PHIL 100 §§0203,0204,0207020 T.A. : W Kallfelz Feb 10 2006

***A Taxonomy of Argument Fallacies*[1]**

Note: These are commonly occurring fallacies when making *general* arguments (not necessarily in SFCS form) As you can see, the descriptions are *qualitative* (not described explicitly in terms of Rules A)-E).) It's useful to familiarize yourself with them, when, for example, analyzing claims in your reading, or when making your claims

Fallacy	Explanation/Example
Question-begging (Latin: *petitio principii*)	To avoid this fallacy, evidence needs to be presented in the premises in such a manner that's supportive but independent of the conclusion. Example of question-begging: "The Bible is the divinely inspired word of God, because it's written in the Bible that it's the divinely inspired word of God." Hence, *circular arguments* are a form of question-begging. There are also *question-begging definitions.* Consider, for example, a philosophical definition of *ethical egoism* (i. e., that all human acts are motivated by selfish desires.) Suppose someone offers a counterexample of a altruistic act (i.e., any act of sefl-sacrifice.) *If* ethical egoism is defined in such a way as to *include* self-sacrificing acts as *selfish* as well, then it's a question-begging definition
False Alternative ('either/or' fallacy)	The fallacy of not giving a full account of all alternatives. Example: 'Since monism is false, then dualism must be true.' 'Either you're a fool or you're a knave,' etc.
False Disjunct	Assuming no combination of possibilities can occur. Example: 'You can't vote Independent and Democratic' (Counterexample: one can vote for a Democratic candidate for senate and an Independent for County Commissioner, etc.)
Ad hominem	Discredits the content of an argument by drawing attention to its speaker. Example: "You can't trust this scientific report about *X* because it's about an 'agenda' *Y*." Aside from the notion: 'agenda' being a very broad and slippery term, this claim is fallacious because the report's content *X* is not directly met.
Genetic Fallacy	Similar to ad hominem, the content of argument *X* is dismissed, based on *X*'s origin. Example: Consider the claim that a certain religion arose out of superstitious origins. The distant origins of a religion may be irrelevant to its value as a practice today.
Red herring	Points introduced in an argument to divert attention from the real point. Consider, for example, the 'claim:' "I was late to work, because I saw a beautiful sunset. The sunset was …' The last sentence is a red herring.
Straw Man	Replacing an original point with some extreme or exaggerated version of it. Example: 'If you want to limit the production of cars, that would leave us with no transportation capability or capacity.' (But there are obviously many alternatives, depending on the context)
Slippery slope	Similar to straw man: some scenario is falsely introduced to distort a view. Example: 'Introducing safety mechanisms on handguns will result in the government taking your gun away,' 'Proposing a 1% sales tax this year will result in a 10% increase ten years from now,' etc. These claims are obviously false unless one can "prove" (in the first case) there's a government conspiracy behind safety mechanisms, and in the second case that there's a mechanism based on the 1% sales tax increase which will perpetually increase sales taxes per annum. Such 'proofs' often rely on conspiracy theories, which usually involve practically all of the fallacies listed above.

[1] From Mark B. Woodhouse (1994) *A Preface to Philosophy* (5th Edn.) (Belmont, CA. : Wadsworth Publishing)

Appeal to tradition	Assuming the long-term existence of X guarantees its quality. Example: "Beer brewed since the 15th century…"
Appeal to novelty	Assuming the novelty of X guarantees its quality. Examples are easy enough to encounter in advertisements.
Appeal to a saying	Similar to ad hominem. Example: using some cliché like 'The older you get, the more set in your ways you become' (which aside from its vagueness, is also strictly false) to justify some discriminatory practice.
Bandwagon	Similar to ad hominem. Assuming the merit or validity of X because of its number of adherents. Example: "One million X can't be wrong!"
Appeal to the few	Similar to ad hominem. Assuming the merit or validity of X based of its *small* number of practicers/ badherents. Example: "The few/the proud/ …" etc
Half-truth (lifting out of context.)	Similar to either/or fallacy. When a *true* statement is made, however without specifying all the relevant facts in support. Example: 'On road tests, car X got 40 mpg' and it was failed to mention that there was a 20 mph tailwind, and the road had low traction reducing the tires' friction, etc.
Weasel words	Words implying more (or less) than the truth. Watch out for arguments that make essential use of phrases like: 'may include,' 'can be,' 'will remind you of,' 'virtually the same as,' etc. They can suggest much, but often guarantee little or nothing. Many philosophers are guilty of such: ☺
Leading questions	Questions biasing or influencing answers. (Lawyers are especially adept at these maneuvers!) Example: "When you robbed the bank, did you use a gun or knife?" (Answering such a question can entrap the answerer into inadvertently assenting to its assumption.)
Irrelevant Reasons	Premises not supporting the conclusion. Seems obvious enough, but consider the statement: "Vote for Bob for Justice of the Peace, since Bob is well qualified for the job." The premise gives a *necessary* condition (Bob had *better* be qualified!) disguised as a *sufficient* condition.
Bad analogy	"The price of analogy is eternal vigilance" (this is one *valid* appeal to a saying!) Though analogies are essential in logic and in life, bad analogies occur when they're used to give a stronger conclusion than warranted. For example, the fact that persons A and B share similar characteristics doesn't, of course, guarantee that they'll excel in similar activities.
Hasty generalizations	Similar to bad analogies, when a conclusion is inferred that will recur based on past occurrences (think of the Induction fallacy) Example: "A is a sunny city, I've moved to A several days ago, and all we've had is sunny weather."
Appeal to ignorance	When a lack of evidence is used to justify a conclusion. Example: Claiming that X does not occur is unwarranted *unless one examines all possible evidence.*
False cause	When someone observes a succession in time between events A and B and assumes they're causally connected (Hume believed we do this all the time!) It's often very difficult to isolate the *real* causes from a set of prior events.
Equivocation	When an unwarranted inference is made based on a word being used in more than one sense. For example, the brand "Long Life" lightbulbs obviously doesn't imply the bulbs have a long life, from the name alone.
Composition	Assuming the whole possesses the same properties of its parts. Inductive reasoning (i.e. "all observed P are X, therefore all P are X") is an example.
Division	Assuming parts possess same properties as the whole. Example: A good organization (i.e., some organization doing beneficial charity work) doesn't imply that all its members are generous, etc.
Illicit appeal to authority	Though we have no choice as to rely mostly on the information of sources outside our own ken, there's always the danger that those sources are flawed. For instance, many considered Edward Teller, a nuclear physicist who developed the H-bomb, an 'expert' on Cold War policy. He certainly tried to pass himself off as one. But his expertise in nuclear physics doesn't obviously make him an expert in policy.