

“This book is a remarkable piece of apologetic reasoning, which uses a format that is both textually rich and diagrammatically wise. I know of nothing else like it and I am thankful to the God of truth and reason for its appearance. It will open doors to apologetics in a new way that will help many Christians and non-Christians. Bravo!”

**Douglas Groothuis, PhD**

Professor of Philosophy, Denver Seminary  
and author of *Christian Apologetics*

“Robert Velarde is a meticulous Christian thinker and gifted writer. His newest work, *A Visual Defense: The Case For and Against Christianity*, again demonstrates Velarde’s ability to understand all sides of an issue, to fairly critique the nonbiblical claims, and to explain and defend the Christian position.”

**Alex McFarland**

Director for Christian Worldview and Apologetics  
North Greenville University, South Carolina



A V I S U A L  
D E F E N S E

THE CASE FOR  
AND AGAINST  
CHRISTIANITY

ROBERT VELARDE

 Kregel  
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*A Visual Defense: The Case For and Against Christianity*

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# Preface

*When we want to correct someone usefully and show him he is wrong, we must see from what point of view he is approaching the matter, for it is usually right from that point of view, and we must admit this, but show him the point of view from which it is wrong. This will please him, because he will see that he was not wrong but merely failed to see every aspect of the question.*

—Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (701/9)

My purpose in this book is threefold: to help the reader (1) learn to think critically; (2) make the case for the Christian worldview; and (3) seek to understand opposing viewpoints. Regarding critical thinking, part 1 provides background on the value of logical discourse, the necessity of defending the faith (apologetics), the life of the intellect in relation to the Christian worldview, and a brief tour through the relationship between faith and reason.

But our overview of critical thinking is far from limited to part 1, as parts 2 and 3 continue to examine and analyze various arguments for and against Christianity. As a committed Christian, I do not want to tear down Christianity and leave its followers without hope. Rather, I desire to demonstrate that Christianity not only can make a robust, positive case for its truth but also can withstand the harshest intellectual attacks. It does no good to the cause of Christ to avoid grappling with challenges to our faith. In reality, much harm can come from such avoidance, since those who follow such a path may lack a solid foundation regarding why they believe what they believe.

Part 2 makes the case for the Christian worldview via eleven argument maps. These diagrams present a visual approach to understanding argument forms including conclusions and premises, as well as objections and rebuttals that arise in the normal course of reasoned dialogue. Note that the diagrams make no attempt to be exhaustive. Such an endeavor would quickly result in lengthy sheets of paper and diagrams that a book cannot accommodate. Consequently, *the diagrams in this book are broad overviews of various arguments for and against Christianity*. In some instances the reader may not consider some of the points central or may note omissions; feel free to think through alternatives and responses to them. At any rate, the arguments presented in part 2 largely fall into positive apologetics—that is, they make a positive case for the Christian worldview. However, even these arguments must grapple with criticisms and challenges, so there is an ongoing interplay with competing ideas.

In part 3 we turn to ten arguments against Christianity. Although the atheistic worldview is stressed due to its current prominence in Western culture, at times we also explore the worldview of monistic pantheism, which remains a powerful draw for millions of people.

Thus, this book primarily addresses three worldviews overall: Christian theism, atheism, and pantheism. There are, of course, other worldviews, but in the assessment of the author, the three addressed represent the primary live options in the world, with many sub-worldviews under them. As such, theism, atheism, and pantheism serve as umbrellas over various offshoots. The arguments in part 3 are not to be approached lightly, either intellectually or spiritually. If one is weak in the faith to begin with, it is best to begin with part 2, which will edify the Christian in the truth of the Christian worldview.

Keep in mind, too, that the argument maps in this book are highly intellectual in their content and nature. But the Christian life is about far more than logical argumentation and analysis. We must not neglect its spiritual side. There is a time and a place for defending the faith, but we cannot always live in that world or in that frame of mind. As C. S. Lewis wisely stated, “A man can’t be always defending the truth; there must be a time to feed on it.”<sup>1</sup>

Part 3 calls us to seek to understand opposing viewpoints. Often, to our detriment, we become entrenched in our own worldview without considering its place in the broader scheme of the pursuit of intellectual truth. This is not to say that, as Christians, we should avoid understanding and believing in our worldview; rather, it is to say that too often we neglect to see other perspectives, quickly dismissing arguments without even assessing them. Consequently, part of our goal in this book is to learn to consider various options and viewpoints when it comes to understanding reality.

As a former atheist and, for a short time, a monistic pantheist, I have attempted to fairly represent the arguments and worldviews in the associated diagrams. This, however, does not mean that all the diagrams are flawless. Indeed, disagreements about the strengths and weaknesses of certain arguments and approaches are inevitable. Moreover, different theists, atheists, and pantheists may have differing ideas as to what arguments, if any, form the key foundations of the relevant worldview under discussion. Nevertheless, it is my hope that the diagrams and related text offer helpful insights as we seek to understand reality as best we can.

A few final points must be noted or reiterated. First, I am unashamedly a Christian theist, and as such I will defend the Christian worldview vigorously. Second, although I will approach the defense of the faith from what is typically called the position of classical apologetics, this does not mean that there is little or no value in this work for Christian thinkers who hold to other views of apologetic methodology, such as evidentialism, presuppositionalism, Reformed epistemology, cumulative case apologetics, and other forms of defending the faith (see the glossary for brief definitions of these types of apologetics). Third, the argument maps are key to our threefold approach. While the accompanying text is of much value in understanding the diagrams, readers should begin each chapter by carefully viewing and considering the flow of thought represented in the diagrams themselves. To this end, we now turn to chapter 1, where our method of mapping is further explained.

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1. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), 7.



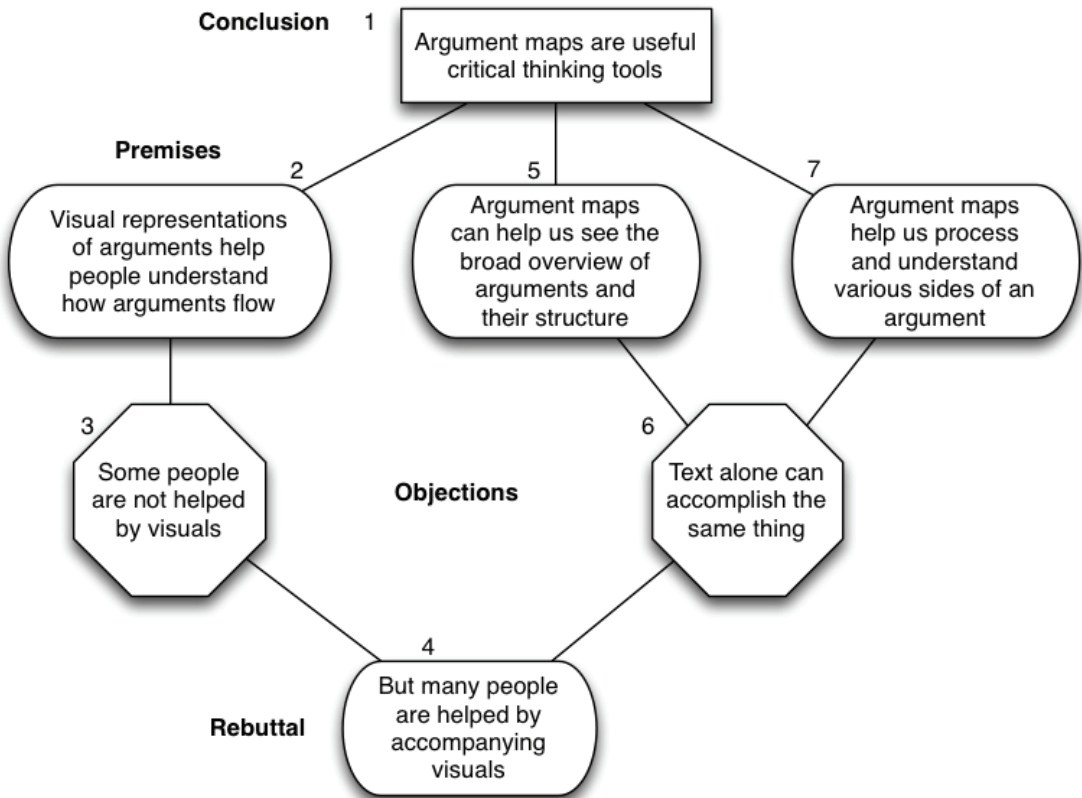
## **PART I**

# Introduction



# CHAPTER I

## Understanding Argument Diagrams



Argument diagrams are crucial to this book. Therefore, this chapter will explain the rationale and structure of the diagrams as well as help the reader interpret the sample diagram at the beginning of this chapter.

An argument diagram visually represents the parts of a logical argument. Such diagrams are also called argument maps. Keep in mind that we are using the word *argument* in relation to logical reasoning, not as in a fight or squabble of some kind.

A logical argument consists of propositions—what we might call truth claims about reality. The argument maps in this book begin with the *conclusion* of the argument, then are followed by *premises* (propositions that claim to support the conclusion). The premises are then followed by *objections*—ideas or even emotional reasons why someone might object to a premise. The objections are then followed by *rebuttals*, wherein the supporter of the conclusion responds to the objection. In some cases the rebuttals are followed by further objections. Obviously, arguments can go back and forth in this manner—objection, rebuttal—for quite some time, so for our purposes the argument diagrams are limited to one page.

Some diagrams include an assumption(s), noted next to the conclusion. This means that the conclusion itself relies on key assumptions or presuppositions. Since every argument relies to some extent on some assumptions and presuppositions, the diagrams will not always note such assumptions. Only where certain assumptions are worth noting are they included in the diagram in question.

Take a moment to look over the diagram at the beginning of this chapter. Make sure you can find the conclusion, premises, objections, and rebuttals. Note the shapes too. The conclusion is always at the top in a rectangular box, while premises and rebuttals have rounded corners. Objections take the form of octagons, as in stop signs. You'll also see that the shapes are connected with lines. These lines represent associations between the ideas represented. For instance, three lines are leaving the conclusion and pointing to three supporting premises for the argument. In turn, these premises are connected via lines to related objections, and so forth.

Finally, take note of the numbers on the argument map. These numbers relate to text in the book. For instance, as we work our way through the sample diagram in the following pages, when you see bold text beginning with a number, the text beside this heading refers to the box next to the number on the diagram. Number 6, then, is followed by text relating to the objection, "Text alone can accomplish the same thing." Many of the argument diagrams in later chapters can involve as many as two dozen or so numbers, so it is important to understand the relationship between the numbers and the text.

While this resource is not a primer on logic, it is important to understand that logical argumentation fits well with the Christian worldview (see chapters 3 and 4). The Bible clearly supports the use of logic both implicitly and explicitly. It contains numerous logical truth claims communicated in reasonable language that relies on the laws of logic.

God's Word is also explicit in its support of logic. In Isaiah 1:18, for instance, we read, "Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD" (NASB). In Matthew 22:37, Jesus admonishes his followers to love God with heart, soul, and mind. The passage uses the Greek word *dianoia*, translated as *mind*, which refers to deep thought, implying the use of logical thinking in order to gain understanding. Moreover, Jesus often interacted with his critics by utilizing various logical

forms of argumentation, such as a fortiori arguments, appeal to evidence, escaping the horns of a dilemma, *reductio ad absurdum* argumentation, and more.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible never encourages believers to shun the intellect (although we often behave in such a way, much to the detriment of the case for Christianity). Ignoring reasoning and emptying the mind are Eastern meditative ideas, supposedly useful in seeking enlightenment, rather than Christian precepts. In short, biblical Christianity is a thinking religion. This does not mean there is no room for feeling or religious experience. Both reason and emotion play critical roles in the Christian life. The point, however, is that the Bible never requires believers to discard the life of the mind, but in fact strongly encourages it.

**1. Argument maps are useful critical thinking tools**

Here we begin to discuss the argument diagram in question (at the beginning of this chapter). Note that the heading includes the number associated with the conclusion, signifying that text below this heading will relate to the conclusion. In this case our conclusion is, “Argument maps are useful critical thinking tools.” The evidence in support of this conclusion is found in points 2, 5, and 7—the boxes below the conclusion in the diagram.

**2. Visual representations of arguments help people understand how arguments flow**

Due to space limitations, the content in most boxes, including the premises, is limited, so the associated text is where ideas are amplified as necessary. The premise here claims, “Visual representations of arguments help people understand how arguments flow.” Here is where the text would add supporting information or reasoning behind the premise in question. In this instance we could cite research documenting the value of visual learning, as well as the benefit of utilizing argument maps and diagrams.

**3. Some people are not helped by visuals**

This is the first objection to the argument. Since it is connected by a line to point 2, we know that the objection is specifically to the premise in point 2. We also know that it is an objection because of the octagonal shape. Keep in mind that arguments in part 2 argue in favor of Christianity, while arguments in part 3 argue against it. Therefore, we must pay attention to the parts of the argument, such as objections, since we will at times, for the sake of argument, defend an alternative worldview such as atheism or pantheism. The objection here notes, “Some people

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1. See Groothuis, *On Jesus*, chapter 3; and Dallas Willard, “Jesus the Logician,” *Christian Scholars Review* 28, no. 4 (1999), 605–14, available at <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=39>.

are not helped by visuals.” In the text, the objector may go on to cite documentation or offer further evidence in support of the objection. For instance, he may claim that the blind are not helped by visuals or that some people prefer text over visuals.

**4. But many people are helped by accompanying visuals**

The supporter of the conclusion now offers a rebuttal to the objection in point 3: “But many people are helped by accompanying visuals.” Further documentation may be offered, or perhaps a partial agreement with the objection. For example, it might be noted that even though it is true that the blind or others are not helped by visuals, argument maps are still useful critical thinking tools (point 1, our conclusion).

**5. Argument maps can help us see the broad overview of arguments and their structure**

We now direct our attention near the top of the diagram as we return to another premise: “Argument maps can help us see the broad overview of arguments and their structure.” Being able to see the broad overview and flow of a conclusion, premises, objections, and rebuttals, will help us to grasp the main points of an argument more quickly, including what we may deem strengths and weaknesses of its structure.

**6. Text alone can accomplish the same thing**

Point 6 objects to our conclusion and to premises 5 and 7, since it is connected to point 5 and point 7. In other words, one objection (point 6) can at times respond to more than one premise. The objector may here tout the value of text in and of itself, demonstrating its claimed superiority to visuals or diagrams. Notice that the rebuttal to point 6 leads to point 4, demonstrating that an individual rebuttal may also respond to more than one objection.

**7. Argument maps help us process and understand various sides of an argument**

As noted in the preface, one of the goals of this book is to emphasize the importance of understanding various sides of an argument, not just our own position. The text associated with point 7, then, would underscore this belief.

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This concludes our tour of the sample argument diagram at the beginning of this chapter. At the end of each chapter, you’ll find discussion questions suitable for individuals or groups (such as classrooms), as well as suggested assignments.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Visualizing argument forms presents us with a different way of understanding arguments and their structures. What do you find helpful and/or unhelpful about argument maps? Why?
2. Would you find it difficult to create your own argument map or not? What would you find difficult or easy about creating your own argument map?
3. If you were to make an argument map, would you begin with your conclusion or your premises? Why would you approach your map that way?
4. Do you find it difficult to come up with objections that others might have to your conclusions and premises? What might make it easier for you to better understand other worldviews such as atheism and pantheism?
5. Critical thinking is a key aspect of creating, understanding, and evaluating an argument map. How would you characterize your skills in the area of critical thinking? What might you do to improve your abilities in this area?

## SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Practice creating some simple argument maps. Pick a few conclusions or premises and make an argument map on paper. Assess how your maps turned out and improve them if you can.
2. Most conclusions in any argument map have some assumptions or presuppositions associated with them. Given the conclusion, “Christianity is true,” make a list of what assumptions and presuppositions you believe go along with the conclusion. Do the same for the conclusion, “God does not exist.”
3. Play the role of a contemporary atheist. List your best arguments against religious belief. Sketch an argument map that includes your arguments. Now take the position of a Christian theist and list your best arguments for your faith. Sketch an argument map that includes your arguments.

