

Practical Critical Thinking in a Nutshell

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I. Language

“Poets, Priests and Politicians. Have words to thank for their positions”
– The Police “De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da”

A. Fuzzy Language vs. Technical Language

Analytic philosophy began in the early twentieth century. Basically, it tried to reduce philosophy to the analysis of statements. Language with all its ambiguity, metaphor, similes, etc. clouded the meat of statements, and only by reducing these statements by definition and clarification, could we get to that verifiable core. Words like “God” were ruled out of this kind of philosophy as ultimately meaningless – only immediately verifiable things could enter into the process of analysis. For this **early** form of analytic philosophy, **mathematical knowledge** was the model for all knowledge. If we can just get our definitions tight enough and our language formal enough, we can do philosophy properly and find the truth. For **later** analytic philosophy, linguistic philosophy, language came to be seen as “all there is” – we can’t do any better than the language we have. Language has the character of a **game** – by language games we “win” at living in this world.

Early and Later analytic philosophy have their good points. First, it does pay to be careful about language – there are lesser and greater degrees of clarity. And secondly, it is the case that human language with all of its metaphor and ambiguity is a gift of God and is not inherently inferior to some kind of idealized formal language like mathematics. But both early and later analytic philosophy tend to turn belief in God into something either meaningless (as in the case of early) or something that is merely convenient or useful (as in the case of later analytic philosophy).

Analytic philosophy also refers to a **method** of doing philosophy. This is the dominant mode of philosophy in British and American universities today, especially among Christian philosophers. The difference is that words like “God” are defined and then statements concerning God are rigorously analyzed and combined with other statements to produce arguments. **Continental philosophy** is the modern competitor to Analytic philosophy and it tends to focus more on narrative, human experience, and consciousness. It relies less on rational argumentation and exults in dramatic statements or parables. This is not a knock against Continental philosophy – literature (even the Bible) operates not so much in an analytical mode as it does in a mode that shapes the reader by taking him or her through a story.

Language is important to us as we learn how to disagree agreeably and discuss things fruitfully with one another. But it is also true that language can’t exhaust our knowledge. Try to put the **smell of coffee** into language! Try to convey **what it is like to suffer** in language! Few can achieve the latter, and no one can achieve the former.

Fuzzy or “natural” language is the language we speak everyday. In it, we use metaphors – “That babe was hot”, similes, “Hey dog, you were dancing like a fiend” and ambiguity – “Hand me that thingamadoo so I can tighten up this doohickey.” **Technical language** is used in a precise sense in order to avoid some of the problems that could result from natural language. It is the kind of language that would be easier for a foreigner to understand. Translating the above sentences into technical language, we get: “That girl was beautiful and well-proportioned”, “Hi friend, you were dancing vigorously and with abandon”, and “Give me that tool whose title I have

forgotten so that I might tighten up this item whose title I have forgotten.”

Many arguments and disagreements are caused by the difficulty of translating natural language into the kind of language that we can discuss more objectively.

Language is a **tool** of theology, like any tool is used in any work and we want to use clean intellectual tools just like we kick the mud off of the shovel once in a while as we dig a hole.

B. Meaning and Words

One of the insights of later analytic philosophy is that **the meaning of words is best determined by observing they are actually used** – words have no inherent meaning and are actually rather arbitrarily attached to what they name. For instance, I figured out what the expression “This is tight” means by observing the child tell his mother excitedly “That toy is tight” while smiling and pointing at a groovy toy at the store the other day. You can illustrate this to yourself by repeating any word over and over and it will eventually sound meaningless. Onomatopoeias are an exception (buzz, bow wow, ruff, meow), but even here, not all people on the earth think dogs sound like “ruff”.

Words have meaning because we use them in a certain way. And we can only use words in a **context**. With the exception of exclamatory words like “wow” and “yuck” and so forth, there is usually a context for the use of a word and it aids us in understanding speech.

Example 1: I once asked a plumber if he could change the “capsule” in a faucet. Even though the correct term is “cartridge” he knew what I meant because of the context.

Example 2: We can substitute “thing-a-ma-jig” or “dooickey” in almost any sentence and the context will help someone understand what we’re talking about.

In other words, there is a “you know what I mean” quality to language that can’t be missed and simultaneously aids communication and can lead to misunderstanding.

- Clarify difference between **translation** and **interpretation**.
- Common Errors Involving Meaning and Words in the Bible¹ - this will need to wait for a separate lesson on word fallacies and scriptural interpretation – e.g., fallacies of etymology, etc.
- Brief, Practical advice on concordances - Concordances give options, not definitions – “illegitimate totality transfer”, Examples: *get*, web, java, bank, field, speaker, colonial, hairy, trunk – all have multiple meanings and shades of meaning. You can swing both ways – choosing a restricted meaning at random, or importing all its various shades of meaning into one place.

¹ From: Vacations with a Godly Purpose, By Brad Winsted

http://www.christianity.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID23682|CHID125043|CIID1631826,00.html
Since I have a large family, anytime we try and get everyone moving in the same direction at the same time is a logistical and timing effort. For the past eight summers at least one of our summer outings has always been a short term mission trip of some sort. I believe its one of the best uses of our time and resources. Why? It allows us and our children to go beyond just recreating and amusing themselves (**by the way, "amusement" is from the Latin to not think**).

- Metaphor or simile – **needs only one point of contact**. In other words, a metaphor or simile is used to compare two things, but this doesn't mean that when Wordsworth said he wandered lonely as a cloud that he also became wispy. When a person uses a metaphor in an argument, it is important to keep a watch on how they use it – do they push it too far, and if they don't, it isn't fair to push it too far for them! Metaphors and similes are often used in moral arguments – life boats, etc.

C. Levels of Discourse

1. Define discourse – any stretch of language that makes sense as a unit (spoken or written).
2. Four levels of discourse in theology:

Level 1: The natural language of the biblical passages – the way words are used in contemporaneous contexts, the “co text” of the word, etc.

- Matthew 12:37- "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."
- Romans 2:13 - for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.
- Romans 3:28 - For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.
- James 2:24 - You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.
- Matthew 28:19 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”
- Luke 10:29 – “But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

Level 2: The 'theologies' of the Bible

- How Paul explores salvation and the relationship between our faith and our works and God's acceptance of us. Examples: How John explores salvation, how James explores salvation.
- This is close to level one, but it is more of an organizational kind of thing, asking what each author is saying in a topical sense.

Level 3: The highly rarified (elevated) language of systematic theology (technical language)

- WSC Q. 33. What is justification?
A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Level 4: Popular usage of language from level 3 (popular language)

- From the LCMS Website: “Holy Scripture sums up all its teachings regarding the love of God to the world of sinners, regarding the salvation wrought by Christ, and regarding faith in Christ as the only way to obtain salvation, in the article of justification.”

Our denomination emerged from a struggle between liberals and conservatives. The liberals used traditional language often, but held back "mental reservations." It is part of our culture to be on the lookout for such duplicity, and there are good and bad aspects to this. On the good side, we are defending doctrines (level 3) that we think are harmonious with the doctrinal themes of Scripture (level 2) and which are rooted strongly in an honest reading of scriptural language (level 1). On the bad side, however, we can so totally eschew an ecumenical spirit, that we might miss valuable insights from outside of our young denomination just because other groups might use different terminology. It is by paying attention to the levels of discourse that we can more easily understand each other and know how to tell the difference between disagreeing over substance, and simply using different language.

II. “Reason”

“Shake off all the fears of servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call on her tribunal for every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God, because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blind faith.”

- Thomas Jefferson

It may indeed prove to be far the most difficult and not the least important task for human reason rationally to comprehend its own limitations. It is essential for the growth of reason that as individuals we should bow to forces and obey principles which we cannot hope fully to understand, yet on which the advance and even the preservation of civilization depend.

- F.A. Hayek

A. Radial Saws and Straight Lines: “Methodism” vs. Apprehension

A handheld radial saw spins nearly perfectly if you have the blade set right and it is new. But the fact that the saw spins perfectly doesn’t guarantee that you’ll cut a straight line. It is in putting that saw to work that you have to do in the right way in order to produce a straight line. Similarly, the laws of logic, even the “scientific method” itself must be applied to individual situations. And wisdom, experience, and so forth, do not arise from those tools themselves.

“**Methodism**” – The idea that if we use the right method, anyone can crank out the truth from a truth machine. This is the ideal of the “Scientific Method” of Bacon (1561-1626):

“There remains one hope of salvation, one way to good health: that the entire work of the mind be started over again; and from the very start the mind should not be left to itself, but be constantly controlled; and the business done (if I may put it this way) by machines.” (Novum Organum).

“**Apprehension**” – A term trying to get at the idea that wisdom, experience, etc. are just as or more important than method in learning the truth. This also implies that character is important!

Time in the church, reading the word, worshipping God is just as much preparation for thinking correctly about God as studying theology (or theological method) is.

“For the excellent person judges each sort of thing correctly, and in each case what is true appears to him. For each state of character has its own special view..., and presumably the excellent person is far superior because he sees what is true in each case, being a sort of standard and measure... .” Aristotle – Nichomachean Ethics

B. Limits of Logic – From John Frame’s article “Rationality and Scripture”

1. The law of non-contradiction is only necessary to those who acknowledge a practical or ethical necessity to think logically.
2. Logic assumes that those using it can agree on the nature of and criteria for truth and falsity. The agreement to say that “x may not be both true and false in the same respect and at the same time” is a formal agreement (nearly meaningless) unless there is agreement on the meaning of “true” and “false”.
3. The disciplines of mathematics and logic themselves, far from being filled with nothing but truisms, are themselves full of controversy.
4. Induction itself can’t be proven logically, yet all non deductive reasoning assumes it. (This one’s hard, but really, all it is saying is that there is no logical way to prove that tomorrow will be like yesterday, and yet all science – gravity, meteorology, etc. – assumes that nature is consistent.)
5. We do not know all the “Laws of logic” and our systems of logic fail to account for a lot of different kinds of everyday reasoning such as when a quarterback sees some movement in the backfield and moves instinctively to adjust who the intended receiver might need to be.
6. Discovering one fact that is apparently contrary to one’s belief system doesn’t automatically overturn that belief system. One can simply treat counter-evidence to one’s beliefs as a research “problem” to be worked out later. There is no precise way to specify how much contrary evidence is needed to constitute refutation or modification of one’s worldview.
7. Logical rigor (a sharp, precise radial saw) doesn’t guarantee truth (a straight line). One also needs true premises and these don’t come from logic itself.
8. The principle of non-contradiction states that “A is A and not non-A at the same time and in the same respect” thus limiting its application to aspects of reality that are unchanging!
9. Logical arguments require restating an argument from natural language into technical language, and there is not always an obvious way to do this – an otherwise adequate argument may fail by inadequately translating the ordinary language which it claims to test.

III. Evaluating the Opinions and Arguments of “Experts”

A. General Rules of Thumb

1. Mind the qualifications of the alleged “expert” Degrees can be either honorary or earned.
2. Be careful about autodidacts (self-taught folks). Why? Yet, don’t write them off either.
3. Beware of contrarians – Duesberg, Holocaust Deniers, Health Food Saviors, New Age Gurus, Geocentrists, etc. It is okay to join the rest of the “herd” sometimes; there really are cliffs to avoid.

4. Beware of people speaking outside of their area of expertise – Lawyers, Doctors, Engineers are worst offenders because they are highly competent in one area and thus are tempted to speak in an area where they are not as qualified with the same kind of certainty.
5. Beware of people who will not reveal their data.
6. Don't trust quotes from other sources until you check out those quotes in their original contexts.
7. Mind the publisher of the book or article. This is not really determinative, but it can be a clue. Some academic publishers are known to simply reprint student work that has not had peer review. Journals are mostly peer reviewed.
8. Mind the alleged expert's language. Is he rash and overly-judgmental without really giving his opponents a fair shake? Such people are unstable and you need to look for answers elsewhere.
9. What does the website look like? Is it terribly designed and has the look of zero funding? Is every other word boldfaced and underlined (emotional language)? In general, the quality of a website can help you begin to form some impression about the credibility of the organization or author.
10. Does the body of the argument support the inspiring introduction and the emotional conclusion? Often people make their most unguarded and unsubstantiated statements in the conclusion of a paper or book.
11. Beware of young people who know everything and yet have had no suffering in life or life experience. Every newlywed is an expert on childrearing and husbanding. Every 25 year old pastor has the lock on who is a heretic and who is not.

B. Informal Fallacies²

A “fallacy” is an error of argument. One argues “fallaciously” when one argues poorly, drawing conclusions from premises that do not follow from those premises. The way arguments work, one gives premises and then those premises should support a conclusion.

Premise One: Jeff Meyers likes to eat all types of steak.

Premise Two: New York Strip is a type of steak.

Conclusion: Jeff Meyers likes to eat New York Strip

Below is a list of commonly encountered fallacious types of argument where conclusions are drawn that are not supported by the premises used. Note that often, however, a fallacy is really just pushing good common sense too far. For instance, while it is true that it is fallacious to reject an argument on the basis of the person making it, we do know there is a connection between virtue in one area and scholarship itself is an activity that can either be done virtuously or not, so we might tend to scrutinize the arguments of some more than others in the course of making the thousands of decisions per day that we make.

Caution: Learning about informal fallacies can turn even the most easy-going soul into a nitpicker. Keep in mind that there is a “you know what I mean” component to language, and nitpicking at fallacies in your friends is a good way to be annoying. Knowing about these will

² You can find lists of informal fallacies in any logic textbook. I used Irving Copi's “Introduction to Logic” text in the preparation of this handout, and at times my language will probably crib directly from his language, but for this informal setting, I didn't worry about a lot of quotation marks.

really help you evaluate the opinions of experts, but they should not be used to pretend that any discussion in a human language will ever achieve perfect clarity.

1. **Argument From Ignorance** – arguing that something is the case because it has not been proven false, or false because it has not been proven true. "No one has ever proved that the Loch Ness Monster exists, so it must not exist." "No one has ever proved that the Loch Ness Monster does not exist, so it must exist." Discuss Burden of Proof, however.

2. **Appeal to Inappropriate Authority** – arguing that something is the case based upon an appeal to a source who has no legitimate authority in the matter. Example: When Nobel Prize Winners all sign a document supporting some particular economic policy and half of them have Nobel Prizes in Mathematics or the like. Or, when an actor who plays a farmer in a movie then testifies about the plight of the family farm before congress.

3. **Complex Question** (Begging the Question) – asking a question that assumes some other conclusion. For Example: Sir, when did you stop beating your wife? Push-polling is another example – “What do you think of George Bush’s plan to give the rich a tax-break?”

4. **Argument Against the Person, Not the Position (Ad Hominem)** – Attack of the person putting forth the argument rather than the substance of the argument. Can take several forms - impugning the character of the one making the argument (e.g., The Father says to the son – ‘don’t smoke, it’s bad for your health’ and presents data to back up his claim. The son rejects the Father’s advice on the basis of his father having smoked when he was a kid.); it can unfairly suggest that the situation the arguer is in makes his argument false (e.g., Christians are often dismissed as being capable of academic rigor because they are beholden to the scriptures. The Rich man can’t be listened to on tax policy because he stands to benefit from lower taxes. The Caucasian man cannot be listened to on Native American policy because he is not Native American. Dick Cheney can’t be trusted to keep the nation’s best interests in mind with regard to energy policy because he used to work for Halliburton.). It can also dismiss an argument simply because of its source (genetic fallacy) and not attend to the quality of the argument. For instance, the liberal theologian might look at a book published by Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company and disregard the book simply because of its publisher. This goes the other way, I often immediately suspect the worst when I see a book published by Fortress Press, but this is unwise because on a case-by-case basis, some amazing books are published by Fortress.

5. **Careless or deceptive use of Generalizations** – When a general rule is applied to cases it does not apply to (i.e., Almost all rules have exceptions. ‘Biblical’ pacifists latch onto ‘thou shalt not kill’ and ignore the case laws which give specific instances in which killing is permitted – self defense, death penalty, etc.) or when something that is true of an isolated case is applied to a great number of cases (e.g., My grandmother smoked cigarettes her entire life and she lived to be 98; now tell me cigarettes cause cancer! Stereotypes often fall into this category, too.).

6. **False Cause** – arguing in such a way as to assume the cause of a thing that isn’t actually the cause or can’t be known to be the cause. For example, “Bill Clinton bombed Iraq during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, therefore the war was just a cover-up.” Or suppose that as a result of the US helping Iraq get its oil production going again, we end up getting cheaper gas. Some might argue that our military action was purposed to create this result. This is sometimes called the fallacy of “after this, therefore because of this”. Because the sun rose after the rooster crowed, therefore, the rooster’s crowing cause the sun to rise.

7. **Appeal to Emotion** – instead of arguing solidly for a position, this fallacy just throws all kinds of emotive language into the mix to excite the audience into believing it is true. Sometimes testimonialism in a health-and-wealth-gospel church can do this. Advertising does this – no down payment real estate schemes must be the way to go because Carlton Sheets and those twin little people are living the high life. Fox News opinion folks sometimes do this – challenging the patriotism of those who would question this or that policy concerning Iraq. Another form of this is argumentation based upon popularity – “everyone’s doing it, you should be too.” Evolution is true because 98% of working biologists believe it. Upon further examination, you’ll find that 98% of working biologists also have no use for the theory of evolution in their daily work and their total exposure to evolution consists of a few books read in grad school!

8. **Appeal to Pity** – when an argument relies more on the empathy and emotion of the audience rather than upon the merits of its case. For instance, how is it relevant that the serial killer’s mother loves him (?!), and yet her testimony is introduced by the defense attorney as somehow arguing in favor of the defendant. Recall the defense strategy of the Menendez brothers!

9. **Appeal to Force** – generally comes in the form of “you oughta believe X is true, or me an’ Vinny’ll bust your caps.”

10. **Irrelevant Conclusion** – The argument given is advertised to establish a particular conclusion that it does not. For instance, death penalty opponents will argue that the justice system is unfair to minorities and the poor because wealthier whites and celebrities are more often able to beat the death sentence by hiring good attorneys. This argument really establishes the point that the poor and minorities need better representation, not that the death penalty should be abolished or that innocent people are being executed. One might just as well conclude, from their argument that the real problem is that not enough celebrities and rich people are being executed! Education arguments are often in this boat. Public educators will argue that the schools are in bad shape financially and then draw the conclusion that the answer is an increase in school funding when one could just as easily conclude that the answer is a refocusing on budget priorities. Often such arguments are combined with emotional arguments to produce their persuasive power. Sometimes we call arguments in this category a “non sequitor”.

11. **Equivocation** – confusing several meanings of a word in order to make an argument. Hot dogs are better than nothing. Nothing is better than steak. Therefore, hot dogs are better than steak. The word “Nothing” is said to be “equivocated upon”.

12. **Amphiboly** – statement is open to varying interpretations because it is loosely constructed, then that statement is used in an argument. The arguer interprets the statement in a way that makes it true when he presents it, but then uses it in a way that makes it false when he finally gets to the conclusion of his argument. Examples: “The anthropologists went to a remote area and took photographs of some native women, but they weren’t developed.”, “One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I’ll never know.” Amphiboly was the stock and trade of George Burns and a lot of Vaudeville comics. Also, roads signs like “Slow Children at Play” can also be amphibolous.

13. **Accent** – The meaning of a statement used in an argument is established by a particular emphasis, and then a conclusion is drawn that relies on a different emphasis. Reporters can sometimes use this to make someone look bad by italicizing the wrong word in a phrase. Notice this possible premise of an argument changes its use each time:

a. *We* should not speak in an unkind fashion to our children, *therefore others may*.

- b. We should not *speak* in an unkind fashion to our children, *therefore we may act unkindly*.
- c. We should not speak in an unkind fashion to *our children*, *therefore we may speak in an unkind fashion to other people's children*.

14. **Composition and Division** – arguing to what must be true of a collection of things on the basis of what is true of an individual thing (composition) or argument to what must be true of an individual thing based upon what must be true of the collection of things (division). An example of composition: the brick is rectangular, the coliseum is made of bricks, therefore the coliseum is rectangular. Another: every man has a mother, therefore mankind must have a mother. An example of division: Rear-wheel drive cars are disappearing. That car is rear-wheel drive. Therefore, that car is disappearing.

B. Other forms of bad argumentation:

1. **Straw-man** – You create a version of your opponent's position that is easy to refute and then you knock down this version rather than the position your opponent actually holds. This can be done deliberately (Gephart characterizes social security reform as starving the elderly), or it can be done inadvertently when we do not do our best to present our opponents viewpoint in the best possible light. This is the number one sin in our circles. The word "heresy" is thrown around at the slightest hint of a tomato/tomahhto difference of expression. Someone might formulate a doctrine slightly differently that the hearer expects, and instantly the hearer puts the worst interpretation upon his opponent's argument.

2. **False Dilemma (Black/White)** – Here, the arguer gives a choice between two things and acts as though there are only these two black and white choices. In reality, there may be other alternatives (shades of gray) that could be held. For instance, Harry Potter assumes that Dolores Umbridge, the new teacher at Hogwarts, must be a "Death Eater" in league with the Dark Lord Voldemort because she is not nice to Harry and is on the wrong side of a particular controversy within the wizard community. One of Harry's wise teachers tells him that the world is not divided into good people and death eaters! Some issues that are often argued in this way in our circles are contraception (either children are a blessing or contraception is allowable), Sabbath observance (either no work, no recreation or we trample Sunday as any other day), and education.

3. **"Big Think" or "Principle" Arguments** – Cosmologic Idea, Sonship, Presuppositionalism, Theonomy, Dispensationalism, Klineanism, Covenant Theology, Radical Orthodoxy, Ecumenical Movement, Liturgical Renewal Movement, Westminster Confession of Faith (getting uncomfortable yet?), Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Total Quality Management, Object Oriented Programming, Federalism, Communism, Capitalism, etc. are all examples of big, overarching paradigms for doing theology, ethics, government, philosophy, computer programming, business management etc. The problem is that often human-created systems have elements in them that might be based upon an interpretation of scripture that is, say, 50% probable. But the humility is short-lived as that element then is used by adherents to the system to deduce new "truths" with 100% certitude. Or the lens on the world that such systems provide the adherent can color all the data so that "what my net can't catch isn't fish" results. Humility, self-criticism, and the ability to read or listen sympathetically outside of one's own tradition are the only tools we have to combat the dangers of this kind of parochialism.

Language plays a role here, too. "Big Think" communities tend to generate their own jargon and it makes communication with outsiders difficult. This argumentation problem can also show up in minor ways when a theme is abstracted from a verse and then applied to different situations.

One popular parenting guide (Ezzo) actually attempts to prove that parents should, at times, ignore a crying child because the Father did not answer Jesus' cry on the cross! "What would Jesus Do" is big-think for ethics as well. We should consider Jesus' life as an example, but Jesus had a different calling than we, and it is not our job, for instance, to publicly rebuke false religious leaders, to give one example.

4. **"Proving Too Much"** – When someone is said to have "Proved Too much" it means that his argument "proves" a conclusion that if accepted would have absurd results. For an example, see this excerpt from an editorial on cloning that I found:

"A human embryo, however created, is alive: It isn't dead, or inanimate. It's human: not a carrot. It is a complete human organism, a member of the human species, at an early stage of development. It is what each of us once was; nothing that is not a living human being becomes one. Is all that enough to make a human embryo worth protecting? Proponents of embryo-destroying research often suggest that a human being must also have mental functioning to be worth protecting. But this argument proves too much: What about infants? The retarded? The comatose? The sleeping? Drawing the line is impossible. But there is no need to draw a line: We can, if we want, protect all human beings in law."

5. **Idealizing the Past** – self explanatory. Just because it is older doesn't make it true. As Christians, we know that the Spirit is working in the church as she grows from child to adult – why should we necessarily privilege the early church, for instance? Example: Older biographies tend to be pretty awful compared to newer, critical biographies.

6. **Guilt by Association** – "You can't believe X because the dreaded _____'s believe X". Arguing against something simply because another group holds to it. Often the outward aspects of Roman Catholicism are the victims of this bad argumentation – kneelers, clerical dress, etc.

6. **Slippery Slope** – Often combined with guilt by association – "You can't believe X because the dreaded _____'s believe X and once you go down that road, you're heading straight into their position, lock, stock, and barrel." Arguing solely against adopting a position on the grounds that it will lead you further into error.

7. **Winning the argument by definition** – "Progressive taxation", "Anti-Choice"

Exercises:

Exercise I and II A. will be done by everyone. We will divide up the contents of II and III.

I. Identify the level of discourse of the following passages, either:

1. - Natural Language
2. – Level of theories or theologies in the text itself
3. – Systematic analysis of the text
4. – popular usage of the terms involved in #3

- “This does not change in the New Testament. We see full continuity between the Old and New Testament on the subject of faithful parenting. The same expectation of parental oversight under the New Covenant continues on from the Old.”
- “The Bible says differently, ‘He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly’ (Prov. 13:24). A man who does not spank his son hates his son.”
- “Spare the rod, spoil the child.”
- “The Rams spanked the 49ers.”

II. The following are from an argumentative essay. A. Identify the levels of discourse happening here in each point. B. Discuss which steps in the argument are surer than others. Where does the argument take liberties that it should not? Where did this man go wrong? C. What does this tell you about levels 3 and 4 of discourse? D. What informal fallacies do you find? D. How does he handle the scriptures? Hint: try looking up the verses that he references without exposition.

- The Bible clearly teaches that we may protect our own lives from unjust harm with deadly force if necessary, "If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no blood guiltiness on his account", Exodus 22:2.
- The Scriptures also clearly teach that as we should defend our own lives with force, we should also do so for our neighbor. The second great commandment is to love "your neighbor as yourself", Luke 10:27.
- Surely Rahab protected the innocent lives of her neighbors when she hid the Israelite spies, Joshua 2:1-24. The Hebrew midwives also defended the lives of the Jewish boys, Exodus 1:15-22. The disciples protected the innocent life of Paul from imminent death in Acts 9:23-25. They helped him escape Damascus by lowering him in a basket through an opening in the wall. In each of the situations referred to above, whatever action was necessary to protect life was taken. In Exodus 22:2 deadly force is justified when used in defense of the innocent. In the case of the midwives, deadly force was not necessary.
- Therefore, the Scriptures clearly teach that we should take whatever action is necessary to protect innocent life.
- Are there any heinous sins being committed today that could again fan the flames of God's righteous anger to the scorching point? Is there any need in today's world for men of the stamp of Phinehas? Could the bold daring of Cozbi and Zimri in parading before Moses as he wept over sin have any modern parallels? The righteous zeal of Phinehas did not permit him to stay his hand long enough to even ask Moses or the church leaders of the wisdom of his action. If any similar

zeal be found among us today, occasion to exercise it will not be lacking.

- Will you remain at home while your neighbors respond to the call from the womb? Will you continue to build bigger barns while your little neighbors are being abruptly decapitated? Will you be like the priest and Levite who passed by on the other side on the way to pursue their own interests? Or will you be like the good Samaritan who gave of his time and property and risked his very life because he realized that all his fellow men are his neighbors? Death opens her cavernous mouth before you. Thousands upon thousands of children are consumed by her every day. You have the ability to save some from being tossed into her gaping mouth. As hundreds are being rushed into eternity, other questions shrink in comparison to the weighty question, "Should we defend our born and unborn children with force?" Take defensive action!

III. Identify the logical fallacies and/or bad argumentation in the following Arguments. Often, the example will contain several types of problems. Some of these are not arguments so much as statements of opinion that contain inconsistencies you will pick up on.

1. "...our first son was born with severe problems that first cost him five weeks in a neonatal ICU ... one nationally known neurologist said his chances of either dying or being crippled for life were ninety-eight percent. By God's grace, the neurologist was wrong, but we didn't know what would happen next. Doctors were advising us to avoid future pregnancies. The fundamental issue, I feel, is 'Is the body more important than the soul?' Frankly, I believe we are affected by our society's disdain for the physically unfashionable and non-perfect. ... God is not limited! Since He doesn't ask us to limit our welcome to children, it's His business to provide the resources – not ours to see them in place in advance. Money, in particular, should be the least of our worries, as God has promised to provide as much of that as we truly need."
2. "I believe in one God, creator of the universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshiped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental principles of all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them. As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the system of morals, and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw, or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England some doubts as to his divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble. I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequence, as it probably has, of making his doctrines more respected and better observed; especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers in his government of the world with any particular marks of his displeasure."
3. "The assumption of modern man is that any occupation is as good as any other, as long as it's not outright sinful and it pays well. But this view is seriously flawed. ... For God has given the human family a clearly-defined mission. That mission is the sacred stewardship of the soil from whence we came, and by which all life is nourished. It is the cultivation of the soil for the production of nutritious food and beautiful living things, to the glory of the Creator. That is the distinctive message of Christian Agrarianism: whatever our individual gifts and callings may be, our corporate task is — and has always been — to make the world a garden. ... From this [Gen. 1:28] I conclude that the proper, basic calling of mankind is the cultivation of the soil. ... But God has not limited all men to the identical task, nor given all men the same gifts or ambitions. Godly Abel was a shepherd, and his murderer was a tiller of the ground. The Scripture allows for many vocations, and the division of labor is a sound principle. But the fact remains that the task set for mankind as a whole is to make the earth a fruitful garden. If we specialize in, for example, tool-making, it should be to make tools which will help in some way to accomplish the overall task. They may be tools to make clothing, or to build houses, or to harvest crops. But what gives the

specialty legitimacy is that it improves the way that the whole community does the basic task of bringing out the God-created potential of the land. . . . If as a society we have a different goal than subduing the earth in this Biblical sense, then we are in outright corporate rebellion against our Maker. If we are employed in work that undermines this Divine plan, or we are in a legitimate field, but using methods which work against the purpose of God, we are also in rebellion against God. . . . We have taken a detour from the biblical plan in favor of hedonistic lifestyles and the values of materialism. We have abandoned our calling to exercise godly dominion over the earth and instead are exercising an ungodly and destructive dominion. Modern man no longer sees himself as God's image, but as God himself! He claims autonomy and sovereignty over the universe. He is making up his own rules as he goes along — he sees no need for a knowledge of the past. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh!”

4. “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord (Psalm 128:3,4). Since God wants a marriage to result in multiplying children, since children are the necessary means to taking dominion, since it is God's prerogative to give and withhold children, it is not surprising to find that the Bible consistently teaches that children are a blessing. How could they be viewed otherwise? Not having children was considered a serious deprivation of blessing (and at times an actual curse) and the barren woman in Scripture invariably seeks relief from her condition. (Gen. 11:30; 15:2; 30:1; Jdg. 13:2; 1 Sam. 1:2; 2 Sam. 6:23; 2 Ki. 4:14; Hos. 9:11; Lk. 1:7; 20:29). Only a people who lose God's perspective on life would come to see children as a burden, and that is where we have come in Western society. We have already mentioned how this anti-child feeling has crept into the church. Those who see children as a burden or a curse want to limit or eliminate them; hence birth control and abortion. Those who see them as God's blessing want all that God chooses to give them, and they receive them with joy and thanksgiving. Why would anyone choose to deprive himself of God's blessing?... Taking together all the relevant teachings of Scripture we are left with the conclusion that we should let God do our family planning. He will open and close the womb as it serves his inscrutable purposes, and we should accept with joyful thanksgiving all the children with which he chooses to bless us.”

5. “The differences between American occupations of 1945 Japan and 2003 Iraq reflect the rise of corporate power here and abroad, and within the Bush Administration in particular. Dick Cheney's former company, Halliburton, is already cashing in on Iraqi "rebuilding" contracts that it obtained from the U.S. government. The oil companies that donated so heavily to the Bush campaign will reap huge profits if they are allowed to take over oil production in Iraq. The weapons makers profit from Bush's policies as well, and even telecommunications companies stand to benefit, since Bremer intends to give foreign corporations license to operate mobile phone networks in Iraq. It's no surprise that Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld have been advocating an invasion of Iraq since at least 1998 through the Project for a New American Century. It could be argued that Saddam Hussein has been a marked man since he nationalized Iraqi oil back in 1973, but that's another story.”

6. The last few years homosexuality and sexual perversion have "exploded" into the mainstream. Legislation is now pending making same-sex marriages legal. Books such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*, promoting homosexuality, are in our schools. According to *The Washington Post*, bisexuality and homosexuality, are the "in thing" in our public schools. *And even churches are now welcoming homosexuals and are even ordaining them in the ministry!* A literary critic on the NIV translation was homosexual author Dr. Virginia Mollenkott. In Episcopal, *Witness* (June 1991, pp. 20-23), she admits, "My lesbianism has ALWAYS been a part of me. . ." To no surprise, "sodomite" is completely removed from the NIV. (Deut. 23:17, I Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46, II Kings 23:7) And of course, I Cor. 6:9, ". . . effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind. . ." is replaced with the non-offensive ". . . nor male prostitutes nor homosexual **offenders**. . ." Notice the NIV in I Cor. 6:9 does NOT condemn "homosexuals" or the "act of homosexuality" - **but ONLY "homosexual OFFENDERS"**.

7. Bishop Wright is an Anglican. He has recently been installed as the Bishop of Durham. Is there really any wonder here as to why he has a faulty view of biblical justification? Anglicans and Roman Catholics are joined at the hip.
8. A couple years ago, the Doe Presbyterian Church, pastored by John Doe, installed kneelers in its auditorium. Last year, while teaching Sunday School, our pastor defended the installation and use of kneelers, on the grounds that kneeling is an acceptable posture for prayer. True, kneeling is an acceptable posture for prayer, but the propriety of *kneelers*, not the propriety of *kneeling*, is the issue. If a congregation wishes to kneel for prayer, it can do so without kneelers, and many do. I grew up in a church in which the congregation frequently kneeled for prayer—without kneelers, simply by kneeling at their seats or pews. There are good reasons why our Reformed forefathers removed kneelers from, or refused to install kneelers in, Reformed church buildings: The purpose and effect of kneelers are not to enable the congregation to kneel in prayer (they can do that anyway, if they wish), but to kneel before the wine and the bread, the “altar,” the cross, and the priest officiating up front, in violation of the Second Commandment. That is why kneelers are commonly found in Catholic, Anglican, and similar church buildings, and absent from Reformed church buildings.
9. When scientists invoke miracles, they cease to practice science.... Behe, claiming a miracle in every molecule, would urge us to admit the defeat of reason, to despair of understanding, to rest content in ignorance. Even as biology daily grows in knowledge and insight, Behe counsels us to just give up. (Futuyma 1997, Critiquing ‘Darwin’s Black Box’)