

An Introduction to Argument Mapping

This course on *Religion, War and Peace in Early Modern Europe* has several objectives, but one of the most important is to hone our critical thinking skills by examining the debate among Christians over what God thinks about war. To do so, we will be reading the arguments put forth by a dozen thinkers throughout the past one thousand years. All of them had a particular point of view on the question, and our goal is to see what each believed, how their historical context shaped their beliefs, how they tried to convince others of their belief, how their particular belief related to the broader debate over war and religion, and how much of an impact their beliefs had on history more generally. To answer these questions, we must confront the arguments they make, and the arguments scholars make about them. Argument mapping will be the tool we use to facilitate this exploration.

Here is one (modern) argument on the subject that we will be looking at over the course of the first week of classes. Before going on to the rest of the argument map tutorials, read through it and see how well you understand the argument it is making. Undoubtedly you understand the gist of the passage, but how clearly do you understand the argument in its details? Write down the answers to the following questions (to hand in at the second class meeting).

1. How many different points of view are being discussed here? What are they?
2. What is the pacifists' main conclusion presented in this passage?
3. How many reasons are there to believe this conclusion? What are they?
4. What are the objections Lackey raises to the main claim?
5. What reasons does he give to support these objections?
6. What do you think of this debate? Do you find Lackey's objections convincing? Why or why not?
7. Finally, how easy did you find it to answer these six questions? If it was not easy, what made it difficult?

Excerpt from Lackey, *Varieties of Pacifism* in Evelyn Asch and Sharon Walsh (eds.), *The Just War: A Wadsworth Casebook in Argument*, (Heinle, 2003), pp. 156-157.

One simple and common argument for pacifism is the argument that the Bible, God's revealed word, says to all people "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13). Some pacifists interpret this sentence as implying that no one should kill under any circumstances, unless God indicates that this command is suspended, as He did when He commanded Abraham to slay Isaac. The justification for this interpretation is the words themselves, "Thou shalt not kill," which are presented in the Bible bluntly and without qualification, not only in Exodus but also in Deuteronomy (5:17).

This argument, however, is subject to a great many criticisms. The original language of Exodus and Deuteronomy is Hebrew, and the consensus of scholarship says that the Hebrew sentence at Exodus 20:23, "Lo Tirzach," is best translated as "Thou shalt do no murder," not as "Thou shalt not kill." If this translation is correct, then Exodus 20:13 does not forbid all killing but only those killings that happen to be murders. Furthermore, there are many places in the Bible where God commands human beings to kill in specified circumstances. God announces 613 commandments

in all, and these include "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. 22:18); "He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord . . . shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall stone him" (Lev. 24:16); "He that killeth any man shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 24:17); and so forth. It is difficult to argue that these instructions are like God's specific instructions to Abraham to slay Isaac: these are general commandments to be applied by many people, to many people, day in and day out. They are at least as general and as divinely sanctioned as the commandment translated "Thou shalt not kill."

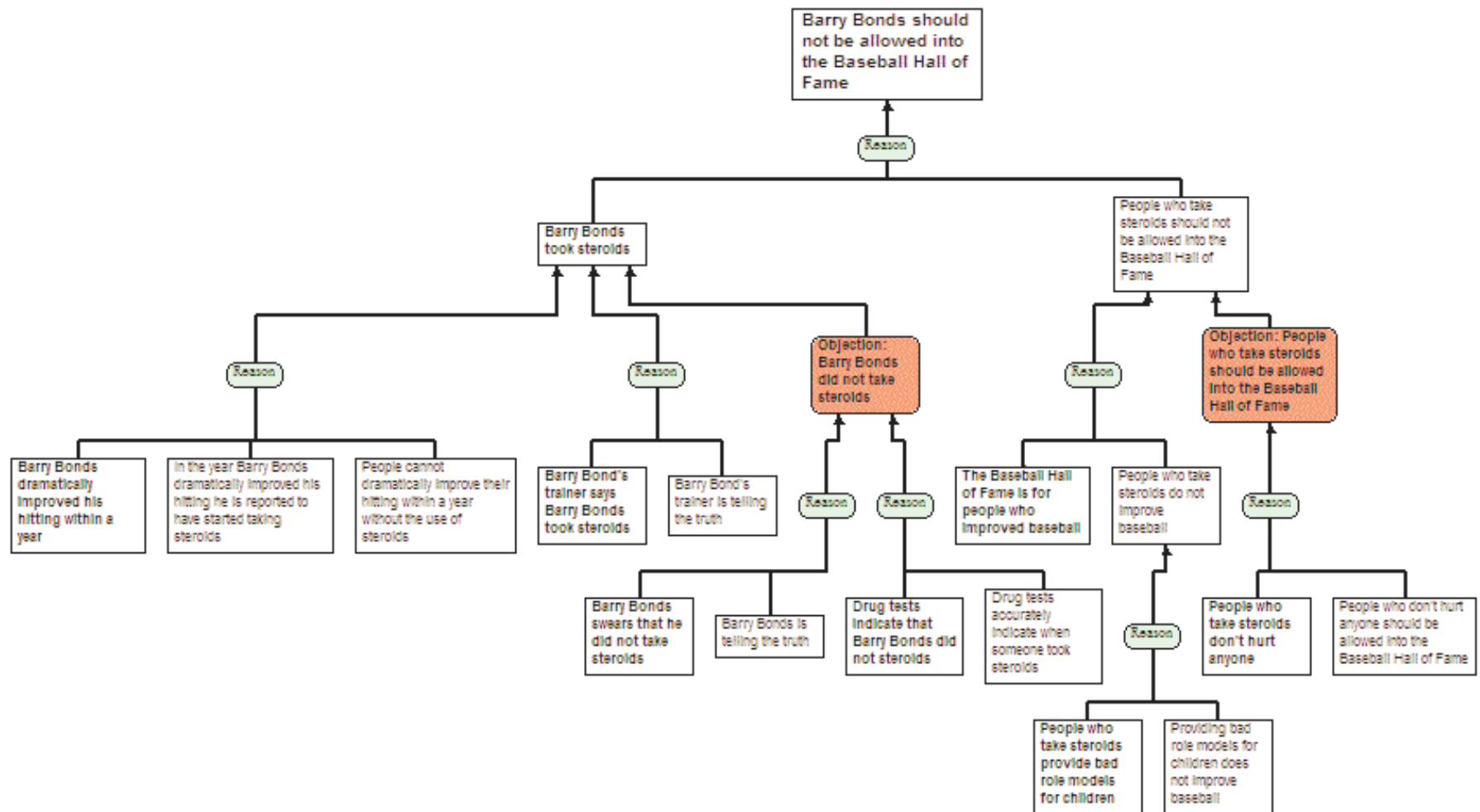
There are other difficulties for pacifists who pin their hopes on prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible. Even if the commandment "Thou shalt not kill," properly interpreted, did prohibit all types of killing, the skeptics can ask whether this, by itself, proves that all killing is immoral. First, how do we know that statements in the Hebrew Bible really are God's word, and not just the guesses of ancient scribes? Second, even if the commandments in the Bible do express God's views, why are we morally bound to obey divine commands? (To say that we will be punished if we do not obey is to appeal to fear and self-interest, not to moral sentiments). Third, are the commandments in the Old Testament laws for all people, or just laws for the children of Israel? If they are laws for all people, then all people who do not eat unleavened bread for Passover are either deluded or wicked. If they are laws only for the children of Israel, they are religious laws and not moral laws, since they lack the universality that all moral laws must have.

Finally, the argument assumes the existence of God, and philosophers report that the existence of God is not easy to demonstrate. Even many religious believers are more confident of the truth of basic moral judgments, such as "Small children should not be tortured to death for purposes of amusement," than they are confident of the existence of God. For such people, it would seem odd to try to justify moral principles by appeals to religious principles, since the evidence for those religious principles is weaker than the evidence for the moral principles they are supposed to justify. . .

This is a good example of what we will be doing for a significant part of the term – looking at the various arguments Christians make about what God wants them to do regarding issues of war and peace, understanding them, and critiquing them. I do not expect (or even desire) the class to come to any consensus on the matter, but it is important that we ask the questions, and think through the answers we find. The question of the proper relationship between war and religion is just as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago, witness the return of 'wars of religion' in the last decade or more.

What Are Argument Maps?

Argument maps are just that – maps of arguments that allow us to visualize the logical structure of an argument. Argument maps allow us to see how each part of an argument relates to every other part – how the main conclusion is supported by reasons, which in turn are supported by their own reasons, which in turn are supported by *their* own reasons, and so on. Here is a relatively simple example of an argument map:



Why Use Argument Maps?

We will be using the technique of argument mapping because it has many advantages.¹ By representing the structure of arguments spatially, argument mapping takes advantage of our visualization skills, our ability to locate things in space. After learning the few rules of argument mapping, it becomes easy to literally ‘see’ how an argument is structured and to navigate that argument quickly. It becomes easy to focus on one part of an argument while keeping the overall structure in mind, and it allows us to shift easily from our point of focus back to the overview. Large arguments which take up pages of prose and whose pieces are too many to be stored in our short-term memory can be summarized in a single argument map. We can then analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the argument much more quickly than by jumping back and forth between those many pages of text. The more complex the argument, the greater the advantage of viewing it in map form. After you have read through a text, you can map out the author’s argument and this becomes an excellent tool for review. From a critical thinking standpoint, the rules that argument mapping follow make it relatively easy to confirm an argument’s logical strength and soundness – it is easier to judge whether a claim is true or not with argument maps than by relying on other methods. Using argument maps in our own work strengthens our logic and makes our arguments more convincing, while allowing us to more easily see the flaws in the arguments of others. This is more than just a debating tool, however, for it encourages us to be intellectually honest with ourselves.

More academically, argument mapping helps us get more out of college. Higher education is fundamentally about arguments. Not the screaming and yelling kind (or at least not usually), but the kind of debate that seeks to find ‘Truth’ and answers to important questions. The discipline of History, for example, is not merely about memorizing facts about the past. More important is how those facts are to be interpreted; this is what professional historians do, debate various interpretations of the past. What do these historical ‘facts’ mean? What do they say about the past and about us today? So too in other fields. The topics may differ by academic discipline and subfield, but the underlying process is the same: scholars try to convince each other that their views are correct by advancing complex arguments for their particular point of view, by refuting opposing claims, and by trying to convince others that their interpretation of the facts is best. And not just scholars, but students as well. The liberal arts in particular emphasize the importance of you engaging in such debates in a variety of fields, to make connections between them in order to grow intellectually and expand your horizons. Argument mapping is a generic enough technique that it can be applied as easily in the natural sciences as it can in philosophy or history or economics. Argument mapping was, in fact, created by a group of Australian philosophers, scholars whose academic specialty

¹ For a fuller discussion of argument mapping and its utility, see Paul Monk and Tim van Gelder, “Enhancing our Grasp of Complex Arguments” at <http://www.austhink.org/monk/Fenner/Fenner.htm>.

is critical thinking. More information on their Reasonable project and their software (Reason!able and the new Rationale) can be found at www.austhink.org and www.austhink.com.

Finally, life is full of arguments. Argument mapping is an example of the use of ‘informal logic,’ that is to say, the type of logic that we come across all the time in the ‘real world’ – though the past worlds we will read about were just as real as our own. Read a newspaper op-ed piece and you encounter arguments; turn on the TV news (or an advertisement) and you hear arguments; listen to a politician campaigning for votes, or a salesman giving a sales pitch, or a preacher thundering from the pulpit, or an employee negotiating a raise with their boss, or a child pleading with its parent, and you will very quickly hear arguments being advanced and critiqued, defended and rebutted, embraced and rejected. What unites all these cases is argument – a claim and reasons to believe that claim. Argument mapping will help us elucidate the process by which all these arguments are made. Argument maps simply formalize what we already do implicitly, and, unfortunately, often inadequately.

Our discussion of argumentation starts with three fundamental assumptions:

- 1) A claim made in an argument is *not* automatically true. Whether it is true or not depends on the strength of both its logical structure and of its reasons.
- 2) Many arguments will be presented throughout the semester, and it is likely you will disagree with at least a few of them. This is fine, but the grades you receive, the respect your arguments will earn from your peers, and the persuasive force your beliefs will have on others more generally will be based on how logically and articulately you support your claims. Everyone may be entitled to their own beliefs, but in higher education not every belief is entitled to equal respect if it fails to abide by the universally-accepted rules of good argument. This means valid logic and sound evidence.
- 3) Do not assume that the examples I offer here and in class reflect my own beliefs. We should always keep an open mind, as even the most repugnant argument offers us the opportunity to learn.