

PHILOSOPHY 101: Seven Sample Argumentative Passages

April 7, 2011

1. Dear Senator Jenkins,

I am writing to urge your support for higher salaries for state correctional facility guards. I am a clerical worker at Kingsford Prison, and I know whereof I speak. Guards work long hours, often giving up week-ends, at a dangerous job. They cannot afford expensive houses, or even nice clothes. Things that other state employees take for granted, like orthodontia for their children and a second car, are not possibilities on their salaries, which, incidentally, have not been raised in five years. Their dedication deserves better.

Very truly yours, ...

2. Letter to the editor: "In regard to your editorial, 'Crime bill wastes billions,' let me set you straight. Your paper opposes mandatory life sentences for criminals convicted of three violent crimes, and you whine about how criminals' rights might be violated. Yet you also want to infringe on a citizen's right to keep an bear arms. You say you oppose life sentences for three-time losers because judges couldn't show any leniency toward the criminals no matter how trivial the crime. What is your definition of trivial, busting an innocent child's skull with a hammer?"

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3. If you want to listen to loud music, do it when we are not at home. It bothers us, and we're your parents.
4. The issue is not whether flag burning is offensive or even wrong. Rock music, vulgar language and punk hairstyles are offensive to many. And, infidelity, deceit, and lying are wrong. But, it is not the business of government to imprison people for offensiveness or wrongdoing of these sorts. A flag is a piece of cloth. To destroy it (assuming it's your own) harms no one. There are thousands of others and new ones are produced each day. True, that a piece of cloth has great symbolic value. But, that is precisely why publicly burning it can dramatize a point ... Chief Justice Rehnquist argues that prohibiting this mode of expression still leaves people with plenty of others. That's true. But, it misses the point. One needn't prohibit all means of expression before one has compromised freedom. If I lock you in a room, it will be of little consolation that you can talk on the phone ... We are genuinely free only when we can hold both the views we want and (so long as we harm no one thereby) express them as we choose.
5. Students who come to school under the influence of drugs are disruptive and they interfere with the education of other students. Students have a right to a quality education, and the school board must not permit some students to interfere with the education of others. So, we should test students to see if they are using drugs and the drug users should not be permitted to attend school.
6. If you pick up a pocket watch and look at the mechanism, you will immediately come to think that someone designed the watch. The universe and all its parts also fit together like a well-crafted machine.
7. Sound logic is not always desirable. It is, in fact, the most dangerous of all things, if one starts with a false premise. In such a case, the more logically one reasons, the farther one gets from the truth. The only hope there is for a healthy conclusion or good thought, if a premise is false, is to make a slip somewhere in the reasoning process.
(Fulton Sheen, *Old Errors in New Labels*, New York, 1931, page 287)