

*Fallacies*¹

A fallacy is an error in reasoning. Some of the below fallacies are logical in nature. Making the other mistakes will prevent you from coming to a solid conclusion. Your claims need appropriate and adequate support, and your conclusion should follow from your previous claims. If you find yourself concluding that you *must* be right, then, chances are, you are guilty of a fallacy.

Generalizing from Incomplete Information

Broad claims cannot be supported by insufficient evidence. You need to substantiate your claims without merely drawing on personal experience, unless you can show that your experience is representative or philosophically relevant.

Example: My uncle is a consequentialist, and he is awful to his family. This proves that consequentialism cannot possibly account for family values, and it should be rejected as a moral theory.

Overlooking Alternatives

Do not oversimplify complex, messy philosophical problems. Words like ‘prove’, ‘conclusively’, and ‘necessarily’ should be avoided. If you have made a strong case against ethical relativism, you have not proven that deontology is the only viable option.

Example: Since ethical relativism is necessarily wrong, we must agree with Kant that morality comes down to respect for the moral law.

False Dilemma

Similar to the above fallacy. You need to characterize the philosophical terrain fairly, so you do not want to give your readers the impression that they only have two options when they have more.

Example: Since the universe could not have been created out of nothingness, it must have been created by an intelligent life force.

¹ Weston, Anthony. *A Rulebook for Arguments*, 3rd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000.

Begging the Question

Your argument cannot stand if your conclusion is used in your premises. In other words, you cannot assume what you are trying to prove. This kind of argument is also called circular.

Example: God exists because it says so in the Bible, which I know is true because God wrote it!

Poisoning the Well

Again, you should characterize your opponents fairly and charitably. By using loaded and disparaging language, you stack the deck in your favor, but through an illegitimate technique.

Example: No sensitive person would accept Kant's moral philosophy.

Straw Man

Your objections need to be robust, strong, and to the point. They should target the heart of one of your claims. It is better to have a strong objection and a weak response than *vice versa*. Your objection should be persuasive, and it should make your reader rethink one of your previous claims. If you can blow over your objection easily, then you have not been charitable.

Example: Utilitarians do not prioritize morality; instead of caring about individuals, they demand infinite sacrifices and thrust us into socialism.