

Lecture 12

More informal fallacies:

Appeal to Pity

Straw Man

Appeal to Force

Appeal to Authority

Appeal to Pity

An appeal to pity fallacy is committed when the arguer attempts to influence the listener not by providing good reasons for the conclusion, but by mentioning sad or difficult circumstances that are irrelevant to the issue.

Professor Grush, I know I bombed the midterm, but surely I deserve to pass the class. My grandmother died, my car broke down, and my dog got hit by the Amtrak train from Fresno. I can't control things like this!!

I think we should give the academy award to Russell Crowe. I mean, he should have received it last year for *The Insider*, and he has had such a hard time getting any good roles for a long time.

I don't think that Lawrence Phillips should get the Heisman Trophy this year. After all, he was accused of rape and a number of other violent crimes during his time at Nebraska.

Straw Man

This fallacy is committed when the arguer distorts an opponent's position, directs arguments at this distorted position, and claims to have defeated the opponent's real argument.

Ms. Smith has argued against prayer in the public schools. Obviously she advocates atheism. But atheism is what they have in Russia. Atheism leads to the suppression of all religions and the replacement of God by an omnipotent state. Is this what we want? Of course not. Ms. Smith's position is nonsense.

The student committee has presented us with an argument favoring alcohol privileges on campus. What do the students want? Is it their intention to stay boozed up from the day they enter as freshmen to the day they graduate? Do they want a chain of bars across the campus? Such a proposal is ridiculous!

Appeal to force

Appeal to force is committed when the arguer threatens (even implicitly) that some harm will come to the persuadee unless the persuadee accepts the conclusion. It is a fallacy if the harmful circumstances are not related to the topic of the conclusion of argument.

***Little Ricky to his smaller brother:* Power Rangers is the best show on TV, and if you don't think so, I'll beat the crap out of you.**

***Secretary to boss:* I deserve a raise. After all, you know that I am good friends with your wife, and it would be too bad if she learned about that 'business trip' you took last month with Buffy from accounting.**

You should turn around, because an insane postal employee with a baseball bat is right behind you, and you will want to avoid the bat if possible, otherwise you'll be knocked wacky.

It's financially advisable for you to join our protection organization. Think of all the money you will lose in broken windows, damaged merchandise, and fires if you decide not to join.

Appeal to authority

This fallacy is committed when the arguer cites as evidence the authority or testimony of someone who is not in fact an authority in the relevant subject area.

I need to buy some drinks for the party tonight. I think I'll get Diet Pepsi, because that's what MC Hammer says has the best taste.

Brad Pitt said in a recent interview that nuclear power plants should be shut down because they are unsafe. So I am going to vote to close them down since they are clearly unsafe.

Lester Brown, author of the annual State of the World report, has said that the depletion of the rain forests is one of the ten most serious problems worldwide. Thus, it must be the case that this is in fact a very serious problem.

Additional Examples

Starr has accused President Clinton of lying under oath and engaging in other unethical practices. But Starr himself has acted unethically, as this report shows, and has probably lied about having sex with interns too.

Of course God exists! Every culture throughout history has had religious beliefs. How could all these people be wrong?

Humanitarian groups have argued recently for housing for the poor and homeless. Unfortunately, high-density housing projects have been tried in the past and have failed. In a short time they turn into ghettos with high crime rates. Chicago's Cabrini-Green is a prime example. So we should reject the proposal by these so-called humanitarians.

Spike Lee says the NBA owners are being greedy and forcing the players to accept a bad deal. So obviously the owners are to blame for the lockout.

I know that some of you are against appointing Sarah Cole as the new sales manager. But you should reconsider. If she is not appointed, I will surely decrease the budget for your department next year severely.

Senator Collins supports the proposal for the new B-2 bomber. But his arguments in favor of this project should be discounted, since the primary bidder on the B-2 bomber comes from the state he represents.

You have heard Congressman Atkins' arguments in favor of reduced military expenditures. But surely you won't take them seriously. Atkins, as you know, is an admitted alcoholic, and his wife, who is a very decent person, just divorced him.

Mr. Jones, surely I'm qualified for the open position in your accounting department. I need the money desperately, and if I don't get a job soon I know I'll have a nervous breakdown.

Everyone is selfish; everyone is doing what he believes will make himself happier. The recognition of that can take most of the sting out of accusations that you're being 'selfish.' Why should you feel guilty for seeking your own happiness when that's what everyone else is doing, too?

**Amanda: I think tax cuts for the rich would be great for the economy.
Ted: Of course you do. You're rich.**

**Beth: You can't do that. That's an illegal move. A pawn can't move backwards.
Andy: But you just did the same thing two moves ago!**

Prof. Grimshaw argues that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by the Duchess of York. His evidence for this claim is a letter supposedly written by the Duchess to Ben Jonson. However, recent scholarship suggests that this letter is a forgery, so Grimshaw's bold conjecture must be rejected.

The President must be doing a bad job. His approval ratings are really low.

I don't know how you can take Heidegger seriously. He was a Nazi sympathizer, you know.

I would advise you not to date my sister. If you do, I'll break your legs.

I'm sorry I couldn't make it to class yesterday. My grandmother passed away and I had to attend her funeral.

My opponent claims that voting for him will improve relations with our neighboring countries. But that is hard to believe, because he's been funding a guerilla army that intends to invade Canada.

Mom, I can't believe you're getting on my case for smoking weed. Dad said you used to drop acid when you were in high school. Where do you get off criticizing me?

Kekule says that benzene has a ring-like structure. But he also says that this idea first came to him in a dream. Why should I trust any scientific claim that was inspired by a dream?