

Master List of Logical Fallacies

Fallacies are fake or deceptive arguments, arguments that prove nothing. Fallacies often seem superficially sound, and far too often have immense persuasive power, even after being clearly exposed as false. Fallacies are not always deliberate, but a good scholar's purpose is always to identify and unmask fallacies in arguments.

- **Ad Hominem Argument:** Also, "personal attack," "poisoning the well." The fallacy of attempting to refute an argument by attacking the opposition's personal character or reputation, using a corrupted negative argument from ethos. E.g., "He's so evil that you can't believe anything he says." See also Guilt by Association. Also applies to cases where valid opposing evidence and arguments are brushed aside without comment or consideration, as simply not worth arguing about.
- **Appeal to Closure.** The contemporary fallacy that an argument, standpoint, action or conclusion must be accepted, no matter how questionable, or else the point will remain unsettled and those affected will be denied "closure." This refuses to recognize the truth that some points will indeed remain unsettled, perhaps forever. (E.g., "Society would be protected, crime would be deterred and justice served if we sentence you to life without parole, but we need to execute you in order to provide some sense of closure.") (See also "Argument from Ignorance," "Argument from Consequences.")
- **Appeal to Heaven:** (also Deus Vult, Gott mit Uns, Manifest Destiny, the Special Covenant). An extremely dangerous fallacy (a deluded argument from ethos) of asserting that God (or a higher power) has ordered, supports or approves one's own standpoint or actions so no further justification is required and no serious challenge is possible. (E.g., "God ordered me to kill my children," or "We need to take away your land, since God [or Destiny, or Fate, or Heaven] has given it to us.") A private individual who seriously asserts this fallacy risks ending up in a psychiatric ward, but groups or nations who do it are far too often taken seriously. This vicious fallacy has been the cause of endless bloodshed over history.
- **Appeal to Pity:** (also "Argumentum ad Miserecordiam"). The fallacy of urging an audience to "root for the underdog" regardless of the issues at hand (e.g., "Those poor, cute little squeaky mice are being gobbled up by mean, nasty cats that are ten times their size!") A corrupt argument from pathos. See also Playing to Emotions.
- **Appeal to Tradition:** (also "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"). The fallacy that a standpoint, situation or action is right, proper and correct simply because it has "always" been that way, because people have "always" thought that way, or because it continues to serve one particular group very well. A corrupted argument from ethos (that of past generations). (E.g., "In America, women have always been paid less, so let's not mess with long-standing tradition."). The reverse of this is yet another fallacy, the "Appeal to Novelty," e.g., "It's NEW, and [therefore it

must be] good, or improved!"

- **Argument from Consequences:** The major fallacy of arguing that something cannot be true because if it were the consequences would be unacceptable. (E.g., "Global climate change cannot be caused by human burning of fossil fuels, because if it were, switching to non-polluting energy sources would bankrupt American industry," or "Doctor, that's wrong! I can't have cancer, because if I did that'd mean that I won't live to see my kids get married!")
- **Argument from Ignorance:** The fallacy that since we don't know (or can never know, or cannot prove) whether a claim is true or false, it must be false (or that it must be true). E.g., "Scientists are never going to be able to positively prove their theory that humans evolved from other creatures, because we weren't there to see it! So, that proves the Genesis six-day creation account is literally true as written!" This fallacy includes Attacking the Evidence, e.g. "Your statistics mean nothing! That proves I'm right!" This usually includes "Either-Or Reasoning:" E.g., "The vet can't find any reasonable explanation for why my dog died. See! See! That proves that you poisoned him! There's no other logical explanation!" A corrupted argument from logos. A fallacy commonly found in American political, judicial and forensic reasoning.

See also "Argumentum ex Silentio."

- **Argument from Inertia** (also "Stay the Course"). The fallacy that it is necessary to continue on a mistaken course of action even after discovering it is mistaken, because changing course would mean admitting one's decision (or one's leader, or one's faith) was wrong, and all one's effort, expense and sacrifice was for nothing, and that is unthinkable. A variety of the Argument from Consequences or the Appeal to Tradition.
- **Argument from Motives** (also Questioning Motives). The fallacy of declaring a standpoint or argument invalid solely because of the evil, corrupt or questionable motives of the one making the claim. E.g., "Bin Laden wanted us out of Afghanistan, so we have to keep up the fight!" Even evil people with corrupt motives sometimes say the truth (and even those who have the highest motives are often wrong or mistaken). A variety of the Ad Hominem argument.

The counterpart of this is the fallacy of falsely justifying or excusing evil or vicious actions because of the perpetrator's purity of motives or lack of malice. (E.g., "He's a good Christian man; how could you accuse him of doing something like that?")

- **Argumentum ad Baculam** (also "Argument from the Club"). The fallacy of "persuasion" by force, violence, or threats. E.g., "Gimmee your money, or I'll knock your head off!" or "We have the perfect right to take your land, since we have the guns and you don't." Also applies to indirect forms of threat. E.g., "Believe in our religion if you don't want to burn in hell forever and ever!"
- **Argumentum ex Silentio** (Argument from Silence. See also, Argument from Ignorance). The fallacy that if sources remain silent or say nothing about a given subject or question this in itself proves something about the truth of the

matter. E.g., "Science can tell us nothing about God. That proves God doesn't exist." Or "Science admits it can tell us nothing about God, so you can't deny that God exists!" Often misused in the American justice system, where, contrary to the 5th Amendment, remaining silent or "taking the Fifth" is often falsely portrayed as proof of guilt. E.g., "Mr. Hixel has no alibi for the evening of January 15th. This proves that he was in fact in room 331 at the Smuggler's Inn, murdering his wife with a hatchet!" In today's America, choosing to remain silent in the face of police officer's questions makes one guilty enough to be arrested or even shot.

- **Bandwagon** (also, Argument from Common Sense, Argumentum ad Populum): The fallacy of arguing that because "everyone" supposedly thinks or does something, it must be right. E.g., "Everyone knows that undocumented aliens ought to be kicked out!" Sometimes also includes Lying with Statistics, e.g. "Surveys show that over 75% of Americans believe Senator Smith is not telling the truth. For anyone with half a brain, that conclusively proves he's a dirty liar!"
- **Begging the Question** (also Circular Reasoning): Falsely arguing that something is true by repeating the same statement in different words. E.g., "The witchcraft problem is the most urgent spiritual crisis in the world today. Why? Because witches threaten our very souls." A corrupt argument from logos. See also "Big Lie technique."
- **Big Lie Technique** (also "Staying on Message"): The contemporary fallacy of repeating a lie, slogan or deceptive half-truth over and over (particularly in the media) until people believe it without further proof or evidence.. E.g., "What about the Jewish Question?" Note that when this particular phony debate was going on there was no "Jewish Question," only a "Nazi Question," but hardly anybody in power recognized or wanted to talk about that.
- **Blind Loyalty** (also Blind Obedience, the "Team Player" appeal, or the Nuremberg Defense). The dangerous fallacy that an argument or action is right simply and solely because a respected leader or source (an expert, parents, one's own "side," team or country, one's boss or commanding officers) say it is right. This is over-reliance on authority, a corrupted argument from ethos that puts loyalty above truth or above one's own reason and conscience. In this case, a person attempts to justify incorrect, stupid or criminal behavior by whining "That's what I was told to do," or "I was just following orders."
- **Blood is Thicker than Water** (also Favoritism, Compadrismo, "For my friends, anything."). The reverse of the "Ad Hominem" fallacy, a corrupt argument from ethos where a statement, argument or action is automatically regarded as true, correct and above challenge because one is related to, or knows and likes, or is on the same team as the individual involved. (E.g., "My brother-in-law says he saw you goofing off on the job. You're a hard worker, but who am I going to believe, you or him? You're fired!")
- **Bribery** (also Material Persuasion, Material Incentive, Financial Incentive). The fallacy of "persuasion" by bribery,

gifts or favors, the reverse of the Argumentum ad Baculam. As is well known, someone who is persuaded by bribery rarely "stays persuaded" unless the bribes keep on coming in and increasing with time.

- **The Complex Question:** The fallacy of demanding a direct answer to a question that cannot be answered without first analyzing or challenging the basis of the question itself. E.g., "Just answer me "yes" or "no!" Did you think you could get away with plagiarism and not suffer the consequences?" Or, "Why did you rob that bank?" Also applies to situations where one is forced to either accept or reject complex standpoints or propositions containing both acceptable and unacceptable parts. A corruption of the argument from logos.
- **Diminished Responsibility:** The common contemporary fallacy of applying a specialized American judicial concept (that criminal punishment should be less if one's judgment was impaired) to reality in general. E.g., "You can't count me absent on Monday--I was hung over and couldn't come to class, so it's not my fault." Or, "Yeah, I was speeding on the freeway and killed a guy, but I was high and didn't know what I was doing, so it didn't matter that much." In reality the death does matter very much to the victim, to his family and friends and to society in general. Whether the perpetrator was high or not does not matter at all, since the material results are the same.
- **Either-Or Reasoning:** (also False Dilemma, Black / White Fallacy). A fallacy that falsely offers only two possible alternatives even though a broad range of possible alternatives are really available. E.g., "Either you are 100% straight or you are queer as a \$3 bill--it's as simple as that, and there's no middle ground!" Or, "Either you're with us all the way, or you're a hostile and must be destroyed! Which will it be?"
- **"E" for Effort.** (Also Noble Effort) The contemporary fallacy that something must be right, true, valuable, or worthy of credit simply because someone has put so much sincere good-faith effort or even sacrifice and bloodshed into it. (See also Appeal to Pity, Argument from Inertia, or Sob Story.).
- **Equivocation:** The fallacy of deliberately failing to define one's terms, or deliberately using words in a different sense than the one the audience will understand. (E.g., Bill Clinton stating that he did not have sexual relations with "that woman," meaning no sexual penetration, knowing full well that the audience will understand his statement as "I had no sexual contact of any sort with that woman.") This is a corruption of the argument from logos, and a tactic often used in American jurisprudence.
- **Essentializing:** A fallacy that proposes a person or thing "is what it is and that's all that it is," and at its core will always be the way it is right now (E.g., "All terrorists are monsters, and will still be terrorist monsters even if they live to be 100."). Also refers to the fallacy of arguing that something is a certain way "by nature," an empty claim that no amount of proof can refute. (E.g., "Americans are cold and greedy by nature," or "Women are better cooks than men.")
- **Excluded Middle:** A corrupted argument from logos that proposes that since a little of something is good, more must be better (or that if cutting down on something is good, none at all is even better). E.g., "If eating an apple a day is good for you, eating an all-apple diet is even better!" or "If a low salt diet prolongs your life, a zero-salt diet should make you live forever!"
- **False Analogy:** The fallacy of incorrectly comparing one thing to another in order to draw a false conclusion. E.g., "Just like an alley cat needs to prowl, a normal human being can't be tied down to one single lover."

- **Finish the Job:** The dangerous contemporary fallacy that an action or standpoint (or the continuation of the action or standpoint) may not be questioned or discussed because there is "a job to be done," falsely assuming all "jobs" are meaningless but never to be questioned. Sometimes those involved internalize ("buy into") the "job" and make the task a part of their own ethos. (E.g., "Ours is not to reason why / Ours is but to do or die.") Related to this is the "Just a Job" fallacy. (E.g., "How can torturers stand to look at themselves in the mirror? But, I guess it's OK because for them it's just a job.") (See also "Blind Loyalty," "Argument from Inertia.")

- **Guilt by Association:** The fallacy of trying to refute or condemn someone's standpoint, arguments or actions by evoking the negative ethos of those with whom one associates or a group, religion or race to which he or she belongs. A form of Ad Hominem Argument. (E.g., "Don't listen to her. She's a Republican, so you can't trust anything she says.")

See also "They're Not Like Us."

- **The Half Truth** (also Card Stacking, Incomplete Information). A corrupt argument from logos, the fallacy of telling the truth but deliberately omitting important key details in order to falsify the larger picture and support a false conclusion (e.g. "The truth is that Ciudad Juárez, Mexico is one of the world's fastest growing cities and can boast of a young, ambitious and hard-working population, mild winters, a dry and sunny climate, low cost medical and dental care, a multitude of churches and places of worship, delicious local cuisine and a swinging nightclub scene. Taken together, all these facts clearly prove that Juarez is one of the world's most desirable places for young families to live, work and raise a family.")

- **I Wish I Had a Magic Wand:** The fallacy of regretfully (and falsely) proclaiming oneself powerless to change a bad or objectionable situation.. E.g., "What can we do about high gas prices? As Secretary of Energy I wish I had a magic wand, but I don't." [shrug]

Or, "No, you can't quit piano lessons. I wish I had a magic wand and could teach you piano overnight, but I don't, so like it or not, you have to keep on practicing." The parent, of course, ignores the possibility that the child may not want or need to learn piano. See also, TINA.

- **Just in Case:** A fallacy by which one's argument is based on a far-fetched or completely imaginary worst-case scenario rather than on reality. This plays on pathos (fear) rather than reason. E.g., "What if armed terrorists were to attack your own neighborhood day-care center tomorrow morning? Are you ready to fight back? Better stock up on assault rifles just in case!"

- **Lying with Statistics:** Using true figures and numbers to "prove" unrelated claims. (e.g. "College tuition costs have never been lower. When taken as a percentage of the national debt, getting a college education is actually far cheaper today than it was in 1965!"). A corrupted argument from logos. (See also Half-truth, Non Sequitur, Red

Herring.)

- **MYOB** (Mind Your Own Business; You're Not the Boss of Me; The Appeal to Privacy), The contemporary fallacy of arbitrarily prohibiting any discussion of one's own standpoints or behavior, no matter how absurd, dangerous, evil or offensive, by drawing a phony curtain of privacy around oneself and one's actions. A corrupted argument from ethos (your own). (E.g., "Sure, I was doing eighty and weaving between lanes on Mesa Street--what's it to you? You're not a cop, you're not my nanny It's my business to speed, and your business to get the hell out of the way. Mind your own business!" Or, "Yeah, I killed my kid. So butt out! It's none of your business!") (See also, "Taboo.") Rational discussion is cut off because "it is none of your business!"
- **Name-Calling:** A variety of the "Ad Hominem" argument. The dangerous fallacy that, simply because of who you are, any and all arguments, disagreements or objections against your standpoint or actions are automatically racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, bigoted, discriminatory or hateful. E.g., "My stand on abortion is the only correct one. To disagree with me, argue with me or question my judgment in any way would only show what a pig you really are." Also applies to refuting an argument by simply calling it a fallacy or declaring it invalid, without proving why it is invalid. See also, "Reductionism."
- **Non Sequitur:** The fallacy of offering reasons or conclusions that have no logical connection to the argument at hand (e.g. "The reason I flunked your course is because the government is now putting out purple five-dollar bills!"). (See also Red Herring.)

Occasionally involves the breathtaking arrogance of claiming to know why God is doing certain things. E.g., "God sent this week's earthquake to punish those people for their great wickedness."

- **Overgeneralization** (also Hasty Generalization). The stupid but common fallacy of incorrectly applying one or two examples to all cases (e.g. "Some college student was tailgating me all the way up North Main Street last night. This proves that all college students are lousy drivers, and we should pull their driver's licenses until they either grow up, learn to drive or graduate!").
- **The Paralysis of Analysis** (also, Procrastination): A postmodern fallacy that, since *all* data is never in, no legitimate decision can ever be made, and any action should always be delayed until forced by circumstances. A corruption of the argument from logos.
- **Playing on Emotions** (also, the Sob Story): The classic fallacy of pure argument from pathos, ignoring facts and calling on emotion alone. E.g., "If you don't agree witchcraft is a major problem, just stop for a moment and picture all those poor moms crying bitter tears for their innocent tiny little children whose little beds and tricycles lie cold and abandoned, all because of those wicked old witches! Let's string'em all up!"
- **Political Correctness** ("PC"): A postmodern fallacy that the nature of a thing or situation can be changed simply by changing its name. E.g., "We can strike a blow against cruelty to animals by changing the name of 'pets' to 'animal

companions.'" or "Never use the word 'victim' because it sounds so negative, helpless and despairing. Instead, call them 'survivors.'" (Of course, if all victims disappear then perpetrators conveniently vanish as well!)

- **Post Hoc Argument:** (also, "post hoc propter hoc" argument, or the "too much of a coincidence" argument): The classic fallacy that because something comes at the same time or just after something else, the first thing is caused by the second. E.g., "AIDS first emerged as a problem during the exact same time that Disco music was becoming popular--that's too much of a coincidence: It proves that Disco caused AIDS!"
- **Red Herring:** An irrelevant distraction, attempting to mislead an audience by bringing up an unrelated, but usually emotionally loaded issue. E.g., "In regard to my recent indictment for corruption, let's talk about what's really important instead: Taxes! Vote for me! I'm going to cut your taxes!"
- **Reductionism:** (also, Oversimplifying, Sloganeering): The fallacy of deceiving an audience by giving simple answers or slogans in response to complex questions, especially when appealing to less educated or unsophisticated audiences. E.g., "If the glove doesn't fit, you must vote to acquit." Often involves appeals to emotion (pathos). E.g., "Moms! If you want to protect your little kids from drug pushers who are giving them dope in crayon boxes, vote for Snith! He's tough on crime!"
- **Reifying:** The fallacy of treating imaginary categories as actual, material "things." (E.g., "Back in the day, the biggest struggle in youth culture was between Goths and Emos.") Sometimes also referred to as "Essentializing" or "Hypostatization."
- **Scare Tactic** (Also Paranoia): A variety of Playing on Emotions, a raw appeal to fear. A corrupted argument from Pathos.(E.g., "If you don't do what I say we're all gonna die! In this moment of crisis you can't afford the luxury of thinking or trying to second-guess my decisions. Our very lives are in peril! We need united action, now!")
- **Sending the Wrong Message:** A dangerous fallacy that attacks a given statement or action, no matter how true, correct or necessary, because it will "send the wrong message." In effect, those who uses this fallacy are publicly confessing to fraud and admitting that the truth will destroy the fragile web of illusion that has been created by their lies. E.g., "Actually, we're losing the war against drugs hands down, but if we admit it we'll be sending the wrong message."
- **Shifting the Burden of Proof.** (see also Argument from Ignorance) A fallacy that challenges opponents to disprove a claim, rather than asking the person making the claim to defend his/her own argument. E.g., "Space-alien are everywhere among us masquerading as true humans, even right here on campus! I dare you prove it isn't so! See? You can't! That means what I say is true."
- **Slippery Slope** (also, the Domino Theory): The common fallacy that "one thing inevitably leads to another." E.g., "If you two go and drink coffee together, one thing will lead to another, and soon enough you'll be pregnant and end up spending your life on welfare living in the projects," or "If we close Gitmo, pretty soon armed terrorists will be

on our doorstep!"

- **Snow Job:** The fallacy of “proving” a claim by overwhelming an audience with mountains of irrelevant facts, numbers, documents, graphs and statistics that they cannot be expected to understand. This is a corrupted argument from logos. See also, "Lying with Statistics."

- **Straw Man** (also "The Straw Person"): The fallacy of setting up a phony, ridiculous version of an opponent's argument and then proceeding to knock it down with a wave of the hand. E.g., "Vegetarians say animals have feelings like you and me. Ever seen a cow laugh at a Shakespeare comedy? Vegetarianism is nonsense!"

Or, "Pro-choicers hate babies!" Or, "Pro-lifers hate women, and want them to spend their lives barefoot, pregnant and chained to the kitchen stove!"

- **Taboo:** The fallacy of unilaterally declaring certain arguments, standpoints or actions to be "sacrosanct" or not open to discussion, or arbitrarily taking some standpoints or options "off the table" beforehand. (E.g., "Don't bring my drinking into this," or "Before we start, I won't allow you to attack my arguments by claiming 'That's just what Hitler would say!'")
- **Testimonial** (also Questionable Authority, Faulty Use of Authority): A fallacy in which support for a standpoint or product is provided by a well-known or respected figure (e.g. a star athlete or entertainer) who is not an expert and who was probably well paid to make the endorsement (e.g., "Olympic gold-medal pole-vaulter Fulano de Tal uses Quick Flush Internet-shouldn't you?"). Also includes other false, meaningless or paid means of associating oneself or one's product with the ethos of a famous person or event (e.g. "Try Salsa Cabria, the official taco sauce of the Winter Olympics!") This is a corrupted argument from ethos.
- **They're Not Like Us:** A badly corrupted, racist argument from ethos where a fact, argument or objection is arbitrarily disregarded, ignored or put down without consideration because those involved "are not like us," or "don't think like us." E.g., "It's OK for Mexicans to earn half a buck an hour in the maquiladoras. If it happened here I'd call it brutal exploitation and daylight robbery, but down south of the border they're not like us." Or, "Sure, the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima killed hundreds of thousands of innocent people, but in Asia they're not like us and they don't think the same as we do about life and death." A variety of the Ad Hominem Argument, most often applied to non-White populations.
- **TINA** (There Is No Alternative. Also "That's an order," "Get Over It," or the "fait accompli"). A very common contemporary extension of the either/or fallacy, quashing critical thought by announcing that there is no realistic alternative to a given standpoint, status or action, ruling any and all other options irrelevant, or announcing that a decision has been made and any further discussion is simply a waste of time (or even insubordination or disloyalty) when there is a job to be done. (See also, "Taboo;" "Finish the Job.")
- **Transfer:** A corrupt argument from ethos, falsely associating a famous person or thing with an unrelated standpoint

(e.g. putting a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on an advertisement for mattresses, using Genghis Khan, a Mongol who hated Chinese, as the name of a Chinese restaurant, or using the Texas flag to sell cars or pickups that were made in Detroit, Kansas City or Kyoto)..

(See also "Testimonial.")

- **Tu Quoque** ("You Do it Too!"; also Two Wrongs Make a Right): A corrupt argument from ethos. The fallacy of defending a shaky or false standpoint or excusing one's own bad action by pointing out that one's opponent's acts or personal character are also open to question, or are perhaps even worse than one's own. E.g., "Sure, we torture and kill but we don't cut off heads off like they do!" Or, "You can't stand there and accuse me of corruption! You guys are all in politics and you know what you have to do to get reelected!" . Related to the Red Herring and to the Ad Hominem Argument.
- **We Have to Do *Something***: The dangerous contemporary fallacy that in moments of crisis one must do something, *anything*, at once, even if it is an overreaction, is totally ineffective or makes the situation worse, rather than "just sit there doing nothing." (E.g., "Banning air passengers from carrying ham sandwiches onto the plane probably does nothing to deter potential hijackers, but we have to do *something* to respond to this crisis!") This is a corrupted argument from pathos. (See also "Scare Tactic.")
- **Where there's smoke, there's fire** (also Hasty Conclusion, Jumping to a Conclusion). The dangerous fallacy of quickly drawing a conclusion and/or taking action without sufficient evidence. E.g., "My neighbor Jaminder Singh wears a long beard and a turban and speaks a funny language. Where there's smoke there's fire. That's all the evidence we need that he's a terrorist! Let's burn his store down!" A variety of the "Just in Case" fallacy.

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