

Beisnerian Logic: a Reductio
September 1, 2005
Mr. Craig Brann

Mr. Beisner speaks clearly and unequivocally when advocating the primacy of logic. His formal, public response(s) to Pastor Schlissel's suggestion that God lies to his enemies provides a rich resource for those of us who wish to examine just how logic takes and retains the initiative. He cites Colossians 2:4 as a proof text against those who would, "argue fallaciously...{by means of}...an argument that persuades on the basis not of valid inference and true premises, but of emotion." He is concerned with the logical implications of Pastor Schlissel's position in three areas:

1. God's Holiness
2. the veracity Scripture
3. subjective assurance and confidence of the believer

First, God hates sin. His Holiness is diametrically opposed to sin, logically and personally. To so much as suggest that God acts sinfully at any time is blasphemy. Here we truly encounter a double edged sword: to call that which is evil, 'good' or to call that which is good, 'evil' results in blasphemy. Therefore, while we must be careful to ascribe to God that which He ascribes to Himself, to define sin categorically may result in blasphemy if and when God acts against the categorical imperative. For example if:

Lying is in all cases sinful (universal affirmative)
(if) God tells a lie (particular affirmative)
He therefore sins (particular affirmative[Figure 1, MP/SM, AII, Valid]).

The logical implication/conclusion is in fact something to be concerned with, but this is not Pastor Schlissel's major premise, therefore this is not Pastor Schlissel's conclusion. The universal affirmative must be presupposed in order to charge Pastor Steve with any logically implied blasphemy. But if God does in fact lie, then the major premise is in fact blasphemy, and one who subscribes thereto, a blasphemer.

When constructing an argument to defend God's holiness, Mr. Beisner employs several informal fallacies beginning with an equivocation of Pastor Schlissel's use of the term 'lie' and the use made by himself. Here he also makes a back-door appeal to authority by associating his own view of the term with very words of Christ, thus implying the latter as the words of Pastor Schlissel:

If the devil is a liar and the father of all lies (John 8:44), it follows that if God is a liar, then He (as creator) is the father of all lies.

If the phrase 'God is a liar' is intended to represent Pastor Schlissel's position, yet in Christ's righteous diatribe against satan, the enemy/friend distinction is not intended, it follows that the deduction above rests on a fallacy of Equivocation wherein the sense of the term 'lie' conveniently shifts within the argument. Furthermore, that which is logically applicable to the devil (created being) is categorically applied to God (un-created), thus a False Analogy. Given this context, it would appear that Rahab made her way into the Hebrews Hall of Faith by being born of the devil! Is this the result of good and necessary inference? That's right- Bad logic from the logician- breaking several of the rules he will consequently apply to Pastor Schlissel's 'arguments'.

Within the framework of the new terminology, no wonder it is tough to defend Scripture- as the Word of the father of all lies, and without the Scriptures the Gospel is lost. We will see, however, that Mr. Beisner again employs the very fallacy that he applies to Pastor Steve. To quote from his letter, "But if God can and does lie, then at most SOME of what God says is true, while some is false. But then the inference from that particular statement (SOME of what God says is true.) to the universal conclusion (ALL of the Bible is true.) is invalid: it commits the fallacy of weaker premise (particular)." That is, if at least one premise is particular (some, most, many, few), then the conclusion must be. This precisely shows us where Mr. Beisner lost the trail. He suggests that if God lies some of the time, then no one can discern when He does and does not- whether in his Word or elsewhere. But to infer from the particular statement (God lies to SOME people {enemies not friends}.) to the universal conclusion (God lies to ALL people {enemies AND friends}) commits the very fallacy of weaker premise (particular) that he (SURPRISE!) finds in Pastor Schlissel's 'argument'. Do you see? He finds what he puts there HIMSELF!

This 'eisegesis preceding exegesis' is most clear in response to Pastor Schlissel's suggestion that because God only lies to his enemies and not his friends, the only people who should have a problem with God's lying are his enemies. Stated formally:

The idea that God lies presents a warranted problem for those being lied to.
God only lies to His enemies.

Therefore, the idea that God lies only presents a warranted problem for His enemies.

So, Mr. Beisner then presented this syllogism:

All who have a problem with the idea that God lies are his enemies.
Cal Beisner has a problem with the idea that God lies.
Therefore, Cal Beisner is God's enemy.

As in our first example above, How is the major premise in Mr. Beisner's syllogism derived from Pastor Schlissel's conclusion? Apparently, 'problem', 'lies', and 'enemies' are to be equivocated, but this is clearly fallacious. Here we have self-conscious emotion overturning the logical context of the conversation. Though stated 'logically', it is little more than an emotionally charged fallacy of equivocation. A more accurate rendering of Mr. Beisner's position would be as follows:

The idea that God lies only presents a warranted problem to God's enemies.
The idea that God lies presents a problem to Cal Beisner.
Therefore, either Cal Beisner is God's enemy or his problem is unwarranted.

Making every effort to critique Pastor Schlissel's claims, for the discerning reader, Mr. Beisner exposes little more than his own insecurities while the actual issue is left obfuscated by a Slippery Slope of fallacious argumentation. The problems raised are problems imposed emotionally and have nothing to do with valid inference from TRUE premises. Therefore, according to God's word (Col.2:4), let us not be persuaded.