical model by emphasizing common ground (points of agreement) *before* calling attention to points of disagreement. The writer's goal is not to win or to prove wrong; it is to work together cooperatively to arrive at an agreed-on truth. From its opening sentence, a Rogerian argument communicates a desire for harmonious interaction rather than combative opposition:

- I. Introduction: What is our shared problem? Let's see if we can work together to resolve it.
- II. These are the points on which we agree.
- III. This is where we differ: misunderstandings, such as drawbacks or limited application to others' solutions, and the possible reasons behind these drawbacks or limitations.
- IV. Possible drawbacks or limitations to the arguer's solutions, followed by greater benefits of the arguer's solutions.
- V. Options for resolving our differences; or, an exhortation to accept a particular option for resolving our differences together.

Developing Multiple Perspectives

Rogerian persuasion requires writers to work hard at developing multiple perspectives toward issues. You must be tolerant and respectful enough of differing viewpoints to take the time to fathom the value systems that underlie them. The first step toward achieving this goal, according to Rogers, is deceptively simple: *to listen with understanding*.

Listening with understanding is a skill that takes time to develop. You may think you are listening with understanding when you permit challengers to speak their minds, but you may only be allowing them their say rather than genuinely paying close attention to what they are telling you.

Here are some suggestions for listening with understanding, in Rogers's sense of the phrase, that also can be applied to reading with understanding:

- Be as attentive as possible. Assume that the speaker's remarks have value.
- Suspend your own judgments while listening, keeping an open mind so as not to run the risk of prematurely judging the speaker's views before you have the chance to consider them carefully.
- If anything is unclear to you or you find yourself disagreeing with anything, ask questions—but only after the person has finished speaking.
- Try to see the speaker's claims in terms of his or her warrants (underlying values or ideology on which the claims are based). One better understands and appreciates a speaker's position if one is aware of these warrants.
- Think of ways in which the speaker's point of view and your own can somehow work together, despite seeming contradictory. Even if you oppose capital punishment and the speaker supports it, both of you could approach a common ground by thinking of extreme situations on either side that would discourage an inflexible stance.

Using Rogerian argument in conversation is one thing; using it in writing is another. When writing, you do not have your audience in front of you to give you immediate feedback. Instead, you have to anticipate questions and counter-responses that challengers would have for you (in other words, automatically consider the needs of your audience). By considering the audience's needs and values and the merits of their beliefs, you will be more inclined to take a cooperative stance rather than a defensive or combative one.

Arguing cooperatively also means including in your Rogerian essay specific instances in which the differing views are logically sound. That way, you show yourself to have listened well to those perspectives. This, in turn, prepares your audience for listening more carefully and sympathetically to *your* side of things. You also demonstrate your awareness of the limitations to your proposal—no position is perfect, after all—even while you show how your position works in more varied or complex or more frequent occurrences of the common problem. You and your audience both become receptive to “give and take.”

Arguing from Problem to Solution

Because the hallmark of Rogerian argument is working cooperatively with those who would otherwise be characterized as “opponents,” the traditional pro-versus-con combative stance, more characteristic of classical argument,

is replaced by a problem-to-solution approach. Instead of asserting, in effect, "Here's why I'm right and you're wrong," the Rogerian arguer instead asserts, "Let's all of us work together in an effort to reach consensus on identifying the problem, and then determining a mutually satisfactory conclusion."

Now keep in mind that this approach will not *necessarily* vanquish opposition. The point is that the Rogerian arguer considers the issue from different perspectives, from different beliefs or value systems—but without undermining his or her own moral convictions. For example, in his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (see Exercise 6.2), Martin Luther King Jr., in his effort to establish common ground with his fellow clergymen, reminds them of what they presumably already are committed to, ensuring that human laws be morally consistent with God's laws to be considered just; and because laws that segregate people on the basis of race are inconsistent with God's unconditional love for humanity, they must be unjust. By means of such reasoning, King is reminding his fellow clergymen not only that they are on the same side but also that they can work together to solve the problem of racial injustice in America.

In brief, then, Rogerian problem-to-solution works like this:

1. The arguer first formulates the problem as a common problem and explains the problem as he or she sees it.
2. The arguer fairly considers the positions of those whose solutions differ from that of the arguer, showing how, in some instances and to certain extents, those solutions may be viable, but the arguer then modifies the solution(s) to propose the solution the arguer endorses.
3. The modified problem is then discussed in terms of a mutually satisfying solution, with points of dissent isolated and examined for their flaws in reasoning, inconsistencies, omissions, and so on.

Organizing Your Argument Using the Rogerian Model

To write an argument based on the Rogerian ideals of cooperation, find common ground with your audience regardless of their views about your claim. You need to become especially sensitive to attitudes and values other than your own. You should focus on the *issue* and the best way to resolve it, not on "winning" the argument over your "opposition."

As with the Classical and Toulmin models, begin thinking about your essay with questions about your audience, the similarities between your views and your audience's (insofar as you are aware of them), and the points at which you differ most, along with possible strategies for resolving those differences. Consider these questions:

1. Can I be objective enough to represent views and evaluate evidence fairly?

2. How much sense do the points of difference make? Do they make more sense than some of my views? If so, do I have the courage to adopt them, or at least modify them to accommodate my views?
3. Am I genuinely interested in establishing a common ground with my audience? What else can I include that could better facilitate this goal?

When constructing an outline for a Rogerian argument, think in terms of thesis, support of thesis, and concluding judgments based on that support—just as you do when using the Classical and Toulmin models. But with the Rogerian model you are more concerned with establishing common ground with readers who otherwise would reject the thesis. Here is how an argument using the Rogerian approach might take shape:

- I. Introduction to the problem
 - A. First scenario: A vignette that illustrates the problem
 - B. Second scenario: Another vignette that illustrates the problem, but one with greater complexity that some solutions wouldn't handle well
 - C. Thesis
- II. Alternative views worth sharing with the target audience and why these views are worth considering
- III. Points of difference, along with reflection on how to resolve them
- IV. Conclusion: The implications of finding a solution in light of the evidence presented that would benefit everyone, plus discussion of the great benefits derived from the solution that all audience members would like

EXERCISE 6.1

Read the following essay in which the author uses the Rogerian method to tackle the difficult issue of sexual harassment in the early teen years. Then answer the questions that follow.

Let's Talk About Sexual Harassment in Middle School

Kimberly Shearer Palmer

Like every new employee at the *Washington Post*, I was given a "Codes of Conduct" packet—the company's policies on everything from smoking to taking medical leave.¹

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It was the section on sexual harassment that startled me most. Perhaps it shouldn't have. But the prohibition against vulgar jokes and "brushing up against another's body" brought home to me the stark contrast between the informal codes of conduct my friends and I had learned to live by in middle school and what's permissible in the working world today.

The situations are very different, of course: There aren't the same sort of power relationships in school that make harassment such a complex problem in the working world. But, looking back, I'm still left wondering why so many teenagers I knew put up with unwelcome sexual behavior. And why adults consistently turned a blind eye. Twelve years ago, when I was in middle school, overt sexual advances were everyday events and usually overlooked by teachers. Boys grabbed girls' breasts in the stairwells and cafeteria as casually as they would say "hello," and our daily routines were punctuated by unwelcome slaps on the behind.

The shared sex
harassment prob-
lems children in
grades 8 through
11 have faced

As it turns out, my experience wasn't unusual. According to the American Association of University Women, 65 percent of girls in public school, grades eight to eleven, say they experience "touching, grabbing, and/or pinching in a sexual way."² My friends and I used to let boys touch, grab, and pinch us, and I don't think things have gotten all that much better. Sure, there's greater awareness: today, the districts have a sexual harassment policy that schools rely on and teachers can refer to. But the issue doesn't always reach administrators, much less the students. My recent conversations with today's teenagers suggest that it wasn't just my grade; it wasn't just my school; and it wasn't just back then. Many kids think—as my friends and I did—that the unwanted touching is just flirtation.

I have since learned to fight back when men harass me. In Paris a few years ago, when a guy grabbed my breasts, I shoved him away from me and yelled at him. After that, he left me alone. Now, when I think back to all the times in middle school when I didn't make guys leave me alone, I feel angry. So I decided to go back and find boys from my class and ask them why. I got out my old phone directory and called the same boys who would have been too cool for me to call in middle school. Most had moved, and the listed numbers were no longer valid. The ones I found shared my memories of unwanted touching in the hallways. They are, as far as I can tell, good boyfriend

material. They are by all accounts sensitive and perceptive; my younger sister knows one well, and my close friend at college dated another. I found out they were just as confused as we girls were in those adolescent years.

One old classmate remembers the casual touching. "Even good guys did that," he said. "It wasn't sexual. . . . I don't know what it was. I can't think it's a good thing." He also recalled walking girls to class because they felt threatened. We didn't speak in terms of apologies, but wonderment. It seemed so very strange that touching someone's breasts or bottom in the hallways was considered friendly behavior. Another one of my classmates told me that he remembered the same sorts of things. "Not until tenth grade would guys . . . realize it was not the best way to get a girl to like you," he said. Grabbing girls was normal behavior, we both agreed. It happened in public, in front of teachers. No one told us it was wrong. No one even seemed worried about the possibility of lawsuits, despite the 1992 Supreme Court decision that warned schools they could be held responsible for harassment.³ Maybe the teachers looked at our sometimes giggly and embarrassed reactions and thought there wouldn't be a problem.

Basis for the
misunderstandings →

One male graduate told me that boys bothered girls back then because they didn't know what else to do. "No one knows how to act [at that age]. . . . You're self-conscious, no one has self-esteem." Boys, I realized, were just as insecure as I remember feeling. We were blindly following what we assumed was routine social conduct—grabbing, pinching, being pinched. Who knew there was another way to flirt? Boys, he told me, were just trying to bridge the gap between girls and guys. "It wasn't meant to hurt," he said.

Looking back now, he knows that what some boys did probably bothered some girls. But the girls didn't show it. "They probably didn't want to seem snobby or stuck up," he remembered. As I spoke to these men, I realized how different they were from the guy who bothered me in Paris. The rules were so blurry to both girls and boys in middle school that neither gender really knew when lines were crossed. For example, when my crotch was grabbed on a school bus one afternoon, it wasn't okay with me, but I didn't even tell my parents because at some level it seemed so similar to what happened every day in school. I still feel mad, but I could hardly blame

my former classmates when they were just acting out of friendship or flirtation—however misguided that was. And the more I talked with my female friends, the more I realized how often we gave the wrong signals. Some girls remembered enjoying the attention, sometimes laughing along. One recalled two boys dragging her into the boys' bathroom, as she tried to kick her way free. But she didn't remember being angry. "It was the only way to express ourselves," she now says. But something else gave her further pause. She said she thought that "teachers let it slide" like the other dumb behavior that happens among adolescents.

Fault lay with the teachers who avoided dealing with the problem.

They shouldn't have. I remember only one teacher who stood in the front of her class and yelled at the boys for grabbing girls. Finally a teacher noticed, I remember thinking. Why was she the only one? And if the teacher noticed, why didn't she inform the principal, and start a school-wide discussion? My annoyance with my former classmates redirected itself as I realized that adults who could have explained and enforced the differences between right and wrong behavior—our teachers—often did not. The fact is, no one taught us the right way to act. But as Peggy Orenstein, author of *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, says, "It still must stop."⁴ For me, it stopped as soon as I emerged from the achingly self-conscious early teenage years. Assertiveness came from the natural confidence that comes with getting rid of braces and glasses.

And yet, would early lessons have done much good?

Shouldn't we have been helped to learn those lessons earlier? An insecure seventh-grade girl shouldn't have to deal with aggressive boys grabbing her. But I keep asking myself: What would I have wanted my parents to tell me? What could they have possibly told me? "Don't let boys touch you"? "Tell me if anyone's bothering you"? I'm sure they told me those things. I'm sure I dismissed them, way too embarrassed to talk to them about anything dealing with boy-girl relationships. How can you help a shy seventh-grade girl who doesn't even know whether to feel grateful for the attention or angry at the violation?

Admission that solutions are difficult

There are no easy solutions. Zero-tolerance policies make no sense, considering the level of confusion surrounding social behavior. Parents can try to teach their daughters to be tough; teachers can integrate into class discussions of what distinguishes flirtation from harassment. There's plenty of inspiration, in anything from the writings of Shakespeare

to Maya Angelou, as Wellesley College sexual harassment scholar Nan Stein suggests in *Flirting or Hurting? A Teacher's Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools*.⁵ And adults can talk to boys about limits.

Yet one thing remains clear

The fact is, my former classmates did not turn into bad men. They don't bother women at work or college. And the women I knew in school have also learned where to draw the line. But we should all have learned the rules earlier, well before it comes time to sign those company policies. ☉☉

Notes

1. This essay first appeared in the *Washington Post* on August 20, 2000. Reprinted by permission.
2. American Association of University Women, *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (Washington: AAUW, 2001).
3. Office of Civil Rights, "Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance" (Washington: U.S. Department of Education, 2001), <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/shguide/index.html>.
4. Peggy Orenstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (Landover Hills: Anchor, 1995).
5. Nan Stein, *Flirting or Hurting? A Teacher's Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools* (Washington: National Education Association, 1994).

1. What rhetorical devices—phrases, words, tone, details—suggest that Palmer is using the Rogerian method of argument?
2. What is most Rogerian about Palmer's approach to her topic? Least Rogerian?
3. Briefly, what is Palmer's position on the matter of sexual harassment in middle school?
4. Critics sometimes say that Rogerian argument is "wishy-washy." Is Palmer being wishy-washy about her middle school experiences with sexual harassment? Why or why not?
5. What, if anything, would you suggest to Palmer to strengthen her argument?

EXERCISE 6.2

In April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. was sentenced to a week in jail because of his antisegregationist campaign in Birmingham, Alabama. While in jail, Dr. King wrote the following letter defending his activities to eight members of the Birmingham clergy. As you read this masterpiece of persuasive writing, notice how King makes a concerted effort to seek

common ground with his audience and to avoid the "good guys" versus "bad guys" combative stance. Look for specific points of emphasis and specific explanations that make his stance Rogerian. After reading, answer the questions that follow.

Letter from Birmingham Jail | Martin Luther King Jr.

APRIL 16, 1963

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely."¹ Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Frequently we share staff, educational, and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Source: Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963. Reprinted by arrangement with the Heirs to the Estate of Martin Luther King, Jr., c/o Writers House as agent for the proprietor, New York, NY. © 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr., © renewed 1991 Coretta Scott King.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation.

Then, last September, came the opportunity to talk with leaders of Birmingham's economic community. In the course of the negotiations, certain promises were made by the merchants—for example, to remove the stores' humiliating racial signs. On the basis of these promises, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to a moratorium on all demonstrations. As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. A few signs, briefly removed, returned; the others remained.

As in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted, and the shadow of deep disappointment settled upon us. We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of the difficulties

involved, we decided to undertake a process of self-purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?" We decided to schedule our direct-action program for the Easter season, realizing that except for Christmas, this is the main shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic-withdrawal program would be the byproduct of direct action, we felt that this would be the best time to bring pressure to bear on the merchants for the needed change.

Then it occurred to us that Birmingham's mayoralty election was coming up in March, and we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that the Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, had piled up enough votes to be in the run-off, we decided again to postpone action until the day after the run-off so that the demonstrations could not be used to cloud the issues. Like many others, we waited to see Mr. Connor defeated, and to this end we endured postponement after postponement. Having aided in this community need, we felt that our direct-action program could be delayed no longer.

10 You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely. Some have

asked: "Why didn't you give the new city administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this query is that the new Birmingham administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one, before it will act. We are sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of Albert Boutwell as mayor will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is a much more gentle person than Mr. Connor, they are both segregationists, dedicated to maintenance of the status quo. I have hope that Mr. Boutwell will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but as Reinhold Niebuhr² has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."³

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white

wait = never

read

people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

15 You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."

just
unjust Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an "I-it" relationship for an "I-thou" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich⁴ has said that sin is separation.

Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong.

Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is *difference* made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is *sameness* made legal.

Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?

Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.

I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.

noting
1945
maker

20

We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's anti-religious laws.

white moderate
I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

25 In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning a robbed man because

his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by the misguided populace in which they made him drink hemlock? Isn't this like condemning Jesus because his unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom. I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency, made up in part of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, are so drained of self-respect and a sense of "somebodiness" that they have adjusted to segregation; and in part of a few middle-class Negroes who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because in some ways they profit by segregation, have become insensitive to the problems of the

Negro comm.

masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred, and it comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up across the nation, the largest and best-known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. Nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incorrigible "devil."

I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need emulate neither the "do-nothingism" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle.

If this philosophy had not emerged, by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble-rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who employ nonviolent direct action, and if they refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black-nationalist ideologies—a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the *Zeitgeist*,⁵ and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides—and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist.

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained

a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime—the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth, and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation, and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.

I had hoped that the white moderate would see this need. Perhaps I was too optimistic; perhaps I expected too much. I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too few in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some—such as Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, James McBride Dabbs, Ann Braden, and Sarah Patton Boyle—have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have languished in filthy, roach-infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as "dirty nigger-lovers." Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful "action" antidotes to combat the disease of segregation.

Let me take note of my other major disappointment. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions. I am not unmindful of the fact that each of you has taken some significant stands on this issue.

and disappointed with the white church & leaders

Black will turn to Muslim & violence if white refuse to support non-violence

I commend you, Reverend Stallings, for your Christian stand on this past Sunday, in welcoming Negroes to your worship service on a non-segregated basis. I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating Spring Hill College several years ago.

But despite these notable exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

35 When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, a few years ago, I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests, and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.

In spite of my shattered dreams, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, would serve as the channel through which our just grievances could reach the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed.

I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother." In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which makes a strange, unbiblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi, and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious-education buildings. Over and

over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?"

Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson, and the great-grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, Oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists.

There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time 40 when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests.

Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch-defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent—and often even vocal—sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.

Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the

church within the church, as the true *ekklesia* and the hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom. They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of Albany, Georgia, with us. They have gone down the highways of the South on tortuous rides for freedom. Yes, they have gone to jail with us. Some have been dismissed from their churches, have lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. But they have acted in the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment.

I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are at present misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny. Before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence across the pages of history, we were here. For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation—and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.

45 Before closing I feel impelled to mention one other point in your statement that has troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I cannot join you in your praise of the Birmingham police department.

It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handling the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather "nonviolently" in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the past few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. Perhaps Mr. Connor and his policemen have been rather nonviolent in public, as was Chief Pritchett in Albany, Georgia, but they used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice. As T. S. Eliot has said: "The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason."

I wish you had commended the Negro sit-inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer, and their amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, with the noble sense of purpose that enables them to face jeering and hostile mobs, and with the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness: "My feet is tired, but my soul is at rest." They will be the young high school and college students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience' sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Never before have I written so long a letter. I'm afraid it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else can one do when he is alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts, and pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a

patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

50 I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil-rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

—YOURS FOR THE CAUSE OF PEACE AND BROTHERHOOD,
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ☉☉

Notes

1. This response to a published statement by eight fellow clergymen from Alabama (Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter, Bishop Joseph A. Durick, Rabbi Milton L. Grafman, Bishop Paul Hardin, Bishop Nolan B. Harmon, the Reverend George M. Murray, the Reverend Edward V. Ramage, and the Reverend Earl Stallings) was composed under somewhat constricting circumstances. Begun on the margins of the newspaper in which the statement appeared while I was in jail, the letter was continued on scraps of writing paper supplied by a friendly Negro trusty, and concluded on a pad my attorneys were eventually permitted to leave me. Although the text remains in substance unaltered, I have indulged in the author's prerogative of polishing it for publication. [King's note.]
2. **Reinhold Niebuhr** (1892–1971) was a minister, political activist, author, and professor of applied Christianity at Union Theological Seminary. [All notes are the editors' unless otherwise specified.]
3. **justice...denied** A quotation attributed to William E. Gladstone (1809–1898), British statesman and prime minister.
4. **Paul Tillich** (1886–1965), born in Germany, taught theology at several German universities, but in 1933 he was dismissed from his post at the University of Frankfurt because of his opposition to the Nazi regime. At the invitation of Reinhold Niebuhr, he came to the United States and taught at Union Theological Seminary.
5. **Zeitgeist** German for “spirit of the age.”

1. King chose to present his views in the form of a letter instead of, say, a manifesto. How might King's choice be explained from a Rogerian perspective?
2. Where do you see King making an effort to establish common ground with his audience? Explain whether you think he succeeded in doing so.

3. Do any moments in King's letter seem un-Rogerian? How so? What positive or negative effect might they have on his intended readers?
4. Does King use any of the three Aristotelian appeals of ethos, pathos, or logos described in Chapter 1? If so, which one(s)? Where do they appear? Why do you suppose King uses them?
5. Where does King most clearly reveal a special effort to reach his audience of fellow clergy?
6. Outline the key points in King's essay. Is there anything Rogerian about the way King sequences and emphasizes some of these points?
7. Should King have taken a more aggressive approach in his *Letter* (that is, used a Classical argument strategy)? Why or why not?

Reinforcing a Rogerian Argument with Visuals

Visual aids most likely to work in a Rogerian argument would illustrate cooperation and interaction among people: photographs of individuals engaged in discussion, of planning sessions, of teamwork. An illustrated “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (pages 184–198), for example, could include, along with those well-known images of Martin Luther King leading a peaceful civil rights demonstration, a photograph of citizens removing a racial discrimination sign (for example, “Whites Only”) from a restaurant window. Also, photographs of individuals who play a role in the issue at hand would inject a human dimension to the controversy. What additional illustrations can you suggest that would capture the spirit of Dr. King's message?

Chapter Summary

A successful argument structured along Rogerian principles, like the Classical and Toulmin models, includes thorough, accurate, and relevant evidence in support of its claim; unlike these models, however, the aim of Rogerian persuasion is not to “win” the argument but to find common ground and to build consensus on an issue troubling both the writer and the audience. Instead of being considered “opponents,” those with differing views are encouraged to reach cooperative dialogue to succeed; not, arguers need to listen with care and open-mindedness to divergent points of view. When considering taking a Rogerian approach to your argument, remember to ask yourself three questions: Can I represent challenging views and evaluate the evidence fairly and objectively? Do any of the challenging views make sense to some degree, and, if so, can I find a way to incorporate them into my own views? Am I sincere in my desire to establish common ground with those who take issue with me?

Summary and Comparison of the Classical, Toulmin, and Rogerian Models

Classical Model

- Based on philosophical ideals of sound thinking, incorporating the Aristotelian appeals of *ethos* (ethical principles, recognized authority, and shared values), *pathos* (stirring of emotions), and *logos* (dialectical reasoning)
- Follows a predetermined arrangement of elements: An *introduction* that states the problem and the thesis, presentation of the *evidence*, *refutation* of challenging views, and a *conclusion*. Note that these elements do not necessarily have equal weight in the argument.

Toulmin Model

- Based on the pragmatics of the judicial system rather than the ideals of philosophical thinking
- Approaches an argument in terms of its *claims* (which are presented more as hypotheses being open to challenge than as truths to be proven), its *data*, and its underlying *warrants*, and *backing* justifying those warrants that make the data trustworthy
- Recognizes the “real-world” complexities of an argument; gives special emphasis to refutation

Rogerian Model

- Based on humanistic values that take into account the importance of social cooperation in argument (that is, finding common ground is valued over “beating the opposition”)
- Emphasizes points of agreement over points of disagreement, and treats the issue as a common problem for both the writer and the audience
- Urges arguers to cultivate multiple perspectives toward issues

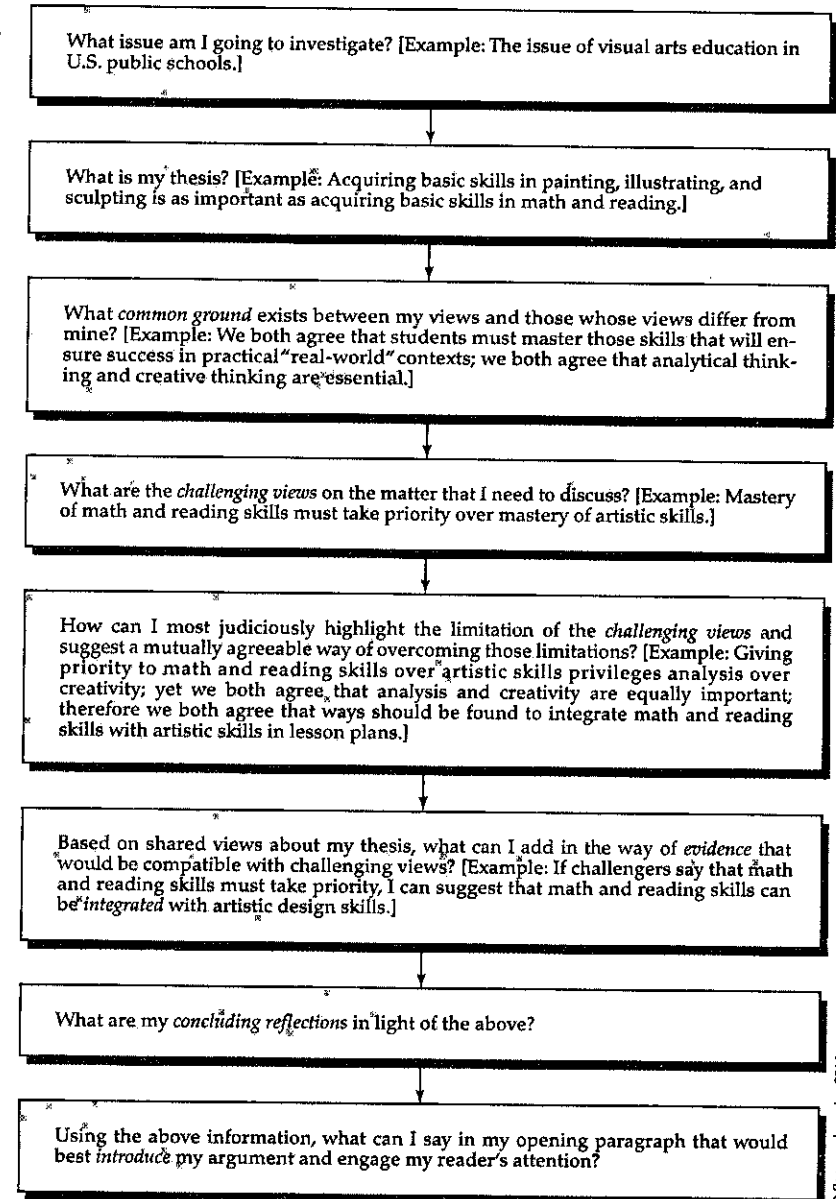
When preparing an argument using the Rogerian method, consult the flowchart presented in Figure 6.1 on next page.

Checklist

1. Do I find common ground with those whose views differ from my own?
2. Do I carefully consider the weaknesses or limitations of my point of view, as well as those of others? Do I share these with my readers?
3. Is my tone cooperative rather than confrontational?

FIGURE 6.1

Rogerian
Model
Flowchart



4. Do I encourage multiple perspectives rather than a singular one toward the issue?
5. Do I treat views with which I disagree respectfully? Do I give more emphasis to the points of agreement than the points of disagreement?
6. Have I considered visual aids in establishing or encouraging common ground with my readers?