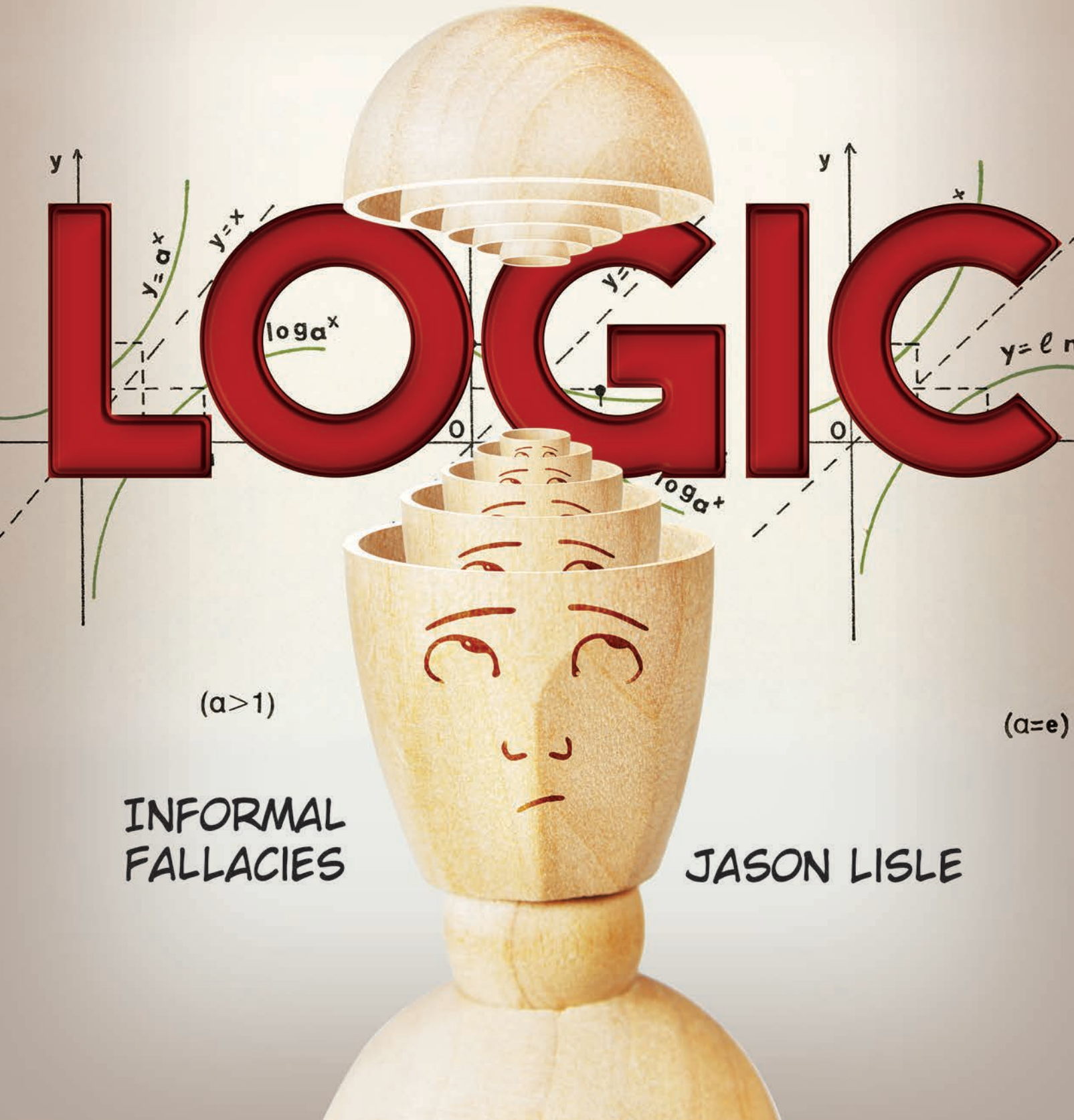


INTRODUCTION TO



INFORMAL
FALLACIES

JASON LISLE

INFORMAL FALLACIES

INTRO TO LOGIC

JASON LISLE



First printing: November 2018

Copyright © 2018 by Jason Lisle. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in articles and reviews. For information write:

Master Books®, P.O. Box 726, Green
Forest, AR 72638

Master Books® is a division of the New Leaf
Publishing Group, Inc.

ISBN: 978-1-68344-148-9

ISBN: 978-1-61458-696-8 (digital)

Library of Congress Number: 2018959895

Cover by Diana Bogardus

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations
are from the New American Standard Bible.

Please consider requesting that a copy of this
volume be purchased by your local library
system.

Printed in the United States of America

Please visit our website for other great titles:
www.masterbooks.com

For information regarding author
interviews, please contact the publicity
department at (870) 438-5288.

MB
Master
Books®
A Division of New Leaf Publishing Group
www.masterbooks.com

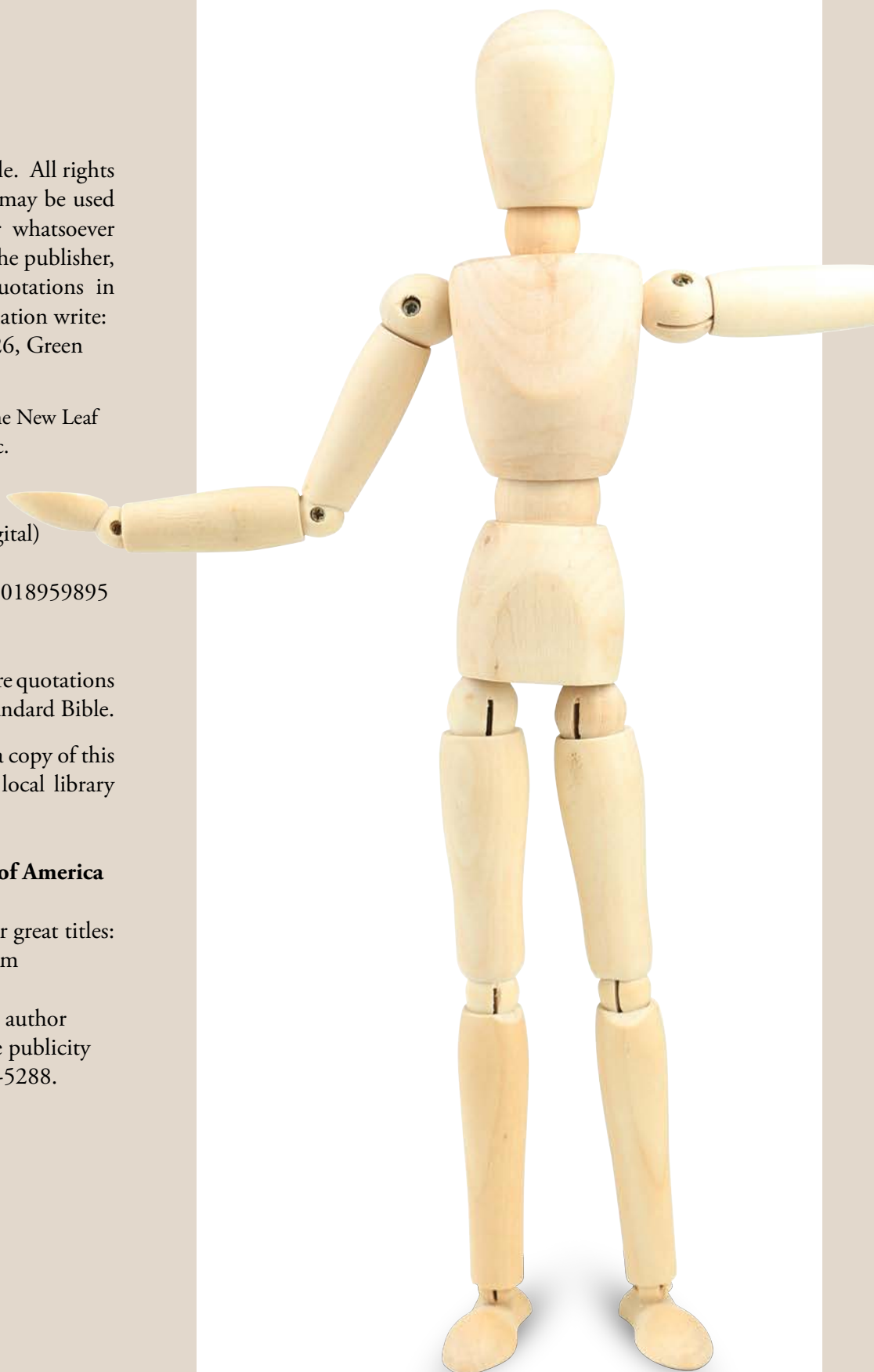





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Logic and the Christian Worldview.....	5
Chapter 2: All Knowledge Is Ultimately from God	9
Chapter 3: Why Study Logic?	13
Chapter 4: Propositions and Arguments	19
Chapter 5: Inductive and Deductive Reasoning.....	23
Chapter 6: The Biblical Basis for the Laws of Logic	27
Chapter 7: Logical Failure of the Unbiblical Worldview.....	33
Chapter 8: Is the Christian Faith Illogical?.....	39
Chapter 9: Is Faith Contrary to Reason?.....	43
Chapter 10: Arbitrariness and Inconsistency.....	49
Chapter 11: Definitions	55
Chapter 12: A Brief Introduction to Syllogisms.....	65
Chapter 13: Enthymemes.....	69
Chapter 14: Informal Logical Fallacies	75
Chapter 15: Equivocation	79
Chapter 16: Reification.....	83
Chapter 17: The Fallacy of Accent	87
Chapter 18: The Fallacies of Composition and Division.....	89
Chapter 19: hasty Generalization and Sweeping Generalization	93
Chapter 20: The Fallacy of False Cause	99
Chapter 21: Begging the Question	105
Chapter 22: Begging the Question — Part 2	111
Chapter 23: The Question-Begging Epithet	115
Chapter 24: The Complex Question.....	119
Chapter 25: The Bifurcation Fallacy.....	123
Chapter 26: The No True Scotsman Fallacy	127
Chapter 27: Special Pleading	129
Chapter 28: The False Analogy and the Slippery Slope Fallacy.....	133

Chapter 29: Review of the Fallacies of Presumption	137
Chapter 30: <i>Ad Hominem</i>	141
Chapter 31: The Faulty Appeal to Authority.....	145
Chapter 32: The StrawMan Fallacy	151
Chapter 33: Faulty Appeals.....	155
Chapter 34: Naturalistic, Moralistic, and the Appeal to Consequences	159
Chapter 35: The Genetic Fallacy and the <i>Tu Quoque</i> Fallacy.....	163
Chapter 36: The Fallacy of Irrelevant Thesis	167
Chapter 37: Review of Fallacies of Relevance.....	169
Chapter 38: Closing Remarks	173
Glossary/Index	175
Quick Reference Guide	183

CHAPTER 1



WHAT DOES
LOGIC HAVE
TO DO WITH
GOD?

LOGIC AND THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

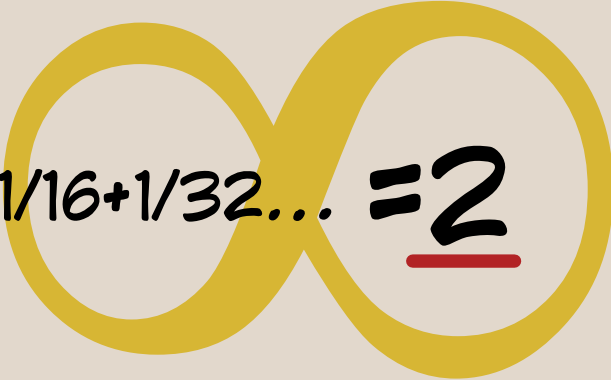
Logic is the study of the principles of correct reasoning. That is its definition. To be logical is to think rightly: to draw reasonable conclusions from the available information. But who decides what is the “right” way to think? If two people disagree on whether something is reasonable, who is right? What is the standard by which we judge a particular line of reasoning to be correct or incorrect? In the Christian worldview, we can answer these questions. God determines the correct way to reason. He is the standard for all truth claims.

WHAT LOGIC IS NOT

In the science-fiction series *Star Trek*, Mr. Spock is half human, half alien serving on board the earth starship *Enterprise*. Mr. Spock is supposed to be very logical. In fact, his species, the Vulcans, are known for embracing logic and suppressing all emotion. As a Vulcan, Spock does not dare smile, laugh, cry, or show any emotion whatsoever, because he believes that emotions are contrary to logic.

But that is not really logical at all. What Spock really embraces is not logic, but stoicism. Logic simply refers to correct reasoning — not the suppression of feelings. Emotions are not necessarily contrary to correct reasoning. If someone is murdered, it would be perfectly reasonable to feel the emotion of sadness for the family, or even anger toward the murderer. God always reasons correctly, and yet He has feelings. So clearly, emotions are not inherently contrary to reason. Of course, strong emotions might tempt a person to act illogically and immorally. But the feelings themselves are not contrary to reason.

Nor is religion necessarily contrary to logic. Some people say, “You have your religion, but I believe in logic.” But religion — in the sense of a set of beliefs about God — is not necessarily contrary to logic. Since logic is the study of correct reasoning, if correct reasoning leads us to a certain religious belief, then it would be illogical to reject that belief. Granted, not all religions are logical. Some beliefs about God are not reasonable at all. The belief that God does not exist (atheism) is a religious belief that is not based upon good reasons. It is illogical.



$$1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} + \frac{1}{32} \dots = \underline{2}$$

Likewise, I would certainly say that Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Mormon beliefs about God are not consistent with the principles of right reasoning because they all reject what God has said about Himself. But the Christian religion — those beliefs about God that are based on what God Himself has said in the Bible — is very logical. In fact, as we will see, it is illogical to believe otherwise.

Logic is not the same as science. Science is the study of the consistent operation of the universe — not the study of the principles of correct reasoning. Granted, good scientists will use logic in their reasoning. So science uses logic. But they are not the same thing. Some people mistakenly equate the two. They seem to think that the only logical way to answer every possible question is the method of science. For some questions, science is a great way to answer them. If we want to know the distance to the moon, the composition of cheese, or the temperature at which water boils, then science is a great tool to use.

But not all questions can be answered scientifically. Moral questions cannot be properly answered by observing the results of an experiment. So, science cannot determine “right” from “wrong.” Historical questions are generally beyond the scope of science, such as “What did George Washington believe about God?” There is no laboratory

experiment that will resolve that question. Many mathematical truths are beyond the scope of science. For instance, what exact number do we get when we add an infinite set of numbers, each of which is half the previous number ($1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16} + \frac{1}{32} \dots$)? Mathematicians can prove that the answer is 2; but the tools of science do not allow us to answer the question by performing the experiment, because there isn’t time to actually add an infinite number of things. Some questions can be answered by science, and some cannot. But all questions should be answered rationally, in a way that involves correct reasoning. We shouldn’t always use science to answer questions; but we should always be logical.

Many words have more than one definition, and this is also true of the word “logic.” In some instances, “logic” can simply refer to a way of thinking, rather than the correct way of thinking. You might say to someone, “I don’t understand your logic.” This really means, “I don’t understand your way of thinking.” It does not necessarily mean that the person’s way of thinking is right. “Logic” can also refer to the arrangement of circuit elements in an electronic device such as a computer. But we will not use these definitions in this book. We will restrict ourselves to the definition of logic as the principles of correct reasoning, or the study of those principles.

LOGIC IS THE WAY GOD THINKS

To think logically is to think — in a sense — like God thinks. And, by definition, to be logical is to reason correctly. This makes sense when we consider that God always thinks correctly. So, when we too think correctly, we are thinking in a way that is consistent with how God thinks. God is the ultimate standard of correct thinking. If we are to be correct, we must learn to match our thinking with God's. Of course, God's mind is not exactly like our mind. But there is some similarity because we are made in God's image. But there are differences too. Our minds discover truth as we learn new things. But God's mind determines truth. Whatever He decides to be true, becomes true. Whatever God says, so the universe becomes. We see this in the first chapter of Genesis.

EXAMPLES

GENESIS
1:3

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

GENESIS
1:9

Then God said, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so.

GENESIS 1:11-12

Then God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed..." and it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed...

GENESIS 1:14-15

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens..." and it was so.

Clearly, whatever God affirms, whatever He says to Himself, is always true because the universe becomes whatever God decides. That's why God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). He cannot say

anything false because reality always becomes exactly what God says it is. He is truth (John 14:6). Reality always matches what God's mind determines, much like our daydreams always match what our minds think.

But our minds do not determine reality as God's mind does. We can have beliefs that are false: we think the universe is one way when in reality it is another. So, if we are going to have true thoughts, we must learn to match our thinking to God's; His thoughts are always true. If you want to think about a particular topic correctly, you must think about it in the same basic way that God does.

But how can we possibly know how God thinks? The answer is the Bible. God has told us much about how He thinks. The Bible is God's Word; He used people to write down some of His own thoughts for us to read so that

we would have a perfect starting point for our thinking. We must base our thinking on God's thinking as illustrated in Scripture if our thinking is going to be correct. Therefore, Bible study is an important part of becoming logical.

But how can we, as finite creatures, ever really think like God? His mind is infinite, whereas our minds are finite. God is beyond time and therefore His thoughts are timeless. But our thinking is within

time; it takes us time to think through things and to learn. We draw conclusions at a later time from information that we received at an earlier time. God's mind is infinite. He can

consciously consider all possible scenarios and all their infinite implications in no time at all. We cannot. God's thoughts are infinitely higher than ours, just as Isaiah 55:9 explains: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Clearly, we cannot think exactly like God, and He does not expect us to. But we can think in a way that is consistent with His character. And that is what is required for correct reasoning. Much the way a shadow resembles the object casting it, our thinking should resemble God's. Our thoughts are far more limited than God's, just as a shadow does not have the depth of the object producing it. But our thinking should have the same basic "shape" to it as God's thinking. We have the capacity to shadow God's thoughts because God has made human beings in His own image (Genesis 1:27). We can be rational, just as God is rational.

As one example of this, God's thinking is self-consistent. He cannot deny (contradict) Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). God does not affirm what He simultaneously denies because this is not faithful to His nature. In other words, He doesn't say both "yes" and "no" about the same thing at the same time. Therefore, neither should we. In faithfulness to God, the things we believe and say should be non-contradictory. As the Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 1:18, "But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no."

STOICISM

A philosophy advocating the repression of emotion and indifference to pleasure or pain. This term is named after the Greek Stoics (dating from around 300 B.C.) who held to such a philosophy. See Acts 17:18.

BELIEF

A positive mental attitude toward a proposition; something a person accepts as true.

FALSE

Contrary to the mind of God. Something is false if it is something that God would never say.

IMPLICATIONS

That which is suggested by evidence or reasoning. That which follows logically from something else.

LOGIC/LOGICAL

In accordance with the laws of logic: reasonable.

RATIONAL

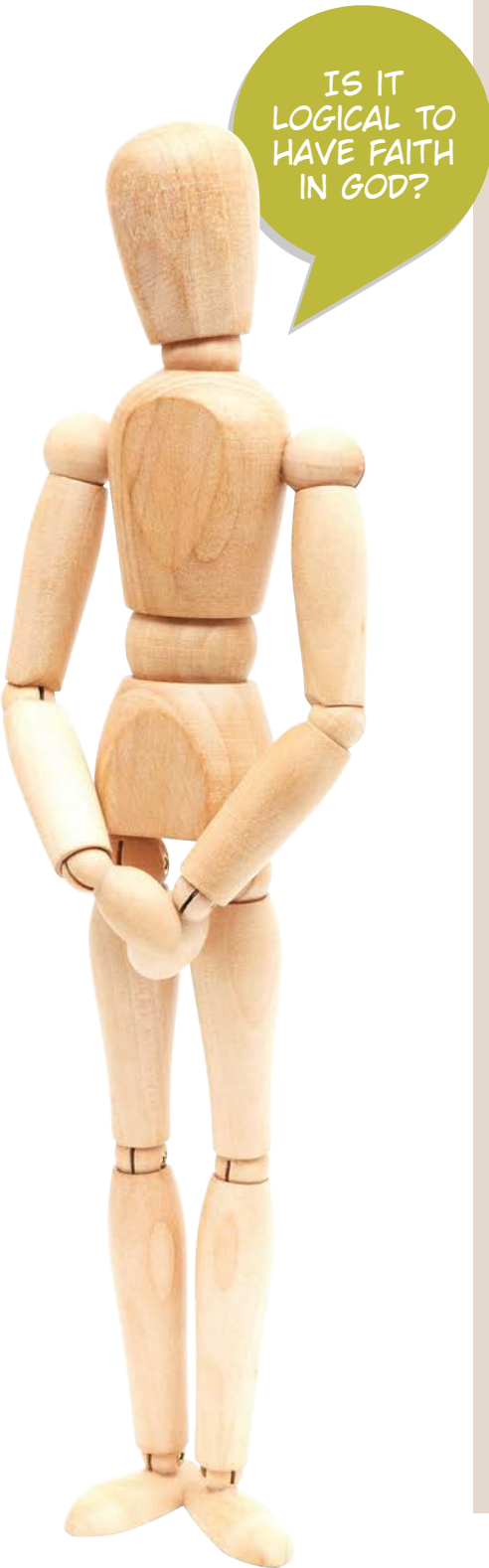
In accordance with laws of logic: logical.

TRUE

Conforming to the mind of God. Something is true if it is something that God would say.

CHAPTER 9

IS FAITH CONTRARY TO REASON?



IS IT
LOGICAL TO
HAVE FAITH
IN GOD?

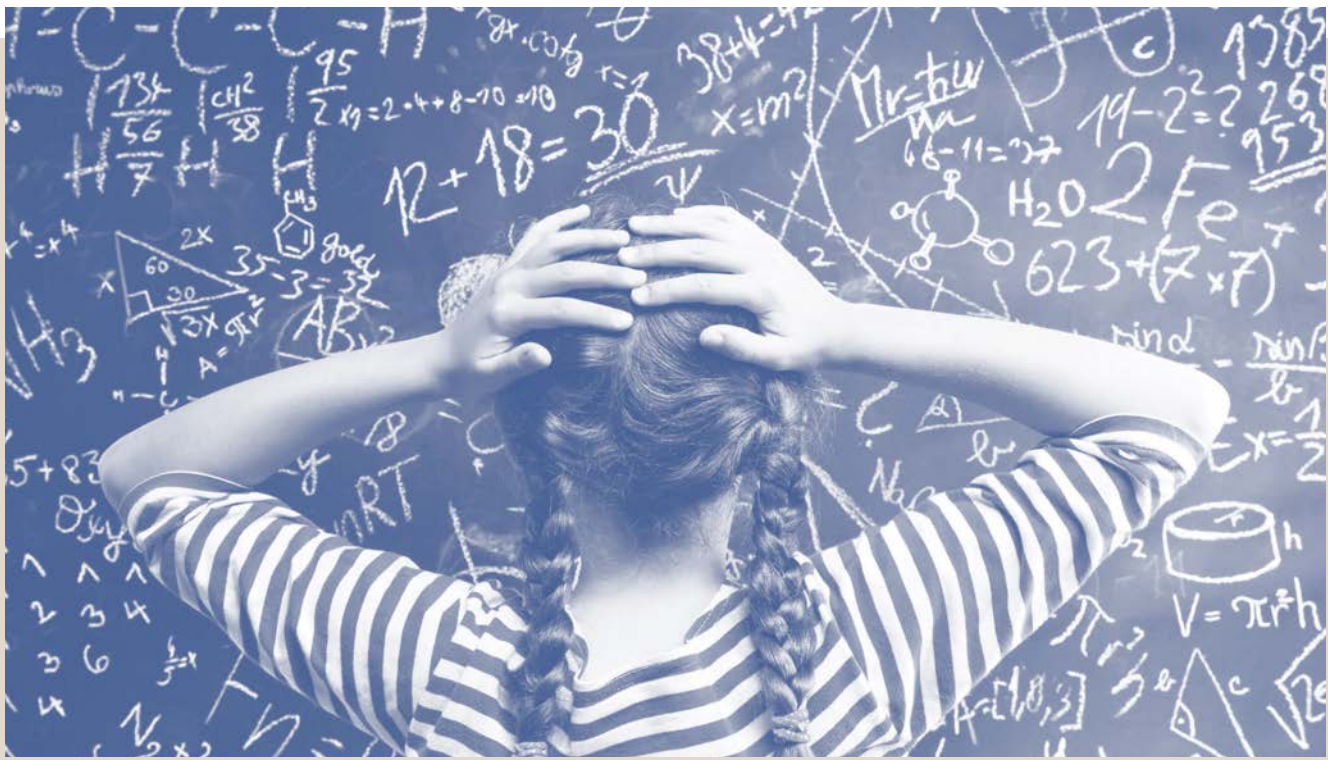
A common sentiment in today's world is summarized by Mark Twain, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." By this questionable definition, faith is necessarily irrational. After all, it is unreasonable to believe in something you know to be false. However, Twain's comment is not the definition of faith. It is not the modern dictionary definition, and it certainly is not the biblical definition of faith.

Biblical faith is rational confidence in something that is not observed by the senses. Hebrews 11:1 gives us essentially a definition of what faith is: a confidence, assurance, conviction, or evidence of things unseen. The Greek word translated as "evidence" or "conviction" in English translations of this verse is *elegchos*, and has the basic meaning of "proof." Biblical faith is not contrary to rational proof; rather, it is rational proof. It is the *opposite* of Twain's misconception. Faith is confidence in what must be true.

Faith in God is highly logical. After all, God never lies (Titus 1:2; Numbers 23:19) and knows everything (John 16:30; Colossians 2:3; Isaiah 46:9–10). What He says is absolutely true and certain. We therefore have a very good reason to trust God's Word. Wouldn't it be utterly absurd to *not* have faith in that which cannot be wrong?

But aren't we supposed to have "childlike faith"? And aren't children generally irrational in their thinking? So, shouldn't our faith be a blind leap in the dark, rather than based on good reasons? In general, children are not very rational; they often do not have good reasons for their beliefs. The point of education is to help them to become rational and to abandon beliefs that lack good reasons (like the monster in the closet). Are we supposed to be this way in our faith?

Actually, the Bible never tells us to have "childlike" faith. Rather, Jesus tell us that we must become as little children in order to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3). However, the context of the passage deals with *humility* rather than faith (Matthew 18:4). Christ's argument was that humility is required for pleasing God. Children often recognize their helpless, humble state; they depend on their



parents for their very life and could not survive on their own. Likewise, if we are to be saved, we must recognize our helpless spiritual state; we must depend entirely on God's saving grace, realizing that we cannot save ourselves.

Now this is perfectly logical. It is rational for a child to trust in his or her parents; if they were not basically trustworthy in taking care of the child, he or she would not be alive. Likewise, it is rational for us to trust in God. And how much more so because God knows everything, is fully good, and never mistaken. God is the one who designed our sensory organs. If, hypothetically, God were deceptive, then we would have no basis for trusting our own observations. Therefore, if our sensory organs are to be considered basically trustworthy, then how much more should God be trusted? Clearly, faith in God is very logical.

ISN'T FAITH EMOTION-BASED?

It is all too common today for people to think that faith in God is an emotional experience. Perhaps you have heard an atheist

say, "I prayed and prayed for God to show Himself, but I *felt* nothing. So I just don't believe in God." This reasoning is absurd. It's a bit like saying, "I looked at the multiplication table in school over and over, but felt no emotional connection to it. So I don't believe in the multiplication table!" The multiplication table is true regardless of how you feel about it. Likewise, God exists and is who He claims to be regardless of your **subjective** emotions on the matter. My faith in God is not merely an emotional experience any more than my faith in the multiplication table.

Don't misunderstand. Faith in God can result in an emotional experience sometimes. In general, it is very satisfying to know God in a saving way. But emotions ebb and flow and are notoriously unreliable; they are not a standard for truth. Nonetheless, people sometimes get the impression that our faith in God is emotion-based, perhaps after reading verses that deal with trusting God with all our heart. We are to love God with all our heart (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37). We are to trust in Him with all our heart (Proverbs 3:5). Does this imply an emotional faith?

We often think of our “heart” as the seat of our emotions. But *biblically*, the heart represents the core of our being. Even today, the word “heart” often has this implied meaning. When we speak of getting to the “heart of the matter” we mean the essential core. Therefore, to love God with all your heart means to love Him with the very core of your being. To trust God with all your heart means to trust Him completely. Neither of these verses is speaking primarily of emotions.

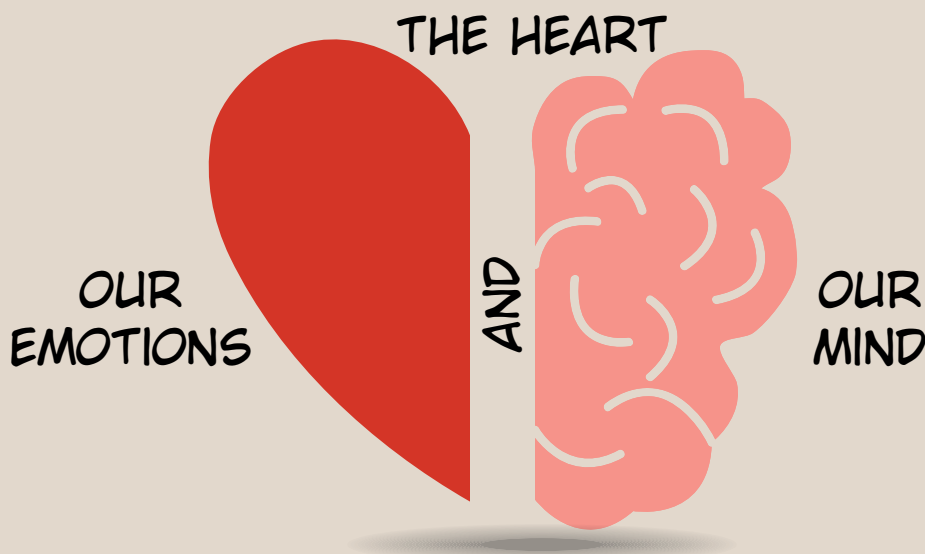
More often than representing the seat of emotion, the biblical term “heart” refers to the seat of man’s intellect. In other words, it is often synonymous with the mind. Consider Genesis 6:5 where God saw the wickedness of man, “that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” The phrase “thoughts of the heart” only makes sense if the heart thinks; it symbolizes man’s intellect in this passage. In Psalm 14:1, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” Internal dialog is an intellectual action, which here is attributed to the heart. Clearly our faith in God is much more than a feeling. It is a rational confidence in God that extends from the core of our being.

WISDOM, OR THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD?

Finally, we have those passages that seem to belittle wisdom in contrast to faith in the Gospel (e.g., 1 Corinthians 1:21). But wouldn’t that mean that faith is anti-wisdom, and therefore anti-logic? The key here (as with properly interpreting all Scripture) is context.

Words like “wisdom” and “foolishness” can be used in an absolute sense, or in an **apparent** sense. When Paul speaks of the “wisdom of the world,” he refers to that which unbelieving people (the “world”) believe to be wisdom, not that which is genuine wisdom. The wisdom of the world is the best philosophy that unbelievers can generate. But it is not genuine wisdom at all. In 1 Corinthians 1:20, Paul asks, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” The only way that wisdom can be foolish (its opposite) is if we recognize that wisdom is being used in an apparent sense. In other words, God has shown that what the unbelieving world considers to be wisdom is in reality foolishness.

The Bible is very pro-wisdom (Proverbs 4:5, 7). But genuine wisdom always comes



from God (Colossians 2:3; Proverbs 2:6; James 1:5). This isn't to say that unbelievers never say anything wise; but they are only able to do so by relying upon biblical principles. In spiritual matters, secular thinking never arrives at the

right answer. Hence, what the secular world considers to be wisdom, God knows to be foolish (1 Corinthians 1:20). With this in mind, we can correctly interpret and understand the message of 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

UNDERSTANDING 1 CORINTHIANS

VERSE 21

Since the unbelieving world through its “wisdom” (what unbelievers consider to be wise) did not come to know God in a saving way, God delighted to use what the secular world considers to be foolish — namely preaching the Gospel — to save those who believe that Gospel

VERSE 22

The Jews (knowledgeable of the Old Testament but not having as yet received Christ) ask for signs (of the Messiah), but the Greeks (these are unbelievers who reject the Bible) search for wisdom

VERSE 23

We preach the Gospel — that Christ was crucified for atonement of sins — a message that causes the Jews to stumble, but which the unbelieving Greeks consider to be foolishness

VERSE 24

But those that God calls — namely, the elect — whether they are Jews or not, recognize that Christ is the power and wisdom of God

VERSE 25

The things of God that the world considers to be foolish are in fact far wiser than the wisest thing secular thought has produced

VERSE 26


In fact, God doesn't call many people who are wise by secular standards

VERSE 27

He has instead chosen to use primarily people that the world considers to be foolish, to embarrass those unbelievers who are considered to be wise

VERSE 29

That way, no one can boast before God



In chapter 2, Paul continues his theme of the foolishness of what the unbelieving world considers to be wisdom. He begins in verse 1 to explain that he doesn't attempt to use worldly "wisdom" or rhetoric when he proclaims the Gospel — a theme he repeats in verse 4. That would be foolish. Paul relied on the power of the Gospel which is genuine wisdom. In verse 5, Paul explains why: our faith should not rest on secular "wisdom" (which is in reality foolishness) but on the power of God — which is genuine wisdom.

Paul clarifies in verses 6–8 that he is not against genuine wisdom. On the contrary, we do speak genuine wisdom — that which comes from God. So these verses solidly refute the oft-repeated error that Paul is somehow against wisdom. Verse 13 clearly indicates that Paul is against *human* "wisdom" — e.g., secular thinking which is not genuine wisdom at all.

CHRISTIANITY: THE RATIONAL WORLDVIEW

Far from promoting irrationality, the Bible commands us to think logically — in a way that is consistent with the character of God (Isaiah 55:7–8). As one example, God does not contradict Himself (2 Timothy 2:13); therefore, neither should we (2 Corinthians 1:18). Far from being anti-wisdom, the Bible commands us to get wisdom (Proverbs 4:5, 7; James 1:5). And genuine wisdom is always ultimately from God (Colossians 2:3; James 3:13–18).

To be rational, one must have good, self-consistent reasons for his or her beliefs. The Bible provides us with such reasons for all those things that most people take for granted. Our mind has the capacity for rational thought because we are made in God's image

(Genesis 1:26–27). Our senses are basically reliable because they have been designed by God (Proverbs 20:12). The universe has order and consistency, having been designed and upheld by God (Hebrews 1:3). And we know that the universe will continue to have predictable cycles because God has told us so (Genesis 8:22). These prerequisites for knowledge are justified in the Bible, but not apart from it. Therefore, it is entirely rational to be a Christian, and entirely irrational to not be a Christian.

KEY TERMS

APPARENT

Something that appears clear to the eye or mind, though it may not be.

PREREQUISITES

Those things that are required in advance; that which is necessary to a particular end.

RHETORIC

The art or skill of speaking or writing effectively and persuasively (regardless of considerations of logic or truth).

SUBJECTIVE

Dependent on the thoughts or feelings of the individual.

CHAPTER 27

BUT THAT DOESN'T
APPLY TO ME!

SPECIAL PLEADING

Special pleading is the fallacy of applying a double standard. This occurs when a person arbitrarily exempts himself from a standard that he expects others to follow. A liar who insists that other people should not lie is committing this fallacy. A murderer who insists that other people should not murder is committing the fallacy of special pleading. Of course, lying and murder are wrong; that's not the issue. The problem is that people should follow the same standard they expect others to follow.

The Bible itself gives examples of several types of the fallacy of special pleading. God warns us not to have a double standard in passages such as Deuteronomy 25:13, Proverbs 16:11, 20:10, 23, and Micah 6:11. Proverbs 20:23 states, "Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the LORD." In Old Testament times, people would trade certain items based on their weight; they would use a scale with a standard weight on one side, and the item on the other. Certain unscrupulous individuals would have two different weights in their bag, which were incorrectly labeled as having the same weight. They would use one weight when purchasing the item so that they would pay a bit less (thereby cheating the seller), and then use a different weight when selling it, so they would receive a bit more money (thereby cheating the buyer). This is an abomination to the Lord because it is dishonest and unfair. A person should use the same weights to measure an item he is buying as the item he is selling.

Likewise, we should live by the same standards we expect others to live by. Romans 2:1–3 states, "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?" Clearly God is not pleased when people fail to follow the same standard that they expect others to follow.



A particular form of special pleading occurs when our behavior does not match our words. This double standard (one for my actions, another for my words) is called hypocrisy. The person who behaves in such a way is called a hypocrite. The harshest words spoken by Jesus in His earthly ministry were to the hypocritical religious leaders of the day because their actions did not match their words. In Matthew 23:2–3 Jesus says, “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.”

Notice the nature of Christ’s criticism: the scribes and Pharisees say one thing, but they do another! Seven times in this one sermon, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites! (Matthew 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). Clearly, hypocrisy is a sin that God absolutely detests.

Of course, there are other types of special

pleading; but all involve using a double standard. You should not arbitrarily exempt yourself or your work from the standards that you insist other people should follow. The word “arbitrarily” is an important qualifier, because sometimes there are good reasons why a different standard should be used in a different situation. After all, not all standards are universal. Sometimes there are exceptions.

For example, a police officer has the right (and obligation) to exceed a posted speed limit in order to catch and ticket a person who is speeding. This is not special pleading because the law allows certain civil servants to exceed speed limits for certain detailed purposes. The officer has not violated any law. But it would be special pleading for a civilian to speed in order to catch another car to tell him to stop speeding! That would be hypocrisy because he is violating the same law that he insists someone else follow.

The fallacy of special pleading occurs when someone expects another person to abide by a particular standard which he himself does not follow, without giving a good reason for why he should be exempt. This fallacy occurs very frequently in debates on origins. For example, almost all evolutionists insist that creationists should have a good reason for their position. Yet, evolutionists themselves do not have a good reason to believe in evolution — or induction, objective morality, or laws of logic.

An often committed, though very obvious example is the following. “You can’t tell other people what not to do!” And what is the person doing when he says this? He is telling other people what not to do. He is doing the very thing he insists that others should not do. It’s special pleading.

A person may say, “There are no absolutes.” In this case, he has made an absolute statement. His behavior does not match his words. I would then ask, “Are you absolutely certain?” The claim that there are no absolutes is an absolute claim. If it is true, then it is false. Special pleading is a form of inconsistency.

An evolutionist might say, “You cannot use creationist journals in support of your position! You must use secular journals!” But this is arbitrary, which is always reversible. I could equally well say, “You cannot use secular journals in support of your position. You must use creationist journals!” It is special pleading for the evolutionist to use articles from journals that agree with his position, while not allowing the creationist the same courtesy.

When people make an exception to a rule or standard, the question we must ask ourselves is this: is the exception justified?

The Lord requires us to use the same standard for others that we use for ourselves. This includes using correct weights and balances. See Proverbs 11:1, 20:23; Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:13-16.



KEY TERM

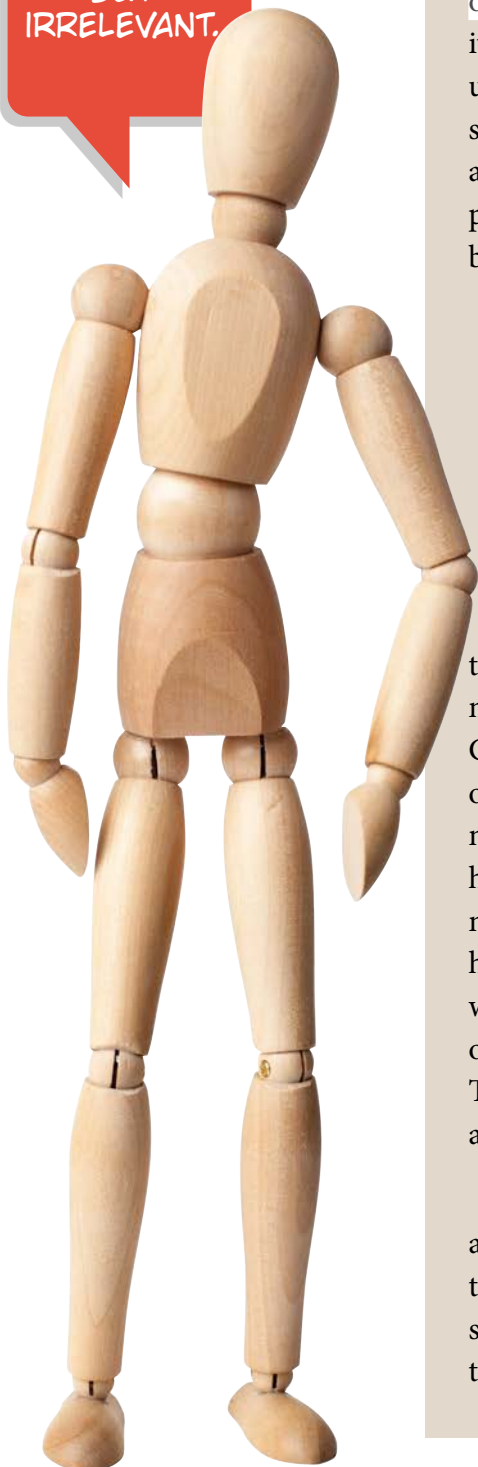
SPECIAL PLEADING

The error of (arbitrarily) using a double standard, especially when the arguer exempts himself from a standard he applies to others.



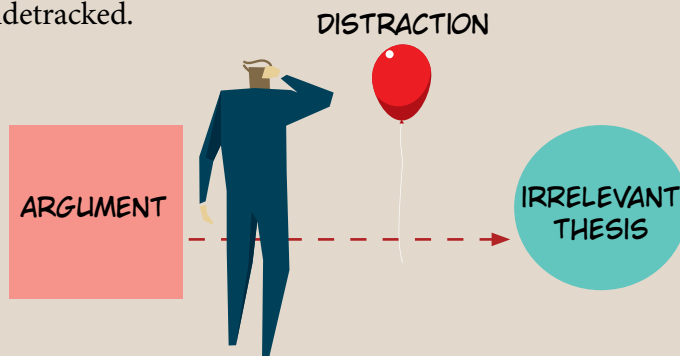
CHAPTER 36

TRUE
PERHAPS,
BUT
IRRELEVANT.



THE FALLACY OF IRRELEVANT THESIS

Also called the fallacy of the irrelevant conclusion, the fallacy of irrelevant thesis occurs when an arguer does prove a point, but it is not the point at issue. His assertion (though possibly true) is utterly irrelevant to the claim he is attempting to prove. The fallacy is seductive because it persuades by distraction. The conclusion of the argument may actually be true, and it may follow logically from the premises. But it is not the claim that is in dispute. The discussion has been sidetracked.



Evolutionists often commit this fallacy when attempting to counter the evidence of design in the universe. For example, an evolutionist might say, “Why is the universe so ideally suitable for life? It’s not God. It’s because if it were not suitable for life, we wouldn’t be here to observe it.” This is seductive because the conclusion is actually true: namely, if the universe were not ideally suitable for life we wouldn’t be here to observe it. But that is utterly irrelevant to the question at issue: namely, why is the universe so well-suited for life? The evolutionist has subtly switched topics. His argument proves that the universe is well-suited for life, but he was supposed to be answering the question of why the universe is well-suited for life. That is a different question. That the universe is well-suited for life is not in dispute; creationists and evolutionists agree on this. What we disagree on is the reason why.

Consider the following analogy. Suppose I was the sole survivor of an airplane crash. When a reporter asks me how it was that I was able to survive, it would be fallacious for me to reply, “Because if I hadn’t survived, I would not be here to answer your question.” Although it is true that I would not be around to answer the question had I died, this

really doesn't answer the question itself — why I was able to survive. All fallacies of irrelevant thesis can be rebutted with this simple phrase: "True perhaps, but irrelevant."

When evolutionists argue, "Life only appears to be designed by intelligence because if it weren't so well-organized it wouldn't have survived until now," this is the fallacy of irrelevant thesis. "The reason that organisms are well-suited to their environment has nothing to do with design. It is explained by natural selection." This is the fallacy of irrelevant thesis because natural selection only explains why we do not find organisms that are not suited for their environment (i.e., because they die). Natural selection does not actually explain why we do find organisms that are well-suited to their environment. The answer for this is that God created the initial organisms with sufficient information in their DNA to produce traits that would allow them to survive in a particular environment. This particular example occurs quite frequently; so study the above example carefully and be ready to discuss it when it comes up.

In a sense, all the fallacies in the category of relevance are examples of the fallacy of irrelevant thesis. So we could consider the fallacy of irrelevant thesis as a "catch-all" bin for those fallacies of relevance that do not fit into any of the above categories.

KEY TERM

FALLACY OF IRRELEVANT THESIS

Proving a point,
but not the point at
issue.

