

## Thinking Straight Critical Reasoning WS 8-2 (May 20, 2011)

- I. The Chapter 9 reading discusses two types of non-deductive arguments: arguments from analogy and convergent arguments.

In small group carry out the following tasks.

- A. **In small group.** Arguments from Analogy can be criticized by (i) pointing out dissimilarities that lead to a counter argument and (ii) challenging the premises by (a) questioning whether the similarity hold, or (b) extending the premise in a different way. Criticize the following arguments from analogy.

1. *In the politics of confrontation the rules of poker apply. Once you begin to run a bluff, never show the slightest hesitation.*
2. *If a “war on rats” that relies solely on a killing strategy will fail, so will a “war on terrorism” that aims at killing terrorists without removing the “garbage” on which they feed.*
3. *The universe is like a clock. Both are systems of moving parts, set in a precise order, balanced, and having repeated, uniform motion. Since clocks have makers, it is likely that the universe had a maker.*

**B. Plenary**

- C. **In small group** Convergent Arguments provide multiple, independent premises for (and possibly against) a conclusion. They can be criticized by (i) adding further considerations, (ii) eliminating doubtful considerations, and (iii) blunting or promoting considerations. Diagram and evaluate the convergent argument in the following passage.

*Many people who were adopted as children would like to know the identity of their birth parents. But this benefit must be weighed against other considerations before we decide to give adoptees the legal right to this information. Would fewer women be willing to go through with a pregnancy and put their babies up for adoption if they don't have the option of remaining anonymous? Probably so. Furthermore, parents who adopt might prefer that their adopted children focus on them as their full-fledged parents, rather than dividing their concern between their adopted parents and their birth parents.*

- D. **Plenary** discussion of convergent arguments.

- II. Chapter 11 presents a six step procedure for understanding and evaluating deductive arguments.

- A. **In small groups** apply the procedure to the Janda op-ed piece *A case history on the killing of rats and terrorists* listed below, You may submit a write-up based on your discussion as part of your portfolio.

**B. Plenary discussion of the essay**

- C. (Time permitting) apply the procedure to the Lott essay *Stop Subsidizing the Future Rich* You may submit a write-up based on your discussion as part of your portfolio.

Assignment for Tuesday May 24. **Read:** Chapter 12. **Submit:** **Exercise 9.3** #4, #6, #8 #10, #12 **Exercise 9.4** #2, #4, **Exercise 11.1** C3, C5, **Extra Credit Exercise 11.1 B** as applied to **Exercise 10.4, passage 3 (“What if Women Ran the World”) or Exercise 11.1 C2**



**Note on the Portfolio of Arguments.**

Your *Portfolio of Arguments* should consist of at least 10 selections. You need to identify the (main) conclusion in all 10. For at least 7, reconstruct the argument or theory into the standard forms as outlined in the text and provide criticism. For any deductive arguments, clearly indicate whether they are sound (that is valid with true premises) You should attempt, whenever possible to apply the six-step

technique presented in Chapter 11. The minimal form of the item is the copy of the passage in question with annotations in the margins (That is, with the reconstructed argument, including implicit premises or conclusion, a statement about whether it is valid—and criticism focused on specific premises. ) More elaborate criticism should be placed on separate (preferably word-processed sheet) placed after the copy of the passage. The Portfolio is due on the last day of class (Friday, June 3) but will be accepted earlier. You may submit a write up of the two items from today's workshop as part of the Portfolio. **In addition, you may submit a program notebook containing assignments, exams, papers, notes and any additional material that would give me a broader picture of your work in the program. If you do so, the portfolio can be a section in this notebook.**

### **Case history on the killing of rats and terrorists**

*Kenneth Janda, professor emeritus of political science at Northwestern University. Chicago Tribune. Chicago, Ill.: Jul 4, 2004. pg. 9*

Rats and terrorists are similar in key respects: Both are widely despised and feared; both move underground surreptitiously; and both types of vermin can't be exterminated by killing them.

In the case of rats, history proves the futility of killing as a means of eradication. Robert Sullivan's recent book, "Rats," contends that the only way to eliminate rats is to remove their source of food--that is, remove the garbage

The Bush administration justifiably regards terrorists as rats, and few U.S. citizens object to killing terrorists when they surface. That policy seems fitting, but it is also insufficient.

If a "war on rats" that relies solely on a killing strategy will fail, so will a "war on terrorism" that aims at killing terrorists without removing the "garbage" on which they feed.

What nourishes terrorism? Why do terrorists kill innocent civilians in the U.S., Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, France, Indonesia, Spain and elsewhere? Looking at the list of disparate countries suggests different answers to the question. Factors that motivated Protestant and Catholic terrorists during the "troubles" in Ireland clearly differ from the sources of terrorism in Israel.

President Bush did not help us to understand terrorism by describing Iraqi terrorists simply as "cold-blooded killers." After a bombing in Baghdad on Oct. 27, 2003, Bush said, "That's all they are. They hate freedom. They love terror."

That view does not explain terrorist acts in Saudi Arabia, which offers few freedoms to hate. And suicide bombers elsewhere probably don't kill themselves for the love of terror. The reasons why terrorists sacrifice themselves differ from Iraq to Israel to Spain. Bush's dismissal of terrorists as freedom-hating terror-lovers may have been a quick response to a gruesome bombing. But in his address to Congress on Sept. 20, 2001, he explained the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attack with similar words: "They hate our freedoms."

Bush's simplistic explanation is misleading but not entirely untrue. Freedom of expression in our mass media allows for excesses of material consumption, violence and nudity. Many Muslims, among others, view our free lifestyle as impious, if not profane.

But a more thorough explanation of the terrorists' motive lies in the United States' international reach and role: its foreign policies and its global economic and military power. We need to look there for the terrorists' nourishment--for the garbage that sustains them.

What aspects of our policies and power cause Muslim terrorists to hate us enough to take their own lives? Reporters have cited several reasons:

- Despite upholding democracy as an ideal, Washington supports authoritarian governments (e.g., Saudi Arabia) when it serves its interests.
- On almost every important conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the United States sides with Israel.
- American culture, spread worldwide through mass media, tends to infect and smother other cultures. Even advocating that women everywhere enjoy civil and political rights--such as going to school, driving cars, voting and holding office--infuriates some in traditional societies.

Should we change all our actions to appease terrorists? Of course not. But we should review our policies while seeking to understand the differing bases for terrorism--different even in the Middle East.

Yet our nation is ill-equipped to understand our enemies there. For example, only 22 of 1.8 million graduates of American colleges in 2003 took degrees in Arabic. The New York Times quoted Richard Brecht, a former Air Force cryptographer and director of a language project funded by the Defense Department as saying, "Five billion dollars for an F-22 will not help us in the battle against terrorism. Language that helps us understand why they're trying to harm us will."

How we deal with terrorism should be based on an understanding of the issues that feed terrorists in different circumstances.

We can't solve a rat problem by trying to kill all the rats.

*Stop Subsidizing the Future Rich*, John Lott, economist, Texas A&M University.

USA TODAY, 1985

*College Station, Texas.* The basic problem with government subsidized student loans is that they are a subsidy to future high income people. The loans students receive carry interest rates far below what even the most stable corporations pay.

While students, especially those from relatively poor families, do not have a high standard of living during college, they enjoy above-average earnings soon after receiving their degrees. Since the loans are slowly paid off after graduation, during a period of high earnings, subsidized interest rates seem unjustified. Why should factory-workers and secretaries be taxed so would-be managers, lawyers, and doctors can be subsidized?

And subsidized federal loans are only a small part of our educational subsidies. Here at Texas A & M, each student pays only a small percentage of the \$10,000-plus it annually costs the state of Texas. The great majority of these students come from relatively well-to-do families. In the cases of those few who do not, the argument about transfers to future high-income earners applies. It is important to distinguish loans *per se* from the currently heavily subsidized loans.

While *subsidized* loans are unjustified, a weak case can be made for government loan guarantees or possibly loans at unsubsidized rates. This is because of the problems created by current bankruptcy laws, which in some cases have allowed students to rid themselves of educational debt by simply declaring bankruptcy after graduation. Banks may therefore consider student loans too risky.

Unfortunately, these bankruptcy laws probably hurt children from poor families the most. For a student from a poor family, the parents' co-signature does not appreciably reduce the riskiness of the loan, since they do not own enough assets.

The simplest and best solution is to alter the bankruptcy laws to get rid of this problem. Private banks could then handle student loans entirely, with no role played by the federal government.

Evidence provided by Sam Peltzman of the University of Chicago suggests that abolishing subsidized loans will have little effect on the number of people attending higher education. The primary effect will be to end the unjustified taxing of people to subsidize the future wealthy of this country.