3.4: Ways to Disagree

When we arrive at a point where we disagree with the claim being made, we find that there are several ways we can respond. In his essay, *How to Disagree*, Paul Graham describes a hierarchy of seven ways a person can respond to an argument. Here is his list starting with the most basic way people react to a disagreement and working up to a more academic method of arguing.

- **Name Calling** – Totally ignoring an argument and instead just calling the person issuing the argument an unwelcomed name. You probably did this as a small child to your siblings or playmates.
  - Example: “You’re just crazy.”
- **Ad Hominem** – Attacking specific aspects of the source of the argument without referencing any aspect of the actual argument.
  - Example: “You don’t have a college degree, what do you know?”
- **Responding to Tone** – Attacking the tone of the argument, instead of and of the actual content of the argument.
  - Example: “Wow, your tone is way over the top, don’t you think?”
- **Contradiction** – Disagreeing by just stating an opposing side, with virtually no actual evidence to support this presented argument.
  - “No I didn’t” or “You’re wrong, basketball is a better sport than football.”
- **Counterargument** – Contradicting the initial argument, but also backing it up with reasoning and evidence. This is an actual argument and what the author, Graham, considers the first form of a convincing disagreement.
  - “No, the death penalty does not deter crime. In Ohio when they initiated the death penalty, crime actually increased.”
- **Refutation** – Here instead of making a unique counter argument, a mistake in the initial argument is found, and an explanation of that mistake along with evidence and reasoning is presented. Here no new argument is made; we are just finding the weakness in the initial argument.
- **Refuting the Central Point** – Explicitly refuting the main point of the initial argument. Instead of refuting some of
the supporting parts of an argument, here we focus on the key, central point of the initial argument.\footnote{Reference}

Reference