

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

Philosophy III Logical Fallacies IV

We conclude our lessons on philosophy by identifying and avoiding a few more Logical fallacies.

Appealing to Extremes: A fallacy very similar to slippery slope, which involves taking an argumentative claim or assertion to its extreme, even though the arguer does not advocate the extreme interpretation. The difference between the two fallacies is that appealing to extremes does not necessarily involve a sequence of causal connections. Example: Debtor to creditor: Hey, you've already repossessed my car and my television. Why don't you just draw a quart of blood or carve a pound of flesh from my heart too? Paul uses a similar rhetorical extreme when speaking to the Judaizers suggesting if they continue to require circumcision, why not castrate themselves, pointing out how wrong it was to continue requiring what God does not. An example of using a logical fallacy that is basically functions as hyperbole.

Hypothesis Contrary to Fact: This fallacy consists of offering a poorly supported claim about what might have happened in the past or future if circumstances or conditions were other than they actually were or are. The fallacy also involves treating hypothetical situations as if they were fact. Example: If you had only tasted the stewed snails, I'm sure you would have liked them. Example: If Hitler had not invaded Russia and opened up two military fronts, the Nazis would surely have won the war.

Non Sequitar: (literally means “does not follow”) in a general sense any argument which fails to establish a connection between the premises and the conclusion may be called a non-sequitar. In practice, however, the label non-sequitar tends to be reserved for arguments in which irrelevant reasons are offered to support a claim. Example: I wore a red shirt when I took the test, so that is probably why I did so well. Example: Mr. Boswell couldn't be the person who poisoned our pet, because he was always so nice to her. What shirt you wear or how nice someone is does not make a factual connection to what took place.

Red Herring: attempting to hide a weakness in an argument by drawing attention away from the real issue. A red herring fallacy is thus a diversionary tactic or an attempt to confuse or fog the issue being debated. The name of the fallacy comes from the days of fox hunting, when a herring was dragged across the trail of a fox in order to throw the dogs off the scent. A variation of this is shifting to a related topic in essence changing the subject. Example: accused by his wife of cheating at cards, Ned replies “Nothing I do ever pleases you. I spent all last week repainting the bathroom, and then you said you didn't like the color.” Example: There's too much fuss and concern about saving the environment. We can't create an Eden on Earth. And even if we could, remember Adam and Eve made a very bad choice there as well.

Inconsistency: advancing an argument that is self-contradictory, or that is based on mutually inconsistent premises. Example: A used car salesperson says, “Hey, you can't trust those other car salesmen. They'll say anything to get you to buy a car.” Example: A parent has just read a child the story of Cinderella. The child asks, “If the coach, and the footmen, and the beautiful clothes all turned back into the pumpkin, the mice, and the rags, then how come the glass slipper didn't change back too?” While I know you might be saying with the child “yea why?” I will respond into what? ☺