

TOOLS OF DECEPTION 2

The common fallacies used to be taught near the beginning of any course on logic. Many of the common fallacies were first formulated in ancient Greece and survived the Middle Ages. Enlightenment scholars knew them well, if not by name. We no longer study them and, consequently, they are increasingly used to deceive us.

The review below derives its fallacy types primarily from Leonard Peikoff's *Introduction to Logic* but also from *Historians' Fallacies*, by David Hackett Fischer. It derives its historical examples from *Whitewash* – a book about Aboriginal history. It offers only one example per fallacy, though they could easily be multiplied.

These are just some of approximately 100 illogical arguments that are used today to mislead and deceive us. Many in the global warming debate.

1. Argumentum ad Hominem - abusive:

Attacking the man instead of the proposition, implying that if the advocate of a proposition is no good, then the idea he is proposing is necessarily no good. The labelling of sceptics as “deniers” followed by denigration is a good example of this illogical argument. Their words and ideas are not discussed.

This fallacy should not be confused with simply an attack on a person, be it on his veracity, scholarship, even on his character. Many people deserve to be attacked indeed it is an absolute requirement of justice that they be so. But ad hominem occurs where an attack is made not because of the person's failings or culpability, but as a substitute for an argument.

2. Argumentum ad Verecundiam - qualitative:

The "appeal to reverence" meaning in this version of “Verecundiam” refers to the status of those who believe a proposition to be true, implying that the truth is necessarily what the authorities or the experts say it is.

For example: The professor, my father, the Prime Minister, the scientist said that - so it must be right. Whatever they said, must be studied not just the status of those saying it. The scientists said melting Arctic ice would cause catastrophic sea level rises. Irrespective of their status, they were wrong

3. Argumentum ad Populum:

The appeal to the people. If everyone believes it, then it must be right, irrespective of what their beliefs are based on. This leads to people implying that if enough people feel strongly enough that something is true it must be so. The argument that it is not what really happened that matters but what enough people imagine happened.

All the scientists agree about global warming; therefore, they must be right. Apart from being incorrect, this statement combines the “ad Verecundiam and ad

Populum” illogical arguments. Everyone agreed the Earth was flat, Y2K was a major problem, and stomach ulcers were caused by stress all turned out to be fallacious.

4. Composition:

Reasoning from parts to the whole, fallaciously applying the characteristics of the parts to the whole. The inference in which you pass fallaciously from the fact that a certain characteristic is true of each part of a whole or each member of a group taken separately, to the conclusion that that characteristic is true of the whole as a whole, or the group as a group.

For example. I met a Scotsman who was seven foot tall, so all Scotsmen must be seven foot tall. Mount Kilimanjaro has lost its snow cap because of global warming, so all mountains are losing their snow caps. Fifteen glaciers are melting so all glaciers in the World are melting.

This fallacy should not be confused with generalization, which is the valid process of observing many instances of a phenomenon, then inducing a conclusion about the nature of the entities and actions involved which is the foundation of knowledge.

5. Argumentum ad Ignorantiam:

The appeal to arbitrary assertion, implying that an opponent is obliged to disprove it, whereas the onus of proof is on he who makes a case and until that is made the opponent has nothing he needs to, or can disprove.

Sceptics are not providing an alternate proposition but are questioning what the Greens’ assertions. It is up to the Greens to provide supporting evidence to support their claims

Another example, the claim that unrecorded killings of Aborigines might have occurred, followed by a demand that Windschutle needs to prove they didn't occur. This is a fallacious approach because it is impossible for anyone to prove a negative. It is up to those claiming that unrecorded killings occurred to produce some evidence before they can claim this to be even a possibility.

The original assertion must be backed with evidence that then can be considered. The unsupported assertion that the number and severity of storms is increasing is found to be wrong when evidence is sought

6. Argumentum ad Baculum, the fallacy that might makes right:

The appeal to the harm that will befall you if you don't, accept an argument. For example, “You will be labelled a ‘denier’, be denigrated, loose your promotion or research funding etc.etc. You have to believe us. Once again, no discussion about the issue.

This fallacy should not be confused with simply warning that harmful consequences could follow a statement - it becomes a fallacy when it implies that the

harm alters the validity of the statement.

7. Argumentum ad Verecundiam, the "appeal to reverence" - prestige jargon:

There are a number of versions of ad verecundiam, the "prestige jargon" version is the assumption that an impressive sounding presentation makes its conclusions valid. For example, Green followers use the term "peer review" to impress and convince even when the review is found to be corrupt, and the work itself is incorrect.

This fallacy should not be confused with technical language that is sometimes necessary - such language becomes fallacious when it is used to confuse and overawe rather than to clarify and convince.

8. The appeal to one's own emotion:

The fallacy of assuming your emotions to be tools of cognition, implying that if you feel strongly enough that something is true it must be so. For example, most Green followers are emotionally invested in their beliefs about global warming, and consequently assert that they must be right.

This fallacy should not be confused with the passions that are inevitably aroused by such a debate, there is nothing fallacious about passion per se, it is only when passion replaces or perverts objective judgement that it becomes a fallacy.

9. The appeal to laughter:

The fallacy of trying to refute a viewpoint by ridiculing the opponent with humour, rather than by giving arguments against a viewpoint. For example, the ABC regularly invite one sceptic onto a panel discussing global warming, encouraging the audience and other participants to laugh at him rather than critiquing his viewpoints or ideas. Once again the issue is avoided.

This fallacy should not be confused with the fact that some arguments are laughable, and when they occur, it is quite acceptable to point that out. It becomes a fallacy when it is used as a substitute for an argument or to obfuscate the real issue involved.

10. False alternative:

Considering one alternative to be the only options, ignoring the fact that there may be other possible alternatives. This illogical argument is rife in the global warming debate. Anytime anything is perceived to be abnormal, the only explanation the Greens can conceive is to blame Man and his CO₂. The whole basis of the Green campaign is based on CO₂ and rarely looks at a myriad of other factors that are known to cause global warming.

11. Cliché thinking:

The fallacy of believing a statement because it is a cliché, without validation in your context, which ignores the fact that clichés can be dead wrong and frequently contradict each other (e.g. too many cooks spoil the broth - many hands make light work).

For example, the statement "Climate change is real" is often made as a stand-alone argument without any supporting evidence.

The cliché that it is the victors who write history is frequently used to imply that historians will always present history through the eyes of the victors. This can happen but not 'always' as implied by the cliché.

This fallacy should not be confused with the fact that clichés are not always fallacious and may have an element of truth.

12. Division:

Reasoning from the whole to parts, applying the characteristics of the whole to the parts (the reverse of composition). Like composition, a particular class of this fallacy occurs because terms can be used distributive or collectively.

For example, sceptics use irrational arguments, so these sceptics cannot be using logical arguments.

13. Non sequitur:

The (broad, catch-all) fallacy of drawing an irrelevant conclusion that does not follow from its premises. For example, glaciers are calving in Greenland, so global warming has not stopped and must be accelerating.

This fallacy should obviously not to be confused with deduction.

14. Argumentum ad Hominem - circumstantial:

Attacking the man's inconsistencies rather than the proposition at issue, implying that if a proposition contradicts a former proposition it is necessarily wrong. For example, it would be committing circumstantial ad hominem to assume that Henry Reynolds' estimate of the pre-colonization population of Tasmania at 5,000 to 7,000 is wrong, simply because he contradicts himself in the same book and estimates it at 4,000. The point being that the contradiction tells us that at least one of the estimates must be wrong, but that leaves one that might be right.

This fallacy should not be confused with pointing out inconsistencies in opponents' arguments, which is a proper thing to do. But what inconsistencies prove is that at least one of the contradictory propositions must be false, it does not tell you which one is false.

15. Argumentum ad Misericordiam:

The appeal to pity, implying that if you feel sorry for someone's situation the "truth" may be adjusted accordingly. This doesn't mean something pitiful can be identified. This only becomes a fallacy when it is made as a substitute for a valid argument.

16. Accent by excerpt lifting:

Changing the meaning of a quote by selecting a misleading excerpt (accent). For example, Reynolds accepting settlers' warnings that circumstances could lead to genocide, to imply the advocacy of genocide. This fallacy should not be confused with summary. When reporting or critiquing another's work it is necessary to summarize his argument, and that may be done by quoting excerpts (which can be checked by the reader if references are provided), but a valid summary should not alter the original's essential meaning.

17. Petitio Principii, or begging-the-question - arbitrary definition:

Arbitrarily defining a term in such a way that it assumes the validity of the proposition under consideration.

For example, UNEP re-defining a 'climate refugee' as any 'refugee' does not mean that a refugee is escaping from a 'climate event' – whatever that means..

18. Petitio Principii, or begging-the-question – circular-reasoning:

Using the proposition under consideration to prove a point, which is then used to validate the proposition.

For example, The Greens re- defining 'global warming' as that warming caused by Man, so they could then claim all global warming is caused by Man.

This fallacy should not be confused with evidence-based circularity. Again, talk to the issue and provide evidence.

19. Petitio Principii, begging-the-question - re-statement:

Re-stating the proposition as an essential part of your proof of the proposition.

The proposed validation of the original proposition is just a re-statement of it in different words which begs the question.

It is not fallacious simply because it re-stated his original proposition, it becomes fallacious when the re-statement is used as an essential part of its pseudo validation.

20. Petitio Principii, begging-the-question - question begging epithet:

A proposition that contains in its own formulation its own pseudo validation. For example, Ryan's statement that Punch: "provided names, places and times for all these incidents with all the accuracy of a good informant", and so was a credible witness. Since Ryan provided no evidence other than Punch's statement, that the names, places and times were accurate, her argument is: Punch's evidence is accurate, therefore he is a good informant, therefore his evidence is accurate.

This fallacy can easily be confused with another version of begging the question: circular reasoning. The only difference is that in this version the circularity is embedded in the original proposition itself

21. Equivocation:

Using a premise from one meaning of a term or phrase and applying the conclusion to a different meaning of the same term - a fallacy made possible by ambiguous terms.

For example, orthodox academics who use of the term "genocide" to imply mass slaughter, but when challenged to make good on that accusation, they often switch to the "cultural genocide" meaning, (i.e. the loss of language and customs) that they may be able to validate.

This fallacy should not be confused with the fact that a word can be used to denote more than one concept, which is not a problem if the meaning is made clear, either explicitly or by the context. It becomes the fallacy of equivocation when the characteristics of one of those concepts is applied to another.

Most of the "loose language" used by the Greens rely on this illogical argument.

22. Non sequitur - extension:

A proposition is extended beyond its meaning so the extension can be disproved, thus discrediting the original statement.

23. Misuse of the mean:

Assuming that a mean between two positions is always correct.

For example, Greens trying to avoid being accused of believing in Armageddon tales will often take a "Solomon position" halfway between the Green and sceptical position. They will claim that it is not as bad as "The End of the World", but it is still "really bad". They provide no evidence of their "really bad" stance, but demand acceptance because they have given ground and have taken a halfway position in the debate.

24. Amphiboly:

Using a meaning of one interpretation of a statement to prove a different meaning that can be construed from the same formulation (a fallacy made possible by the ambiguity of grammatical structures).

For example, amphiboly was involved in the interpretation of Peggy Patrick's statement. The statement as broadcast on the *7:30 Report* and posted on the ABC website the next day stated: "My mum, mother, father, and two brothers, two sisters got killed here too". This statement is not entirely clear, since, if taken literally, it implies that Patrick has both a mum and a mother.

But given the fact that in conversation we frequently repeat words, the most credible interpretation of this formulation was that Patrick's mother, father and siblings were killed.

However, this apparently was not what Patrick meant, she says she meant her mum's mother (grandmother) and her siblings were killed. So inadvertently the fallacy of amphiboly was committed by Windschuttle when he took Patrick's words at face value.

25. Neglected aspect:

Accepting certain facts that plausibly suggest a conclusion but ignoring other facts that contradict that conclusion. This occurs regularly in the global warming debate and is referred to as "ignoring the other side of the coin"

For example, Jan McFarlane's embrace of Rosalie Hare's evidence claiming that it explains a "sanitised" dispatch by Curr about a skirmish that occurred early February, while neglecting the fact that the dispatch was sent in January. This fallacy should not be invoked if a more specific fallacy is applicable. Practically all fallacies are forms of neglect aspect, but by convention this fallacy, and the fallacy of non-sequitur, are invoked only if no more specific fallacy can be invoked.

26. Stolen concept:

The fallacy of using a concept while ignoring, denying, or contradicting one of the antecedent concepts upon which it itself depends and without which it could be neither formed nor defined. For example, Aboriginal "land-rights" claims assume that Aborigines once had a right to land, and that the right and the land was stolen from them by settlers, and that therefore, in justice, "native-title" must be restored to them. But the Aborigines had not concept of "land", or of "property" or of "title" to such property, or of a government that protects the "right" to that title. "Country" to the Aborigines was something to be hunted and gathered on, not to be owned, fenced, ploughed and improved as life sustaining and enhancing property that the improver then owns - a point many advocates of indigenous land rights are very proud of. But that being the case, their concept of "native-title" has no foundation in their culture. That does not mean they can't claim title, Aborigines obviously have the same inalienable rights to the product of their labour as members of any other race. What it

does mean, however, is that they have to use the Western concepts of land, ownership and rights to make such a claim. That being the case, to impose an Aboriginal concept of communal, land-less, property-less, right-less, use of "country" on this Western conception of rights, is to steal it, and undermine its validity. Hence the anomalies and frustrations and injustices and disputes that snarl up tribunals and courts and waste vast tracts of Australia that is removed from the productive use of individual and corporations. This fallacy should not be confused with any idea that any race or culture or collective owns any concept or that anyone is excluded from using any concept. The fallacy of the stolen concept is not about who properly uses a concept but how they are to properly use them.

27. Argumentum ad Verecundiam: quantitative:

The quantitative version of "the appeal to reverence" appeals to the number of people who believe a proposition to be true, implying that the truth is what enough people think it is. This fallacy should not be confused with an appeal to numerous witnesses, or the knowledge many people may have, it is not fallacious to consider this evidence of what actually occurred - "out there". It becomes a fallacy when the mere fact that many people believe a proposition makes it true - for most of history most people believed the world was flat but were wrong. For example, in the next chapter we will examine an extreme form of the quantitative form of Argumentum ad Verecundiam in the next chapter, where we see how Greg Lehman promotes this fallacy to a status that is not only acceptable, but the foundation of "truth".

Note

1. Taken from page 228-238 in "Washout" by John Dawson. (Dawson implies his source was "Introduction to Logic" by Leonard Peikoff).