Fallacies of Presumption and Ambiguity (3.4)

• Begging the Question (Petitio Principii)
  • Complex Question
  • False Dichotomy
• Suppressed Evidence
  • Equivocation
  • Amphiboly
• Composition
  • Division
Begging the Question (Petitio Principii)

- X is true because X is true.
- Y is true because X is true (and Y is already tacitly assumed to be true).
- A.K.A., Begging the Question and Circular Reasoning (though some think these are distinct fallacies).
- Arguments are supposed to prove a claim that goes 'beyond' the premises. It would be odd if we were to say we've proven something simply by asserting it once and then reiterating it in other words. But this is just what question begging does. The conclusion simply restates the premise(s) in synonymous words (but not substantively different).
- The fallacy called circular reasoning occurs when the premise tacitly (but not explicitly) assumes the conclusion is true (and so does not thereby prove it). Accepting the premise requires prior acceptance of the conclusion.
- When the relationship between the premise(s) and conclusion seems to rely on an unstated premise (hidden assumption), the argument may be fallacious.
- “Question” simply means the point at issue; that which is to be proved.
PLAYER IS BEGGING THE QUESTION
TRIED TO ASSUME THEIR PREMISE WAS ALREADY CORRECT
Logical Fallacy Comics

Today's Fallacy: Begging the Question

Begging the question is when what you're trying to prove is assumed implicitly in one of your premises!

For example: T-Rex is a pretty sweet dude because he's always so friggin' awesome!

This is actually formally valid: if the premise is true and I'm friggin' awesome, then it follows that I'm a pretty sweet dude. However, I've provided no logical support for my "T-Rex is awesome" premise, but only made a conclusion (T-Rex = pretty sweet) which relies on the premise being true. I haven't offered any evidence, so I am begging the question!

But "begging the question" is mostly used today to mean "raising the question"!

Well, I suppose that begs the question, T-Rex: if it's used more often to mean "raises the question" than "a fallacy of presumption", doesn't that suggest that the definition of the phrase has evolved?

No it does not! What it suggests is that everybody sucks but me!

Later: The Face of Prescriptive Language??
Since I am by definition always right, I have won this argument before it has even begun.

A unique version of begging the question.
Begging the Question Examples

Begging the Question
• Government ownership of public utilities is a dangerous doctrine because it is socialistic. (Morris Engel, *With Good Reason*)
• ‘Fox-hunting is not cruel, since the fox enjoys the fun.’ (H.W. Fowler, *Modern English Usage*)

Circular Reasoning:
• Adam: God must exist
• Josh: How do you know?
• Adam: Because the Bible says so.
• Josh: Why should I believe the Bible?
• Adam: Because the Bible was written by God
More Examples

BtQ

• Murder is morally wrong. This being the case, it follows that abortion is morally wrong.

Circular Reasoning

• Verizon has the best cell phone service. After all, their phones have the clearest sound. And we know this is so because customers hear better on Verizon phones. And this follows from the fact that Verizon has digital technology. But this is exactly what you would expect given that Verizon has the best cell phone service.
"I understand completely. I like good movies, and you like bad movies."
THE MAP SAYS WE START AT THE BIG OAK TREE...

I'M SO EXCITED!

THEN WE WALK TWELVE STEPS THIS WAY AND SIX STEPS THAT WAY...

UNTIL WE COME TO A GORSE BUSH!

OH, BOY! THERE IT IS!

THIS IS WHERE THE MAP SAYS THE PIRATES BURIED THEIR TREASURE!

I DON'T SEE IT!

ARE YOU SURE THIS IS THE RIGHT PLACE, POOH?

OF COURSE I'M SURE, PIGLET...

...I MADE UP THE MAP, DIDN'T I?
Complex Question

• It’s difficult to formulate a structure for this type of fallacy, but it goes something like this:
  o Why/How/When/Where X? (Assuming that Y is the case is contained in the question)

• Complex Question, question occurs when a single, grammatical question is asked, but ‘tucked’ within it is another question, the answer to which is assumed at the outset.

• Though strictly speaking not arguments, complex questions are dubious attempts at getting a claim accepted without proving it.
Complex Question Examples (Also known as Loaded Question)

• Have you stopped beating your dog?
  o No… So, you still beat your dog.
  o Yes… So, you used to beat your dog.

• Where did you hide the marijuana you stole from the neighbor’s backyard?
  o Nowhere. I didn’t hide any marijuana…
    So, you smoked it already!
  o Under the bed…
    So, you did steal it from the neighbors.

• Are you going to stop being a pain in the #%@%?
  o No… So, you’ll keep being a pain in the #%@%.
  o Yes… So, you are being a pain, but will desist.
Examples

• E.g., a prosecutor demands from a defendant, "Did you commit the murder before or after you bought the soft drink?"
“If elected, would you try to fool some of the people all of the time, all of the people some of the time or go for the big one: all of the people all of the time?”
LOGICAL FALLACY COMICS
today's fallacy:
PLURIAM INTERROGATIONUM
"the loaded question"

A "loaded
question" is
when you ask a
question that
presupposes
something
unproven!

For instance, Dromiceiomimus, I could ask,
"Hey, Dromiceiomimus! Are you still
punching children?"

Aha - so when did you
stop? See what I did
there? The question
presupposes that you've
been punching on children
in the past, and goes on
to suggest that maybe
you're still doing so.
It is LOADED like
rich uncle
Pennybags. From Monopoly?

Your question is really
two questions combined
into one!

It breaks down to "Have you ever
punched children, and, if so, are
you still doing so?" But since
these are merged, and since this
merged form still demands a yes or
no answer, "no" becomes
misleading.
The solution
is not to
answer "yes" or
"no", but to
reject the
question!

T-Rex, are YOU still punchin'
children? Are you still
punching them just to steal
their ice cream cones?

Yep!

I reject your
question,
Utahraptor!
It's loaded!

Why are you SO
AFRAID of the
truth coming
cut, T-Rex?

Okay you must
never enter
politics ever.

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False Dichotomy

- X or Y alone is the case. Since it is not X, it must be Y.
- Sometimes called false dilemma, false dichotomy occurs when two options are presented as being exclusive and exhaustive. In a false dilemma, more than two options are available.
- Often, the dilemma is between two unpalatable choices presented in such a way that you will choose the lesser of the two ‘evils.’
- The erroneous assumption at work in a false dichotomy is that the options presented are, in fact, exclusive and exhaustive.
- Notice that a false dichotomy mimics a disjunctive syllogism…
False Dichotomy Examples

• In his address to the nation and the joint sessions of Congress shortly after the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, the president declared, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

• “To remain silent in the face of mounting failures by this president and this White House is to weaken our security even further.”

  (Ted Kennedy, in a speech at George Washington University in September, 2004.)

• "I don't see how you can win in Iraq if you don't think we should be there in the first place."

  (President Bush, in 2nd Presidential debate on Oct. 8, 2004.)
The meaning of life.
Cheese and crackers.

Image: A cartoon showing a figure standing in front of a sign that reads "The meaning of life. Cheese and crackers."
MEANWHILE, AT THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE DEBATE...

I stand against going to war!

Since you are against war, you must be against our troops.

Against our troops?

Is she really?
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT
Suppressed Evidence

• A bad inference, X, is drawn on the basis of incomplete premises.
• Recall that cogent arguments do not leave out pertinent evidence. When such evidence is overlooked, ignored, or otherwise suppressed, the inference is no good.
• Another version of this fallacy involves taking quotes or passages out of context in order to suggest a particular inference.
• We can distinguish this fallacy from question begging by noticing its missing evidence would lead us to a different conclusion from the one drawn. Q.B. involves leaving out a premise needed to support the conclusion stated.
Suppressed Evidence Examples

• Ads for Slim Fast claim that drinking Slim Fast shakes will result in weight reduction. Therefore, if I maintain my normal calorie intake and drink Slim Fast shakes every day, I will lose weight.

• During the past 10,000 years, no human has set foot on Mars. So, no human will set foot on Mars in the next 10,000 years.

• You’ll do great in Prof. Z’s course. She’s nice and fun and knows a lot about the subject.
Ambiguity: Equivocation and Amphiboly

• Word ambiguity (Equivocation) occurs when a word can be taken in more than one sense (there is a semantic ambiguity), or when it is unclear to what a word refers.
  
  o More specifically, equivocation occurs when the conclusion of an argument relies on the shift in sense of a word from one premise to another, or from the premise to a conclusion.

• Grammatical ambiguity (Amphiboly) occurs when sentence structure is flawed. The result is a conclusion that rests on one interpretation of the sentence’s meaning.
Equivocation by the offense

Player intentionally used misleading term with multiple meanings
Duck-Rabbit
Old-Young Woman
Equivocation Examples

• Someone said to the American critic, poet, and short story writer, Dorothy Parker, “I can’t bear fools.” Parker replied, “Your mother could give birth to them.”

• As far as I'm concerned, we need pay no attention to the president of the college when it comes to educational matters because he has no authority in education. He doesn't even have enough authority to prevent students from staging protest rallies.

• “Change is good. Nickels, dimes, quarters are always helpful. (Ellen DeGeneres)

• Bob: Looks like you’ve been missing a lot of work, lately.
   Peter: Well, I wouldn’t exactly say I’ve been missing it, Bob. (“Office Space”)
So where's my dinner? One of the Great Masters indeed.
“Do you like it? I made it from scratch.”
The queen told the curious little crane that she could have jam every other day, but never today, since today was not any other day.
Nuna & Toodles

What's this new health diet you've started?

They say I should cut out all desserts.

Oh my! That must be hard!

Not really.

You want me to cut out a piece for you too?
Amphiboly Examples

• I can't say too many good things about her.
  o Therefore, you don’t like her. [or]
  o Therefore, you like her a lot.

• He ate the cookies on the couch.
  o Therefore, he picked up cookies that were on the couch.
  o Therefore, he sat on the couch while eating the cookies.

• For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
  o Therefore, you’d better figure out whether or not you have kids!
  o Therefore, you can let your kids play in the nursery.

• I’ll give you the house or the car and the cottage.
  o Therefore, I’ll take the house and the cottage.
  o Therefore, I’ll take the car and the cottage.

• I saw the game at the bar.
  o Therefore, the game was played at the bar.
  o Therefore, the game was viewed at the bar.
MEETING TONIGHT - HOW TO GET MONEY OUT OF POLITICS

IT'S EITHER A CAMPAIGN REFORM RALLY OR A LOBBYIST'S WORKSHOP.
Hey man, where you going?

Sorry dude, I gotta go feed my baby turtles.

Awww how cute, can I watch?

Sure!
Composition

• The fallacy of composition is committed when the conclusion of an argument depends on the erroneous transference of an attribute from the parts of something onto the whole.
Composition Examples

- Sally likes spaghetti with marinara. She also likes thai curry. Therefore, it is certain that she would like spaghetti with marinara and thai curry.
- Each atom in this teacup is invisible. Therefore, this teacup is invisible.
- Each player on this basketball team is an excellent athlete. Therefore, the team as a whole is excellent.
Composition

Parts
Parts
Parts
Parts

attribute is improperly transferred

Whole
Division

- The fallacy of division is the exact reverse of composition. As composition foes from parts to whole, division goes from whole to parts. The fallacy is committed when the conclusion of an argument depends on the erroneous transference of an attribute from a whole onto its parts.
Division Examples

- Salt is a nonpoisonous compound. Therefore, its component elements, sodium and chlorine, are nonpoisonous.
- This motorcycle was made in America. Therefore, every component part of this airplane was made in America.
LOGICAL FALLACY COMICS: today's fallacy:
"THE STRAW MAN"

The "Straw Man" fallacy isn't so much a fallacy as it is a way of life!

In this fallacy, you present an altered version of your opponent's argument in order to make it appear absurd! You then tear apart this weaker, ridiculous argument and claim victory. Basically it can be summarized as "make stuff up and attribute it to your opponent"! Haha! EXCELLENT.

What? It's not excellent, T-Rex! It's bad argument technique!

BUT, it's also a great way to win debates. And if anyone calls you on it, you just say "come on. Your attack on me is the real straw man fallacy here; let's be serious."

Hey, how did you know I use the internet?

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