Chapter 7

More common fallacies!

What you need to know…
AD HOMINEM FALLACIES
Argumentum ad hominem: the most common fallacy on earth.

- Example:
  “According to Al Gore, global warming is the most serious threat facing us today. Folks, what a crock. Al Gore spends $20,000 each year on electricity in his Tennessee mansion!”
The only crock here is that argument! Why is it a fallacy?

- Look at it logically:
- **Premise**: All Gore spends $20,000 each year on electricity.
- **Conclusion**: Therefore global warming is not the most serious threat facing us today.
In case you still don’t see it:

- Issue: Is global warming the most serious threat?
- Which of the following assertions is RELEVANT?
GW will cause rising sea levels to swamp all east coast cities by 2100.
GW will cause coral reefs to die within 30 years.
CO2 levels have risen over 30% in the last 25 years, due to GW.
According to a study published in Nature, current rates of warming will lead to extinction for 1 million species by 2050.
All Gore spends $20,000 a year on electricity—NOT RELEVANT!
ATTACK *ad hominem*

- “What Al Gore says about air pollution is a joke! That clown will say anything to get attention!”
CIRCUMSTANTIAL *ad hominem*

- “What Al Gore says about air pollution is pure bull. Al Gore makes a fortune from alternative energy investments. What do you think he’d say?”
INCONSISTENCY *ad hominem*

- “Senator Clinton says we should get out of Iraq. What a bunch of garbage coming from her! She voted for the war, don’t forget.”
POISONING THE WELL

“Senator Clinton is going to give a talk tonight on Iraq. Well, it’s just gonna be more baloney. That gal will say anything to get a vote.”
GENETIC FALLACY

- “Does God exist? Of course not. That idea originated with a bunch of ignorant people who knew nothing about science.”
GENETIC FALLACY:

- Rejecting an idea as false because it came from a defective source.

Ad hominem:

- Rejecting some particular person’s idea as false because there is something defective about the person.
GENETIC FALLACY:

 “Does God exist? Of course not. That idea originated with a bunch of ignorant people who knew nothing about science.”

Circumstantial ad hominem:

 “John says God exists. What nonsense. He’s just saying that because he works for a church.”
New fallacy!

- FALSE DILEMMA
- Also known as Black/White; Either/Or; All/Nothing.
FALSE DILEMMA

- Example:

  “Either we increase the number of troops in Iraq or the terrorists will be attacking U.S. cities. Seems like a simple choice to me.”
“PERFECTIONIST” version of false dilemma

- Example:
  - “It’s impossible to eliminate terrorism entirely. We should stop wasting money on it.”
“LINE-DRAWING” version of false dilemma

- Example:
- “There shouldn’t be restrictions on violence in the movies. After all, when is a movie ‘too violent’? You can’t draw a line.”
Now two other famous fallacies:

- STRAW MAN
- SLIPPERY SLOPE
STRAW MAN

- Example:
- “Twenty percent? You want to tip her 20%???? Hey, maybe you want to give her everything we make, but I frankly think that is ridiculous!”
SLIPPERY SLOPE

- Example:
  
  “Twenty percent? You want to tip her 20%? Hey, next thing you’ll want to tip 25%! And then 30%! It will never end.”
Two more famous twins:

- BEGGING THE QUESTION
- MISPLACING THE BURDEN OF PROOF
MISPLACING THE BURDEN OF PROOF:

- Example:
- “Can I prove the Biblical flood really happened? Hey, can you prove it didn’t???”
BEGGING THE QUESTION

- Example:
- “Can I prove the Biblical flood really happened? Of course it happened! Why else would Noah build an ark???”
What they all have in common:

- They don’t demonstrate their conclusion.
- They don’t support their conclusion (they don’t make their conclusion more likely).