

"ARGUMENT" FROM POPULARITY

--Urging someone to accept a claim because all or most people believe it. --When you make a decision only because it's well-known or most people believe it. There is no other reason given to support the issue—just that everybody thinks it so you will, too. --Pushing people to agree with a claim because the majority of a population agrees with it.

Since most people believe God does exist, therefore I do, too.

I don't really know much about President Bush, but I hear most people say he's a good president, so he must be.

Everyone loves the new taste of Sprite, so you should, too.

Everyone thinks the Raiders are the best team, so they must be the best.

This rain can't be doing any good, just ask anyone, it's unbearable!

"ARGUMENT" FROM COMMON PRACTICE

--Justifies an action by attributing the action as being of frequent occurrence. --You try to defend a wrong action or practice that you want to do or did by saying that it has been done before by other people or everybody is doing it. --To justify an immoral, unethical, or illegal practice on the pretense that "everyone else does it" or that it's socially acceptable.

I'm told not to download music off the Internet, but everybody else does, so there's nothing wrong with me continuing to do so.

All kids in college who are underage drink alcohol, so that makes it OK for me to do it, too.

Since everyone is always late for work, it's OK for me to not be on time.

Everybody here is doing drugs, so I don't see why I shouldn't do it, too.

It's OK for me to drink Budweiser everyday even though I'm under 21, because the average American consumes 2 beers a day.

Don't tell me I shouldn't litter and that it's bad for the environment. What's the big deal? Everybody else does it.

Come on! Downloading music off the Internet is no big deal. Just look at all the people doing it.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE "ARGUMENTS" FROM POPULARITY & COMMON PRACTICE:

The difference between these 2 fallacies is that in Common Practice, you're always trying to JUSTIFY something that's considered WRONG somehow (e.g., it's illegal, immoral, impolite, etc.). In other word, this line of reasoning urges us to accept or ignore a questionable action because others are doing it (the action is common).

In Popularity, you're not trying to claim that some action that looks wrong really isn't because lots of people do the same sort of thing, rather, you're simply pointing out that a belief is true or false because that's what many people think.

PEER PRESSURE

--Accepting a claim regardless of its credibility, but simply to gain approval from others. --Uses the desire for acceptance and willingness to accept something not necessarily because there are good reasons, but because you seek approval from the people you value.

Peer Pressure deals with the desire for acceptance and willingness to accept something not necessarily

If you don't smoke with us, your friends, you won't fit in because all of us smoke.

If you don't have a flip cell phone you won't be part of the "in-crowd."

Ad for Dr. Pepper: "I'm a pepper, she's a pepper, he's a pepper, we're all peppers--wouldn't you like to be a pepper, too? Drink Dr. Pepper."

Look, I may be standing up here talking to you about this issue. But I'm a person just like you. We're all just plain folks trying to see our way clear. I'm against this bill, we're all against it.

GROUP THINK FALLACY

This occurs when someone lets identification with a group take the place of reason and deliberation when arriving at a position on an issue.

The gang member helped the rest of the gang strip a car of all its parts because that's what his gang does—even though the car belonged to his grandmother.

The majority of people in this class voted "yes" so you should, too because we want a unanimous vote.

Come on buddy, you're our key player on the team, and all the rest of the soccer team is going out to get blitzed, you CAN'T stay home and study.

NATIONALISM

--Peer pressure on a national level. , --Using the pride of a country to push or support a decision or action. --Blind endorsement of one's own country simply because the rest of the country agrees.

You're a U.S. citizen, so you should agree with the rest of us that we've done the right thing in Iraq and support our troops as right-thinking Americans should.

A good American should not buy anything from the French because the French did not support our invasion of Iraq.

Bush is right because he's our President and was elected by fellow Americans!

We have to root for the U.S. during the Olympics because we're Americans.

"ARGUMENT" FROM TRADITION

--Believing a claim or practice is legitimate on the basis that this is how it has always been done. --An argument that's based on the idea of that's the way it's always been done—so it must be the best. Or that it's always been done that way so why change. --An argument that a claim is true only because the claim has traditionally been believed to be true. --Mistaking the longevity of belief in a claim as evidence that it's true.

Men should work and women should clean because that's how it has always been done, and always will be..

When your friend asks why you're driving home from school on the same route you used to take before you move and you say, "This has always been the fastest and best way because I've always taken this route before."

The government should spend less of the budget on social welfare programs because individualism is the American way.

When in the 16th century Copernicus argued that the earth is NOT stationary (but instead orbits the sun), his opponents argued that belief in a fixed and immovable earth had endured for centuries.

For centuries, smoking in public places has not been restricted shows that we shouldn't do so now.

We have to give them a present because we do it every year.

Vote for Bush. We've always had a member of the Bush family in government.

Our workers have always been happy working 9 to 5; there's no need to change that schedule.

SCARE TACTICS

--Trying to scare people into taking action or accepting a position. --To manipulate or convince someone into believing your statement or cause by scaring them—regardless of whether or not your claim is legitimate, relevant or realistic.

If you don't go to college you'll be very unsuccessful and a failure. This is why you should come to Chico State.

If you don't buy a Brink's home security system you won't be safe at home alone. Don't rob yourself; buy a Brink's security system for you and your loved ones.

Advertisement: Without Insurance, your life would be a deathtrap.

"ARGUMENT" BY FORCE

--Similar to Scare Tactics, but instead of simply scaring a person, you threaten someone.

One Senator to another: "If you don't see that my bill is a good one and vote for it, I'll have the 30 million people I represent vote for your opponent when you run for President.

If you don't agree that I'm right, I'll take my ball and go home.

You must believe with me that this woman is guilty of the crime for which she is accused, for if you don't find her guilty of it, she'll be released and you may end up being her next victim.

GUILT TRIP

--A tactic that forces someone to accept or not accept a claim by making the person feel guilty. --When a person or group tries to influence one's feelings on a matter by only making one feel bad or guilty

Don't tell me we can't afford that, if you really loved me you would have bought it for me.

You should invite Pete to your birthday party. You were invited to his.

"ARGUMENT" FROM ENVY

--When we criticize somebody because of jealousy. --Basing an argument on feelings of envy and/or jealousy. --Allowing jealousy to cause acceptance of a claim, rather than relying on unbiased fact.

Well, he's got that really nice car I've always wanted, but he surely isn't a nice person.

He did better than me on the last test, so he must have cheated.

"ARGUMENT" FROM PITY

--An argument that calls on a person's feelings of compassion to persuade them about an unrelated topic. --Supporting a claim by arousing pity rather than offering legitimate argument.

If there are 2 candidates and one is disabled, and you vote for him, not because he's better than the other guy, but because you feel sorry for him.

Ed and his father were out fishing on Goldfish Lake when a Fish and Game Officer boated up and asked Ed's father for their fishing licenses. Ed begged the officer not to give his father a ticket because he only had one arm and furthermore, he lost it because a fish bit it off!

At an American Idol audition, the judges picked one young woman to go to the finals because she had had such a hard life, even though most of the other singers were better than her.

"ARGUMENT" FROM OUTRAGE

--Getting others angry in order for them to make a decision based on that anger or using anger as the only reason for claiming that something is true.

Smith wrote to the dean last year saying that my class was bad. So, Smith is a bad student and I'll give him a bad recommendation to this employer.

Do you want your child to fail all her classes? Do you want her to quit school before she even graduates high school? Do you want her to spend the rest of her life on welfare? Of course not! Nor should you stand for such treatment of her. Let's get rid of all the public school teachers and replace the public schools with private schools. We can't let this shoddy treatment of our students continue.

WISHFUL THINKING

--Making a claim based on desire rather than evidence. --Accepting (or rejecting) a claim just because it would be more pleasant (or unpleasant). --The urge to accept something as true (or reject something as false) simply because we would or wouldn't like it to be true and because it would make us happy if it were true (or unhappy) even if there is not sufficient evidence for accepting it. --Believing something simply because you want it to be true or not believing something simply because you don't want it to be true.

This whole tobacco scare is crap! I smoke a pack a day and I feel fine! Besides, I have every intention of outliving you non-smokers.

An alcoholic refuses to accept the fact that excessive drinking is bad for his health because he wants to continue drinking.

Hey Steve, check out that old car with the cool paint job, it's really cool. If we had a car like that all the girls would like us.

It's not going to rain today because I'm wearing my favorite skirt and it would be ruined if it got wet.

I know I'll go to heaven because if I didn't I'd be miserable for all eternity.

Parent #1: I think I smelt marijuana on Ben when he came to my house.

Parent of Ben: No, my son would never smoke marijuana because I'd be so disappointed if he did, and I know he'd never disappoint me that way.

We're going to win this election. We've got the spirit, the determination, and the confidence and we believe in ourselves.

SUBJECTIVISM

--The mistake of treating factual information as if it were nonfactual information. --Believing a factual claim is true for one person but false for another. --Treating a factual claim as nonfactual by agreeing that when 2 people's opinions on a factual claim differ, they're both correct.

I think her hair is black, she thinks it's dark brown, but we can both be right.

Look, I know that Americans landed on the moon. But if you believe they didn't, that's OK.

I think flying is dangerous, but you believe flying is safer than driving your car, but we're both right.

RATIONALIZATION

--Deceiving yourself that you're doing something for a good reason when that reason was not why you did something. --A defense mechanism often used when we want to avoid an unpleasant truth. It's one of the clever ways we deceive or protect ourselves by coming up with reasons to make sense of something (and we deceive ourselves, because these weren't our real reasons).

The reason I bought new clothes using my parents' credit card rather than my own is because I know how happy it makes them doing something nice for me and I know they want me to look nice.

The reason I didn't go to the dentist isn't because I was afraid or was worried about being hurt. The reason I cancelled my appointment is

because I was trying to save money and taking care of your teeth isn't necessary for good health.

Your favorite political candidate is found to have cheated on his taxes. You rationalize our continued support for him by saying, "He may have cheated on his taxes, but he's made up for it by all the good budget cuts he helped pass."

You smoke cigarettes but tell yourself that you're not going to worry about every habit you have because you could die tomorrow by slipping on a banana peel and that you might as well enjoy life today.

Someone you like keeps refusing your requests for a date and you think "S/he must be really busy this year."

You discover that the market didn't charge you for some sodas on the bottom of your cart and you think, "Oh well. They're a big company and will never miss a few dollars."

TWO WRONGS MAKE A RIGHT

You claim that something isn't wrong to do to someone, but rather it's alright to do because someone else has either done the same sort of thing or would have done that sort of thing if given the chance. Or you claim that someone else can't complain that what we've done is wrong because they've done the same sort of thing.

There's nothing wrong with me hitting you because you hit me.

I can take money from my roommate's wallet because he's eaten some of my food.

Since the Colombians have kidnapped Americans for ransom, it's OK for us to go in without telling their government and kidnap members of the drug cartel there.

RELATIVIST FALLACY

Claiming that a factual claim can be true for one culture and false for another culture.

If the Aztecs really believed that throwing a virgin into a volcano would prevent the volcano from erupting, then they were right about that.

SOME COMMENTS FROM MORRISSEY ON CH. 6 FALLACIES

MISPLACING THE BURDEN OF PROOF

This is committed when someone argues that because her claim cannot be proved false it therefore should be accepted as true.

No one has objected to my proposal so that means everyone is in favor of it.

Two years ago I publicly declared she was guilty of falsifying her income tax return, and she's never sued me for perjury. Isn't this that an open admission of my charge?

Mental telepathy is true because no one has been able to prove that it isn't.

You can't name one thing this woman has done that would prove she's capable of this job; I can't see, therefore, that there are any reasons for voting for her.

People have been trying for centuries to disprove the claims of astrology, and no one has ever succeeded. So, we must conclude that the claims of astrology are true.

Terrorists are taught to deny that they're terrorists, so his saying he isn't a terrorist just proves that he IS one.

I didn't see any "No Trespassing" sign, so I figured that mean it was alright to walk through this field.

Science cannot prove categorically that the theory of evolution is true. So any scientist who accepts it is doing so on faith alone.

Remember, with Misplacing the Burden of Proof, we do not emphasize the evidence FOR a thesis, but the LACK of evidence against it. E.g., there must be other life in the universe since no one has proven there isn't. Note that this SAME line of reasoning can support the other side of the issue, too (that there is no other life). This is a good sign that this line of reasoning CANT support the conclusion if we can both prove and disprove that same claim with the same line of reasoning.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that because someone can't DISPROVE someone else's position, that that inability to disprove actually counts as some sort of proof. E.g., Since you can't prove that you've never murdered someone I use your inability to disprove this as evidence that you HAVE killed someone (as if I get to count that inability as evidence to support/prove my claim). Just because we can't prove that something is true, does not mean it has to be false. And just because we can't prove something is false does not MAKE it true.

STRAW MAN

The key to this fallacy is to realize that a SUBSTITUTION has occurred. Someone has substituted a different, usually highly objectionable, issue for the real one.

Anna: "There is no logical, moral, or legal justification for discriminating against a person on the basis of gender. Yet there is still legally sanctioned sex discrimination going on against persons in many areas of our culture. So, yes, I think there still may be a need for something like an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution." Joe: "Look, if you want men and women to have to use the same public restrooms, you go right ahead and support it. The way I see it, you women just don't want to do housework anymore." [Joe has misrepresented Anna's argument. He's not only drawn an unwarranted inference from it (the stuff about housework), but he's oversimplified it beyond recognition.]

The anti-abortionists are really out not only to stop abortions, but also to stop every form of birth control except the rhythm method and abstinence.

Those who oppose prayer in schools want to remove religion from American life. They want to make it impossible for children to learn anything at all about religion in school, and they want to forbid your child to privately murmur a silent prayer to herself before she eats lunch or gets on the school bus.

#1: Unless we construct a power plant in this area within the next 10 years, we won't be able to meet the growing demand for electrical power. #2: What you're saying is that you couldn't care less what happens to the plant life and wildlife in this area or even to human lives that might be displaced by the building of this plant.

We must stop those people who favor censorship of TV. They want to eliminate all programs that have anything to do with sex, ban any programs that have any violence at all, and forbid shows that contain even the mildest profanities.

Those people who push for gun control take an unreasonable position. They want to ban all firearms in the U.S., so that not even the police will be able to carry handguns in the line of duty, and law-abiding hunters will have to give up their sport.

You have to play fair when characterizing your opponent's position in order to be talking about the same thing. You can't portray someone's position any way you want and still be guaranteed to be talking about the same issue.

Another common form of Straw Man pseudo-reasoning is to take a complex issue and reduce it to a misrepresentative over-simplification. E.g., if someone describes the Equal Rights Amendment as basically a bra-burning issue, she has committed a Straw Man. Bertrand Russell, the late British philosopher, did this when he characterized Christianity as being nothing more than the belief that one can walk on water and turn water into wine. Or dismissing the theory of evolution by claiming that evolution says we're the same as monkeys.

SLIPPERY SLOPE

This occurs when someone mistakenly asserts that if we take the first step (accept a belief or practice, or do something), then we CANNOT stop until we hit a horribly objectionable extreme end. I.e., that other steps are INEVITABLE (and these steps are generally awful ones). Just because we can imagine that the first step might lead to a chain of events does not mean that that chain of events must occur. In other words, the claim in Slippery Slope is: Don't do X because if we do X then Y will happen, then Z happens, then A, then B will happen--and B is bad. Slippery slope fallacies focus attention on some awful end result and fail to show that such a horrible result and fail to show that such a horrible result will actually follow.

A politician commenting on a proposed initiative in San Francisco to abolish the vice squad: "If this passes, San Francisco will be the whorehouse of the nation. There'll be soliciting on the steps of City Hall and lovemaking on Market Street, organized crime will profit and residents and businesses affected. It will be a signal that "anything goes" in San Francisco.

If you ask for a day off to take your sick dog to the vet and your employer says, "I can't give you the day off because then everyone would want the day off."

Today it's legalized abortion, but tomorrow it'll be the mentally ill, and then the sick and the aged or anyone else considered undesirable.

I don't permit questions in my class because if I allow one student to ask a question, then everyone starts asking questions, and the first thing you now, there's not enough time for my lecture.

BEGGING THE QUESTION

This occurs when, instead of offering proof for its conclusion, an argument simply reasserts the conclusion in another form. There are 2 primary forms: #1: Offering, as a premise, a simple restatement of the desired conclusion--A because of B, where B means essentially the same thing as A (e.g., miracles are impossible because they can't happen). #2: A circular argument--A because of B, where B is dependent on A (accepting B requires that you ALREADY believe that A is true). E.g., God exists because it says so in the Bible.

#1: A Christian would never drink alcoholic beverages. #2: That's just not true. I know several Christians who occasionally take a drink. In fact, I know some Christian ministers who do. #1: Then, as far as I'm concerned, they couldn't be real Christians.

I think that capital punishment for murders and rapists is quite justified; there are a number of good reasons for putting to death people who commit such crimes.

Some people question whether our government is sufficiently concerned about the safety of nuclear power plants. Obviously our government does take great care about the safety of nuclear over plants, for the U.S. allows many nuclear power plants to operate, and our government certainly wouldn't allow nuclear power plants to operate if they weren't safe.

Drivers who drive alertly are good drivers because they're ready for anything. They think ahead. Safe drivers take precautions against the unexpected.

This college is very paternalistic in its student policies because it treats students like children.

Abortion is always wrong because it's never right to voluntarily and purposefully destroy a living and growing and developing human fetus.

FALSE DILEMMA

You're offered a set of alternatives (choices), as if these were the only ones, when actually there are other choices possible.

Do you want 4 more years of overspending and poor priorities or do you want 4 years of prosperity and sensible spending.

When you're out of Schlitz, you're out of beer.

Either there truly is a Loch Ness Monster, or a lot of good upright Scots with no motive for lying are telling outrageous lies.

Did you vote for him for President because he's a Democrat or because he promised to reorganize and simplify the federal bureaucracy?

I know that you're not a wealthy man, but I hope that doesn't embarrass you. There's nothing wrong with being poor.

There are only 2 kinds of people in the world: winner and losers.

Everything that's good in life is either illegal, immoral or fattening.

You're either for me or against me.

It's a simple question: Do you believe in God, or are you an atheist?

Attorney: Did you love the deceased? Accused: No Attorney: Then you were in fact in love with him, weren't you?

PERFECTIONIST FALLACY

You reject an idea, policy, etc. because it won't work perfectly. The underlying mistaken assumption is that there are two choices: something works perfectly (solves all problems) or you should have nothing.

If studying logic doesn't make me an infallible thinker it's useless.

No drug law is going to prevent everyone from taking drugs, so we might as well get rid of them.

LINE-DRAWING FALLACY

This fallacy plays off the fact that there are gray areas for most concepts—in other words, we may not be able to tell which hair falling out makes a person bald, but we certainly can tell for most people whether they're hairy or bald. In this fallacy the person would insist that if we can't always clearly put something into one category or another, then we may never do so.

Anyone who eats meat basically condones the killing of animals. We might just as well condone the killing of human beings, for how do we draw the line between one form of animal life and another.

How can you propose to tax the rich more than the poor or middle-class? I mean, how can we tell for sure when someone is rich. When is that? Which dollar makes someone rich? Which \$10? You can't do it. So it's just not fair to propose taxing the rich more when you can't even be sure anyone really IS rich.