

# A Brief Essay on Correct Reasoning with Applications

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*“Opinions are like **assholes**.  
Everyone has one and they all **stink**.”*

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# 1 Prologue

## 1.1 Purpose of Document

This document contains a collection of notes, ideas and concepts intended to aid the reader in identifying and clearly distinguishing between *true* and *false* statements. Recall that a true (or factual) statement is one which corresponds to an event, property or condition of objective reality, and a false one does not. Furthermore, there is only one reality, although there may be multiple opinions about the truth or falsity of any statement. Establishing the tools required to properly separate them is the goal of this paper. Rational discussion about any topic is impossible unless consistently correct ground rules are observed and employed without exception. Some of the required ground rules are identified, analyzed and applied in these pages.

Central to the paragraphs which follow are definitions and examples explaining why there can be only one set of facts but multiple opinions with respect to any search for truth. It is almost certain that the reader will find himself guilty of promoting false positions and conclusions without realizing it and succumbing to propaganda which, in extreme cases, may be deadly.

In short, a true statement either corresponds directly to a fact, or is a conclusion reached by applying rules of valid inference from factual statements. On the other hand, a repeated accusation without supporting evidence is no more credible than a single unsupported claim.

Disclaimer: This document has nothing whatsoever to do with my skin color or life experiences. It is entirely concerned with reasoning and intellectual issues. References to others is not intended to substitute their thoughts for mine, but to amplify or clarify a concept we share.

## 1.2 Motivation

Current journalistic practices are riddled with factual and formal errors unnoticed by many and providing intellectual traps for the unwary, the uncritical or the gullible. Worse, observers without clear insight into the difference between opinions and facts

often simply repeat the errors of others, compounding the sometimes appalling mistakes.

Why are there so many divisive opinions flooding the news media? Recall that if two people have divergent views of the facts at least one of them is WRONG. In disputes you can only conclude that some of these views are actually opinions, not facts. Yet everyone seems to believe that his views correspond to the facts, and that the other guy has been duped into accepting a false idea as true. Every day we see statements made by politicians or journalists which are taken as fact by those who find the claims plausible or consistent with their agenda. For those listeners rigor is unnecessary and annoying. To more critical listeners rigor is absolutely essential and, if missing, is sufficient grounds to invalidate the claim altogether.

We may see reasons for expecting disagreement from an observation of H. L. Mencken that “for every problem there is a solution which is neat, plausible and wrong.”

It is hoped that by revealing the logical (formal) errors as well as the presumptive (informal) errors that populate the airwaves the reader will be better equipped to avoid both.

### 1.3 Strategy

To achieve the intended result, many of these intellectual errors will be described in detail and the means to avoid them will be identified and illustrated with examples and proofs. Many examples from statements made in *mainstream media* and on political programs will be analyzed. Some of these will be familiar to those who have had occasion to witness the rhetoric promoted by major networks.

Here you will find examples of incorrect thinking, fallacies and flat-out lies. You will also find explicit conditions under which statements are categorically or circumstantially true. In each case of error, the actual false statements will be identified and the reason or proof of the error will be given. In order to minimize fallacies arising from *identity politics*, where truth and falsity are intimately wound together in the persona of an individual, rather than by addressing objective facts, only a few examples will involve specific individuals. In general, I do not post any prose from journalists or reporters, as they are much better at talking or babbling than in providing any useful information. Instead, I sometimes will quote from texts by economists or political



statesmen, not to defer to their insight or to substitute their authority to mine, but to acknowledge their mastery of the language, which is far superior.

Many topics involve political issues because they are the subject of so many disputes and disagreements.

## 2 Definitions

It is essential that words used have identical meanings to every party of a rational discussion. Hence, I have included a few definitions of terms which may be critical in debates or even simple dialogues.

### **hypocrisy**

1 : a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not; behavior that contradicts what one claims to believe or feel.

### **idiosyncrasy**

1a : a peculiarity of constitution or temperament; an individualizing characteristic or quality

b : individual hypersensitiveness (as to a drug or food)

2 : characteristic peculiarity (as of temperament) broadly; eccentricity

### **voluntary**

1 : proceeding from the will or from one's own choice or consent a; voluntary action, voluntary cooperation

2 : unconstrained by interference; self-determining, a voluntary participant

### **coerce**

1 : to compel an act or choice; ...was coerced into agreeing, abusers who coerce their victims into silence

2 : to achieve by force or threat; coerce compliance, coerce obedience

3: to restrain or dominate by force; religion in the past has tried to coerce the irreligious— W. R. Inge

### **usurp**

1a : to seize and hold (office, place, functions, powers, etc.) in possession by force or without right

b : to take or make use of without right usurped the rights to her life

story

2 : to take the place of by or as if by force

: to seize or exercise authority or possession wrongfully

### **fallacy**

1a : a false or mistaken idea. prone to perpetrate the fallacy of equating threat with capability— C. S. Gray

b : erroneous character; The fallacy of their ideas about medicine soon became apparent.

2 : deceptive appearance; deception

3 : an often plausible argument using false or invalid inference

In the following exposition, it's important to keep in mind (at all times) the difference between *voluntary consent* and *involuntary consent*. The presence of *force* or *coercion* in a transaction distinguishes events involving the mutual consent of equal partners from the dominant/submissive character of the other. Purchase of a product exemplifies the first, and armed robbery exemplifies the second. Hiding the gun that both parties are aware of changes nothing in this latter case. An illustration can be found in Appendix G.

## **3 Laws of Thought**

Aristotle (384-322 BC) first formulated the three *Laws of Thought* in order to identify the minimal requirements for valid observation or inference. These laws are meant to apply to Aristotelian (binary valued) objects, statements or other entities. In one simple form the laws are presented as *existence* theorems. That is, whether an entity exists or does not exist. They may be applied to an entire universe or a subset, either of which is taken as the *universe of discourse* in a given context. In digital logic they pertain to the binary values '1' and '0' or 'true' and 'false'.

Note that these laws apply to a wide variety of circumstances, although non-Aristotelian logic is also possible. An example of an Aristotelian logic problem might be whether Dragons exist. Given a suitable definition of a Dragon, it is inescapably

clear that either they do or do not exist. No other choice is available or possible. The process of determining the truth given correct premises constitutes a proof.

Non-Aristotelian logic applies to entities which do not have quantitative definitions. Examples include: *bald, warm, tall, etc.* Although Aristotelian logic applies to all sciences and are explicitly or implicitly accepted by all scientists, it is because of the absolute truths they appeal to — not the personal preferences of specific individuals.

Aristotle's laws are subject to misinterpretation and improper application, but these errors are well-understood, thoroughly documented and can be avoided. Applied correctly, they form the basis for every valid position or conclusion on any issue whatsoever. In a sense, they are the golden jewels of rational thought.

### 3.1 Law of Identity

The Law of Identity simply states that  $A$  is  $A$ , or a thing is what it is. The reason for codifying such an observation is to make it possible to distinguish between an identity and an approximation. This is particularly important when analogies are used to reveal some truth. An analogy is NOT an identity. At some level, every analogy will break down and expose the difference between them. If there are no differences at any level, then they are synonymous and identical.

If one attempts to reject the law of identity, it would result in *equivocation* and a consequent contradiction. The law makes it possible to know what one is talking about because its rejection yields nonsense and unintelligible babbling.

The law of identity can be expressed mathematically by the equation  $A = A$ .<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2 Law of Non-Contradiction

This law states that a thing cannot *be* and *not be* at the same time and sense. An object has specific properties which cannot be both present and absent. Note the qualification of 'same time and sense'. This allows for changing states over time and excludes these cases from application of the rule.

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<sup>1</sup>See the Appendix for more details and analogous reasoning methods.

### 3.3 Law of the Excluded Middle

The third law addresses the placement of an entity within the universe of discourse and states that it must either exist or not exist and that there is no third choice. No object can both be and not be and furthermore it *must* be one or the other.

A number of philosophers have suggested that there needs to be a fourth law, often called the Law of Sufficient Evidence. One can construct situations where such a law may be convenient, but restricting the range of necessary entities will usually avoid the need. An example of the concern over insufficient evidence occurs when one or more of the premises are incompletely distributed. This leaves the claimant with the choice of admitting that any conclusion is an opinion only, or confessing, “I don’t know.”

The law of excluded middle often appears in other forms. For example, to state that two propositions or claims are *mutually exclusive* and *collectively exhaustive* is a simple restatement of the law of the excluded middle.

We may, for example, apply this law to the concepts of *theism* and *atheism*. These are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. An attempt to introduce *agnosticism* as a third possibility fails because agnosticism is **not** a third choice, but a refusal to take a position. There still remain only the two possibilities cited.

Every argument or logical derivation will have the above three laws employed with exacting precision, or they are subject to error.

Here is a link to the Wikipedia article on [the Laws of Thought](#).

## 4 Arguments and Proofs

*“Testimony is not evidence, evidence is not proof.”*

— C. Bond

The relevance of the above statement is simply this: One can always find *testimony* to support opposite sides of an issue. One can often find *evidence* to support either

side of an issue. But one can **never** find *proofs* which support both sides of an issue. If a proof is available, it will only support one side, rendering the opposite side false.

A truism in constructing a valid argument to support a claim, besides starting with correct premises and employing only valid inference is acknowledging that the burden of proof is on the claimant. This is concisely summarized by Hitchen's Razor: "What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence." Every *valid* argument is an argument *ad rem*, meaning that there is no attempt to shift the burden of proof elsewhere and all premises and logical steps in the argument are relevant to the topic under discussion.

In the following paragraphs, the requirements for valid arguments will be explained and examples of *true* and *false* premises and conclusions will be given. In some cases, because this exposition is linear, there may be some distance between a claim and its supporting evidence. This is a normal consequence of parsing a multi-dimensional problem into one dimension.

It's worth noting here that an absence of evidence is **not** evidence if absence. That is, failure to find support for a claim does not prove that the claim is false. A famous example is in the assertion, taken as a fact, that all swans are white. This was commonly believed to be true in European countries and only disproved when a species of black swans was found in Australia.

## 4.1 Correct (Verifiable) Premises

Every communication, whether it be a monologue, isolated statement or part of a dialogue must provide support consisting of operating premises which are explicitly stated or simply implied. If any of these are false or unverifiable the entire argument may fail.

## 4.2 Burden of Proof

Attempting to shift the burden of proof is considered by **all** logicians and students of logic as an intrinsic fallacy, and in the case of truth-seeking dialogues is grounds for immediate dismissal of a claim. One cannot refute a claim for which no evidence is

offered, and it is clear that attempting to shift the burden of proof is a devious means to take oneself out of the argument by disclaiming the burden of proof on himself and placing it on another. This act is not only fallacious, it is shameful and dishonest.

An allegation or other statement which is made without providing a valid proof is, and can be, little more than an opinion — not a fact. Think: Jumping to conclusions or on a bandwagon.

### 4.3 Syllogism

The *syllogism*, invented by Aristotle, is one concise model for an argument or proof. It takes the following form (along with an example):

Major Premise	All men are mortal
Minor Premise	Socrates is a man
Conclusion	Socrates is mortal

This example is a correct syllogism. The premises are clearly stated and the conclusion follows from the premises. Many other example syllogisms harbor errors, either in the premises or logic. Here is an example of such an error:

Major Premise	All cats have four legs
Minor Premise	All dogs have four legs
Conclusion	All dogs are cats

The premises are correct, but the conclusion does not follow from them. This is the fallacy of the *undistributed middle*, which will be explained later. Although some of the errors presented here are obvious, there are examples which are very difficult to spot. Some of them will be presented as well.

Here's an example of a political fallacy in the form of a syllogism:

Major Premise	All xenophobes want a closed border
Minor Premise	Trump wants a closed border
Conclusion	Trump is a xenophobe

This contains exactly the same error as the previous example, and provides another example of an undistributed middle, (*i.e.* advocates of a closed border).

Observe that a simple, slight change transforms the false assertion to a true one:

Major Premise	All xenophobes want a closed border
Minor Premise	Trump is a xenophobe
Conclusion	Trump wants a closed border

But this change, although formally correct, relies on an unproven Minor Premise which may or may not be true. There are other reasons for wanting a closed border besides xenophobia.

For a syllogism to produce a valid conclusion, **both** premises must be true. At all times a claimant is expected to state his premises on demand. Refusal to do so is an admission of ignorance or duplicity. In addition, the conclusion must be derivable from those premises.

Consider this syllogism, which arrives at a false conclusion but appears plausible enough to have convinced many political activists to accept.

Major premise	Trump is a liar
Minor premise	Trump is a Republican
Conclusion	You can't believe Republicans

Now here's a false syllogism harboring the same error.

Major premise	A candy cane has stripes
Minor Premise	Candy canes are edible
Conclusion	You can eat anything with stripes

In both cases the error involves sloppy generalization and an undistributed middle.

Here's another example of a faulty syllogism.

Major Premise	All white men are racists
Minor Premise	You are a white man
Conclusion	You are a racist



See if you can find the error(s). In this example, the minor premise is not the problem.

## 4.4 Degrees of Certainty in Reasoning

Syllogisms are not the only means to derive truth from accepted premises, just the simplest formal method. Most valid conclusions are derived by processes involving methods of reasoning whose results vary from conceivable to certain.

*There are degrees of certainty. They range from conceivable to possible to plausible to convincing to conclusive.*

### 4.4.1 Deductive Reasoning

Deduction is the strongest method for arriving at correct conclusions from accepted premises. The syllogism is an example of a deductive form, but more elaborate rational processes are common. If you see someone frying an egg, you can deduce that an eggshell had been previously cracked. This is certain.

Sherlock Holmes was noted for his deductive skills, and they are used by everyone at one time or another. An accepted premise, for example, is that all mortals die. From this, with certainty, you may deduce that you will (eventually) die.

Deduction is the dominant cornerstone of mathematical proofs. It provides no escape from exact reasoning.

### 4.4.2 Inductive Reasoning

This is somewhat weaker than deductive reasoning and relies on compelling, but not conclusive evidence. For example, to conclude that the stronger fighter will win a battle is induced from reasonable assumptions and past experience. However, upsets occur often enough to allow for other results. Here, the preponderance of evidence swings the decision — but without conclusive proof.

### 4.4.3 Abductive Reasoning

Abduction is the weakest form of arriving at a conclusion and involves evidence from only a small sample of relevant cases. An example would be to conclude that an individual is more likely to commit a crime if he is from a poverty-stricken neighborhood. This weak reasoning was only recognized as a distinct form by Pierce in the late 19th century in his search for ‘more likely than not’ conclusion when the evidence is too weak to support a valid proof.

## 4.5 Guilt by Accusation

Besides being the name of a book by Prof. Alan Dershowitz, the title of this section refers to an all-too-common error made by politicians, journalists and Main Stream Media (MSM). It consists simply of making some derogatory statement about an individual or group, followed by nothing at all. It serves to convince the gullible by doing nothing more than making a charge against the victim. In presidential debates these often include racism, sexism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and “you name it”.<sup>2</sup> Under this concept no one is expected to prove, or even defend, his accusation.

If some political activist announces that Trump has told over 20,000 lies, but neither cites a single one nor offers any credible refutation, you are logically entitled to ignore him. He is not a worthy opponent in a rational debate. Rather, he is an example of a hysterical, demented blowhard.

## 4.6 Name-calling, Insults and Diversions

These tactics all fall under the umbrella fallacy *argumentum ad hominem* cited in the next section. It’s little short of appalling that these diversions are still used in modern discourse. Yet we still see political activists resorting to these shameful techniques and the gullible succumbing to them.

Donald Trump has alienated some political opponents by his habit of insulting others

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<sup>2</sup>During the 2016 presidential debates, Hillary invited anyone to add his own accusation against Trump to her list.

with derogatory name-calling, exaggerations and faulty comparisons. However, these practices are commonly used by politicians on all sides of every issue. There seems to be little interest in improving the the quality of rhetoric in current politics, so resolving disputes is the exception rather than the rule.

## 5 Fallacy: Counterfeit of Argument

Since disagreements about facts occur frequently, and at least one party to the discussion **must** be wrong, the error often constitutes a fallacy. Here are a few examples of fallacies which can be found on current news media. More comprehensive lists are cited in the appendix. Even those lists are not exhaustive, as there are literally hundreds of named fallacies.

## 5.1 Common Fallacies

Latin Name of Fallacy	English meaning	Explanation
<i>non-sequitur</i>	It does not follow	The conclusion does not follow from the given premises or logic. This is the flaw in ALL fallacies.
<i>argumentum ad hominem</i>	Appeal to the man	Shifting the argument from the issue at hand to the person who raised the issue.
<i>argumentum ad populum</i>	Appeal to the masses	Using popularity as a substitute for reason.
<i>argumentum ad baculum</i>	Appeal to force	Using threats instead of offering proof.
<i>argumentum ad verecundiam</i>	Appeal to authority	Avoiding proof by deferring to some (alleged) expert or authority.
<i>ab absurdu</i>	Appeal to mockery	Using ridicule instead of refuting a claim.
<i>ipse dixit</i>	“He said it.”	An allegedly factual source, like the Bible, is offered as proof without challenge.

Particularly important are the *non-sequitur* which applies to all fallacies, and the *argumentum ad rem* which is a valid argument and hence, is not a fallacy.

The appeal to authority harbors multiple problems besides shifting the burden of proof. Carl Sagan observes that an expert or authority bears the same burden as anyone else, so this appeal moves the original claimant one step further from a proof, not closer. Consider one argument intended to prove there is a god. It begins with the premise that the Universe could not have existed forever and therefore had a moment of creation. This requires a creator, who we call God. The argument fails, however, because it shifts the question to “Who created God?” Thus the arguer has only moved the question about creation of the Universe to the creation of God. No proof of anything is evident.

A common attempt to invoke *authority* is the appeal to an alleged or self-proclaimed archive of truth such as ‘PolitiFact’ or any of the other organizations which believe

themselves to be modern incarnations of the *Oracle of Delphi*. One would expect such a source to be unbiased and objective. But this has not been the experience of all readers or analysts. In fact, many investigators place PolitiFact on the left. Example: PolitiFact rates Trump’s complaint about the Obama administration sending billions to Iran as a *half-truth* because he said the money was sent in boxes when it was actually sent on pallets. There was no dispute over the amount. PolitiFact also sometimes retracts the ‘facts’ they had previously posted, as was done recently on a “pants on fire” judgment over an interview about Covid-19 on [Tucker Carlson](#). PolitiFact has accumulated a number of retractions which they defend and explain as the results of their ‘ongoing’ commitment to factual reporting.(?) You’d think if they were *that* dedicated, they would have taken the time and made the effort to get things right the first time.

It’s worth noting that the ‘facts’ alleged on PolitiFact are usually obtained by invoking the *appeal to (unnamed) authority* sometimes extending several layers deep. This is why there may be some time lapse between initial postings and retractions.

## 5.2 Faulty Generalization

Imagine a family is on a road trip in the country and the four-year-old spots a cow and announces, “Look! Big doggy!” We can all laugh at the mistake because we understand why it happened — namely, that the child does not yet have the concept of, or a word for, ‘cow’. But this is the same error as is made when a citizen observes a policeman in uniform and announces, “Look! A murderer!” This is a faulty generalization. It is also the fundamental error which leads to *racism*.

I’ve singled out this fallacy because it, along with the *appeal to authority*, is so common in political discourse. It’s a weak attempt to elevate the maxim that a ‘bad apple spoils the whole barrel’ to the level of a universal truth. It maintains that if one apple is bad they all are. Regarding authority, these citations are usually applied to anonymous authorities or self-proclaimed ones. However they manifest themselves, any alleged authority should be identified and bears the same burden of proof as does anyone else.

Note that if an authority has a relevant proof, the claimant can cite the proof without reference to the authority. Also note that citing an authority is not an error in itself,

but only if it is used to avoid the burden of proof. For that case, it is fallacious and can be grounds for rejecting the claim without further discussion. It is equivalent to saying, “I’m not going to prove my point. Go see a (possibly anonymous) authority, and he will prove it for me.” The moral is that if you will not or cannot prove your claim, don’t make it!

### 5.2.1 Generalizations as Syllogisms

Here are a few syllogisms which summarize commonly asserted errors.

Major Premise	Every white person I know is a racist
Minor Premise	I know every white person
Conclusion	Every white person is a racist.

Major Premise	No one I know is perfect
Minor Premise	I know everyone
Conclusion	No one is perfect.

Note that each syllogism is formally correct, but every conclusion is false because the Minor Premise is false. It would be a good exercise to devise a syllogism which survives a critical analysis of the premises and conclusion.

### 5.3 Buzzwords and Phrases

These are common terms which are meaningless because they are stated as objective concepts, but are so subjective in content that everyone means something quantitatively different.

**‘fair’ share** Applied to taxation, but could refer to some form of Marxist *progressive* tax, a flat tax or no tax at all. Note that no one ever **defines** fair share, either through cowardice, duplicity or ignorance, but the expectation is that every listener will fill in the blanks himself, resulting in universal agreement over nonsense,

*we're all in this together* Does not distinguish between the ‘we’ who are benefiting from some situation from the ‘we’ who are suffering from it. Could be spoken by a plantation owner to a meeting with his slaves, or a tyrant to his subjects,

*the American people* This generalization is intended to imply unity when dealing with a divisive issue. It’s also often an example of personification.

*manufactured crisis* Manufactured? By Whom? Crisis? Yes?...No?,

*reimagine public safety* Invariably leads to defunding or eliminating police,

*our democracy* The government of this country is NOT a democracy. It is a Constitutional Republic. In fact, the Constitution, which was ratified by every state, guarantees that every state will have a Republican form of government.<sup>3</sup> The false characterization that we have a democracy was ceded to the Democrats years ago, and has crippled any attempts to defend individuals or other minorities from the crushing weight of agenda-driven political groups. Every form of superiority is subverted to numerical superiority.<sup>4</sup> The word *democracy* or *Democrat* never occurs anywhere in the Constitution. Federalist Paper #10 explains in detail why democracy is a dangerous form of collectivism.

We do, of course, have a *representative* form of government, but painting it with a democratic brush paints over the fact that our Constitution protects minorities from mob rule, whether the mob is called ‘the people’ or anything else.

## 5.4 Weasel Words and Expressions

There are a number of words which ‘talking heads’ use to smuggle a point into an argument. Consider the word: **we**. This, on close look, provides a way to sneak a poorly defined target audience into a conversation<sup>5</sup> with the expectation that the listener will interpret the label as a symbol of unity. Beware when a politician declares “that’s who *we* are”. Another, similar tactic involves a reference to **the American**

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<sup>3</sup>Article IV Section 4. Also note that every session of Congress opens with the Pledge of Allegiance (...to the Republic...)

<sup>4</sup>The meaning has a sinister equivalence to the maxim *might makes right*.

<sup>5</sup>Or a rant, diatribe, sermon. etc.

**people.** These are not only personifications and metaphors, they are presumptuous and arrogant. Further, they are not only unsupported, but also unsupportable.

A common case of the abuse of language can be found in the words *authorized* and *qualified*. It is commonly assumed that electing or appointing an official, which authorizes him to carry out his tasks, somehow qualifies him to do so. This is false. Consider Hunter Biden's appointment to the Board of Directors at Burisma.

Another example involves swapped concepts. Consider that man is a *social* animal. Now compare this with man is a *herd* animal. The first is true, the second is false. But notice that the the first is a premise underlying a focus on *unity, conformity* and certain forms of equality, when the actions promoted actually imply the second. Observe that men do spontaneously form groups with shared interests, but this does not justify forcing *all* men to adopt the same behavior on all subjects.<sup>6</sup>

## 6 Oxymorons

An oxymoron is a concept which includes contradictory terms, hence is categorically false. It is often used as a euphemism to confound the meaning of the commonly used term. The examples shown here should be familiar to anyone aware of current journalistic practices.

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<sup>6</sup>An Asian proverb holds that the 'nail' that sticks up will soon be hammered down.



<b>Valid term</b>	<b>Oxymoronic euphemism</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
illegal migrant	undocumented immigrant	You cannot immigrate without some documentation, including having applied for citizenship.
party crasher	uninvited guest	If you weren't invited, you are NOT a guest.
drug dealer	unlicensed pharmacist	If you do not have a license you cannot be a pharmacist.
illegal act	victimless crime	If there is no victim, there is no crime. "The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute." J.S.Mill
riot	peaceful protest	Although it should be obvious that these terms refer to drastically different events, the propaganda riddled agenda displayed by interchanging them seems to escape many.

Regarding the alleged equivalence of a riot and a peaceful protest, we see absurd mixing of the two concepts depending on the purpose of the comparison. The first error here is that a protester is an individual motivated by a grievance and a rioter is an individual who engages in looting, vandalism, trespassing and other crimes. One is characterized by his motives, the other by his actions.<sup>7</sup> Peaceful protests do not create victims — riots do.

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<sup>7</sup>It's possible to argue that World War II was 'mostly peaceful'. But toward what end?

## 7 Refuting an Argument

### 7.1 Lack of Evidence

There is clearly nothing to refute if no evidence supporting a statement has been made. This is the essence of Hitchen's Razor. But that's not the only situation that is outside the realm of rational argument.

### 7.2 Disproving the Assertion

This may involve proof that a premise does not hold or that an error had been made in reasoning. Uncovering a fallacy is one reliable tactic.

### 7.3 Opinions vs Facts

Opinions are another case where refutation is unnecessary (or even impossible). If you state that chocolate ice cream is better than vanilla, you are expressing an opinion that no one can, or needs to, refute. You are, as the saying goes, entitled to your own opinion. You are not, however, entitled to your own facts. Facts correspond to objective reality and are the same for everyone, opinions are subjective.

### 7.4 Metaphors, Analogies and Similes

Another case involves metaphors. A metaphor attempts to equate one situation with an allegedly analogous one. To say that an election was *stolen* is to treat an election as if it were some kind of tangible entity, when it obviously is not. Arguing about this is an almost comical abuse of language. Yet, you'll find heated exchanges between those who succumb to the fallacy and somehow imagine that their arguments about a metaphor have some connection with real issues. It's interesting that not only did Trump declare that the 2020 election was *stolen*, Hillary made exactly the same claim in 2016. My election was [stolen!](#)

In summary, when disputes occur, political or otherwise, rational discourse is impossible if any of the following flaws in the arguments exist:

1. No evidence is forthcoming,
2. The matter under discussion is an opinion,
3. Words are used with different or ambiguous meanings by the parties,
4. The subject is a metaphor, analogy or simile, rather than a real issue,
5. The matter at hand is an unsupported claim or allegation,
6. Consecutive statements are *unhinged*.
7. A fallacious argument is offered as some kind of proof.

It would be foolish to engage in any discussion suffering from these defects. Still, we see endless debates<sup>8</sup> raking over the same territory day after day.

Now, metaphors and analogies have their place in a debate. However, it is understood that these devices are NOT identities and, if explored beyond narrow grounds, will eventually depart from the original subject matter and fail accordingly.

## 7.5 Fraudulent Concepts

It is fairly common for the political left to reject Republican ideology as simply the rantings of groveling Trump surrogates. The fault with this description starts with noting the long existence of the party before Trump. Republican ideology began even prior to the ratification of the Constitution. It's a much more accurate characterization to say that many Republicans agree with the policies Trump advocated, even if it meant they had to put up with his idiosyncrasies (of which there appear to be many).

The Republican party platform clearly states its position on major political issues and has nothing whatsoever to do with *identity politics* or any kind of blind hero

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<sup>8</sup>Usually screaming matches!

worship. It is an issue-driven ideology which places the individual citizen over the state, unlike the Democratic party platform which places the state (or majority) over the individual. Those who are familiar with monarchies often style the difference as one between a citizen and a subject. In other words, Trump's position and actions on lowering taxes, reducing government controls and regulations, prison reform, fixing the V.A., securing the border, defeating ISIS, etc. are favored by many Republicans who don't seem put off by his being a jerk.

### 7.5.1 The 'Dry Well'

A **well** is normally taken to be a source of water (or oil, or ...), but if it is dry it will not perform its intended function. If you are dehydrated, a dry well is equivalent to no well at all. If you are interested in buying land that the seller assures has a well, but doesn't tell you it is dry, you are being defrauded.

### 7.5.2 Bad Checks

A check is used to pay a bill or complete a financial transaction. But a check written on a non-existent or depleted account is fraudulent and will not serve its expected purpose. Writing bad checks is not only fraudulent, it is criminal.

### 7.5.3 Illegitimate Votes

Voting harbors a number of opportunities for fraud — but not just from unauthorized ballots. A vote delegates authority from a voter to a candidate or proposition. However, if a voter casts his ballot for something he has no legitimate authority to delegate, his vote is not valid. Legal?—maybe, but legitimate?—no!. An example from philosophical literature is whether legislators, worried about overpopulation, vote to drown all babies born in the next five years. Ridiculous? Maybe. But recall that the Governor of Virginia, Ralph Northam, recently triggered a dispute about allowing the killing of babies who survived abortion if the mother and doctor agree — [Abortion or Infanticide?](#)

So not only is there an issue about whether a voter has voting privileges<sup>9</sup>, but also whether he has any legitimate authority to delegate specific powers.

*You cannot delegate authority you do not possess.*

Note that a government whose legitimate authority is derived from the consent of the governed cannot exercise illegitimate power.

*You cannot derive power from a source that does not possess it.*

Hence, like the ‘dry wells’ or ‘bad checks’, votes are subject to misuse and abuse. Specifically, they are logically restricted to those issues over which a voter has legitimate authority. It cannot include acts which result in the infringement of the rights of others.

In a pure democracy there is no restriction on the issues brought before voters. A major objective of Democrats is the authorization of the maximum number of voters, which provides them with maximum power. This amounts to an absolute tyranny.

*In a democracy you can do anything you want to your neighbor, as long as your gang is bigger than his.*

— Ayn Rand

It’s not surprising that democratic campaign slogans echo the message: *Stronger Together*. Contrast this with the Libertarian slogan: *Don’t hurt people and don’t take their stuff*. In the first slogan the appeal is for power, in the second the appeal is to morality.

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<sup>9</sup>The ‘right’ to vote is a legal right or conditional privilege, not a natural right.

#### 7.5.4 Universal Suffrage

This term has always been used to promote voting rights for special interest groups. We are supposed to understand that *universal* does not mean universal or total privileges for every citizen. Although voting privileges now extend to all races and genders, there has been and always be an exclusion based on age. Universal suffrage and universal healthcare are terms which do NOT and cannot mean what they suggest. We are supposed to infer the basic premises behind them even though these premises aren't stated. In short, no country on earth has ever implemented *universal* suffrage or *universal*<sup>10</sup> healthcare.

This doesn't mean the terms are useless or that the concepts they represent are unusable, but it does mean that if either term is invoked to motivate some government action, the terms must be suitably qualified and the advocate must explain how it is that he expects to accomplish what no nation on earth has ever succeeded in doing.

## 8 Common Political Fallacies

Politics is a science. As such, it is subject to the same requirements for correct premises and valid inference as is any other science. Note that *majority rule*, as exemplified by Democracies or collectivist governments do **not** fit the scientific model, because they are not based on self-evident principles, but on numerical superiority. It is often invoked by asserting *the will of the people*, a tactic which has historically led to genocide, slavery and the persecution of minorities.

### 8.1 Is *accountability* a Lost Concept?

The concept of accountability is used to attach 'praise' or 'blame' to persons whose actions are laudable or contemptible, respectively. It has no transferable moral significance otherwise. No one is responsible for the actions of his ancestors or others who happen to share the same profession unless they were voluntarily engaged in similar acts meriting moral appraisal.

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<sup>10</sup>Bernie Sanders defines this as 'cradle to grave'.

No one is responsible for his skin color or any other birth property. Responsibility and accountability refer to voluntary actions. Matters over which one has no control whatsoever are beyond the bounds of forcible modification.

This was in issue during the Geneva Conventions of 1948 where the nations involved, including ours, agreed that no one should be blamed or punished for the actions of others unless he was a voluntary contributor to the events in question.

Moreover, if it is impermissible to punish someone for something he did NOT do, imagine how much worse it is to punish him for something he could not have conceivably done? For example, by what reasoning can one justify punishing descendants of slave-owners for slavery?

Note that the previous paragraphs are not expressions of opinions. They are appeals to the definitions of the terms and are not subject to dispute, unless there are disagreements over definitions.

Before illustrating a valid political system, some common misconceptions and fallacies argued by contemporary politicians and so-called journalists will be examined.

## 8.2 When Does Taxation Become Theft?

There are short answers and long answers to the question. Clearly, when the government plunders its citizens in order to extort money through taxation for purposes it has no authority to engage in, any legitimacy in taxation is lost. When the government spends more money than it has and tries to use debt as if it were a source of revenue, the same applies.

Consider some of the recent spending programs which totally exceed any authorized budget. Specifically, even the first of the recent spending programs (circa early 2021) require in the neighborhood of \$6 trillion. Now observe that the **total combined wealth of all U.S. billionaires is only \$4 trillion**. In other words, if the government confiscated every penny owned by all the billionaires, it would fall dangerously short of satisfying its appetite. So what happens? The government soaks all those it can, it prints excess money to rob the entire population by watering down the value of money by inflation and it borrows the rest so future citizens will get the bill. This behavior would be absolutely unconscionable if engaged in by individuals, it is

multiply so when engaged in by an armed agency exercising monopoly powers over those whose property rights it is duty-bound to protect.

### 8.3 Maxims Worth a Second Look

This seems to be a good place to revisit the insights of others who have observed faulty or self-defeating solutions proposed to perceived problems.

*You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.*

*You cannot enrich the poor by impoverishing the rich.*

*You can't get fat by drinking your own blood.*

*A nation cannot tax its way into prosperity.*

*Democracy: The triumph of popularity over principle.*

*A man of integrity identifies, acknowledges and corrects his errors. A man without it ignores, denies or defends them.*

*Correct a rational person and he will thank you. Correct a fool and he will hate you.*<sup>11</sup>

### 8.4 Redefining, Renaming and Label Swapping

We've all heard of some miscreant entering a store, peeling the label off an inexpensive item, and replacing the label of a more expensive item with it. The plan is to cheat the store out of its revenue by substituting one item for the other. This act is analogous

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<sup>11</sup>The original maxim referred to a 'wise man', but I think the broader 'rational person' applies.



to counterfeiting and is not only deceptive, it is criminal. Yet we see this kind of behavior by politicians and rarely call them out for it.

Sometimes the would-be deceiver claims that his action is simply redefining the label under consideration — ignoring that definitions are not the province of politicians, but of lexicographers. In any debate, both parties are expected to use words in common use by their accepted meanings, not to make up definitions in an attempt to camouflage their faulty arguments with inappropriate alternatives.

A famous illustration of label misuse is the assertion that if we call a dog's tail a leg, the dog now has five legs; clearly an absurd position. Now consider the so-called Infrastructure spending bill of President Biden. When congressmen complained that only a small fraction of the spending was for roads, bridges, transportation and other infrastructure, with the bulk including unrelated items such as education and child care, he declared that infrastructure should be *redefined* to include those items. This is no different than label switching and is both deceptive and false.

Another example is in redefining vandalism to be non-violent, and that violence only applies to human injuries. The 'justification' being that vandalized property can be repaired, without acknowledging that many injuries to humans can also be repaired. Violence implies forcible aggressive action, whether to an object or a person.

The most comprehensive misuse of labels is to call any political shift leftward as 'progressive' or 'moving forward'. The banning of fossil fuels, fireplaces, air conditioners, gas engines or the plea to ban clothes dryers in favor of a return to clotheslines is hardly moving forward. This country has gone from energy independence to a state of abject dependency on foreign countries, which depletes our resources and enriches theirs.

## 8.5 Word Police

Here are a few examples of censorship masquerading as politically correct speech. The focus is typically on removing gender references or the identification of personal relationships. The intent is to remove words and concepts which permit distinctions between individuals in the hope that this will establish interchangeability among all people. This is a flat violation of the First Amendment, and a clear example of asserting illegitimate power.

Canceled term	Preferred choice
male/female	they
parent	grownup
mother	birthing person

## 8.6 Spin Doctoring

There are so many examples of this rhetorical device that it's not easy to order them by importance. However, here's a recent example that is used to promote unwarranted special favors to selected factions and which is acceptable to unthinking listeners.

*We are a nation of immigrants.*

Wrong! We are a nation of citizens, some of whom are naturalized immigrants, but the vast majority of whom are citizens by birthright. This kind of word-smithing is used to promote propaganda when there are no rational arguments serving the same purpose. Note that statements like this are often used to promote illegal entry in this country, as if it were equivalent to legal entry. Notice also that illegal migrants are NOT citizens yet account for millions of residents.

We can arouse suspicion over those who oppose voter ID, for another example, and probably know the *real* reasons for their objections, it makes no difference since they have never attempted to prove their case and have no grounds to expect any belief in it.

## 8.7 Replacing *Principled* With *Popular*

Defending an intrusive regulation by asserting that it is the *will of the American people* ignores the Constitutional restraint on the government or the 'people'. The Constitution, ratified by every state, is the highest law of the land<sup>12</sup> and restricts any legislation or regulation by the federal or state governments to specifically named legitimate acts. Other acts are unauthorized and unconstitutional. Every legislator

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<sup>12</sup>Article VI, Paragraph II.

swears an oath to uphold the Constitution. Invoking popular will does not invalidate or override that obligation. The 9th and 10th amendments are there to prevent this.

Here are a few more examples of fallacious arguments.

- Diverting the argument to unrelated issues with a red herring (*Ignoratio elenchi*)
- Insulting someone's character (*argumentum ad hominem*)
- Assuming the conclusion of an argument, a kind of circular reasoning, also called "begging the question" (*petitio principii*)
- Making unsupported jumps in logic or invoking false premises (*non sequitur*) — ALL fallacies.
- Identifying a false cause and effect (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*)
- Asserting that everyone agrees (*argumentum ad populum, bandwagoning*)
- Creating a false dilemma (*either-or fallacy*) in which the situation is oversimplified, also called false dichotomy
- Selectively using facts (*card stacking*) cherry picking
- Making false or misleading comparisons (*false equivalence and false analogy*)
- Generalizing quickly and sloppily (*hasty generalization*).

## 8.8 Does Capitalism Exploit the Working Class?

No This widely held belief is false by definition and in practice. Capitalism, also called *free enterprise*, forbids the use of force or coercion in any transaction. Furthermore, it is the **only** economic system which excludes force from the marketplace and is therefore the only moral economic system. Recall that the government has a monopoly on the use of force and its presence in the economy is inherently coercive.

Here's a debate between a Socialist and Capitalist over labor cost vs investment with [Ben Shapiro and the Pencil Factory](#). Note that the Socialist argument that the workers, not the investors, should own the business is moot. Workers can and do own

businesses under Capitalism. In this country Kelly-Moore paints and Rosendin Electric are employee owned. There is no restriction under Capitalism in **any** individual or group starting or maintaining a business. Recall that Hewlett-Packard began with two engineers in a garage, as did Apple or Microsoft (scratch the garage on this latter one and substitute lab.)

Socialists universally condemn Capitalism in favor of government ownership of the means of production — meaning total control of the market, employers and employees. They use focused taxation, minimum wages, and a myriad of special laws to assure state control over business even under mutually acceptable working conditions. Strangely, Aron Ra blamed the high cost of prescription drugs on ‘runaway Capitalism’ even though drugs are not manufactured or distributed in a free market. Instead, they are one of the most highly regulated commodities under government control, being subject to the FDA, DEA and PTO. A popular example of ‘failed Capitalism’ is in the enormous price increases by Martin Shkreli of drugs *he licensed*. These drugs were approved for the sole use of his company and all competition was forbidden by the PTO. This is NOT the result of Capitalism, it is the result of government controls. He was ultimately convicted of securities fraud and other crimes for outrageous involvement in Ponzi schemes, but not yet for price gouging.

Fortunately, the benefits and virtues of Capitalism have been defended by no less than John Locke: “Two Treatises on Government”, Adam Smith: “Wealth of Nations”, through contemporary economists including Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman: “Capitalism and Freedom”, F. Hayek: “The Road to Serfdom”. Henry Hazlitt: “Economics in One Lesson”, von Mises: “Human Action”, etc. Their work is dismissed by Socialists who have little to offer but loud voices and unsupportable Utopianism based on an equality more suited to herd animals than to humans.

Here’s a link to a free version of [Bastiat’s “The Law”](#). Here’s one to [Hazlitt’s “Economics in One Lesson”](#). Note that Bastiat focuses his attention on what he calls *legal plunder*, and Hazlitt deals with political fallacies in general. Both reject Socialism for reasons that they clearly discuss.

## 9 Foundations of Government

There could be no better beginning for this section than a quote from The Declaration of Independence for our own country. This document expresses the political beliefs on which this country was founded and contains implicit prohibitions against racism, slavery, crime and other forms of abuse. It was followed by the expanded narrative which is our Constitution.

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*

Although the weakness, ignorance and avarice of elected officials to implement the principles laid out here, it is the failures of men, not the objectives of this creation where lies the blame.

Political discourse is a fertile ground for promoting propaganda and smuggling fallacious arguments into debates. Beginning with the choice of premises which underlie the basis and structure of government and the properties which distinguish a government from other organizations we can immediately discover fallacies and contradictions that are accepted by uncritical observers.

A fundamental observation is that people exist *before* governments. It is inconceivable that the order could be reversed. Nevertheless, some forms of government are based on the belief that governments are imposed on their subjects and are separately legitimized by outside authority. Here are some examples.

**Theocracy** Government is established by and is charged with service to God.

**Statism** The State is the ultimate authority over its citizens or subjects.

**Collectivism** Any government which imposes the will of those in power over everyone by force.

**Conquest** A conquered nation serves the interests of the victor by invoking the *might makes right* justification.<sup>13</sup>

**Constitutional Republic** A government formed by individuals to secure and preserve their natural rights.

**Monarchy** Holds that there is a *divine right* of kings which is passed down by heredity or some other complicated protocol.

## 9.1 The Law

*It is not because men have made laws, that personality, liberty, and property exist. On the contrary, it is because personality, liberty, and property exist beforehand, that men make laws. What, then, is law? As I have said elsewhere, it is the collective organization of the individual right to lawful defense.*  
—F. Bastiat

A central theme in Bastiat's treatise is that the *law is institutionalized justice*. Hence, it must be analyzed with due regard for rational thought and logic. Anything else amounts to just rhetoric or propaganda — worse, it will involve the usurpation of power.

## 9.2 Regarding Democracy

The founders considered and rejected pure democracy as a viable form of government because it grants all power to the majority, or whoever succeeds in being accepted as such. It also encourages or even demands divisive factions as every special interest

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<sup>13</sup>Explained by Rousseau in “The Social Contract”.

group vies for dominance over all the rest. The arguments for and against are memorialized in Federalist Paper #10. Democracies provide NO protection to minorities or individuals who may be victimized at the will of the majority. In some cases majority rule is indistinguishable from mob rule and can be compared to a lynch mob. Witness the existence of slavery in the Confederate Democracy, and its absence from states which honor and secure individual rights.

This fatal flaw in democracy stems from the believe that majority rule is a valid principle for establishing the political relationships among men. It is NOT. It is an unlimited license or blank check by which some faction can exert their authority over all the rest. The consequence has been called “the tyranny of the majority” and was discussed in detail by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*. Here’s a link to this seminal work: [Democracy in America](#). Interestingly, he was not the first to perceive this to be a tyranny.

The foregoing cautions are not a disclaimer that our government is representative. We do use consensus to elect representatives. It’s just that the authority delegated is NOT without limit and the range of action allowed to the elected officials is constrained by the rights of the voters.

### 9.3 Monopoly on the Use of Force

*You can make an act illegal, but you can't make it unjust, immoral or wrong!*

Although this is rarely discussed, a major property of government is its monopoly on the use of force. In fact, this is the primary reason that moral issues arise and that governments may be classified as good or evil.

Although I prefer not to quote others to establish a point, economists and statesmen are often gifted with eloquence I lack. Therefore, I offer the following short excerpt from “The Law” for its direct approach to identifying an evil government:

*See whether the law takes from some persons that which belongs to them, to give to others what does not belong to them. See whether the law performs, for the profit of one citizen, and, to the injury of others, an act that this citizen cannot perform without committing a crime.*

## **9.4 Evolution of Support systems**

Clearly an individual can hire a bodyguard to defend himself from assault, given his right to self-defense. He cannot authorize the bodyguard to attack others or violate the rights of anyone else. Paying for this protection requires negotiation between the involved and parties and in a *Laissez-faire* Capitalist economy requires mutual consent. Similarly, a retail business owner can hire a security agency to protect his property from theft or shop-lifting based on the same rights and the assumption of voluntary consent. He also cannot authorize the security guards to violate any rights of others.

Whenever a group of individuals agree to exercise their rights in concert, they may form a government whose purpose is to secure and preserve those rights. They cannot, however, authorize the government to abuse, abridge or violate the rights of any of their members or of external parties. It is expected that the services provided will be paid for, but unauthorized activities of the government which are outside the bounds of the formative purpose are illegitimate and represent usurpation.

The distinctive property of a government, unlike the other agencies, is the absence of competition. This monopolistic character is managed democratically by the negotiations of representatives. Note that representatives who deal with establishing consensus only operate within the confines of the government charter or Constitution, and cannot operate outside the legitimate constraints associated with its purpose.

## **9.5 Voluntary vs Involuntary**

Only a government rooted in the sanctity of individual rights can be considered voluntary. In all others, some authority or segment of the population will exercise rule over all the rest. Nor can we assume that governments always act in the bet



interest of all. History shows otherwise. Factions are problematic. In all cases they represent opposing interests. But if the rights of all are secured and preserved, no dominance of one over the other can exist.

Thomas Jefferson once put it this way: “Your right to swing your arm stops where my nose begins.”

## 9.6 Legitimate Authority

It should be clear that legitimate authority exists when its power is derived from the rights of its individual constituents. There can be no right of any citizen to delegate authority he does not possess.

## 10 Consistent and non-Contradictory Political Systems

History provides the interested reader in endless examples of governments holding contradictory laws and exercising unjust authority over the populace. The law, even in modern nations, contains unjust mandates, rules without rational bases and traps for the unwary voter or his chosen representatives. This section offers some guidance in detecting flawed legislation with the hope that abuses can be minimized.

Fundamental concepts which motivate this discussion include the difference between voluntary and involuntary compliance, the monopoly on the use of force and the consequences of inappropriate laws. For example, there has been a vocal effort to increase gun controls whenever crime rises. The means chosen are the subject of endless discussion, with 2nd Amendment supporters generally opposed to them.

One argument in favor of outlawing guns is remarkable for its potential proliferation and abuse. Namely, it is often held that it is permissible to outlaw assault weapons because *no one needs them, anyway*. People are rather quick to decide what others do or do not need. But, consider that no one *needs* video games, X-Boxes, tattoos, luxury cars, jewelry, etc. The argument simply reduces to: “If I don’t want it, no one should be allowed to have it”. I don’t think that’s the message intended, but I’ve

never seen it argued.

## 10.1 Premises

All sciences are built on a foundation of obvious truths. Euclid's Geometry, for example, accepts that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. This postulate is one of his axioms. Another is that parallel lines never meet.

In Newtonian physics, his three laws of motion serve as axioms.

Although some conceivable political systems involve opposing factions<sup>14</sup> which inherently lead to class warfare, it is possible to construct a political system which is rooted in consistent premises and, through valid inference, derive a complete system on which a moral government can be constructed.<sup>15</sup>

Our government (that of the United States) is such a system. It begins with the premises required to establish a government — namely, the first premise is that all men are created (read: born) equal. Consider the consequences of this belief. It is understood that the term 'all men' in this context means 'all individuals'. If you accept this premise, then you cannot, at the same time, be a racist. Such opposing views are contradictory and inconsistent. No escape from the contradiction by asserting that these views are offered as opinions only is credible, because the two views simply cannot coexist in the same system.

## 10.2 Equal Rights

A second premise supporting non-Collectivist forms of government is that all men (individuals) are endowed with (born with) equal rights. This is consistent with the previous premise, and leads to conclusions that do not conflict with it.

Before proceeding, it's necessary to make a distinction between *natural rights* and *legal rights*. Natural rights are those that pertain to individuals as humans. They belong

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<sup>14</sup>Marxism: proletariat vs bourgeoisie, Democracy: majority vs minority, Collectivism: state vs individual.

<sup>15</sup>Some specific examples are codified in the *Declaration of Independence*.

to each person, independent of governments or other associations, and independent of time or place. No person or group can legitimately deprive any other individual of his natural rights, although anyone can forfeit his own rights by refusing to honor those of others. In other words, it is possible to prevent someone from exercising his rights but the rights themselves remain.

Legal rights are those granted by other individuals or organizations to selected individuals and are, by their use and application *conditional privileges*. This is in stark contrast with natural rights which are, by their nature, *unconditional*. Examples of legal rights include the ‘right’ to a speedy trial, the ‘right’ to vote, the ‘right’ to drive, etc. All these are clearly *conditional* privileges.

Add to these the so-called *printing press rights* which appear whenever a wish-list is offered as a list of rights. These include a ‘right’ to a decent job, a ‘right’ to a living wage, a ‘right’ to affordable housing, a ‘right’ to universal health care, etc. These are neither natural nor legal rights, but are simply unsupported and unsupportable assertions.

It is easy to distinguish between natural rights, on which our government is based, and other types of rights. Observe that natural rights apply unqualified to every individual whether he is the sole inhabitant of an otherwise deserted island or a resident of a thriving metropolis. Specifically, natural rights provide moral authority to a range of potential actions limited only by the logical restriction that one observes the same rights in others, if any. These are unconditional privileges. Conditional privileges, on the other hand, include all other ‘rights’ and are characterized by demanding benefits for some at the expense of others. It is inconceivable that these can represent the same thing. The following paragraphs dealing with natural rights will compare and contrast these, as well as identifying false claims about them.

### 10.3 Natural Rights

Rights pertain only to the living. One must exist in order to claim to have any rights at all. Thomas Paine made a point of this when he found it necessary to distinguish between the living, the as yet unborn, and the previously departed. Many texts on rights accept that they are granted to man by God. Others are content to regard them as granted by nature, which generally is taken to mean they are obvious and

can be determined by observation. In either case, they are the operating premises which motivate philosophers, politicians, statesmen and others to analyze and uncover further implications of the concept — and spawn a plethora of errors, misconceptions and contradictions, as well as defensible truths and consistent logical consequences.

For example, if you accept that every man has a natural right to his life, you cannot escape the conclusion that he has a right to self-defense. In other words, he may, by right, take all steps necessary to preserve his life; the corollary being that he cannot take any action to deprive other men of theirs.<sup>16</sup>

Further, we find that the only life worth living is the one which an individual chooses for himself. Living as a slave to others is not a life at all, but the compulsory execution of a program laid out by others for their benefit.

On the subject of natural rights, there is some ambiguity about the meaning of *unalienable*. But the explicit meaning is this: A robber can take your property, but not your right to it. In every case, when an innocent citizen has lost his property by force or fraud, he retains his right to repossess it when possible. If someone steals your equipment and sells it to another, the sale is invalid because the property was not owned by the seller.

The only means by which an individual can lose his rights is by forfeiture. One who voluntary abridges the rights of another has no standing to claim rights for himself. That is why it is in the interest of justice and public safety that his liberty may be restricted, which is what incarceration is, or should be, about. In the words of enlightened law enforcement, a criminal is imprisoned AS punishment, not FOR (unspecified) punishment.

The facts are that you can forfeit your rights by your own voluntary behavior, but you can neither take away nor vote away the rights of anyone else. When you ignore his rights and limit his liberty or property, whether alone or as a member of a gang, you are culpable.

So what about dealing with drunk drivers or individuals brandishing weapons? Here you are entitled to invoke the judgment of a rational observer. If you are reasonably under threat you may act to defend yourself. Courts are the ultimate arbiter in such

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<sup>16</sup>Please observe that I use the term *men* and *individual* more or less interchangeably as is customary in English literature.

cases, and this is why a government may engage in law enforcement and may establish a judicial system.

## 10.4 A Note on Reparations

Clearly, the concept of *reparations* is inconsistent with the premise that all men are created equal. Instead, it asserts that some individuals are born in debt to others. Worse, it holds that the descendants of some are obligated to pay a debt to descendants of others — to wit, a man who never held slaves must pay compensation to men who were never enslaved. This is promoted by its advocates as *justice* even though it demands payment from innocent parties to be given to uninjured others, and thus amounts to a doubled injustice.

Furthermore, the idea of reparations is hypocritical. Why? It is based on the notion that a descendant can be held responsible for the bad behavior of one of his ancestors. But do advocates of reparations believe that if one of their ancestors got away with murder they could justifiably be executed for it? No? What's the difference?

Consider also that over 300,000 Union (Free State) soldiers died in order to put an end to slavery in the United States. They lost their lives in the Civil War but won the war, so on what basis should their descendants now be forced to pay reparation? — not for defending slavery, but for abolishing it? And what about the African-Americans who fought alongside fellow Democratic, Confederate soldiers to **defend** slavery? Do they now have legitimate grounds to demand reparations? From whom? Should those individuals who immigrated to this country after the Civil War be responsible for slavery?

Now imagine a *real world* application of this premise. Suppose two women, one black and one white, are in labor at the same maternity ward. Each gives birth to to a son. Under what circumstances does one of the newborns owe a debt to the other? Answer: There are none! Both children just got here. There is no conceivable mechanism by which either could have incurred a debt to the other.

The point here, is that valid premises can support valid positions on related subjects, and that invalid premises are simply wrong and lead to absurdity. Justice, if anything, means getting what you deserve. Can this be matched with the concept of reparations? Note that the Geneva Conventions of 1948 forbid punishing any indi-

vidual member of a group for actions done by other members unless he was an active participant.

## 11 Epilogue

I must confess that I have little confidence that this essay's focus on facts, logic and critical reasoning will influence many readers to re-examine their deeply-held beliefs in religion, philosophy, politics or economics. Such challenges can be painful or even too frightening to consider. I recall a quote from a famous American writer...

*It's easier to fool someone than it is to convince him he has been fooled.*

— Mark Twain

One's basic belief system, whenever and however wrong, too often stands outside the bounds of rational discussion and becomes, instead, the fundamental driver and justification for a myriad of other, equally wrong, beliefs. It's the rule, not the exception, that one who has been thoroughly indoctrinated to accept ideas for which no rational foundation exists, will passionately defend rather than correct them.

Nevertheless, for those readers who seek a rational foundation for their beliefs, and who are willing to correct them when errors are discovered, it is my hope that this essay may be of some small service.

# Appendix

This Appendix provides a glance at several exacting scientific disciplines which can be applied to reasoning in any context. There are counterparts in each which have a direct role in managing facts and avoiding any reliance on personal opinions.

## A Mathematical Version of Laws of Thought

### A.1 Law of Identity

A true statement is true; a false statement is false.

$$A = A \quad ; \quad \overline{A} = \overline{A}$$

### A.2 Law of Non-Contradiction

A statement cannot be true and false in the same sense and time.

$$A \neq \overline{A}$$

### A.3 Law of Excluded Middle

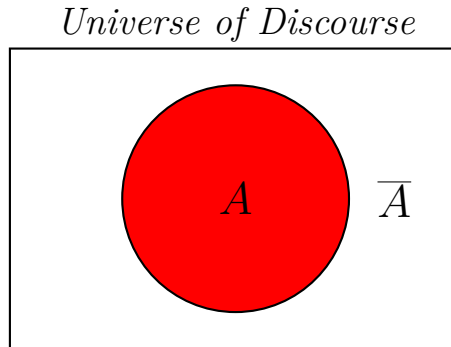
A statement must be either true or false.

$$A \cup \overline{A}$$

## B Venn Diagrams

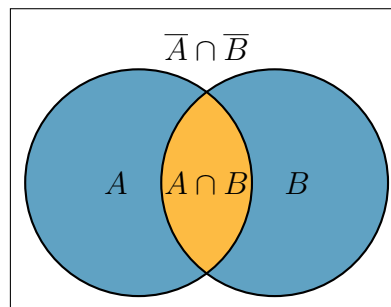
Venn diagrams are used to visualize relationships between elements of a given algebra. For many branches of mathematics and logic, there is a one-to-one correspondence between Venn diagrams and algebraic propositions.

Here is a minimal Venn diagram which can be used to illustrate the Aristotelian Laws of Thought.



In this diagram, the red colored area stands for some object, entity or a collection of group members with a common property. The rectangular frame contains all entities within the scope of the discussion. For example, the red region may represent all mammals, in which case the uncolored region contains everything else.

A slightly more elaborate diagram, shown below, illustrates a universe which contains two collections of entities,  $A$  and  $B$ , which are displayed as overlapping circles. Suppose, for example, we are interested in discussing people who are rich and famous. In this case,  $A$  represents wealthy individuals and  $B$  represents famous persons. Then the region of overlap contains the rich AND famous. But also we can find a group of people who are neither rich nor famous, assuming only that the universe of discourse contains all persons.<sup>17</sup>



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<sup>17</sup>The operator  $\cup$  means OR and  $\cap$  means AND.



## C Propositional Logic

Correct reasoning can be modeled by and assured within the confines of *propositional logic*. In this branch of logic the law of identity is expressed as  $(\forall x)(x = x)$ . The law of non-contradiction is given by  $\neg(p \cdot \neg p)$ . Finally, the law of excluded middle is  $p \vee \neg p$ .

## D Boolean Algebra

Boolean algebra consists of an exact mathematical science based on binary-valued variables. It is fundamental to the success of digital technology, and corresponds to propositional logic which applies to all sciences. The binary valued restriction broadly covers *true* and *false*, and thus has applications beyond pure mathematics.

### D.1 Truth Table

The collection of cells in binary truth tables are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. This means they are suitable for deriving exact solutions to binary problem statements and in finding flaws and contradictions in proposed problem solutions.

The following tables, where  $T$  equals *true* and  $F$  equals *false*, are taken from the previous Venn diagram. The first is an exact equivalent and the next two are proofs of deMorgan's theorem which shows two expressions which represent the same quantity. In this case,  $\overline{A \cap B} = \overline{A} \cup \overline{B}$ .

$A$	$B$	$A \cap B$	$A$	$B$	$\overline{A \cap B}$	$A$	$B$	$\overline{A} \cup \overline{B}$
$T$	$T$	$T$	$T$	$T$	$F$	$T$	$T$	$F$
$T$	$F$	$F$	$T$	$F$	$T$	$T$	$F$	$T$
$F$	$T$	$F$	$F$	$T$	$T$	$F$	$T$	$T$
$F$	$F$	$F$	$F$	$F$	$T$	$F$	$F$	$T$

**1**                      **2**                      **3**

## D.2 Boolean Equations

Rules for  $\cdot$  (AND) operator.

$$0 \cdot 0 = 0 \quad (1)$$

$$0 \cdot 1 = 0 \quad (2)$$

$$1 \cdot 0 = 0 \quad (3)$$

$$1 \cdot 1 = 1 \quad (4)$$

Rules for  $+$  (OR) operator.

$$0 + 0 = 0 \quad (5)$$

$$0 + 1 = 1 \quad (6)$$

$$1 + 0 = 1 \quad (7)$$

$$1 + 1 = 1 \quad (8)$$

A more general application using the variable  $A$ :

$$A \cdot 0 = 0 \quad (9)$$

$$A + 0 = A \quad (10)$$

$$A \cdot 1 = A \quad (11)$$

$$A + 1 = 1 \quad (12)$$

It is trivial to replace  $A$  with 0 or 1 to produce a correct equation corresponding to the earlier rules.

Using these rules, an *exclusive OR* is written as  $A \cdot \bar{B} + B \cdot \bar{A}$ . This expression will be true whenever  $A$  and  $B$  have opposite parity. A simple application might be that a parent would like to give his car,  $C$ , to his son,  $A$ , or his daughter,  $B$ . Then the equation

$$A \cdot \bar{B} + B \cdot \bar{A} = C$$

exactly expresses the decision.

## E List of Fallacies

There are many articles and texts which deal with fallacies. Here is an article from [Wikipedia](#). Here is another in the form of [exerpts from book](#).

Fallacies represent failed attempts to support or justify an assertion. They are ubiquitous in *Al Sharpton's* propaganda-driven diatribes and arguments intended to persuade gullible listeners to adopt a false conclusion. Since many fallacies occur when ambiguous or poorly defined terms are used, it isn't always clear whether the propagandist's understanding of his own narrative involves deception or ignorance.

## F Social Justice

Here are some discussions of the concept of *social justice* by several contemporary economists and philosophers. Their observations apply equally well to similar compound concepts like *racial justice*, *climate justice* and other nonsensical terms.

The dominant concerns involve the meaning of the term *vis-à-vis* the theoretical and practical consequences as it is used. Part of the difficulty is caused by the fact that the term is a personification, *i.e.* it uses a concept appropriately applied to individuals and applies it to a conglomerate.

Consider the long petition for *justice* in the murder of George Floyd. Clearly the trial and conviction of Officer Derek Chauvin was intended to accomplish that. But according to some, *e.g.* *Jesse Jackson*, *Al Sharpton*, *etc.*, **that** isn't enough. Well, apparently it isn't justice they are after, but *retribution*.

### F.1 Michael Novak (former Ambassador to U.N.)

He argues that social justice has seldom been adequately defined, arguing:

[W]hole books and treatises have been written about social justice without ever defining it. It is allowed to float in the air as if everyone

will recognize an instance of it when it appears. This vagueness seems indispensable. The minute one begins to define social justice, one runs into embarrassing intellectual difficulties. It becomes, most often, a term of art whose operational meaning is, "We need a law against that." In other words, it becomes an instrument of ideological intimidation, for the purpose of gaining the power of legal coercion.

— Michael Novak

## **F.2 F. Hayek (Nobel prize winning economist)**

There can be no test by which we can discover what is 'socially unjust' because there is no subject by which such an injustice can be committed, and there are no rules of individual conduct the observance of which in the market order would secure to the individuals and groups the position which as such (as distinguished from the procedure by which it is determined) would appear just to us. [Social justice] does not belong to the category of error but to that of nonsense, like the term 'a moral stone'.

— F. Hsyek

## **F.3 Ben O'Neill (Mises Institute)**

This is an excerpt from [The Injustice of Social Justice](#).

[For advocates of "social justice"] the notion of "rights" is a mere term of entitlement, indicative of a claim for any possible desirable good, no matter how important or trivial, abstract or tangible, recent or ancient. It is merely an assertion of desire, and a declaration of intention to use the language of rights to acquire said desire. In fact, since the program of social justice inevitably involves claims for government provision of goods, paid for through the efforts of others, the term actually refers to an intention to use force to acquire one's desires. Not to earn desirable goods by rational thought and action, production and voluntary exchange, but to go in there and forcibly take goods from those who can supply them!

— Ben O'Neill

## G Example of Consent vs Coercion

Here is a clearly stated pair of scenarios which highlight the difference between voluntary and involuntary consent.

### G.1 Case 1

Consider two men walking along a sidewalk in a major city. At some point they notice a beggar sitting on the curb. One of the men pulls out his wallet and gives the beggar \$20 dollars. The men then continue along their way.

### G.2 Case 2

Consider two men walking along a sidewalk in a major city. At some point they notice a beggar sitting on the curb. One of the men pulls out a gun and forces the other to give the beggar \$20 dollars . The men then continue along their way.

### G.3 Analysis

In both cases the starting conditions and the end result are the same. However, the crucial difference is exactly the difference between *right* and *wrong* or *good* and *evil*. This is a stark contrast and one which should never cloud ones thinking about the role of government and its monopoly on the use of force.