

Fallacies:



FALLACY: DEFINITION

A deceptive, misleading, or false notion, belief.

A misleading or unsound argument.

Deceptive, misleading, or false nature;
erroneousness.

Logic. any of various types of erroneous reasoning that render arguments logically unsound.

Fallacy of False Dilemma

Definition:

A limited number of options (usually two) is given, while in reality there are more options. A false dilemma is an illegitimate use of the "or" operator.

Putting issues or opinions into "black or white" terms is a common instance of this fallacy.

Examples:

- (i) Either you're for me or against me.**
- (ii) America: love it or leave it.**
- (iii) Either support Meech Lake or Quebec will separate.**
- (iv) Every person is either wholly good or wholly evil.**

Argument from Ignorance

Definition:

Arguments of this form assume that since something has not been proven false, it is therefore true. Conversely, such an argument may assume that since something has not been proven true, it is therefore false. (This is a special case of a false dilemma, since it assumes that all propositions must either be known to be true or known to be false.) As Davis writes, "Lack of proof is not proof." (p. 59)

Examples:

- (i) Since you cannot prove that ghosts do not exist, they must exist.**

- (ii) Since scientists cannot prove that global warming will occur, it probably won't.**

Slippery Slope

Definition:

In order to show that a proposition P is unacceptable, a sequence of increasingly unacceptable events is shown to follow from P. A slippery slope is an illegitimate use of the "if-then" operator.

Examples:

- (i) If we pass laws against fully-automatic weapons, then it won't be long before we pass laws on all weapons, and then we will begin to restrict other rights, and finally we will end up living in a communist state. Thus, we should not ban fully-automatic weapons.**
- (ii) You should never gamble. Once you start gambling you find it hard to stop. Soon you are spending all your money on gambling, and eventually you will turn to crime to support your earnings.**

Complex Question

Definition:

Two otherwise unrelated points are conjoined and treated as a single proposition. The reader is expected to accept or reject both together, when in reality one is acceptable while the other is not. A complex question is an illegitimate use of the "and" operator.

Examples:

- (i) You should support home education and the God-given right of parents to raise their children according to their own beliefs.**
- (ii) Do you support freedom and the right to bear arms?**
- (iii) Have you stopped using illegal sales practices? (This asks two questions: did you use illegal practices, and did you stop?)**

Appeals

- **Appeal to Force:** "You better agree to the new company policy if you want to keep your job."
- **Appeal to Pity:** "C'mon ref, that's not a penalty! Give us a break, we're down 7-1!"
- **Appeal to Consequences:** "You can't believe evolution is true. If it is, we're no better than apes."
- **Prejudicial Language:** "Proper citizens will agree..."
- **Appeal to Popularity:** "It is true because many people believe it."

Changing the Subject

Attacking the Person:

- (1) the person's character is attacked**
- (2) the person's circumstances are noted**
- (3) the person does not practice what is preached**

Appeal to Authority:

- (1) the authority is not an expert in the field**
- (2) experts in the field disagree**
- (3) the authority was joking, drunk, or in some other way not being serious**

Anonymous Authority: the authority in question is not named:

- (1) Studies indicate that 95% of people who start arguments with “studies indicate” have never read the study they wish to hold up as evidence.**

Style Over Substance

Definition:

The manner in which an argument (or arguer) is presented is taken to affect the likelihood that the conclusion is true.

Examples:

- (i) Nixon lost the presidential debate because of the sweat on his forehead.**
- (ii) Trudeau knows how to move a crowd. He must be right.**
- (iii) Why don't you take the advice of that nicely dressed young man?**

Begging the Question.

Definition:

The truth of the conclusion is assumed by the premises. Often, the conclusion is simply restated in the premises in a slightly different form. In more difficult cases, the premise is a consequence of the conclusion.

Examples:

- (i) Since I'm not lying, it follows that I'm telling the truth.**

- (ii) We know that God exists, since the Bible says God exists. What the Bible says must be true, since God wrote it and God never lies. (Here, we must agree that God exists in order to believe that God wrote the Bible.)**

Non Sequiturs

Affirming the Consequent.

Examples:

- (i) If I am in Calgary, then I am in Alberta. I am in Alberta, thus, I am in Calgary. (Of course, even though the premises are true, I might be in Edmonton, Alberta.)**
- (ii) If the mill were polluting the river then we would see an increase in fish deaths. And fish deaths have increased. Thus, the mill is polluting the river.**

Denying the Antecedent:

Examples:

- (i) If you get hit by a car when you are six then you will die young. But you were not hit by a car when you were six. Thus you will not die young. (Of course, you could be hit by a train at age seven, in which case you still die young.)**
- (ii) If I am in Calgary then I am in Alberta. I am not in Calgary, thus, I am not in Alberta.**