

be better judges and better advocates. If we understand how we have been persuaded, we can more effectively move others. In the end, rhetorical analysis always points outward. We don't analyze to analyze. We analyze to understand, to judge more justly, to speak more effectively, to behave more responsibly. In general, we analyze to become better people ourselves.

WHAT IS THE RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE?

Constant rhetorical analysis demonstrates that we are often uncertain about our actions and our beliefs. Appreciating the art, the reason, and the merit of a contrary argument should help you to understand that many of your own convictions have been formed through persuasive actions. Many people might disagree with good reason. This isn't to say that you should abandon all principles, standards, morals, and values. Relativism (the belief that all beliefs are equally good and true) and nihilism (the belief that nothing is good or true) are easy escapes, and they're ultimately unsustainable. We must act, we must believe, and we must believe in our actions. A rhetorical perspective, however, cautions us against absolute conviction. A great deal in our lives is unknown, unknowable, and unpredictable. When we cannot absolutely know something for certain, we must elect the best options, and we must defend the best among a series of good (or possibly bad) choices. In these circumstances, we should learn to see the merit in opposing cases and to see why our own case depends on probabilities, gut reactions, appeals to abstractions (such as freedom or justice), and appeals to pragmatic though not guaranteed effects (such as a balanced budget). Part of the rhetorical perspective, therefore, is an acknowledgment that, however much we may believe an argument, it may be flawed (if not wrong) and, however much we may disapprove of an argument, it may be reasonable (if not right).

Another part of the rhetorical perspective involves the pragmatic search for ways to become more persuasive in the future, or to find better—more ethical, more productive—ways to persuade. While some manners of analysis focus on the beauty of an object, and others focus on its intricacy, rhetorical analysis focuses on an object's