

Argument Mapping 8: Making a Claims Table

We see how, even with short texts, it is not always a simple process to figure out *exactly* what an author's point is and how they support it. The various parts of their argument get jumbled together too easily and our expectations are frequently overturned by their many unstated assumptions. In short, we can only discover what people are (and were) really thinking if we look very carefully at what they say and try to reconstruct their argument for our own understanding. Further, we cannot decide whether we agree or not with their conclusions until we evaluate the validity and strength of their argument. We cannot judge them until we know *exactly* what they are saying!

Here is a technique that is the middle man between the argumentative prose we read and the argument map that we can fully understand. This method consists of marking up a copy of the argumentative text itself, writing down each of the main statements being made in a claims table, and then transferring these statements into an argument map so that it can be understood and evaluated appropriately.

STEPS

1. Determine which parts of the text (if any) are an argument.
2. Mark up argumentative text – identify indicators, conclusions and reasons.
3. Convert claims table into argument map

1. Find the Argument

Read the text to see if it is making an argument, i.e. attempting to prove a statement true by offering supporting evidence. Many texts may only be *asserting* something without evidence (e.g. a belief or opinion) or *illustrating* or *describing* or *explaining* or *entertaining*, or *defining* or doing *something other than* supporting a claim with evidence (our definition of an “argument”). Within a single document there may even be a combination of both argument *and* non-argument, e.g. ¶s 1-3 introduce and describe the context while the argument only starts in ¶ 4, or maybe an argument is started but the author then switches to an explanation instead of providing reasons to believe the statement true. If there is no argument anywhere in the text, we will need to use different techniques to analyze the document.

If the text (or part of it) *is* presenting an argument, get the gist of that argument and write down the conclusion (i.e. the main claim the author makes) in a single sentence.

- Make sure you understand the prose used
Make sure you understand what exactly is being said and look up any unknown words, people or places in a dictionary or reference source – many arguments hinge either on specialized terminology or understanding the deeper significance of the examples.
- Paraphrase each sentence
If you are having trouble understanding a particular paragraph, paraphrase each sentence, i.e. put it in your own words, without changing the meaning significantly. Write them down in the margin or on another piece of paper and then figure out how they relate to one another. Remember to always ask “What is this text *doing*?” as well as “What is this text *saying*?”

2. Mark up the text

Once you've identified which parts of the text are making an argument, go through it sentence by sentence in order to better see its structure. There are several things to do for this step:

- Circle indicator words

Recall that a good writer will use transitions to signal to the reader when they are moving from one part of the argument to another, in order to help us understand the structure of their argument. We circle all such indicator words when we come across them. Words that indicate that the author is about to make a **conclusion** (abbreviated as C) include: *therefore C, so C, hence C, thus C, consequently C, which proves C, conclude that C, implies that C, infer that C, follows that C, demonstrates that C*, etc. Other words indicate the author is giving a **reason to believe a conclusion(C) is true**. Each reason is made up of one or more premises – P. Such indicators include: *C because P, C for P, C since P, C follows from P, C firstly P, C the reason being P, regarding C, P* etc. Use your judgment, however, because these words do not always indicate a reason (especially *since* and *because*). They may instead serve as an indication of time (*since*) or, in the tricky case of *because*, sometimes as an explanation. Note that an explanation says *why* a conclusion is true, whereas an argument's reason provides evidence that tells you the conclusion itself is true (the *why* is immaterial to the structure of the argument) – “An argument is how we know, an explanation is why it's so.”¹ To give an example, the statement “Fray Antonio wanted a Crusade because he hated Muslims” is an explanation that *assumes* that Fray Antonio wanted a Crusade, but it is not necessarily *providing evidence* that he wanted one, only giving a reason as to *why* it may be true – it is possible, for example, that as a hater of Muslims, he would not want to be contaminated by coming into close proximity to any of them. On the other hand, the following sentence does provide a reason: “We know Fray Antonio wanted a Crusade because he wrote a letter telling the Marquis to reconquer Jerusalem.” Follow the tips given in Tutorial #3 to determine which is which.

Not every part of an argument will necessarily be signposted with indicators – sometimes you have to figure out whether the next sentence or phrase or paragraph is a continuation of the reason/conclusion, a new reason, a new claim, or irrelevant to the argument altogether.

- Eliminate irrelevant prose

If you want, you can also ~~cross-out~~ text that does not contribute to the argument, e.g. text that describes or explains a term, provides background information, gives an illustration or example, summarizes, etc. Not that this isn't important information (so don't obliterate it), just that you don't need it when trying to figure out the structure of the argument.

- Underline/highlight conclusions and make a Claims Table

Now that we have the indicators identified, we can determine which parts are conclusions and which are reasons.

¹ To add more confusion, the indicator *because* could be both an explanation *and* a reason – it will depend on whether the author intended it to serve as an explanation, a reason, or both.

Using the indicators and logic as a guide, underline or **highlight** each conclusion and number it in the margin. Then, on a blank piece of paper, make a list of each of these conclusions paraphrased in your own words if necessary – simplify long sentences into a true-or-false statement (not a question), but be sure that you are not changing the meaning in the process. A sample claims table might look like this:

Number	Lines	Statement	Part of Arg	Case
1	3-5	The Marquis should stop fighting the French	Conclusion	FrayA
2	6-8	God does not want Christians fighting each other	Reason	FrayA

- [Bracket] reasons in text and add to Claims Table
As you identify a conclusion, mark the reasons for that conclusion as well – they’ll often be right next to each other, divided by the indicator word or phrase. Put each reason in [brackets] and number each. Paraphrase each of these and add them to your table as well. Note that bracketing the reasons in a piece of prose is not the same thing as bracketing a statement in an argument map, where brackets indicate an unstated assumption.
- Determine and label the main conclusion
Now that you have identified all the pieces of the argument, you need to put the puzzle together: what is the main point of the argument? You may have to choose between several possible conclusions; a complex argument will likely have many intermediate conclusions, but will usually have only one (or at most a few) main conclusion(s).² How can you tell which is the conclusion?
 1. If the document has a title, this will often suggest the main conclusion.
 2. The main conclusion is also usually a controversial issue – why would an author waste his/her time arguing for something that everyone already agrees with?
 3. Conclusions are often, but not always, stated early in the text, or else at the end of the text in a concluding passage.
 4. Conclusions are not always the most abstract or generic claim in an argument. Often times a general principle (e.g. a major premise) will be a reason to believe a specific course of action is necessary, e.g. We should execute this witch on trial because the Bible tells us to “Suffer not a witch to live.”
 5. In a structural sense, the main conclusion will be the one that doesn’t serve as a reason for any further conclusion.
 6. Without mapping out the whole argument in advance, you’ll also need to think about the *context* of the document. Why did

² Intermediate or subsidiary conclusions serve as *reasons* for the main conclusion above it, as well as functioning as the *conclusion* of reasons below it. The technical term for this part of an argument is a lemma, and it is identified with both brackets *and* underlining: [John is a boy].

the author create it? Who was he/she trying to convince, and of what? This requires you to consider the author, the audience, and the relationship between them. Authors are writing for a specific reason, often to give a specific message: stop fighting the French, start fighting the Muslims, execute this witch, etc.

7. If you can't find a reason for a claim, ask yourself "What argument or evidence *would* support the conclusion?" and look to see if the author mentions such evidence.
 8. Don't forget to apply the AQ, RR, HH rules. You could try to construct their argument by working your way down: ask the Assertibility Question and this might prompt you to recall a point they made which is actually a reason for this claim.
 9. If you still can't figure out what the main conclusion is, start with the one you think is the main conclusion, assume that it is, and see if you can account for all of the claims made in the claims table. If that doesn't account for all of the claims made, try it with another candidate until you find a structure that makes logical sense (i.e. use the principle of charity to give the author the best argument possible).
- Distinguish author's supporting case from opposing case
As you are marking up the text and identifying its parts, pay special attention to whether each supports the author or not. Each author has his or her own 'case' that they are trying to support, i.e. they have a number of reasons and conclusions that together form *their* argument (what we call the supporting case), and these are usually distinct from the reasons and conclusions of someone who disagrees with them (the opposing case). The tricky part is that sometimes an author will discuss arguments *against* his/her own case. In such cases they're usually not contradicting themselves, but instead they're stating a possible objection in order to refute or rebut it. In such instances, it is important to keep track of which premise or conclusion belongs to which case, so you don't get confused about the author's overall claim.
An author will often point out the **opposing case** with indicator words and phrases like: *some claim P, it is said P, one might argue P, what about the argument P?, but P, yet P...* You might find it easier to keep track of these opposing arguments by marking them in a different style, e.g. opposing conclusions in dashed underlining or **red** highlighting, and opposing reasons/premises in {curly brackets}. Notice that a supporting case's **rebuttals** or **refutations** of the opposing case also have indicators, such as: *but P; however P; nevertheless P; regarding P, still P; all the same P...*

If you are having trouble figuring out the parts of an argument, first make sure you understand what is being said by paraphrasing and looking up any unknown words. Then fill out the Number, Lines & Statement columns first and then try to make sense of them using step 3. If you are in doubt of which is the reason and which the claim, use the "therefore test" – insert the word "therefore" between the two and see which order makes the most logical sense.

3. Convert Claims Table into Argument Map

Now that you have all of the parts of the argument written in your claims table, and now that you understand (thanks to indicator words and logic) how each of these parts relate to the others, you can follow the rules of argument mapping to convert this table into a map.

As you go along, be sure to mark off the statements as you put them in your argument map. This way, you'll not only be certain to fully understand their argument, but you'll also avoid adding unnecessary unstated assumptions.

You should never add a reason if there is no direct evidence for it in the text, or if it is not logically necessary as an unstated copremise, at least when you are creating *their* argument.

Lackey

Finally, we return to the Lackey reading we read at the beginning of the first tutorial. Here's the text once again, now marked up, as well as a discussion of how we make a claims table for it, and then how we convert that claims table into an argument map.

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,

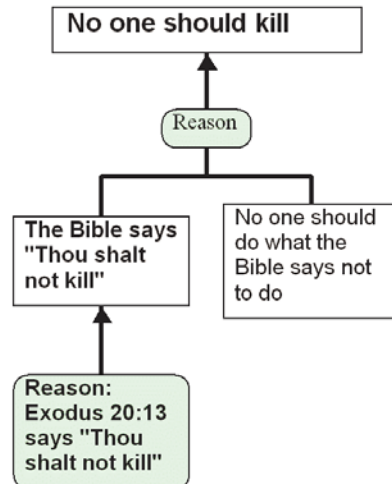
not to moral sentiments). Third are the commandments in the Old Testament laws for all people, or just laws for the children of Israel? If they are laws for all people, then all people who do not eat unleavened bread for Passover are either deluded or wicked. If they are laws only for the children of 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. . .

Let's start with a draft claims table for this argument (which I've simplified).

#	Statement	Part of Arg	Case
1	The Bible is God's revealed word	Reason for ?	Pacifist
2	The Bible says to all people "Thou shalt not kill"	Reason for 3	Pacifist
3	No one should kill under any circumstances	Conclusion	Pacifist
4	Exodus 20:13 says "Thou shalt not kill"	Reason for 2	Pacifist
5	Deuteronomy 5:17 says not to kill	Reason for 2	Pacifist
6	'Lo tizrach' is best translated as "Thou shalt not murder"	Reason for 6	Lackey
7	Exodus 20:13 only forbids murder	Objection	Lackey
8	God commands people to kill specific individuals in many places in the Bible	Objection	Lackey
9	Exodus 22:18 says "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"	Reason for 8	Lackey
10	Leviticus 24:16 says to stone blasphemers	Reason for 8	Lackey
11	Leviticus 24:17 says to kill murderers	Reason for 8	Lackey
12	The Bible is not the word of God	Objection	Lackey
13	The Bible is only the guesses of ancient scribes	Reason for 12	Lackey
14	We are not bound to obey divine commands	Objection	Lackey
15	[We should only obey divine commands out of moral sentiment]	Reason for 14	Lackey
16	[We obey divine commands out of fear of punishment]	Reason for 14	Lackey
17	The Old Testament commandments are only for Jews	Objection	Lackey
18	The Old Testament commands are only religious laws		Lackey
19	Religious laws lack universality	Reason for 18	Lackey
20	It is not clear that God exists	Objection	Lackey
21	[We should not follow rules from something that may not exist]	Reason for 20	Lackey

The argument map for this is surprisingly complicated, and I am presenting a simplified version that rephrases some of the statements. It starts with this simple argument made by pacifists:



In this example, the claim that “No one should kill” (the main conclusion; a call for pacifism) is supported by a single reason, made up of two co-premises. Both of these co-premises therefore need to be true for the conclusion to be true. A single reason is also provided to believe the co-premise that “The Bible says ‘Thou shalt not kill,’” which is a citation from Exodus 20.³ Get in the habit of checking the map: start at the top, asking AQ for the conclusion, then check to make sure that each reason chain below it answers the AQ and obeys HH and RR.

With this argument, one could theoretically object to any (or all) of the four boxes.

Other things to note:

1. The second co-premise is worded somewhat awkwardly, but that’s so that you can see how it follows the wording of the conclusion in order to obey the Holding Hands and Rabbit rules. The second co-premise could just as easily say something like “You should only do what the Bible says”, but the Bible is saying you should *not* do something, which is slightly different – if you changed the conclusion to “You should not kill” the co-premises’ wordings would also change. In short, the wording can vary as long as the concepts are substantively the same and HH/RR apply. In general, you should keep the wording as close to that in the text as possible.
2. The copremise that “Exodus 20:13 is in the Bible,” is pretty obvious – unless of course, someone were to challenge the authenticity of Exodus, or question whether it deserved canonical status... More subtly, what the argument is really saying is that this passage from Exodus is an accurate measure of the Bible’s overall view of killing, e.g. “Exodus 20:13 is representative of the Bible’s view on killing.” You can hopefully see this important distinction (and how Lackey will address this with one of his objections).

³ Technically (i.e. in logic-speak) the reason “The Bible says ‘Thou shalt not kill’” is called a *lemma*, defined thus because it is both a *reason* for the claim above it and a *claim* for the reason(s) below it, all at the same time.

3. Remember that, as a rule, if you have two of the three boxes in a simple argument (i.e. one claim with a single two co-premise reason), you can automatically figure out the missing box by applying HH and RR. Match up the important terms in the two existing boxes, cancel them out and see what terms are left behind to be put in the empty box. However, if you only have one box (e.g. only the concept that “The Bible says ‘Thou shalt not kill’”), you can conclude *any number of things*, depending on what your other co-premise is. You could even conclude the *exact opposite* of the pacifists, if, for example, you believe that people should specifically do what the Bible says *not* to do (for you Satanists out there, I guess). This is why a ‘fact’ by itself is of little use – it requires a broader context and argumentative framework for it to lead to some conclusion.

There’s more to the Biblical pacifism argument though, as you need to ask the AQ (Assertibility Question) of these lower-level reasons as well. We are about as far down as we can go with the citing of the Exodus verse for the moment. The second co-premise, however, requires more justification. We ask the AQ: *How do we know that we should not do what the Bible tells us not to do?* The reason that answers this AQ expands our map to:



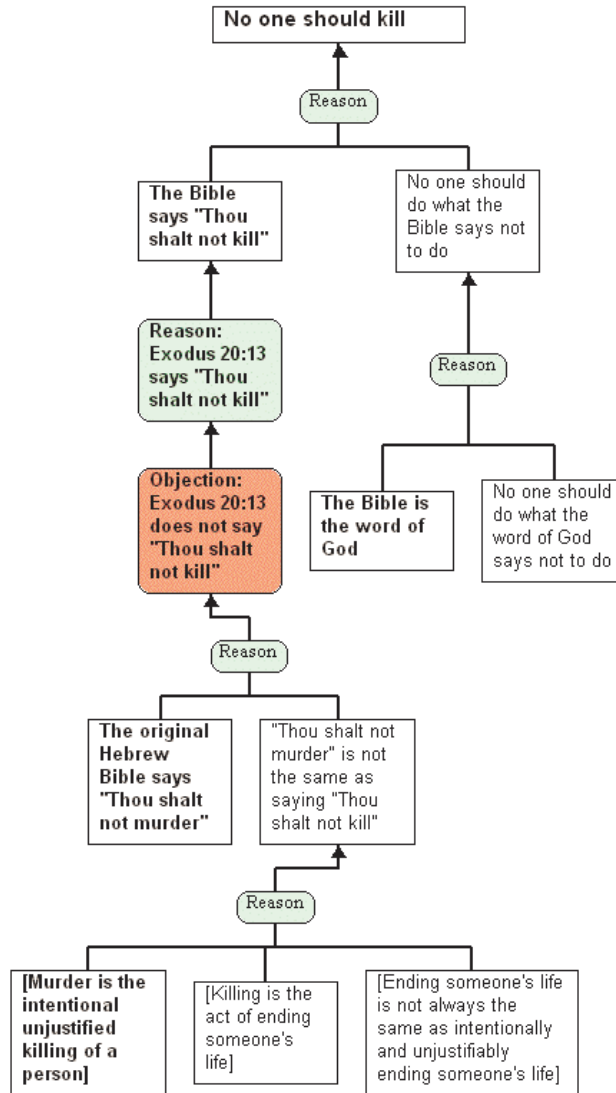
Note:

1. While a Biblically-motivated pacifist’s argument might not initially state this reason explicitly, it is logically necessary and they are most likely assuming it (whether or not they say it outright), so it needs to be included. In this case, the first sentence’s aside of “the Bible, God’s revealed word,...” makes this point. It is also required because, as we shall soon see, Lackey will object to these reasons. If it was truly not stated explicitly, you would put the text in brackets, [].

So now we have the fundamentals of this Biblical pacifist argument. What does Lackey think about it?

He finds six main objections to it. So let's take them from our claims table and map out some of them and see where they apply, i.e. what exactly in the argument he objects to.

Here is the first objection Lackey raises, with its associated reasons:



Notes:

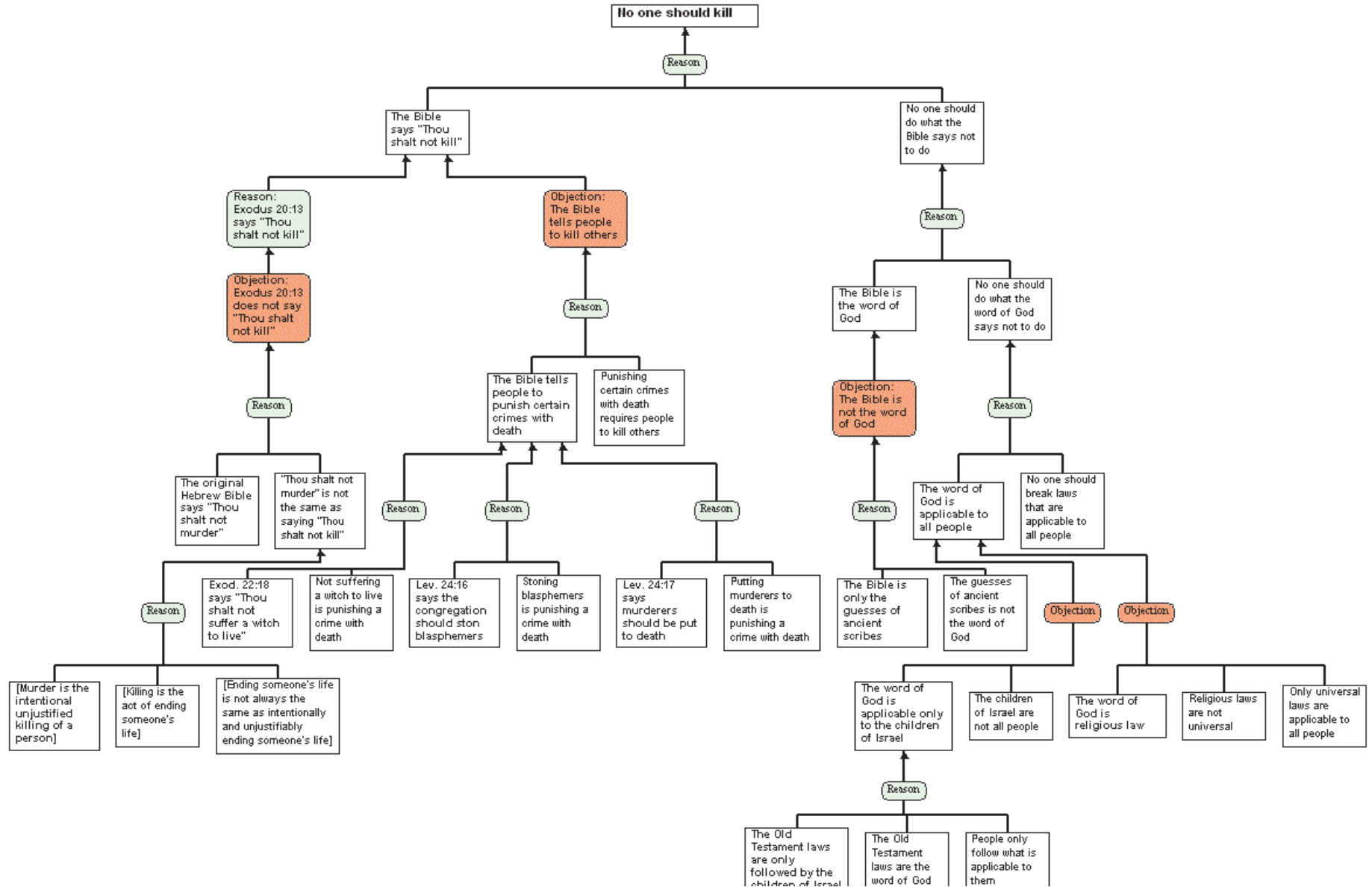
1. Notice that we ignored the fact (as did Lackey) that the pacifists also cite Deut. 5:17. Depending on whether it uses *Lo tirtzach* or not, Biblical pacifists could bring this up as another (independent) reason to believe that “the Bible says thou shalt not kill” (it would go next to the Exodus reason on the second level of the map above).
2. Notice that any objection (or reason) targets a specific claim in the argument, and not the argument as a whole. However, *given the structure of this particular argument*, an objection that invalidates *any* of these reasons will necessarily invalidate them all, because in this argument there is only one reason given to believe the conclusion is true (that single reason having multiple co-premises, *all*

of which must be true). Lackey's other objections will target different parts of the argument, though he could conceivably add a separate, independent objection to this claim on what Exodus 20:13 says.

3. We have added Lackey's unstated reasoning as to how we know that (AQ again) murder is not the same as killing. This seems to be a reasonable interpolation, but it's possible Lackey meant something else. Depending on how detailed you want to get, you could add reasons to these claims as well, perhaps cite some commonly-held definition of murder or killing.

4. You could provide a reason for "The original Hebrew Bible says 'Thou shalt not murder'", which would mention *Lo Tirzach* as Lackey does. We would especially want to include this reason if it turned out there was some contention over whether *Lo Tirzach* actually meant murder instead of killing. Presumably such reasons would consist of evidence that other Biblical uses of *Lo Tirzach* clearly refer to murder rather than killing.

The following map shows several of the other objections and the associated reasoning – I've left out the last objection.



Notes:

1. The claim that “The Bible says ‘Thou shalt not kill’” is supported by one reason and refuted by one objection. However, the reason for the claim is also objected to, so if either one of those objections is valid, the claim is untrue and therefore the conclusion as well.
2. Lackey’s later objections are a bit weaker in that they are speculative rather than empirical. That is to say, he doesn’t provide evidence that the Bible is only the guesses of ancient scribes (though one could demand that Biblical pacifists should provide solid evidence to believe that the Bible is the word of God – this is the old ‘You posit it, you prove it’), or that we should only obey laws that appeal to moral sentiments rather than threaten punishment. Depending on the academic discipline, these may or may not be legitimate objections (the Reasonable authors would say no, they must have solid empirical backing). I put them on the map so you can see where they would go.
3. We’ve had to expand the reasoning (e.g. give reasons for the claim “No one should do what goes against the word of God”) because Lackey is objecting to a specific co-premise supporting that claim. With his fourth objection he’s not objecting to the claim of following the word of God overall, just questioning whether *everyone* needs to follow it or not.
4. There are three specific reasons why one should believe that “The Bible tells people to punish certain crimes with death” (and therefore accept the objection to the argument that the Bible prohibits people from killing). Again whether these specific cases should be included in an argument map will differ by discipline. In philosophy (at least with critical thinking authors), an example is not a reason, but in the discipline of history you may only have a couple of pieces of evidence relevant to a claim, in which case you need to make use of what little information you do have. It’s a matter of how strict your standards of evidence are.
5. There are two separate objections to the idea that “The word of God is applicable to all people”.

In short, what does the argument map show us?

- It reminds us that arguments are webs of reasoning and evidence, made up of chains of reasons, and that the longer the chain, the more opportunities for problems. Conversely, a broader (i.e. wider) argument map usually has more independent reasons to believe the conclusion, and therefore a stronger base for support.
- It shows us the overall structure of the argument, and allows us to focus in on any particular part of it in a second. We do not have to follow the linear order of the argument as it is spelled out in Lackey’s text.
- It shows that there are many different objections, and they are objections to different parts (assumptions) of the pacifist argument.

Just glancing at the large number of objections, this particular conclusion would seem to be in trouble. Given the structure of the argument (only one reason to support the main claim), any one of these objections, if true, would be enough to invalidate the conclusion. Note that this does *not*, however, necessarily mean that the conclusion is irrevocably false. First, you need to weigh the strength of the various objections against the reasons they object to, in order to see whether the Biblical injunction against killing is reason enough to not kill. One could even come up with counter-objections (refutations or rebuttals) to the objections Lackey raised, in which case you'd have to refigure whether the conclusion holds true or not. Also, there are other reasons that one could come up with as to why one should not kill – some might have to do with the Bible, some not at all. If one still wanted to argue that no one should kill, they would start mapping out other, independent reasons, and you would repeat the process. And maybe Lackey would have something to say about these other reasons. And on it goes. This is what people do when they argue; mapping out their arguments allows us to keep track of the many strands of such debates.