

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

**Philosophy 1104: Critical Thinking**

**Answers to Quiz #3**

June 18, 2009

1. Comment on the following *ad hominem* (to the person) arguments, explaining why they are, or are not, reasonable.

(i) Dr. Everett says that my rash is nothing to worry about – just a mild allergy of some kind.

-- And you trust Dr. Everett? Didn't you hear that he cheated on his wife?

Not reasonable. Dr. Everett seems to be a bad husband, but that has little bearing on his skills as a physician.

(ii) Dr. Malcolm Wardlaw argues, in the *British Medical Journal*, that wearing a helmet while cycling is unnecessary, since even bare-headed cycling is much safer than driving a car.

-- Yes, but Wardlaw is a well-known opponent of bike helmets, so he's biased on this issue.

Not reasonable. The fact that Wardlaw has a view on the matter isn't evidence of bias. After all, his opinion may be based on facts and arguments.

(iii) Gillette does indeed shave closer and smoother. Tiger Woods says so, and he's probably the best golfer ever.

-- He sure hits the ball well. But that doesn't make him an expert on razors. I find Gillette no better than the generic brands.

Reasonable. Mr. Woods' skills as a golfer aren't relevant to the evaluation of razors.

(iv)

### Few Biologists but Many Evangelicals Sign Anti-Evolution Petition

By KENNETH CHANG (New York Times, Feb. 21 2006)

In the recent skirmishes over evolution, advocates who have pushed to dilute its teaching have regularly pointed to a petition signed by 514 scientists and engineers. The petition, they say, is proof that scientific doubt over evolution persists. But random interviews with 20 people who signed the petition and a review of the public statements of more than a dozen others suggest that many are evangelical Christians, whose doubts about evolution grew out of their religious beliefs. And even the petition's sponsor, the Discovery Institute in Seattle, says that only a quarter of the signers are biologists, whose field is most directly concerned with evolution. The other signers include 76 chemists, 75 engineers, 63 physicists and 24 professors of medicine.

It's reasonable to question whether or not these scientists are experts in a *relevant* field. On the face of it, chemistry, engineering, physics and medicine are of limited relevance to biological evolution. Also, if scientific conclusions are driven by religious belief, then this is a case of bias. (On the other hand, some objections to Darwinism are based on very broad considerations that engineers, physicists, etc. might have views about. And Christian theology is more neutral toward Darwinism than many other metaphysical stances, such as naturalism, are. So you could argue this one either way.)

2. Comment on the following passages, being sure to:

- (a) Identify the type(s) of argument used (e.g. ad hominem, appeal to force, etc.)
  - (b) Say why the argument is reasonable, or not, as the case may be. (Most are unreasonable.)
- (i) I hate jobs where they tell you exactly when you have to take your breaks. You know, you have to work till 10.45am, then you get a break until 11am sharp. It turns whatever you're doing into drudgery. They should just give you certain tasks to complete by the end of the day, and then let you work as you want to.

Oh sure, that would work! *Hey guys, do only as much work as you want to, ok? If you feel tired, then just lie down and rest.*

Straw man. (A straw man is always unreasonable.) The first speaker was talking about how the work is done, not *how much* work is done.

- (ii) Yes, these cookies are wheat-free. I carefully checked each and every ingredient I used, making sure there was no wheat in it.

Composition argument. This one's reasonable, as wheat can't be created by mixing together other ingredients. (Unlike, say, mayonnaise.)

- (iii) Old Professor Hampton died of a heart attack last night. They say it was brought on by stress. It just goes to prove what I've been saying for years, that we professors are seriously overworked.

Hasty generalisation. Unreasonable. Even if Hampton was an overworked professor, it doesn't follow that most professors are overworked. (Note also that there's no evidence that Hampton was stressed by his work as a professor. He might have had troubles with his family, etc.)

- (iv) The war in Pipelineistan – oops, I mean Afghanistan! – is illegal and unjustified. I mean, taking over a country just to keep the oil flowing in our direction.

Yeah, yeah. I've heard your peacenik stuff before. The problem is, the bad guys don't go for all that peace and love talk, and you gotta use guns to keep them in check.

You might say this is a straw man, as there's nothing in the first speaker about winning over bad people with talk of peace and love. But it's more like changing the topic altogether. Unreasonable.

- (v) I can't believe you! You really think that children who grow up in single-mother households are at greater risk of becoming criminals? Those mothers are some of the hardest-working, self-sacrificing people on the planet! Imagine how they'd feel if they heard you say that! What a slap in the face!

Appeal to pity. Unreasonable. One's beliefs should be based on evidence, not on how other people will be offended.

- (vi) You think it's reasonable for Scotland to be governed from London? Try saying that in a pub in the east end of Glasgow, and see what happens! You'll need a stomach pump to get your teeth back.

Ad baculum (appeal to force). Well, it's not a *real* threat, of course. But the imagined hostile reaction might make someone drop this view, which would be a fallacy.

- (vii) It's a myth that Chinese people are poorer than Canadians. The GDP of China now stands at almost 8 trillion dollars per year, compared with less than 2 trillion dollars for Canada.

Division argument. Unreasonable. Since there are about 20 times as many Chinese as Canadians, the wealth of individual Chinese is still less.

- (viii) Hyman Brown was not, contrary to claims on NBC News, any kind of architect or senior engineer in the World Trade Center construction. For one thing, there is no mention of

Brown in any history of the towers, even though several other architects and engineers are referred to. Also, his own CV only vaguely refers to his involvement with the project.

Argument from ignorance. Fairly reasonable, since if he *had been* such a senior figure, he would very likely be mentioned, and people usually highlight their top jobs in their CVs.

- (ix) I wouldn't take Phil 321 with Professor Drear if I were you. Some friends of mine took it last term and they all said he had such a monotonous delivery that it was impossible to stay awake. Then I checked his student evaluations online. For the question, *The instructor created interest in the course material*, he averaged 1.3 out of 5!!

Ad populam (appeal to popularity). Fairly reasonable, as students in a class are good judges of how interesting and engaging the professor is. (Of course Prof. Drear might be good in other ways.)

- (x) Sure, smoking weed is pretty harmless in itself. The problem is that it leads to abuse of hard drugs later. The studies prove it. For example, it's been shown that almost all crack addicts previously smoked marijuana.

False cause (Hence, unreasonable.) The statistic cited shows nothing, except perhaps the popularity of marijuana.

3. The following complex questions either involve an assumption, or ask two questions in one. For each question below say which kind it is, and state the assumption being made, or separate the question into two, as appropriate.

- (i) How long have you been spying on me?

Assumption: You have been spying on me.

- (ii) Are you aware of the harm that eating beef is doing to your body?

Assumption: Eating beef is harmful

- (iii) Should we welcome refugees and criminals into our great country?

Two questions: Should we welcome (a) refugees and (b) criminals into our great country? (Also assumes that our country is great.)

4. Read the passage below. (Note that I have edited it in rather unfair way, that conceals the author's real point, but that's not relevant here.)

To what extent can one argue, on the basis of research of this sort, that voting Republican is a mistake?

If you can show that a certain belief typically has a *pathological* cause, then that is some argument against it. (So there is some evidence that voting Republican is a mistake.) But be careful, as such a belief might be true, and be held reasonably by some people. (As the joke goes, "Just because I'm paranoid, that doesn't mean they're not out to get me.") Further, it's not clear in this case that the causes are really pathological (unhealthy). Is strict parenting worse than lax, permissive parenting? Is "moral clarity" worse than moral confusion and relativism? Perhaps a "fondness for hierarchy" is really respect for authority? And so on. (It's harder to put a positive spin on "cognitively inflexible".) Anyway, the general worry is that the argument can cut both ways.

## WHAT MAKES PEOPLE VOTE REPUBLICAN?

(JONATHAN HAIDT, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia)

What makes people vote Republican? Why in particular do working class and rural Americans usually vote for pro-business Republicans when their economic interests would seem better served by Democratic policies? We psychologists have been examining the origins of ideology ever since Hitler sent us Germany's best psychologists, and we long ago reported that strict parenting and a variety of personal insecurities work together to turn people against liberalism, diversity, and progress. But now that we can map the brains, genes, and unconscious attitudes of conservatives, we have refined our diagnosis: conservatism is a partially heritable personality trait that predisposes some people to be cognitively inflexible, fond of hierarchy, and inordinately afraid of uncertainty, change, and death. People vote Republican because Republicans offer "moral clarity"—a simple vision of good and evil that activates deep seated fears in much of the electorate. Democrats, in contrast, appeal to reason with their long-winded explorations of policy options for a complex world...

...We can explain how Republicans exploit frames, phrases, and fears to trick Americans into supporting policies (such as the "war on terror" and repeal of the "death tax") that damage the national interest for partisan advantage...