

## Ch. 06: More Fallacies

### I. Ad Hominem

- a. The simplest form of this fallacy, the **personal attack** *ad hominem*, maligns a person in order to dismiss that person's beliefs.
- a. A more specialized personal attack goes by the name of the **inconsistency** *ad hominem*. Here one dismisses a claim on the grounds of the speaker's inconsistency.

### II. Straw Man

- a. The fallacy of attacking a straw man consists in arguing against a distorted or simplified version of what someone has said, and treating the argument you give as if it brought down what the person really did say.
- b. A **straw man** fallacy typically involves a **smokescreen** (see Chapter 5), because recasting another person's opinion in distorted form amounts to changing the subject.

### III. False Dilemma

- a. A false dilemma assumes that only two alternatives exist in a given situation, so that anyone who does not agree with the first alternative has to accept the second one.
- b. The **false dilemma** distorts a sound logical principle, namely the principle that when there are only two alternatives and the first one does not hold, the second one must. If my cat is not male then my cat must be a female.
- c. Thus a false dilemma goes wrong not in its logic but in the move before the logical move, when it falsely describes a situation as though only two alternatives existed, when in fact others exist too.

### IV. Slippery Slope

- a. One invokes a slippery slope when predicting that if one thing happens, or is permitted to happen, another thing (always a very undesirable thing) will eventually result.
- b. The structure of the **slippery slope** fallacy is itself logically healthy. If A does imply B, and B is indeed absurd, or very undesirable, then you have produced an argument against A.

- c. The slippery slope therefore makes good sense when A does imply or does lead to B. A society's small restrictions on the press can in fact lead to greater restrictions; so newspapers fight curbs on highly offensive language, not because they intent to print such language themselves, but in order to prevent being censored themselves in the future for something more ambiguous.
- d. Such reasoning turns into fallacy when it rests on *unfounded claims* about whether A leads to B. It is not enough to point to some similarity between A and B; one must give a good reason for believing that A produces B.

## V. Burden of Proof

- a. One of the trickiest fallacies to detect is the one that misplaces the burden of proof. This fallacy occurs when one places the burden of proof on the wrong side of an issue, or places the burden of proof more heavily on one side than it should be.
- b. All other things being equal, the greater burden of proof rests with someone making an affirmative claim, rather than with the one who is denying that claim.
  - i. Watch out especially for someone who defends an affirmative claim by throwing the burden onto the other side, calling a claim true simply because it has not been shown to be false.
  - ii. This special type of burden-of-proof fallacy is called an **appeal to ignorance**.
- c. Finally, consider special circumstances that shift the normal burden of proof. When there is a lot at stake (life, liberty), we should place a higher than usual burden of proof on claims that might cause harm.

## VI. Begging the Question

- a. The would-be defense of a claim that relies on the very claim it purports to prove is begging the question. This also gets called "circular reasoning," "starting too close to the conclusion," or (in certain cases, not always) "tautology."
- b.
- c. Begging the question defeats the very idea of an argument, because premises ought to be statements that the other person already accepts, not the conclusion you are trying to get that person to accept.
- d. Rarely does a question-begging bit of argument simply repeat the same words exactly -- that is too obvious -- so you should be alert for such

disguises as appeals to synonyms. For example: "It's impossible to believe that space goes on infinitely, because that's inconceivable."