A Few Catholic Statements on Philosophy

- Referring to Christ: "In the beginning was the *Logos*…The true light that enlightens *every* man was coming into the world." *John 1:1-9*

- "[God] wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth." *1 Tim 2:4*

- "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope." *1 Peter 3:15*

- "..there can never be any real disagreement between faith and reason, since it is the same God who reveals the mysteries and infuses faith, and who has endowed the human mind with the light of reason." *Dei Filius,* Vatican I [ancient repeated doctrine, but codified]

- "It is well known how highly the Church regards human reason, for it falls to reason to demonstrate with certainty the existence of God…and, finally, to attain to some notion, indeed, a very fruitful notion of mysteries. But reason can perform these functions …only when properly trained, that is, when imbued with that sound philosophy which has long been…handed down by earlier Christian ages…" *Humani Generis*, Pius XII.

- "Man judges rightly that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind." *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II

- "Philosophy emerges, then, as one of the noblest of human tasks… the Church considers philosophy an indispensable help for a deeper understanding of faith and for communicating the truth of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it." *Fides et Ratio,* St. JPII

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- "The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason "mutually support each other"; each influences the other, as they offer to each other a purifying critique." *Fides et Ratio*, St. JPII.

- "Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents." *Fides et Ratio*, St. JPII.

- "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy….the autonomy which philosophy enjoys is rooted in the fact that reason is by its nature oriented to truth and is equipped moreover with the means necessary to arrive at truth." *Fides et Ratio*, St. JPII.

- "There are also signs of a resurgence of *fideism*, which fails to recognize the importance of rational knowledge and philosophical discourse for the understanding of faith, indeed for the very possibility of belief in God." *Fides et Ratio*, St. JPII.

- "It is necessary therefore that the mind of the believer acquire a natural, consistent and true knowledge of created realities—the world and man himself—which are also the object of divine Revelation. Still more, reason must be able to articulate this knowledge in concept and argument." *Fides et Ratio*, St. JPII.

Arguments

i. Definitions:
   1. **Sound arguments**
      a. An argument with true premises that lead to the conclusion.
   2. **Valid arguments**
      a. An argument with premises that lead to the conclusion.
   3. **True**
      a. That what a premise means is the case.
   4. **Premises**
      a. The data that supports (when the argument is valid) the conclusion.
   5. **Conclusion**
      a. The result of the argument. If the true premises lead to it, then it has to be true too.

ii. Examples:
   1. **Sound and valid argument**
      a. All dogs are mammals (premise 1)
      b. Lassie is a dog (premise 2)
      c. Therefore, Lassie is a mammal (Conclusion)
   2. **Valid but unsound argument**
      a. All dogs are hairless (premise 1)
      b. Lassie is a dog (premise 2)
      c. Therefore, Lassie is hairless (conclusions)
   3. **Invalid argument with true premises (and even a true conclusion)**
      a. All dogs are mammals (premise 1)
      b. A feline is a cat (premise 2)
      c. Therefore, a feline is a mammal (conclusion)
   4. **Invalid argument with false premises**
      a. All dogs are reptiles (premise 1)
      b. All computers are dogs (premise 2)
      c. Therefore, all computers are electronic (conclusion)

iii. ONLY 2 Ways to Logically Criticize Arguments:
   1. **A False Premise**
      a. One can challenge that a premise, needed for the conclusion, is false.
   2. **Validity**
      a. One can challenge that the conclusion does not follow from the premises.
   3. **Examples of Bad Criticisms**
      a. "I do not like the conclusion."
      b. "That conclusion can't be true!"
      c. "Here is another argument with the opposite conclusion" (this might be interesting but it does not directly address the argument).
      d. "Something does not feel right about the argument" (again, it might be an interesting feeling that may *help* you get to a good criticism, but it is not a logical criticism in itself).

3 Powerful but Basic Tools

i. <u>The Principle of Reflectivity.</u>
   1. **What it is**
      a. Perseus' Reflecting Shield Against Medusa.
      b. Testing Claims Against Themselves.
   2. **Examples:**
      a. "There is no such thing as truth." "Hmmm, if that is true then it is false, therefore it must be false."
      b. "All principles of the faith are found in the Bible alone" "Is that a principle of faith?" "Yes" "Then it must be in the Bible. It is not, therefore it must be false."

ii. <u>Principle of Parsimony/Simplicity.</u>
   1. **What it is**
      a. The simpler explanation, that is *more or equally* explanatory, is better.
         i. **Definition**
            1. <u>Simplicity:</u> made up of few or no parts
            2. <u>Explanation:</u> an account or reasons for, something.
      b. Just being simpler does not make it better, it must **also** *explain* the thing just as well.
      c. This is a Divine Principle, For Truth/God is, as our faith says, Simple, so all Truth has this quality by being truthful.
   2. **Scientific Example:**
      e. Because of the relativity of motion, this is one of the primary reasons for why the heliocentric is far superior to the geocentric model of our solar system. The geocentric model requires insane complexity such as retrograde motion of the planets, explaining stellar parallax, planetary phase shifts, and an added complexity for the laws of gravity. As invented tools (such as better telescopes) for detecting such complexities improved, the geocentric model (which once scientifically appeared to be the simpler explanation) was quickly abandoned.

iii. <u>Hypothetical Reasoning/ *Reductio ad absurdum*</u>
   a. **What it is**
      i. The best way of figuring out if something is true or false is to **assume it is true (or its opposite is true)** and see what is the most absurd thing that would have to be true as well. If it is too absurd to be true, then the thing assumed to be true, must be false.
      ii. This uses the following logical structure:
         1. A= assumption X=something true if A is true Y=the absurd thing that is true if X is true
         2. If A then X,
         3. If X then Y,
         4. A (assumption in question)
         5. Therefore Y
      iii. In other words, ask "if something were true, what would also be true, or what would follow from that?"
   b. **Example**
      i. "You should reject faith (A). If you should reject faith, then you should throw out beliefs based on faith (X), then most beliefs needed for everyday living need to be rejected (Y), but (Y) is false, therefore (A) is false."

Ought

1. Be Logical
    a. In a philosophical conversation put aside emotional attachments and biases and focus on the logic of the argument.
    b. Having strong feelings on a subject does not make it less or more true.

2. Always Follow the Principle of Non-Contradiction
    a. <u>Non-Contradiction:</u> Something is **never** the case and not the case in the same way at the same time. (A is not not A)

3. Be Aware of Assumptions
    a. We all make them, they are necessary, but we should be able to identify and argue for them. When we are aware of our assumptions as assumption, this is where faith is.

4. Be Simple
    a. Focus on a single topic, do not focus on multiple topics. Stay on target!
        i. Example dialogue:
            1. *John*: "I am atheist because I believe **evil contradicts God's existence.**"
            2. *Mark*: "Well let's address that through Augustine's arguments…"
            3. *John*: "Ya, but the idea of **God is unprovable**, so I don't believe him."
                a. Here there are two topics (*Evil and God* and *Provability of God*). Address one before moving on to another.
    b. Avoid vague and ambiguous language and clarify such language when another uses it.
    c. Be clear and concise.

5. Be Socratic
    a. Ask short questions and give short responses
        i. Do not address all the things you think are important JUST ask or answer the question **briefly** and **completely**.
    b. Dialogue, do not trade long speeches.

6. Play Devil's Advocate
        i. Do that even with yourself. Argue against your position, argue against your argument against your position, argue against your argument against your argument against your position, etc etc, until you can't.
            1. This does not mean you need philosophical proof to believe something, just that you do not have a solid <u>rational</u> foundation without it.

7. Argue Often [in philosophy]
    a. True argument is civil and logical and often helps all get to truth.
    b. Expect to argue and be argued with, do not take offense in this context.

Ought Not

1. **"Hear what I'm not Saying"**
   a. Critical to avoid! Don't read into hidden intentions behind an argument or premise, just take the argument itself.

2. **Disbelieve Because of No Solid Logical Proof.**
   a. Otherwise you could hardly do anything!
   b. Most of what you believe is because of intuition, faith, biological impulse, trusting in what others have said, and convention. This is not always a bad thing, but be aware of it because it is not a logical proof to others.

3. **Thinking a Thing is Illogical Because You have no Solid Proof for it.**
   a. Just because you don't understand something doesn't mean it is unreasonable!
      i. To think that is just lazy and prideful
   b. There is a <u>BIG</u> difference between:
      i. proving something is illogical; versus
      ii. proving you have little proof for it.

4. **Believe Something Can be Illogical.**
   a. One can't even think of something illogical (e.g. a 4 sided triangle).

5. **Think Agnosticism is always a Good Position for Little Evidence.**
      i. After all Agnosticism holds that it is better to refrain from believing something when you have little evidence for it, but where is the great evidence for that? Use skepticism against skepticism. Reflect it back onto the thing and see if it survives.

6. **Waste Time on "Merely Verbal Argument"**
      i. <u>Merely Verbal Argument</u>: a dispute where both parties might actually agree about the meaning in question, but use different terms or words.
         1. E.g. "I *love* (enjoy) dogs" "You should not *love* (valuing above all) dogs!"
      ii. "..stop disputing about words.." (2 Tim 2:14).

7. **Think Arguing is bad.**
      i. It is often thought of as bad, because most people refer to trading angry, poorly thought-through speeches as argument. "Avoid foolish and ignorant debates," (2 Timothy 2:23). True argument is Socratic. It leads to *Apo-logia* [giving reasons] (1 Peter 3:15).
      ii. "...do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame," (1 Peter 3:16).
      iii. Trust God, Who is Truth, to make the Truth known when it needs to be. Do your best, but avoid a Messiah complex that all rests on *your* arguments. Christ is savior, not you.