

### 3 LEVEL OF MEANINGFUL INQUIRY:

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#### Formal Level:

Abstract, formal,  
& logical inquiry.

1.

At this level we pursue our inquiry at a very abstract and analytical level. This analytical approach focuses on the nature of the argument, its logical weightiness, justifications, and counter-objections. In other words, at this level the inquiry is divorced from historical origins, social context, and practical implications.

#### Existential Level:

The struggles of our soul: Origins, meaning, values, & destiny. It is concerned with our personhood & our relationship to the larger world.

2.

At this level we pursue our inquiry by looking at the idea in relation to our existence, the shaping of our personhood (e.g., identity, meaning, values, hope, destiny) & our moral stance with the world, each other, & God. Does this idea displace or help realize our humanity? Does it degenerate or enrich the potentialities of our personhood? The deep struggles of our soul, expectations, intuitions, & our dreams are expressed in the arts (e.g., art, literature, music, & poetry) in relation to the idea. What do the arts communicate? What is the reaction by the spectator? How does it contribute

#### Prescriptive Level:

Focus on the commands, precepts, & principles.

3.

At this level we pursue our inquiry on the prescriptive level. We begin by examining “ought” claims. These “ought” claims are applicational and can deal with rules, commands, traditions, precepts, and principles in many spheres of authority: cultural, familial, political, religious, social, and theological.

**How should we critique an inquiry?** This is an important to question to always ask. Why? Consider this insight by Blaise Pascal, “*People almost invariably arrive at their basis of beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.*” Thus, in order to refrain from such frail gullibility & to only accept that which is true & beneficial & not merely that which is proposed to be meaningful by a mesmerizing person but is vacuous, I govern my inquiry by applying a seven-fold checklist. **Does this truth-claim, belief, or idea possess...**

1. **Coherence:** Does it harmonize with what we already know to be true?
2. **Empirically adequate:** What evidence do we have that is readily available? Does it tell like it is? Does it correspond with the way things actually are?
3. **Existentially relevant.** Does it relate or speak meaningfully to my situation, my context?
4. **Consequential:** What are the consequences generated from this idea, truth-claim, or belief?
5. **Viability:** Can one live out this idea, truth-claim, or belief in a consistent manner?
6. **Explanatory Power:** Does this truth-claim help pull all of life together? Does it shed light on other known inquiries, claims, insights, or discoveries?
7. **Aesthetic & Moral Quality:** Does it meaningfully improve or degrade that which is good, honorable, & trustworthy. Does it generate vice or virtue? Does it contribute to the well-being of our community? Does it add to that which is ugly and/or evil or contribute to that which is good and/or beautiful?

**Do not commit the fallacy of reductionism by approaching your inquiry only on level to the neglect of all other levels. Use all three levels in your investigation into any idea, belief, or truth-claim. Be thoughtful! Be patient! Be creative! Use all your resources. For example, do not neglect lessons from history, context, & the cultural, social, & moral implications generated from a belief, idea, or truth-claim. ~ Paul R. Shockley ©**