



Building a Better Argument

Student Handout #2: **Argument Examples**

1. "Since pain is a state of consciousness, a 'mental event,' it can never be directly observed." (source: Peter Singer, "Animal Liberation," 1973)
2. "All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality." (source: Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 1963)
3. "Genes and proteins are discovered, not invented. Inventions are patentable, discoveries are not. Thus protein patents are intrinsically flawed." (source: Daniel Alroy, "Invention vs. Discovery," *The New York Times*, March 29, 2000)
4. A meter is longer than a yard. Therefore, since this ship is 100 meters long, it is longer than a football field.
5. "I hate books. They only teach us to talk about what we do not know." (source: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Emile," 1762)
6. "At any cost we must have filters on our Ypsilanti Township library computers. Pornography is a scourge on society at every level. Our public library must not be used to channel this filth to the people of the area. (source: Rob J. and Joan D. Pelkey, letter to the editor, "The Ann Arbor News," February 3, 2004)
7. "Democracy has at least one merit, namely, that a member of Parliament cannot be stupider than his constituents, for the more stupid he is, the more stupid they were to elect him." (source: Bertrand Russell, "Autobiography," 1967)
8. "Twenty-eight children in the United States were killed by falling television sets between 1990 and 1997. That is four times as many people as were killed by great white shark attacks in the twentieth century. Loosely speaking, this means that watching 'Jaws' on TV is more dangerous than swimming in the Pacific. (source: "The Statistical Shark," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2001)
9. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts." (source: Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia," 1891)

10. "I think [Sen. John Kerry] was right [to vote against the Defense of Marriage Act]. I think he was right because what happened with the Defense of Marriage Act is it took away the power of states, like Vermont, to be able to do what they chose to do about civil unions, about these kinds of marriage issues.... I think these are decisions the states should have the power to make. And the Defense of Marriage Act, as I understand it...would have taken away that power. And I think that's wrong – that power should not be taken away from the states." (source: Sen. John Edwards, January 22, 2004)

11. "Since 1976, states [in the United States] have executed 612 people, and released 81 from death row who were found to be innocent. Is there any reason to believe that the criminal justice system is more accurate in non-capital cases? If the criminal justice system makes half the mistakes in non-capital cases that it makes in capital cases, thousands of innocent people live in our prisons." (source: Philip Moustakis, "Missing: A Death Penalty Debate," *The New York Times*, February 23, 2000)

12. "Has it ever occurred to you how lucky you are to be alive? More than 99% of all creatures that have ever lived have died without progeny, but not a single one of your ancestors falls into this group!" (source: Daniel C. Dennett, "Darwin's Dangerous Ideas," 1995)

13. "Men love the suit so much, we've actually styled our pajamas to look like a tiny suit. Our pajamas have little lapels, little cuffs, simulated breast pockets. Do you need a breast pocket on your pajamas? You put a pen in there, you roll over in the middle of the night, you kill yourself." (source: Jerry Seinfeld, "SeinLanguage," 1993)

14. "Rights are either God-given or evolve out of the democratic process. Most rights are based on the ability of people to agree on a social contract, the ability to make and keep agreements. Animals cannot possibly reach such an agreement with other creatures. They cannot respect anyone else's rights. Therefore they cannot be said to have rights." (source: Rush Limbaugh, "The Way Things Ought to Be," 1992)

15. "If having rights requires being able to make moral claims, to grasp and apply moral laws, then many humans – the brain-damaged, the comatose, the senile – who plainly lack those capacities must be without rights. But that is absurd. This proves that rights do not depend on the presence of moral capacities." (source: Carl Cohen, "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research," 1986)

16. "When what is just or unjust is thought to be determined solely by whoever has the power to lay down the law of the land, it unavoidably follows that the law of the land cannot be judged either just or unjust." (source: Mortimer J. Adler, "Six Great Ideas," 1981)

17. "It is a scientific fact that 1974 was the worst year in world history for rock music. And I am NOT saying this because among the top musical acts to emerge that year were Abba AND Barry Manilow. I am saying it because the hit songs included 'Kung Fu Fighting,' 'Seasons in the Sun,' 'Billy Don't Be a Hero,' 'The Night Chicago Died' and '(You're) Having My Baby.'" (source: Dave Barry, "Dave Barry Turns Fifty," 1998)

18. "Supporters of the law [that bans the sale of handguns in Washington, D.C.] warn that if the appellate ruling stands and the District is forced to enact a weaker statute, permitting loaded weapons in homes, more shootings are sure to result, by accident and on purpose. Meanwhile, if pistols become legal in homes, many residents probably would acquire them, giving thieves more guns to steal and sell on the streets." (source: "Lawyer Who Wiped Out D.C. Ban Says It's About Liberties, Not Guns," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 2007)

19. "Get a job that lets you 'analyze' or 'evaluate' something as opposed to actually 'doing' something. When you evaluate something you get to criticize the work of others. If you do something, other people get to criticize *you*." (source: Scott Adams, "The Dilbert Principle," 1996)

20. "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." (source: *Declaration of Independence*)