M18A1 Debating Techniques

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Chapter 1 Analysis Of Debating Techniques

Common debates generally have no arbiter or referee. Thus the winner of public opinion may not have followed the courtesies or ethics of debate. Courts of law are an exception in that the judge functions as the arbiter.

Chapter 2 The Existence Of Tricks And The Reasons

Without TV or radio in the 19th century, debates in an auditorium were more available, even into the 20th century. This is pretty much no longer the case. These debates often were moderated and some sense of rules and courtesies enforced. Until the Republican Party in the U.S. recently announced they won’t participate in presedential debates in 2024, we did have rudiments of formal debate. These were controlled for time but otherwise rules and courtesies were largely ignored.

“Straight thinking analyzes problems carefully, logically, without bias, and without subjectivity. It takes all data into consideration, and objectively applies logical analysis to it.” -lecturer Biased thinking often repeats propaganda points with little regard for the basis of straight thinking.

In the 20th century, grand ideas came up for grabs to control populations, *ie*. evolution and Marxism. As mass media communications expanded and became affordable, gaining control became the object of debate. Power-hungry people determined to win their side of the argument at all costs.

In regard to evolution, Darwinism mixed philosophy, biology, palaeontology, genetics, biochemistry, probability mathematics, information theory, thermodynamics, and numerous other subjects. This created a complexity that the general public could not easily grasp. Even scientists were specialists and found difficulty piecing it all together with adequate understanding.

Propagandists couldn’t discuss this in a systematic way and thus used twisted arguments that even they often could not completely understand. The public better followed the rhetoric without quite getting the reasoning. Dishonestly cutting corners in logic misleads the listeners.

Chapter 3 Multiple Meanings And Dishonest Tricks

Words have multiple meanings and even more connotations (implied meanings). Some of these meanings and connotations have emotional overtones. “Liar” raises hackles when we recklessly fling that word at others. Fights can even break out. If we want to be listened to we must be careful with our words. And we must carefully and respectfully redirect our opponent’s words that arouse passions. We “should take care so that the opponent is denied every opportunity to manipulate public emotions.” -lecturer

The lecturer suggests that to avoid strong emotional, negative reactions that we generally debate is smaller groups where mob anger can be avoided.

The word “all” can result in unexpected responses and negative reactions. “All” is generally too strong a word, better replaced with the words such as “some” and/or “many”.

“Debating is a good method for arriving at truth, provided that all the sides participating in a debate are sincere and honest.” -lecturer It is tempting to enter a debate primarily to win. This desire to win influences some debaters to be a bit dishonest. The flow of the moment may be so fast that this dishonesty escapes notice. The Christian apologist must be alert to gently call the opponents on their “misstatements”.

Chapter 4 The Debaters' Tricks 1

We can refute most debaters' tricks remembering they fall under six categories.

1-Provocation/Emotional Manipulation

2-Generalization/Misguiding

3-Deceit/Outright Cheating

4-Sidetracking/Diverting

5-Creating Delusion/Confusion

6-Irrelevance/Idiocy

1-Provocation/Emotional Manipulation

Debates are adversarial. The apologist must maintain his emotional balance. Refrain from taking the bait. Remain calm and centered. Lose your emotional control and you’ve lost the debate. You can expect your opponent to poke and prod to find your emotional weakness. Expect it and retain your equilibrium.

Don’t let hidden meanings in words be used against you to provoke you. Ignore all kinds of provocation. Your anger in these provocations will be used against you. Your point of reason seems weak when you react with hurt. Debaters will enjoy driving the wedge deeper into you. Respond as if you wear an invisible shield. When charged with greed or malice, stick with the facts and win arguments.

2-Generalization/Misguiding

Sometimes the debater against you overgeneralizes. A few examples appear to point his way. Find the exceptions. Debate is often rapid and overwhelming. It takes time to rationally sort through falsehood and truth. Put on the brakes, slow the rush. Take care to effectively counter and neutralize the techniques of your opponent.

Look for repeated contradictions and misrepresentations. Your opponent probably starts with generally agreed premises. Be careful to recognize when his premises vear to less agreed on premises. He may believe them and want his audience to agree with him. But slow the debate to point out exceptions and lack of universal agreement.

Analogies can help an audience visualize an idea. But analogies have limits. Don’t permit your opponent free rein in his analogies. Even Christ’s parables have limits. In the parable of the seed, “some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered.” Matt 13:5-6 The parable explains why some people respond eagerly to the gospel’s good news. It can suggest predetermined destiny. Jesus often says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear.

But Christ is not limited by obstacles. His miracle converted an obstinate Saul who became Paul. God sent Paul to his disciple Ananias in Damascus to learn more of the gospel. Farmers sometimes clear the field of the stones before planting. Jesus doesn’t say that people who live hard, troubled lives; or who live rich, indulgent lives can’t and won’t be reached by the gospel. He never stops calling them and he never stops sending his disciples to them.

Chapter 5 The Debaters' Tricks -- 2

Your opponent may cheat by presenting selective evidence. He may try to get away with avoiding the one scenario that disproves the conclusion that other scenarios seem to point to.

Sophists use a web of fancy words to seem to prove even the most illogical things, such that even light might be dark.

Sometimes all it takes to convince is a confident delivery. If we sound like we know the facts, then what we tell must be true. Even when it’s a tall tale of lies.

Sometimes we are persuaded because of the prestige of the speaker. Church goers often believe what their pastor says the Bible says - rather than read the texts themselves. The pastor probably has one or more degrees in religion. We think that gives him authority. But there are divinity schools that go so far as to doubt the words of the Bible.

We get confused by technical jargon, depending on the expert to explain technical words we don’t know. Sometimes he doesn’t understand the jargon, but as the expert he feels constraint to pretend to understand.

A debater may prefer to run down a rabbit hole. He may ask the apologist to identify the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Most graphic depictions in western society show it as an apple tree. But the tree itself is insignificant. The tree was a location where the great deceiver could approach the original humans. The serpent was restricted to one specific tree. Identifying the tree would run down the time and detract from meaningful discussion.

Formal logic isn’t well understood by most people. A debater can take advantage of this ignorance, using seemingly relevant logic that fails the test of logic. He may even be like the crowd; not really knowing the logic he should in order to participate in the discussion.

Sometimes the debate may run down the rabbit hole of speculation. But that avoids any evidences. Speculation is fantasy, not necessarily false but certainly without evidence. I like to speculate about what heaven will be like. But what I know about heaven is epherimicle.

Sometimes authorities may be quoted. But authorities can be quoted on both sides of an issue. This becomes nothing more than a battle of authorities.This happens in courts of law. Which authority has more charisma…

Some debaters may appeal to the prejudices and biases of the audience. This poisons the debate.

Chapter 6 The Debaters' Tricks -- 3

Your opponent in a debate may try to obfuscate, create confusion. They may default to circular reasoning, beat around the bush, attack my character, try to force limited options rather than face the range of choices. My opponent may attack my qualifications and competence. They may focus on the irrelevant to stall for time and avoid loss of face.

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1. How this module helped your studies?

Note: I find questions 1, 2, and 4 to be closely equivalent. Perhaps my responses to question 2 should have been distributed.

2. What new lessons you learned?

The lecturer suggests that to avoid strong emotional, negative reactions that we generally debate is smaller groups where mob anger can be avoided.

3. Your critical evaluation on the topic. We mean what is the shortcoming you see in the text, your suggestions for improvement.

I’m Seventh-day Adventist and would say your statement that SDAs publish books telling how to win an argument as any cost mischaracterizes our books. We write books explaining our beliefs based on the Bible itself. Not everyone recognizes the meanings we see. Many mischaracterize first day of the week texts in the Bible, seeing them from a present day perspective rather than the cultural perspective of believers in their day. Two different viewpoints certainly, but the SDA perspective remains a valid viewpoint. In the USA the Supreme Court makes majority decisions. The dissenters publish the other side of the coin. Majority may dominate but this doesn’t negate the possible validity of the dissenters’ reasoning. If majority reasoning is by its nature always correct then Christianity would itself be disproved because most of the world’s population dissents and rejects Christianity.

Correct page 4, “they respect now law or order”, probably using the word “neither”.

4. How does this lesson help you?

It becomes more apparent that listening carefully to your opponent is essential. There may be a limited number of tricks to recognize. But there seem to be so many variations. Further, you must not only fully know your side of the debate. You must know the strengths and flaws (weaknesses) of his and perhaps even of your own side of the debate.

You may have to concede possibilities without conceding the logic of your position. (I hope you don’t disagree with this thought. Perhaps we never concede on anything.)

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