

Fallacies of Relevance 3.2

- Appeal to Force
(Argumentum ad Baculum)
- Appeal to Pity
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- Argument Against the Person
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Fallacies of Relevance

- Fallacies of relevance all share the same pattern: their premises lack logical relevance to the conclusion.
- The premises may seem emotionally, psychologically, or topically relevant, but there's nothing in the premises that logically implies the conclusion. The conclusion is not logically inferred from the premises.

Appeal to Force or Fear (Argumentum ad Baculum)

- X is true because you'll be harmed if you don't believe it.
- The conclusion is accepted, not because it's true, but because one fears the consequences of not accepting it.
- The appeal to force is common in all types of interaction where there is a threat of power or perceived power such that the one in power "wins" the argument not because the argument is correct or good, but because the other person fears that not agreeing with the argument's conclusion will result in some harm to himself or herself.

Appeal to Force or Fear Examples

- You'd better not give me a speeding ticket officer. My father is the mayor of Logicville and he will fire whomever I want fired.
- The Republican campaign message this year is an unsubtle one: If you vote for Democrats, terrorists will kill you. (Kevin Drum, *Washington Monthly*, August 2006)
 - Drum is accusing the Republicans of committing the *ad baculum* fallacy.

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“Just remember, son, it doesn’t matter whether you win or lose—unless you want Daddy’s love.”

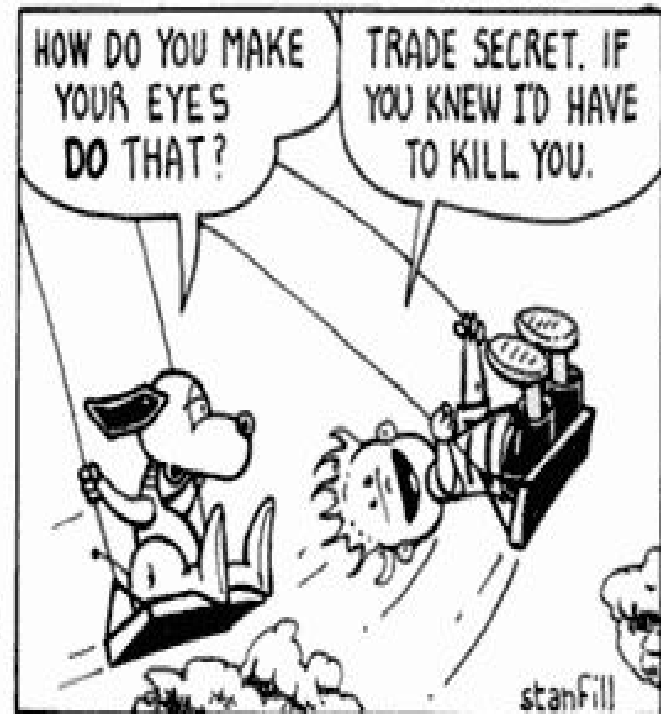
Appeal to Pity

(Argumentum ad Misericordiam)

- X is true because Y feels sorry for Z, who advanced X.
- A conclusion is supported by evoking pity from the listener or reader, and this pity hasn't much to do with the situation for which s/he wants pity.

Appeal to Pity Example

- Student to teacher: I shouldn't have to take this exam. I didn't have time to study because I was so hung over that I was too sick and then I got called into work and I need the money so that I can pay my tuition so I couldn't say no to work. If I have to take this exam I'll fail it and then I'll get kicked out of school and I won't find a good job and my life will suck.



Appeal to the Masses (Argumentum ad Populum)

- X is true because everyone believes it.
- X is true because everyone feels this way.
- Believing a claim simply because ‘everybody else’ does or because you wish to be accepted is not the same as the claim having been demonstrated.
- Saying or thinking something doesn’t make it so!

Appeal to the People Examples

- Polls show that 80% of Americans are opposed to same sex marriage. Clearly, same sex marriage is morally abhorrent and should never be allowed.
- Quit complaining about SUVs. More people than ever drive them.
- The Dixie Chicks were ostracized after their 2003 pre-war criticism of President Bush. It's only right their album sales slumped, they received death threats, and their 'red states' fan base waned. If you know what's right, you won't go see them tour for their new album.

Specific types of appeal to people

- Bandwagon
 - Of course you want to play basketball in high school . Almost everyone who lives in the US plays basketball.
- Vanity/Snobbery
 - You definitely will consider buying this jacket. Afterall, Justin Beiber is wearing it.



Argument Against the Person (Argumentum Ad Hominem)

- An ad hominem is a personal attack. Some personal characteristic of an individual is attacked as a response to an argument, such as a lack of experience, association with a group, or having a vested interest in advancing the claim.
- *What* someone claims, and their argument in support of it, is entirely distinct from whether or not we like them, or think they'll gain in some way if the argument succeeds.
- Not liking Person A does not undermine A's argument.

- X is a bad argument (or X is a false claim) because Y, who advanced it, doesn't know what s/he's talking about.
- X is a bad argument (or X is a false claim) because Y, who advanced it, is a jerk, ugly, mean, etc.
- X is a bad argument (or X is a false claim) because the person advancing it is only doing so because of their affiliation with a group that supports X/has a vested interest in seeing the claim succeed (*ad hominem* circumstantial).
- X is a bad argument because Y, who advanced it, didn't follow his or her own advice.

Ad Hominem Examples

- The following excerpts are from the Tom Cruise-Matt Lauer *Today* show interview. Though Lauer has not put forward an explicit argument, he has made some weak attempts to defend the use of psychiatric drugs. Cruise attempts to silence Lauer by attacking Lauer's (assumed) lack of knowledge of psychiatry:

Lauer: But Tom, if she said that this particular thing helped her feel better, whether it was the antidepressants or going to a counselor or psychiatrist, isn't that enough?

Cruise: Matt, you have to understand this. Here we are today, where I talk out against drugs and psychiatric abuses of electric shocking people, okay, against their will, of drugging children with them not knowing the effects of these drugs. Do you know what Aderol [sic] is? Do you know Ritalin? Do you know now that Ritalin is a street drug? Do you understand that?

And later:

Cruise: No, you see. Here's the problem. You don't know the history of psychiatry. I do.

- "Rosie's a loser. She's been a loser always. Her show failed, her magazine failed. Barbara Walters gave her new life, but she'll fail at that also because she's inherently a stone-cold loser." (Donald Trump in 2006, responding to initial attacks by Rosie O'Donnell.)
- All of Trump's proposed economic policies would have a negative impact on the American population. After all, Trump is a deceitful scumbag who only cares for himself.
- Actress and Playboy Playmate Pam Anderson argues against animal testing and animal cruelty. In her *Jane* magazine column, she has called Jennifer Lopez and Sean Colmes "idiots" for using fur in their clothing lines, and more recently, criticized NASCAR champ Dale Earnhardt Jr. for his endorsement of KFC. Of course she's critical of these people and practices. After all, she is P.E.T.A.'s spokeswoman.

Accident

- X is good or not good to do because rule or policy Y requires or forbids it.
- The Accident fallacy occurs when a general rule is applied to a specific case to which it was not meant to be applied. The accident is the case which is the exception to the rule that is applied, or does not properly fall under the rule:

Accident Examples

- Woman says to man: "Of course I'd love to marry you, John, but you know what George Washington said about not getting into 'entangling alliances.'"
- "Thou shalt not kill; therefore, you should not try to control termites in your home or fight for your country" (Lander Philosophy Web)
- "People are defined as rational animals. Therefore, you should spend more time reasoning and thinking rather than enjoying yourself with what you do" (Lander Philosophy Web)
- "The U.S. is a true democracy; therefore, children and criminals should be allowed to vote." (Lander Philosophy Web)



"Shhhhhh . . . I wanna surprise the kids."

Straw Man

- Position, argument, or claim X is (distorted as) terrible, and as such is easily dismissed.
- This pattern often includes another step, in which the individual committing the straw man then inserts his or her own position, as far more reasonable, in place of the ‘terrible’ one.
- The distortions in a straw man fallacy are distortions of others’ positions.
- The straw man fallacy occurs when someone's position is distorted to the point that it bears little resemblance to the individual's actual position, and is then easily discredited. Very often, this distortion is an oversimplification of someone's position.

Straw Man Examples

- “Very strong gun control advocates may not get everything they want. And people who think they should have a missile launcher in their backyard as a Constitutional right may not have that.” (Bernie Sanders, 2015 NBC Debate)

-Senator Jones says that we should not fund the attack submarine program. I disagree entirely. I can't understand why he wants to leave us defenseless like that. We should definitely fund the program.

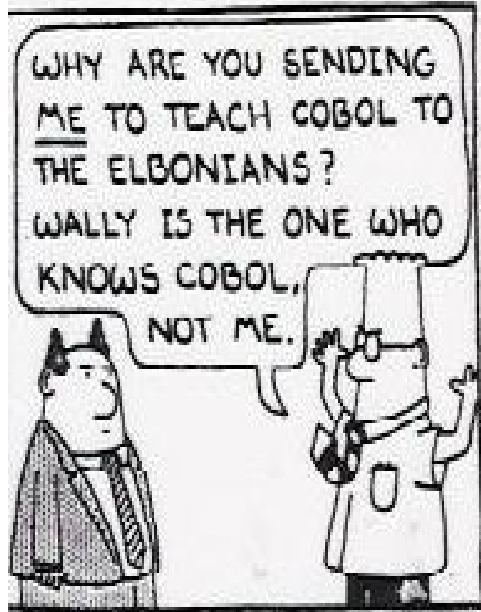
- In attacking a proposed equal rights amendment to the state constitution of Iowa, Pat Robertson said that the proposal was part of a “feminist agenda [which] is not about equal rights for women, it is about a socialist, anti-family, political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.” (*The Washington Post*, Aug. 23, 1992)

Missing the Point (Ignorantio Elenchi)

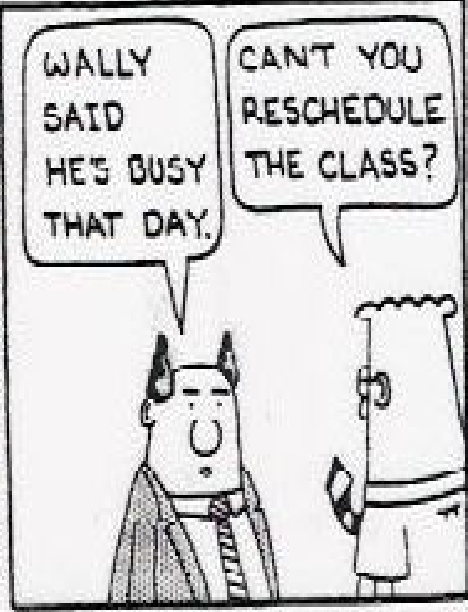
- X is true, but premise Y actually supports conclusion Z.
- When an argument commits the missing the point fallacy, the conclusion that is drawn is irrelevant to the premises, although it is vaguely related to what should have been the correct conclusion. In fact, the premises support another conclusion altogether.
- A handy way to tell that you've got an irrelevant conclusion of the *ignorantio elenchi* variety is to ask whether or not you'd accept the conclusion, even if the premises were false.

Missing the Point Examples

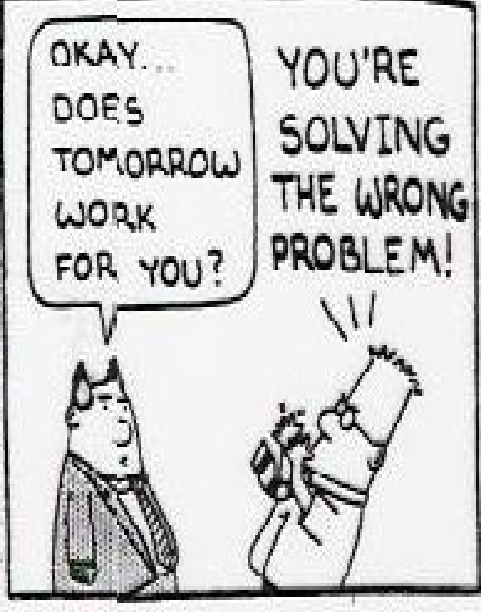
- Cheating is at an all-time high in high schools and universities across the country. We should get rid of tests altogether.
 - The premise is about how to address cheating within the context of a system that uses exams and other assessments to measure learning. Elimination of tests won't stop cheating. That conclusion doesn't address the issue.
- You should support the new housing bill. We can't continue to see people living in the streets; we must have cheaper housing.
 - It may be true that people living in the streets is not good for anyone. It may be true that cheaper housing is also a good idea. Neither premise, however, leads us to the conclusion that *this* bill is going to solve either problem. We don't have enough relevant information to determine whether or not this bill is “the answer.”

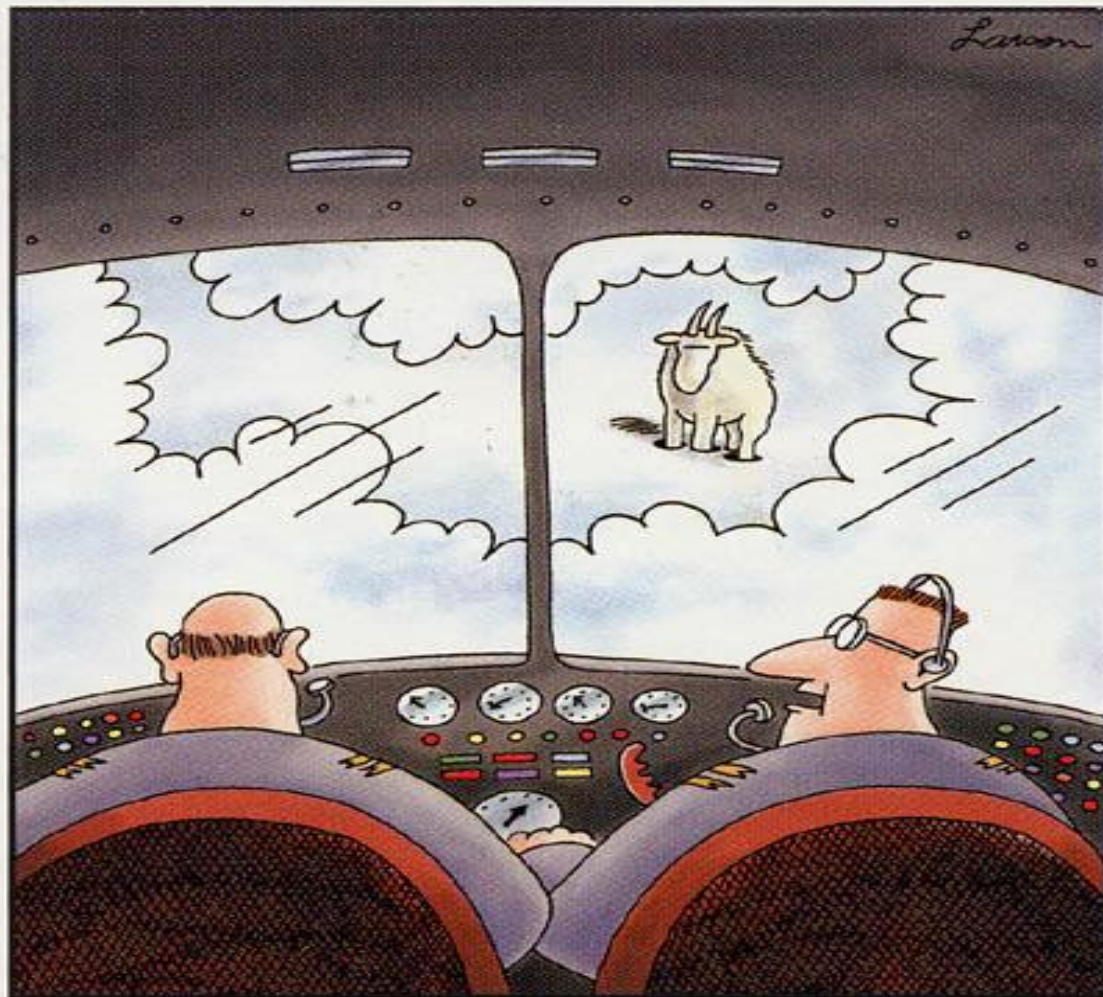


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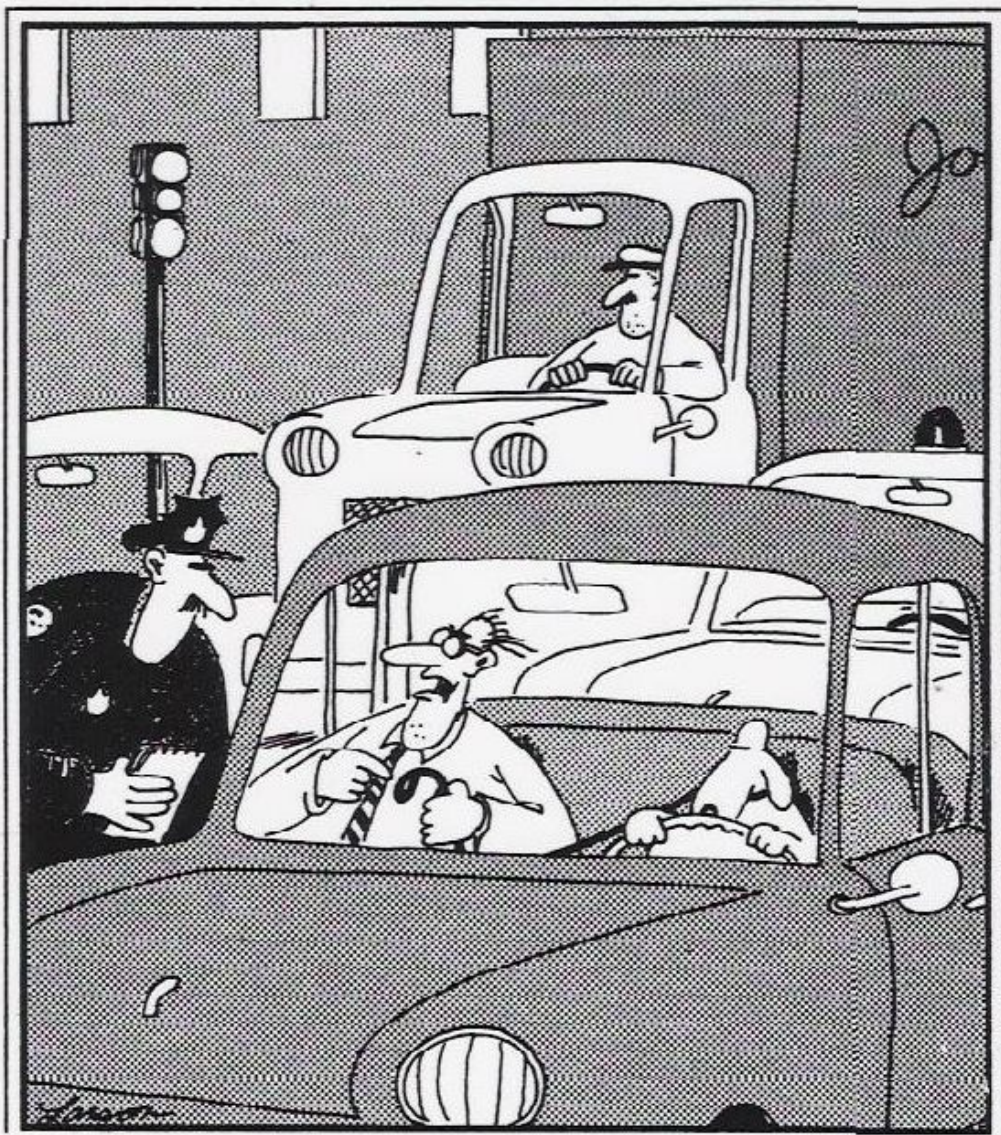
"Say ... what's a mountain goat doing way up here in a cloud bank?"

Red Herring

- A red herring is something like a magic trick. The aim here is to divert the attention of the listener/reader away from the real issue of the argument and then asserts a conclusion as if it was drawn from those premises. In fact, however, the conclusion is drawn from the diversion premises.
- When a magician does a lot of hand waving s/he's really diverting your attention away from more subtle gestures that would clue you into the trick's mechanics. A red herring does the same thing, it leads you astray.

Red Herring Examples

- No, I don't believe a murderer has a right to live, and here's why. The criminal justice system has gotten completely out of control, what with rapists, murderers – you name it – all getting off scot-free.
 - Rather than addressing the right to life issue of a murderer, the arguer diverts attention to problems with the justice system.
- Those officers who killed the innocent man in New York by mistake should be found not guilty of any crime. None of them had ever been in any kind of trouble before, and, tragically, this kind of thing is just going to happen when we have aggressive police work.
 - Guilt or innocence is not established by someone's history of obedience to the law and "aggressive" police work. (A portion of this reasoning may also be an example of question-begging, which we'll see later...)



“Hey, I’m not crazy... sure, I let him drive once in a while, but he’s never, never off this leash for even a second.”

ON MESSAGE



"How do I feel about us? I feel that America is a safer place today because of the steps taken by this Administration. That's how I feel about us, Carolyn."