

## **Detecting Fallacies**

Come Let Us Reason Together: Learning To Love God With All Thy Mind

9/21/25

### **Detecting Fallacies**

- The technique for identifying informal fallacies is the same as identifying any kind of reasoning. You must ask two questions about the person doing the arguing:
  - What is he trying to prove?
  - How is he trying to prove it?
- For example, consider this section out of Bertrand Russell's essay entitled "Why I am not a Christian":
  - Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly on fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have kind of an elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing—fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death.
- What is Russell trying to prove?
- How is he trying to prove that in this paragraph?
- By attempting to identify the source of Christian faith.

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- Apparently, he thinks that if he can say why someone believes Christianity, then it must not be true.
- We can readily spot this as an extended Bulverism [A rhetorical fallacy where someone dismisses an argument by attacking the arguer's motives or psychological background, rather than addressing the argument's merits. ]
- Remember these questions:
  - What is being argued?
  - How is it being argued?

### **List of Fallacies**

- Ipse Dixit—Appeal To Authority
- Ad Populum—Appeal To The Masses
- Ad Baculum—To The Stick i.e., threats
- Ad Hominem—Attacking A Person
- Bulverism—Genetic Fallacy
- Tu Quoque—You do it too!
- Ad Ignorantiam—Lack of Information

- Chronological Snobbery
- Equivocation—confuse the real issue with multiple, vague or unclear meanings
- Accent—altered meaning through changed emphasis
- Amphiboly—vagueness of grammar alters meaning.
- Composition—transferring attributes from parts to whole
- Division—transferring attributes from whole to part
- Circular Reasoning—assuming what you are trying to prove
- Post hoc ergo propter hoc—assuming sequence in time implies cause & effect
- Either/Or—false dilemma
- Complex Question—question that excludes a legitimate response
- Apriorism—hasty generalization

Identify the fallacies made in the examples below. They can be any of the fallacies of distraction, ambiguity, or form.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ The Facebook post read, “If you don’t share this, you may lose your job in an accident or go bald!”
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ That Facebook post was real! Just a week after I ignored it, I failed my logic test.
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ My girlfriend always shares posts. She says that nobody has to prove to her that they don’t really work.
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_ A recycling poster said, “Recycle cans and waste paper.” So, I am wasting paper every change I get!
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_ All my friends recycle their cans, so it must be a good thing to do.
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_ I read that “Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” My life certainly isn’t a daring adventure, so I guess it’s nothing.
- 7) \_\_\_\_\_ The apostle Paul told us to honor our leaders. But he dishonored the high priest, so why should I listen to him?
- 8) \_\_\_\_\_ Honoring your leaders is an old tradition that no longer applies to our modern, sophisticated age.
- 9) \_\_\_\_\_ The Japanese always score higher in math than Americans. So, I am sure our Japanese neighbor can help you with your calculus.

- 10) \_\_\_\_\_ The Japanese are better at math because they're smarter. We know that they're smarter, because they always do better at math.
- 11) \_\_\_\_\_ Hi, I am selling tickets to the policeman's ball and I am sure you would like to support your local police. So, how much would you like to give?
- 12) \_\_\_\_\_ Of course, the Joint Chiefs of Staff say we ought to increase military spending. As members of the armed forces, they want as much as they can get.
- 13) \_\_\_\_\_ We shouldn't listen to Senator Slug either, since we all know he is a card-carrying member of the radical right.
- 14) \_\_\_\_\_ Oh, so you believe in evolution? Tell me, are you descended from a monkey on your mother's side or your father's side?
- 15) \_\_\_\_\_ The world was not created by God, for matter has always existed and, thus, needs no God to explain where it came from.
- 16) \_\_\_\_\_ The press has a duty to publish what is clearly in the public interest. And there is certainly public interest in the private life of the rich and famous.
- 17) \_\_\_\_\_ I had a bad time with my former husband. Trust me, dear, men are no good.
- 18) \_\_\_\_\_ The idea of trying to colonize Mars is ridiculous. My mother said it couldn't possibly work.
- 19) \_\_\_\_\_ Each snowflake is very light. There is no way that snow could make that roof collapse.
- 20) \_\_\_\_\_ Did that last guy say that snowflakes were light? I always thought that snow was frozen water.