

Appendix B

Selected Fallacies

AD HOMINEM (AGAINST THE PERSON)

Criticizing the person who makes a claim or argument rather than criticizing the claim or argument itself.

PERSON 1: The federal government shouldn't raise the minimum wage because that would lead to a lot of poor people losing their jobs.

PERSON 2: You don't really care about poor people! You're just a selfish, rich jerk who is worried that goods and services will become more expensive for you personally if the minimum wage goes up.

ANECDOTAL FALLACY

Using personal anecdotes or vivid examples, rather than adequate data, to support a broad generalization.

My great-grandmother smoked four packs a day for seventy years, and she never got lung cancer. Therefore, cigarettes don't really cause lung cancer.

APPEAL TO AUTHORITY

Illegitimately arguing that a statement is true because an authority figure said so, especially when the statement is outside the authority figure's area of expertise.

Philosophy is useless. The astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson said so.

APPEAL TO IGNORANCE (AD IGNORATIUM)

Arguing that something is true because it can't be proven false.

PERSON 1: Airplanes are secretly spraying chemicals to control our minds!

PERSON 2: That's a nonsense conspiracy theory.

PERSON 1: Can you prove that it's not happening?

APPEAL TO NATURE

Arguing that something is good because it's natural or that it's bad because it's unnatural or artificial.

It's much better to treat illness using natural herbs than with pharmaceuticals. Pharmaceuticals are full of artificial chemicals!

APPEAL TO POPULARITY (AD POPULUM)

Arguing that something is true because everyone believes it or that something is good because everyone likes it.

Most Americans agree that the death penalty deters crime. Therefore, the death penalty does deter crime.

CIRCULAR REASONING (BEGGING THE QUESTION)

Including or assuming your conclusion as one of your premises—often as a hidden premise.

PERSON 1: This salesman is trustworthy; he's not going to try to sell me something I don't need just to get the commission.

PERSON 2: How do you know?

PERSON 1: He told me that all he wants is to help me find the best deal.

COMPOSITION

Illegitimately arguing that because something is true of each part of something, it's also true of the whole; or that because something is true of each member of a group, it's true of the group as a whole.

My greenhouse gas emissions don't make any difference to the climate. Nor does my neighbor's, or my friend's, or any other individual's emissions. Therefore, humanity's greenhouse gas emissions don't make any difference to the climate.

DIVISION

Illegitimately arguing that because something is true of a group or thing as a whole, it's also true of each part.

The United States is rich. Therefore, all Americans are rich.

EQUIVOCATION

Using the same word or phrase in two different ways to make it seem like an argument works when it really doesn't.

This school is a drug-free zone. Caffeine is a drug, and coffee has caffeine in it. Therefore, coffee isn't allowed in this school.

FALSE DICHOTOMY (FALSE DILEMMA)

Falsely assuming that there are only two options in order to argue *for* one of them simply by arguing *against* the other.

The Egyptians built the Great Pyramid to align with magnetic north. Since they didn't have compasses, that's either a complete coincidence or aliens helped them build it. There's no way the Great Pyramid's alignment is just a coincidence. Thus, aliens helped the Egyptians build the Great Pyramid.

GENETIC FALLACY

Arguing that a statement is false or an argument is weak because of the source (i.e., the genesis) of that statement or argument

PERSON 1: Your uncle told me that I should start saving for retirement in my twenties because then my retirement investments will have much more time to grow, and I'll end up with a lot more money when I retire.

PERSON 2: What!? Don't listen to my uncle! He gives terrible advice!

HASTY GENERALIZATION

Arguing for a sweeping generalization on the basis of too few examples or examples that aren't representative of the group as a whole.

Only one of my friends was enthusiastic about Hillary Clinton for president. Therefore, very few Americans were enthusiastic about Hillary Clinton for president.

POST HOC FALLACY (POST HOC, ERGO PROPTER HOC)

Illegitimately arguing that because one event happened after another event, the earlier event caused the later event. From a Latin phrase meaning “after this, therefore because of this.”

I got a flu shot, and the next day I came down with the flu. The flu shot must have given me the flu.

SLIPPERY SLOPE

Arguing that something shouldn't be done because it would inevitably lead to some unacceptable outcome, without giving adequate reasons to think that the first thing really would lead to an unacceptable outcome.

It's not that there's anything wrong with adults using marijuana recreationally. But if we legalize marijuana, then before long, we'll have middle schoolers snorting cocaine and shooting heroin.

STRAWMAN

Arguing against a distorted, weaker version of someone's statement or argument rather than against the real statement or argument.

PERSON 1: This country should implement stricter gun control laws because they'd reduce the number of gun deaths.

PERSON 2: Nonsense! Universal background checks wouldn't eliminate gun deaths, so there's no point in imposing them on law-abiding citizens.