

CHAPTER 6: MORE PSEUDOREASONING OR FALLACIES

AD HOMINEM

In all ad hominem fallacies we attack the speaker rather than the claim.

Personal Attack

We commit the fallacy of PERSONAL ATTACK AD HOMINEM when we try to discredit a claim by personally attacking the speaker.

Jack said that bilingual education has been a failure, but what does he know? He's totally clueless.

Circumstantial Ad Hominem

We commit the fallacy of CIRCUMSTANTIAL AD HOMINEM when we try to discredit a claim by attacking the speaker based upon their circumstances.

My brother says you always should give a 20% tip, but he works in the food industry

Pseudorefutation

We commit the fallacy of PSEUDOREFUTATION when we attack the credibility of a speaker by accusing them of having been inconsistent in some way.

Maria said that NPR is a success, but I don't believe it because she used to be against it.

Poisoning the well

We commit the fallacy of poisoning the well when we say something to discredit somebody before they have even made a claim.

For example,
Karen Horney isn't nuts. Really.

GENETIC FALLACY

Someone commits the GENETIC fallacy when they challenge a claim based on its history or source (where the source isn't an individual, in which case it would be ad hominem).

The FDA says that blue food coloring is safe too eat but I don't trust anything the FDA says.

FALSE DILEMMA

We commit the fallacy of FALSE DILEMMA when we wrongly see a situation as having only two alternatives, when it has more.

You either need to declare a major or drop out of school.

MISPLACED BURDEN OF PROOF

Someone commits the MISPLACED BURDEN OF PROOF fallacy when they are making a claim they should have to prove, but they act like the burden of proof falls on the other person.

She: Souls exist.

He: Can you prove it?

She: Can you prove that they don't?

STRAWMAN

We commit the STRAWMAN fallacy when, instead of attacking (or defending) the claim we are supposed to address, we attack or defend a different claim altogether.

She: The publishers' profit margins on textbooks are outrageous.

He: If publishers don't charge any profit, they won't stay afloat.

PERFECTIONISTIC FALLACY

We commit the PERFECTIONISTIC fallacy when we reject a reasonable proposal simply because it isn't perfect.

Nurse practitioners shouldn't be allowed to give prescriptions at all because there will be some cases in which they can't because a doctor is needed.

LINE DRAWING FALLACY

We commit the fallacy of LINE DRAWING when we wrongly insist, in a case in which no clear line can be drawn, that either a line must be drawn or we can't claim that there is a difference between one extreme and the other. In the line drawing fallacy, a claim is made about a concept in which no clear line can be drawn. Then the claim is rejected because no clear line can be drawn.

There's no such thing as eating too many cookies. Clearly there's nothing wrong with one cookie. So there must not be anything wrong with two cookies. Since we can't tell exactly when there are too many cookies, there can't ever be too many cookies.

I'm tired of people saying that secondhand smoke causes cancer. I just don't get it. When exactly does smoke cause cancer? When you take your first breath in a smoky room? Your second? Your third? If you can't tell me exactly when the smoke causes cancer then it doesn't cause cancer at all.

You can say that Harriet ate too much. When exactly did she eat too much? Was it when she put jelly on her waffles? Was it when she ate the ice cream cone?

I don't think you can say that I'm late, because you don't say on the syllabus exactly how many minutes you have to be late for it to count.

SLIPPERY SLOPE

Someone commits a SLIPPERY SLOPE fallacy when they assume that taking one step will take them down one step after another until they are all the way down the slope.

My son wants me to give him five dollars for his class's field trip. I'm not going to give him the five dollars. I have five dollars and wouldn't mind giving it to him, but if I give him five dollars for this field trip I will have to give every class five dollars and that will cost over one hundred dollars.

Our economist thinks that we should raise taxes one percent. I am against it. If we raise taxes this year we will have to raise them next year by the same amount, and I'm against more than a one percent rise in taxes.

BEGGING THE QUESTION

Someone is BEGGING THE QUESTION when, instead of answering the question, the speaker just repeats their position.

Kara: It's wrong to take more than twenty napkins at Burger King.

Jack: Why?

Kara: Because it's wrong.

Murderers don't have a right to live. Why? Because they don't have a right to live