

Via Antiqua Classical Tutoring

Pre-Logic Colloquium

Sample Material

SAMPLE

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1st Quarter Lecture: The Need for Socratic Conversation

The word *dialectic* is an important word to recover in our day. Broadly speaking, it means rational conversation conducted in a mutually respectful manner. Its ordinary usage in Ancient Greece, which has taught us all so much about faith and reason, referred to philosophical discussions such as those in which men like Socrates and Aristotle engaged.

In Plato's dialogues between Socrates and his opponents, dialectic takes a variety of forms. It can move quickly and forcefully, or slowly and calmly. It can be a cool Joe Friday-like "just the facts" exchange, or a vigorous sparring match employing much irony and sarcasm. But whatever form it takes between particular interlocutors, it is not driven by a desire to *win*. Dialectic is not a contest. It is not a debate. It is a process in which one rational being helps another rational being discern the truth.

Discussion driven by reason is generally not done in a highly emotional "six guns blazing" manner. Classically speaking, reason moderates the emotions and directs them toward the goal of attaining the peace of mind that can only be brought by embracing the truth. Hence, dialectic is normally done as a *conversation*, with all the give-and-take and general calmness of demeanor that that word implies.

As Christians, we should recognize that dialectic is not just for pagans. Scripture uses the word to describe several of Paul's defense speeches. For example, in Acts 17, in both Thessalonica and Athens, the word *dialegetomenos*, meaning "to argue" in the sense of making rational arguments in respectful conversation with other people, is used of Paul's attempts to persuade the unbelievers of the truth about Jesus. The same word comes up in Acts 18:4 and Acts 19:8 in the context of Paul's arguments in the Jewish synagogues.

Like most things in the world, the healthy practice of dialectic has a few perverse counterparts. One of these is *eristic*. The Greek word *eris* means "strife," and so eristic means arguing just for the sake of arguing, arguing strenuously and passionately to fulfill some emotional need in ourselves. Eristic is a kind of conversation, but it is a disordered kind. When we feel threatened and respond out of our feelings, we are engaging in eristic. When we think we know much about something and our opponent does not, and so we are going to *let him have it*, to show how ignorant he is, we are engaging in eristic.

At this point of our discussion, certain helpful souls like to point out that the New Testament contains some examples of fiery polemics. They remind us of Jesus' diatribes against the Pharisees, or of Romans 1, or of Galatians 1. It is very easy for us to say, "Hey, Jesus and Paul

spoke Truth that way, so I should too.” Indeed, it is easy for us to draw the inference that if we *don't* say it “like Jesus and Paul did,” we are somehow *compromising* the Truth.

However, the classical art of Socratic conversation urges us to take stock of our audience before we speak to them. Who are we talking to? What kind of people are they? What is their background, their “story,” so to speak? Do we know we understand their motives in taking the position they take? Is it possible the way they approach the issue might have some beneficial qualities that we can make use of in constructing our rejoinder? Questions like this must be asked, for dialectic is meant to persuade others of the truth and the best way to accomplish this goal is to speak to those others in a way that they will find persuasive.

The New Testament itself warns us to avoid strife and to cultivate such godly virtues as peace, joy, contentment, and a love that covers a multitude of sins. We are to let our speech be full of grace and seasoned with salt – why? *so that we may know how to answer anyone* (Col. 4:6). We are not to be quarrelsome, for quarrelsomeness short-circuits the ability to teach (2 Tim. 2:24). In short, discussing truth with other people should not follow the eristic mode. Discussion is about persuasion, not demolition.

Obviously, these distinctions and principles are difficult to put into practice. Like all good things, the art of dialectic is a goal to be striven for. Dialectic, like Virtue itself, is a “Golden Mean” between extremes. People have different strengths and weaknesses, so their struggles are different. There is no “one size fits all” approach to discussion – conversations can come in as many permutations as there are people to have them. Thus, there is no straightforward and certain *science* of dialectic. Strictly speaking, there is no *universal* and *objective* application of the above definitions.

We must take care not to confuse having faith with *not having questions*. More clearly, we must not confuse *having questions* with *having doubts*. Our culture continually demands that Christians bow to its assumptions about truth and modify their faith accordingly. This milieu of 24/7, top-to-bottom unbelief has created a Christian culture characterized by *fear of that which is Different*. The Different is weird. The Different is unsettling. The Different is *scary*. Faced with the Different, we are always on the defensive about our faith.

Defensiveness based on fear creates a “fist-fight” attitude toward contrary views. The goal of a fistfight is to win, and in order to win the fistfight with Modernity we cannot allow intellectual any uncertainty in ourselves. Thus, for many of us, the Truth about the matter under dispute is *plain* and *obvious* – and what in the world is wrong with people who don't think like *we* do? We can't afford to ask questions about serious matters, let alone allow others to ask questions, for questions imply that we don't already have the answers. And since we must have *certainty* of belief, not already having the answers is psychologically and emotionally unacceptable.

But as Douglas Wilson has helpfully put it, the difference is that questions have answers but doubts do not.¹ There is everything wrong with a Christian having doubts, but there is nothing wrong with a Christian having questions. (See also Mitch Stokes' *Dealing With Doubt*.)² Once we understand the lawfulness (indeed, the inescapableness) of Christians having questions, the way is opened to recover the lost art of dialectic. For if it is not wrong for oneself to *have* questions, it is not wrong for oneself to *ask* questions of others. The ability to ask intelligent questions directed toward the goal of finding truth, combined with the ability not to fear the results of the inquiry, is the basis of the lost art of dialectic.

A few final words about how the word *conversation* is often used in our culture. Many unbelievers assume that *conversation* means approaching others with the intention to "tolerate diversity," that is, by accepting that their "take" on something is just as "true for them" as ours is for us. In some Christian circles, movements that use words like "emerging" and "missional" urge the rest of the Church, in the name of *conversation*, to take its doctrinal cues from the skeptical truth claims of our culture.

These considerations make many conservative Christians wonder why they should be interested in conversation at all. Are we *really* supposed to have *conversations* with God-rejecting non-Christians, with people who claim to be Christians but who in the name of "fairness" question the reality of Hell? Who in the name of making peace with Modern Science advocate theistic evolution? Who in the name of "tolerating diversity" urge that we accept moral perversity as just an "alternative lifestyle"? How is being willing to *converse* about such things compatible with the perceived biblical duty to uncompromisingly stand proclaiming the Truth of God's Word and just let the chips fall where they may? Isn't *conversation* just another way to say "wimpy" and "sentimental" and "squishy"?

It could be, but it isn't necessarily. If *conversation* means having no stomach for the solid ground of Truth because one prefers endless willingness to fall back when challenged, then it isn't a good thing. Thankfully the classical art of dialectic doesn't define *conversation* that way. In dialectic, *conversation* is based on the *fact* that there is Truth to be found and the *fact* that both parties are, through rational give-and-take, able to find it. A postmodern "dialogue" is driven by the belief that it isn't the destination that matters, only the journey. Contrariwise, the whole point of a classical dialectical conversation is the destination. There is no point to the journey if it is not a means capable of reaching the destination. The whole point of dialectical conversation is to discern the Truth.

¹ See "The Differences Between Doubts and Questions" (<http://www.dougwils.com/Previous-Publications/the-difference-between-doubts-and-questions.html>).

² See <<http://theresurgence.com/2012/04/17/dealing-with-doubt>>.

**1st Quarter – *Socrates Meets Jesus*
Writing Assignment – *Chreia***

In *Socrates Meets Jesus*, Socrates tells Bertha, “if religion is God-made, it would be reasonable that other religions, human religions, be unequal to the one God made, because human things are unequal to divine things” (pg. 94). Using the principles we learned about the progymnasmata exercises, write a *chreia* of about 500 words on this statement. The *chreia* section prompts are outlined for you below.

[Chreia Statement]

[Paraphrase]

[Praise]

[From the Cause]

[From the Contrary]

[Analogy]

[Example]

[Testimony of the Ancients]

[Epilogue]

2nd Quarter – *The Unaborted Socrates*
Quiz 1

1. Give a definition of *elenchus*, the mode of argument that Socrates uses.

2. What does Socrates mean by his term “the common master” that decides questions between himself and Dr. Herrod?

3. What is Socrates’ definition of *metaphysics*?

4. Why does Socrates believe that Herrod is wrong to be “impatient for truth”?

5. According to Socrates, when you are trying to find the answer to a complicated question, what is “the first lesson,” and how does it relate to being “in the presence of wisdom”?

6. According to Socrates, what is the difference between *being a person* and *functioning as a person*?

7. Describe the *natural law* approach to moral issues in general. How does Socrates' behavior in *The Unaborted Socrates* make use of this approach?

8. What is Socrates' definition of *philosophy*?

9. What do Herrod and Socrates agree are the three elements that make up *murder*?

10. On pg. 52 Socrates says that “The affliction of the mind is the only road I know to the comfort of knowing.” On pg. 60, referring to the “common master,” reason, he says “Difficulties are the master’s bait.” Considering the whole of this Dialog that you have read, what does Socrates mean by these remarks? (Hint: your answers to Questions 5 and 8 may help.)

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3rd Quarter: Religion and Science Project

The purpose of this study is to highlight one of the most basic issues underlying our culture's belief that *science* is a more reliable way of knowing things than *religion*. We will approach this issue by examining the thing that science thinks it is best at examining: the idea of what *causes* things to happen.

Christians must not concede to science the right to define the word "cause." The reason is that science can only look at *one kind of* cause, but there are *other kinds of* causes beyond the ability of science to analyze. And it is these other kinds of causes that make room for religious truth claims.

Meanings of the Word "Cause"

1. Science studies the physical causes of phenomena in the world. But are physical causes the only kind? Modern Science says "yes" because its worldview is materialistic.
2. The ancients recognized four kinds of causes: formal, material, efficient, and final
 - a. Formal Cause – the *plan* according to which a thing is made (e.g., a blueprint)
 - b. Material Cause – the *stuff* out of which a thing is made (e.g., wood, metal)
 - c. Efficient Cause – the *means* by which something is made (the hand of the carpenter; "laws of physics," etc.)
 - d. Final Cause – the *ultimate purpose* for why the thing was made

Note: Modern Science is committed to the philosophical idea that only material and efficient causes exist. There is no plan for the world, so there is no formal cause. Neither is there any purpose for the world, so there is no final cause. The only kinds of causes that exist are material (the *stuff*) and efficient (the *means*). These two causes are what Science studies, and they are the only things that can be known. (This is why creationism, along with all "religion," is considered taboo by Modern Scientists, and why they *must* believe in evolution – evolution is the only possible material / efficient cause for the existence of the world.)

The Four Causes

Science studies the physical causes of phenomena in the world. But are physical causes the only kind? Ancient people, following the lead of Aristotle (384 B.C. – 322 B.C.), recognized four different kinds of causes: formal, material, efficient, and final.

The formal cause of a thing is the *plan* according to which the thing is made (e.g., the construction team building the house followed the blueprint). The material cause of a thing is the *stuff* out of which the thing is made (e.g., metal was used to construct the building). The efficient cause of a thing is the *means* by which the thing is made or an action performed (e.g., the hand of the carpenter shaped the wood.) Lastly, the final cause of a thing is the *purpose* for which the thing was made (e.g., the hamburger was cooked to satisfy my hunger.)

Think about the following examples, and answer the questions about them.

a) What is the final cause of a chair?

b) What is the efficient cause of a book?

c) What is the formal cause of a house?

d) What is the material cause of a penny?

e) Would plastic be the material cause or the efficient cause of a bottle of soda pop?

f) Would the flowing action of a river creating erosion in the ground be the efficient cause or the formal cause of a canyon?

g) Would “in order to get somewhere without walking” be the material cause, the formal cause, or the final cause of a car?

h) Would a tree be the efficient cause, the formal cause, or the material cause of a piece of paper?

i) What do you think is the final cause of scientific observation of the world?

j) What do you think is the efficient cause of your salvation?

k) What is the formal cause of a chocolate cake?

l) What is the material cause of burned skin that comes from being outside too long?

m) Does God's existence have a material cause? A formal cause? An efficient cause?

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4th Quarter Lecture: What's In A Worldview?

The term “worldview” has a simple dictionary definition: “the way that a person views the world.” The way that we view the world is made up of a variety of factors, including spiritual, cultural, emotional, and intellectual ones.

Usually people who talk about worldviews focus primarily on the intellectual factors, or the things that we *think*. In this sense, when people talk about a worldview they mean the things that we *think* about God, ourselves, the world, and other people. It is important, however, to understand that worldviews have non-intellectual elements and practical consequences. Worldviews are not just thoughts rattling around in people’s heads. Thoughts in our minds come from our hearts and reflect what is in them (Mt. 9:4; Rom. 1:21).

As well, the things that we think about God, ourselves, the world, other people, and so forth substantially influence our behavior. Ideas give birth to actions. Someone who thinks that there is no God will act differently than someone who does think there is a God. Someone who thinks that humans evolved from lower life forms will act differently than someone who thinks humans were created by God. Someone who thinks that life does not mean anything will act differently than someone who thinks life does mean something. And so forth.

One easy way to get hold of the concept of a worldview is to think of it as answering certain basic questions. Different people give different lists of the basic questions that a worldview answers. A simple list is this one:

- **Who am I?** - what kind of creatures are human beings (what is the *nature* of a human being)? What is the task of human beings in the world? What significance or meaning do human beings have?
- **Where am I?** - what is the origin and nature of the reality in which human beings find themselves?
- **What's wrong?** – In many ways, the world seems to be broken, or at least, somehow “sick.” What is the reason for this brokenness, this “sickness”?
- **What's the remedy?** - Can the brokenness and “sickness” of the world be alleviated? If so, how?

These are basic questions, questions that you can use to get a “feel” for what a person’s worldview is. However, you must take care not to “put people in a box” based on the answers

they give to these questions. It is important to understand that within a particular worldview there can be disagreement about the proper answers to the basic questions.

For instance, all Christians believe that the answer to the third question, “What’s wrong?” is that “Mankind sinned against God and must be saved by God.” But not all Christians agree with each other on “sub-questions” that come under this one, such as “What were the effects of man’s Fall on the human mind?”, “Do human beings after the Fall have free will?”, and so forth. All Christians believe as a basic answer to this part of the Christian worldview that man has fallen into sin, but not all Christians believe the same things about particular parts of the answer to the question.

Likewise, all Christians practice baptism because Jesus said to baptize people in his name. But not all Christians believe exactly the same thing about baptism. Some think that baptism can be given to infants, while others think it can only be given to people who have first made a public statement of their personal belief in Christ. Some believe baptism is only properly done via immersion. Others believe in sprinkling, and still others in pouring.

All Christians believe that Jesus is coming back to this world at the end of time, but not all Christians believe the same thing about *when* the end of time will be and *how* the events described in the Bible’s passages about the end times will all work out.

All Muslims share certain beliefs about the inspiration of the Koran and the character of Allah, but this has not stopped diverse views (such as Shi’a, Sufi, and Sunni) from developing due to different takes on “sub-questions” within the worldview. All Hindus believe in a nebulous entity they call “Brahman,” but great differences have arisen amongst them about the precise role of Brahman in their religion.

More examples could be given, but these show that outlining the basic questions of a worldview and its basic answers to those questions is only a start at understanding a belief system. Worldviews can help us to clearly organize beliefs and analyze their consequences. But worldviews are less like encyclopedia articles and more like the superstructures of skyscrapers upon which different exteriors and within which different arrangements of rooms can be built.

This means that part of good worldview thinking is to be able to discern essential questions from secondary questions. Another part of good worldview thinking is to be charitable toward others. People are not just minds. People do not always think and act in ways fully consistent with their espoused worldview. This is true not only of unbelievers, but of Christians, too.

Thus, worldview thinking is not a bludgeon with which to hit people who disagree with you. Nor is it a mental straitjacket, preventing the movement of the mind outside its narrow confines. It is just a tool to help you learn to systematically think about beliefs, both your own and those of others who, like you, are made in the image of God but need the redemption from sin and all its effects on life and culture that only comes through Jesus Christ.

4th Quarter
Writing Assignment – Creation and Evolution

We have recently discussed issues of science, creation, and evolution. Using the principles we learned about the progymnasmata exercises, write a confirmation of one of the views we have discussed. Then write a *refutation* of the same view (even if it is the view you yourself believe), so that you can practice seeing both sides of the argument. The *confirmation* and *refutation* section prompts are outlined for you below.

Confirmation of _____

[The True Claim]

[The Claim is Clear and Believable]

[The Claim is Possible]

[The Claim is Logical or Appropriate]

[The Claim is Expedient or Consistent]

[OPTIONAL - Epilogue]

Refutation of _____

[The False Claim]

[The Claim is Unclear and Incredible]

[The Claim is Impossible]

[The Claim is Illogical or Inappropriate]

[The Claim is Inexpedient or Inconsistent]

[OPTIONAL - Epilogue]

SAMPLE