

Recognizing Microstructural Fallacies in Argumentation and Advocacy

Compiled by: John Louis Lucaites and Michael Calvin McGee
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Admittedly, I am asking you to do something unfashionable in education these days: You are to memorize the *name*, *definition*, and *structure* of each of the following fallacies in reasoning and in use of evidence. The goal is to equip everyone of you with the critical ability to recognize fallacies as an autonomic mental reflex. I want you to *know immediately*, without having to stop and think of every possibility, that a piece of reasoning is questionable, why it is questionable, and how one goes about explaining its weakness. We will devote only a small amount of time to discussing this list in lectures and discussion sections, *but* you will be responsible for the entire list on the midterm examination.

Group I: Causal Fallacies

1. INSUFFICIENT CAUSE

In seeking to establish cause-effect relationships, the advocate may settle on a “cause” which, by itself, does not have the *potency* or *power* to produce the alleged “effect.” The insufficiency may lie:

- a. in the distance between asserted cause and asserted effect.

“For want of a nail, a shoe was lost; for want of a shoe, a horse was lost; for want of a horse, a general was lost; for want of a general, the battle was lost; for want of a victory the war was lost; for want of peace, the kingdom was lost. A blacksmith’s nail caused the downfall of the French Empire.”

- b. or in the *conjunction* or *inappropriateness* of relating cause and effects from different categories of experience.

“With the 1960s came legalized pornography, the portrayal of sex and violence on television and in film. Our youth, exposed to such immorality from a very tender age, have lost all contact with goodness and decency. They have been corrupted by philistine philosophies and pornographic art. All morality has been destroyed.”

Observe that in both examples *neither* causal nor sign relationships have been established. Both reasoning sequences fail because:

- (i) the asserted “cause” is not directly related to the observed effect,
- (ii) and even if related, the asserted cause is not powerful enough in itself to produce the alleged effect.

2. MULTIPLE CAUSATION

Nearly all human beings have a tendency to oversimplify objective reality as they attempt to reduce it to rational principles. Most common is the belief that there is a single, definitive explanation for our problems. In argumentation, this impulse takes the form of asserting that there is a *single cause* of a problem when in fact most problems are the result of *several* causative agencies working in concert. The fallacy of multiple causation is committed when:

- a. the advocate asserts that a *partial* cause is *the* cause,

“Several surveys have established that the incidence of juvenile delinquency among children from broken homes is almost four times higher than the incidence of juvenile delinquency in homes never broken by divorce. The cause of juvenile delinquency is the breakdown of traditional family structure, instanced primarily in a high rate of divorce corresponding to the rate of increase of juvenile delinquency.”

- b. or if the advocate asserts that modification of the partial cause will in any way modify the effect (problem).

“The primary cause of air pollution in this country is the internal combustion engine. If we can find a way to reduce significantly the pollutants put into the air by our motor vehicles, we will have solved the problem of air pollution.”

3. POST HOC, ERGO PROPTER HOC

“After the fact, therefore because of the fact.” As we have indicated, there is always a linear, chronological relationship between cause and effect: the cause invariably occurs in time before the effect. This does not mean, however, that all one needs to do is establish a chronological relationship. If an advocate claims that a cause-effect relationship exists between two phenomena simply because the two phenomena occur sequentially in time, s/he commits the post hoc fallacy.

“Surveys indicate that 90% of all heroin addicts first used marijuana. A report issued by the Surgeon General has determined, therefore, that the use of marijuana leads to the use of heroin. If you smoke marijuana, you will eventually become a heroin addict.”

4. REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM

“Reduction to the absurd.” This fallacy occurs when the advocate assumes a claim for the sake of argument, arrives at an obviously absurd conclusion, and then confirms that the original assumption must have been wrong because of the absurd outcome. A *reductio ad absurdum* occurs when an advocate attempts to expose another advocate’s fallacy. Since cause-effect chains inherently invite extensions, either into the past (Why? Why? Why?) or into the future (What is the result of that? And that? And That?), and since increasing distance in either direction from the original cause-effect assertion decreases confidence in the claim, most

causation chains ultimately result in comic conclusions, humorous because of an obvious absurdity. *Reductio ad absurdum* is a way of ridiculing an opponent's reasoning, and hence is not itself reasonable. Such units may appear as *illustrations* of an opponent's error, but they do not *prove* either that she is *wrong* or that you are *right*.

“My opponent has claimed that smoking marijuana leads to heroin addiction. He says that 98% of the heroin addicts once smoked pot. I believe that. I'll bet they also smoked cigarettes. Better yet, I'll bet they all drank coffee – and every one of them tasted mother's milk! Freud missed something: If you suckle your mother, you'll become a heroin addict!”

5. SUBSTITUTION OF SIGN FOR CAUSE

The advocate establishes a single relationship between two phenomena A and B, but then asserts that A *causes* B. Remember that a *sign* is merely a coincidental relationship – whenever B exists, A exists; where there's smoke, there's fire; when you have measles, you get little red, itchy bumps. BUT there is in sign reasoning no assertion that A in any way *caused* B, or that B *caused* A.

“Members of Phi Beta Kappa have been shown to attain far higher incomes than the average college graduate. If you're invited to join, don't pass up the chance – it could add a lot to your earning capacity.”

Of course, being elected to PBK might be a good *sign* of one's potential for future success—but there is no evidence that it is the *cause* of such success. Put differently, correlation is not causation.

Group II: Circumstantial Fallacies

In forced choice situations, when we cannot know all the facts, we are forced to make judgments based on what we *do* know. We depend on reasoning from *sign*, what the courts refer to as “circumstantial evidence.” One pitfall of sign or signal reasoning, the substitution of sign for cause has already been discussed under the heading of causal reasoning. Others include:

6. HASTY GENERALIZATION

Almost all signal relations require *corroboration*. That is, we need to have more than one sign to have confidence that the thing signaled actually exists – the doctor will need to know you have a fever, are lightheaded, and have itchy, sore eyes *in addition* to having little red bumps before she will diagnose measles. An advocate commits the fallacy of hasty generalization if he draws a conclusion from one or just a few fallible signs without diligently searching for additional corroboration.

“J. Robert Oppenheimer was seen in the company of Luther Perkins, a known communist spy. Shortly thereafter, atomic secrets were smuggled out of the country by men associated with Luther Perkins. We can conclude that Oppenheimer is probably a communist spy.”

7. THE FALLACY OF COMPOSITION

The fallacy of composition is a sophisticated version of the hasty generalization. It occurs when the advocate assumes that what is true of the “parts” is true of the “whole” itself. So, for example, one might argue that if all of the parts of an “engine” are of the very highest quality then the engine itself must be outstanding. But, of course, the engine is more than just the sum of its parts, it is also a function of *who* put the parts together, how those parts interact with one another, etc. We see the fallacy in the following quotation:

“The USA men’s Olympic basketball team is going to be outstanding defensive unit since all of its members are excellent defensive NBA players.”

Of course, if the players don’t learn “team defense” or play as a “team” then they will not be particularly defensive good. (NOTE: This is purely hypothetical since no one in the NBA actually plays defense!)

8. FALLACY OF DIVISION

The fallacy of division is the obverse of the fallacy of composition. It occurs when the advocate assumes that what is true of the “whole” is equally true of the “parts.” Here, the owner of an outstanding engine might assume, erroneously, that because she has an outstanding engine that all of the various parts are of outstanding quality. Or, to draw from our basketball example, we might erroneously conclude that because the USA basketball team plays great “team defense” that all of the individual players are great defensive players.

9. EQUIVOCAL SIGN

Very often, signs are associated with many phenomena, as, for example, a high fever is a signal of many illnesses, not just measles. An advocate commits the fallacy of the equivocal sign if he takes a sign that could be evidence of several different things and argues, without adequate evidence, that the sign signifies *one particular thing*. For instance:

“In San Francisco, where there is the constant threat of an earthquake, the people seem to live a life of reckless abandon. Decadence reigns supreme. Drug use, prostitution, and a variety of crimes are significantly higher than in the rest of the country. It is as if everyone wanted to live it up while they still have the chance.”

“One student in the class continually yawns during lectures. Such clear evidence of boredom is disconcerting.”

10. CONSTANT SIGN

Most (though not necessarily all) signal relationships are time and culture bound. That is, the existence of A in 1932 or in Russia may signal the presence of B; but in 2002 or in the United States, A will *not* signal the presence of B. If an advocate establishes a sign relationship between two phenomena A and B, and subsequently assumes that this relationship will continue *ad infinitum*, he or she may have committed the fallacy of the constant sign. This can be a difficult fallacy to detect because there are some signs which are (or at least are assumed to be) necessary and constant, such as the example of red bumps as a sign of measles.

11. MYSTIC SIGN

As we have discovered, two phenomena must be related to one another *naturally* before we assume that there is either a fallible or a necessary signal connection between them. Sometimes, an advocate can be fooled by their own value system and personal superstitions by arguing that a signal relationship exists between two phenomena A and B on no other basis than common belief or personal value judgments. Any such relationship is *imposed* by the advocate and is warranted only by his or her *faith*; the relationship does not exist *logically* or *in nature*. It is thus logically a mystification:

“An automobile accident occurred at the corner of State and Vine. The driver of one car, Hannah Lyle, a 37-year-old Kansas City housewife and the mother of three children. She had never been in an accident before. The other driver was John Carnes, a 19-year old student from New York City just passing through town. He has long hair and a beard, and his driver’s permit expired three days before the accident. He never had been in an accident before, nor had he ever been cited for a traffic violation. Though there is no physical evidence to indicate that either driver was at fault, we can safely assume that Carnes was probably the person who caused the accident.”

“The American flag is the symbol of our greatness as a nation. Anyone who burns it, for whatever personal reason, is a traitor and probably a subversive.”

Group III: Synthetic Fallacies

Perhaps the most common means of gathering, interpreting, and transmitting information in the modern world is statistics, the language of inductive reasoning. Three terms are important in understanding reasoning from statistics:

- a. “Survey” – If one wants to know the number of left-handed Lithuanian carpenters there are in Spencer, Indiana, and if she asks every person who lives in Spencer, she has conducted a “survey.”
- b. “Population” – The number of left-handed Lithuanian carpenters will be expressed as a percentage of all who have been surveyed, in this case all the people who live in Spencer, Indiana. All those who are surveyed constitute the “population.”
- c. “Sample” – If it is not possible to count *everyone* in a particular population, it is possible to count only a few people in the population and to assume that their responses will be *typical* or *representative* of the responses one would have gotten if it had been possible to survey the whole population. In this case, those who are actually asked are referred to as the “sample.” Samples can be *random* – in which case there is no predetermined pattern of selection – or *stratified* – in which case specific criteria of inclusion and exclusion are employed, e.g., males, income level, etc.

While numbers are an efficient means of interpreting data, it should be remembered that serious mistakes in reasoning can occur if the advocate is not wary. As British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli put it in the 19th century, “there are lies, damn lies, and statistics.” There are three common ways in which statistics can be used to distort:

12. UNNAMED BASE

An advocate will cite percentages without identifying the population from which the percentages are drawn (48% of those surveyed support the President – Really? 48% of whom? The citizens of Crawford, Texas? The red states? The blue states?)

“In 1968 there were 500,000 American soldiers in Viet Nam, including over 4,000 winners of medals for valor in combat. There was also at that time a good deal of discontent about the war among certain elements of you people in this country who didn’t have the courage to put on a uniform. Thank goodness for our boys in Viet Nam, however! America was saved because 94% favored our crusade in Southeast Asia!”

13. INADEQUATE SAMPLE

An advocate will give the impression of having taken a survey when in fact he or she has only looked at a sample, and in addition the sample is not large enough to be representative or typical of the total population to which his generalization applies.

“To find out the cause of juvenile delinquency, we interviewed five hundred juvenile delinquents from the Chicago area. “

14. FAULTY SAMPLE

An advocate will accurately identify the population, and will indicate that the statistics are reported on the basis of sampling. He will then report on a sample which is large enough, but fails to account for all groups to which the generalization applies.

“Last year we wanted to find out about the problem of rural unemployment in the U.S., so we passed out questionnaires to a sample of the rural poor. We looked at black and white farmers in Appalachia between the ages of 21 and 65 who reported less than \$3,000 income in their last Federal Income Tax Return. We were surprised to find that almost 40% of the rural poor actually have more than enough to live on, what with capital investments in land, growing their own food, and holding down part-time jobs in the off-season in nearby towns. Their income only *looks* low.”

GROUP IV: Formal Fallacies

Formal fallacies refer to logical mistakes in the *structure* or *organization* of a unit of reasoning.

15. AFFIRMING THE CONSEQUENT

This is a faulty inference involving a conditional (if ... then) statement. Starting with the premise that “if x is true, then y is true,” the advocate reasons that “if y is true, then x is true.” This is a mistake because such relationships are not inherently reversible. For example:

“The teacher said that if I am to get an “A” I must work hard. I worked hard, so I should get an A.”

In this case the argument is faulty because there may be other factors that could keep one from getting an “A,” such as incompetence, failing an exam, etc. Hard work, in other words, would be a *necessary condition* but *not a sufficient condition*. Not all instances of affirming the consequent lay out their “if ... then” clauses so explicitly, so you need to be on-your guard for variants of the argument sequence. For example:

“For life to appear, there must be a very complex set of favorable conditions. Since these conditions are probably present on Venus, it is reasonable to conclude that there are life forms there.”

NOTE: This differs from the fallacy of multiple causation, in that the alleged effect is the very thing in question here, not something to be explained.

16. DENYING THE ANTECEDENT

This is another fallacious use of an “if ... then” argument, occurring when the advocate *denies the “if” clause*, and reasons as though that entailed the denial of the “then” clause. So, for example,

“Since good education has given us good technology, it follows that bad education will give us bad technology.”

It may well be that bad education yields bad technology, but that is not a valid inference from the premise given here.

17. UNSTATED ASSUMPTION OR FAULTY ENTHYMEME

The advocate reasons from a premise s/he never names. By not naming the assumption, s/he doesn't have to prove it – s/he lets his audience supply the missing proof out of their reservoir of common beliefs and general knowledge. If the missing assumption is indeed a matter of general knowledge we call this an enthymeme and there is no inherent fallacy. But if the missing assumption is actually highly debatable – a thing which the audience would be inclined to

question seriously or even to reject if it were brought specifically to their attention – then the advocate has committed a fallacy.

“All of this talk about air pollution is sheer nonsense. Air pollution is part of the price we pay for our advanced civilization. You can bet that there’s no way to have the convenience of modern life without pollution. If in our zeal to ‘clean up the environment,’ therefore, we force major industries to go bankrupt, we will destroy the fiber of civilization itself, life as we know it will stagnate, the progress we’ve fought so hard for will come to an end.”

The unstated, debatable assumption in this quote might be phrased this way: Technological development is our only measure of “progress,” and it is therefore one of the positively “good” things” in our civilization.

18. PETITIO PRINCIPI

“Begging the Question” occurs when the advocate attempts to “prove” her or his assertion with the assertion itself (or merely a variant form of the original assertion), thus reasoning in a circle: “A is true because B is true, and we all know that B is true because A is true.” Put differently, one begs a question by asserting a premise that is no more than a restatement of the conclusion. In simplified form, the tautology is easy to spot and can sound silly:

“To understand Governor Dean’s rhetoric, we must understand the nature of the Dean Audience. A good insight into the nature of the Dean audience can be had from an analysis of Dean’s rhetoric. After all, Dean wouldn’t say anything he didn’t think was effective in persuading his audience, so by gauging the intent of his argument, we can determine the nature of his audience.”

In the hands of a skilled advocate, however, the tautology can be concealed and the argument can be persuasive:

“Don’t be fooled by what they say about me in the east coast liberal press. You all know I’m a good and honest man. And if I weren’t, those New York Times liberals wouldn’t be so anxious to put the ax to me!”

19. FAULTY DEFINITION

Arguments are sometimes needlessly protracted because of a simple misunderstanding over how a term is being used. Other times, an advocate deliberately tries to make his case appear stronger than it is by using a peculiar definition. Would you be shocked to learn that child abuse occurs in no less than 85% of all American homes? You might well be, unless you knew that the operative definition of “child abuse” includes routine spankings. Consider another example: “The majority of the Bush tax cuts went to those with lower incomes.” For this claim to be true the term “lower incomes” has to be operationalized as all those with incomes lower than the top 1% of the population. Under such conditions the claim is technically correct, but the definition of “lower incomes” is not one that most people would typically accept. The main point to keep

in mind here is that if a *key term* in an argument is not defined, the stage has been set for the occurrence of the fallacy of faulty definition. This is not to say that a dictionary definition has to be cited, of course, so long as adversaries agree on common terms and the audience understands those terms as well.

20. FAULTY DILEMMA (OR BLACK AND WHITE FALLACY)

The faulty dilemma occurs when the advocate reduces the logical alternatives in an argument to two, his way and the wrong way. There are time when this is a good argumentative strategy. But if the advocate fails to take into account *all* possibilities – that is, if he asserts that there are only two possibilities when actually there are three or more – he has created a false or faulty dilemma. Such reasoning generally occurs at the policy level of argument in two ways:

- (a) With reference to defending one's own policy, by asserting that this is the desirable course of action while the other possibility is dysfunctional, counterproductive, or disadvantageous.

“We have only two choices: We can continue the present Administration's disastrous piece-meal approach to the problem of inflation (freezing all prices, freezing wages, devaluing the dollar till hell freezes over), or we can end the problem once and for all by recognizing the reality of the modern industrial state. We can at long last nationalize the basic industries and stop the rape of our national resources by greedy, fat-cat bureaucrats who run our nation's businesses.”

“Either you support the United States or you support the terrorists.”

- (b) Or, with reference to attacking someone else's asserted policy, by asserting that an opponent's proposal will result in one of two effects, both undesirable.

“If my opponent succeeds in implementing his proposal, he will either not have adequate machinery or the public will ignore his new law. If he does what will be necessary to enforce the law, he will irreparably damage individual freedoms, creating much unrest and discomfort among the citizenry. If he provides for less-than-effective enforcement, the law will have no effect on the problem he alleges exist, and hence might as well not be passed.”

Observe that neither form of the dilemma is *necessarily* fallacious. A dilemma becomes fallacious *only* when the advocate fails to investigate all reasonable alternatives. Dilemmas are dispelled if there are *any* alternatives other than the two isolated by the advocate who posed the “either-or” situation.

21. NON SEQUITUR

“It does not follow.” As we all know, conclusions are propositions which follow logically and in sequence from other propositions, much as one note follows another to make a melody. If twelve musical notes in a melody are clear and the thirteenth flat, the last note is out of sequence, unpredictable, *non sequitur*. So it is with a conclusion which does not fit the pattern of evidence or statements which precede it. An advocate commits a *non sequitur* by:

- (a) drawing a conclusion unrelated to the evidence which precedes it:

“The rate of illegitimate births is four times higher among blacks than whites. Three out of four unemployed persons are black. Most of our welfare recipients are black. Three of every five high school dropouts are black. The rate of illiteracy is ten times greater among blacks than among whites. As the Bible says, the sons of Ham will forever be hewers of wood and carriers of water – it is obvious that the black man is, has been, and always will be inferior to the white man.”

- (b) or by drawing a conclusion not related to the premises of the argument:

“Aggressive, imperialistic nations, like bandits, cannot be tolerated in the modern world. Of all other nations, the Red Chinese behave most like a group of bandits. The UN is dedicated to end aggression in the world. If we allow Red China into the UN, and place the responsibilities of membership on her, she will behave less like a bandit.”

Group V: Propaganda Devices

Most any reasonable person recognizes propaganda when he or she is exposed to it, but many of us respond anyway. Technically, each major propaganda device represents three or four logical fallacies occurring at the same time, so it might be possible for you to see in some of the examples one or more of the fallacies covered in previous groups. But the propaganda devices should be recognized as common, repetitive psychological appeals that *resemble* reason, but which do not possess even the basic requirements of rationality that one might call them “fallacies.” You see, the idea “fallacy” implies that an advocate simply makes a mistake and probably would be willing to correct his error. But when an advocate uses a propaganda device, it rarely is a mistake; rather, it is used on purpose to short-circuit the listener’s reasoning faculty. There are four common propaganda devices:

22. GLITTERING GENERALITY

An advocate will offer an unproven proposition couched in heavily emotional, evaluative terminology, relying on the force of the words to carry his audience along with him. Nothing “proves” his point; only pretty language makes an audience believe him.

“Our boys in Asia, fighting and dying for you, for me, for all of us, for this great country – these boys need and deserve your support. Don’t let them down. Don’t let them die in vain. Let’s stick out this dirty little war until we’ve run every last one of those atheistic communists right into the sea.”

This is an actual quotation taken from a letter to the editor of the *Newark Star Ledger* in the late 1960s. Notice how easy it would be to substitute “Persian Gulf” for “Asia” and “Islamic terrorists” for “atheistic communists” without changing the tenor of the statement – which could easily have appeared in any local paper in the U.S. in the past several years – thus accenting the generality being invoked.

23. BANDWAGON

An advocate will assert that the audience should accept a proposition because “everyone else” accepts it. The phrase “everyone else” can refer to significant numbers of people (thus implying that those who don’t are not in the “mainstream”); or it can refer to “important others” who are part of an “in-group,” i.e., the beautiful people, and thus imply that if you want to “belong” you will behave in particular ways. The bandwagon appeal is quite common in commercial advertisement where we are told that “millions are seeing X movie” or “60 Billion served!” Or consider this ad from the late 1960s:

“In Paris, in New York, in London, in San Francisco, even in Tokyo women are abandoning the short-skirt look. The maxi is *in!* Don’t be caught out of fashion this spring – on down to Macy’s and see our new selection of maxi skirts and dresses. Everybody is wearing them. Everyone who counts.”

We find the bandwagon fallacy in political discourse as well, when appeals to public opinion polls are used to support the “truth” or “validity” of an advocate’s position. A more private example of this would be the argument we all imagine making when we are stopped by a police officer for speeding, “But officer, I don’t deserve a ticket; everyone goes this speed. If I went any slower, I wouldn’t be going with the stream of traffic.”

24. PLAIN FOLKS

An advocate asks the audience to accept an argument warranted on the blind faith of his or her membership in the audience:

“We all come from the same stock, folks, and we know what it’s like to be dirt-poor, to get up in the morning and be cold and hungry. We have all been through that together. Now I’m asking you to send me to Washington so that I can tell folks up there that we haven’t forgotten what happened when folks are cold and hungry. Because I come from you, I can get action for you. Talk’s cheap, but blood is thicker than water.”

It should be noted that there is no inherent fallacy involved in seeking identification with an audience. As Kenneth Burke argues, we come to persuade another person in large measure by getting her to identify with our interests and values. The appeal to “plain folks” is fallacious only when it is used to substitute for or short circuit a critical reasoning process.

25. CARD STACKING

An advocate will quote material from a recognized authority and then attempt to strengthen the proof by asserting that other well-known authorities (who might even be named) agree. But the advocate offers no evidence that these other authorities do in fact agree. Have you ever added a lengthy bibliography to a paper you’ve written without having cited materials from those sources? If so, you are guilty of “card stacking.” The more common instance comes in claims such as the following:

“Milton Friedman argues that the problem of globalization is a result of the failure to adhere to the principles of a free market system and many of the world’s top economists agree.”

Group VI: Ethical Appeals

The use of the word “ethical” here does not refer to “morality,” but rather to an advocate’s *ethos* or credibility. These fallacies in reasoning occur in the attempt to make one’s opponent in argument seem to be a bad fellow, one who should not be followed. There is nothing wrong with attempting to make yourself a more credible source of information for your audience, and conversely there is nothing wrong with making your opponent seem *less* credible. But when these attacks displace rational argument, there is a fallacy in reasoning. Notice also that if there is such a substitution, these fallacies assume the proportions of the propaganda devices listed in Group V. Note too that the *reductio ad absurdum* might fit within this group as well.

26. AD HOMINEM

An advocate often will not reply directly to an opponent’s *argument*, choosing instead to *attack the character of the opponent directly*, coupling such an attack with the observation that *nothing* such a man might say could possibly be correct or believed:

“This man has stood before our investigative subcommittee and told us horrible stories about supposed brutalities in our state correctional institutions. You all know who he is – a convicted rapist and murderer, a scofflaw from the day he was born. We cannot credit what he says. All he wants is to make imprisonment for major felonies into a five year vacation. Next he’ll want air conditioning and a swimming pool!”

Observe however, that very often – and especially in the case of politicians – it *is* the person’s character which is at issue. In such cases, *ad hominem* is not precisely a fallacy, but rather a subject of argument itself. Here it is an ideological decision whether we believe that the “issue” in an election properly is “the man himself,” or on the contrary “the measures he stands for.”

27. AD POPULAM

An advocate might try to avoid *what* his opponent says by asking the audience to make an immediate *emotional* decision regarding the subject of argument. As we have stressed, one should have some rational basis for having been persuaded on any subject. He ought not make *a priori* decisions based on his own emotional state, and should rather attempt honestly to evaluate the good reasons which advocates should use to warrant their arguments.

“Ladies and gentleman of the jury, you don’t need to pay any attention at all to what the defendant has had to say while trying to worm his way out of the charges. He has twice before been convicted to murder, and here he stands before us again. What does he have to do? Should we let him go free so that he might come into *your* home and take the lives of *your* children? Enough is enough. He must be hanged.”

“Mr. Lucaites, you’ve just *got* to give me some special help in making up the work I’ve missed. I was in a traffic accident and in the hospital for two weeks, my grandmother died and I had to attend her funeral, my dog had an operation to remove his goiter and I have to go home to take care of him or he’ll die. I’ll only miss two more weeks of your

class, and I'll work hard to make up everything I miss. You've just to have a heart – if I don't pass this course, I can't graduate in June."

28. TU QUOQUE

Literally translated, it means "You're another." The fallacy resides in the advocate's use of precedent as an excuse, suggesting that because someone else did something, she or he should be allowed to do it too. It is a line of reasoning that holds that two (or twenty) wrongs make a right.

"My fellow Americans, you see before you a President who has had more abuse heaped upon him than any other President of this century. This Congress, dominated by Democrats, suddenly says that it is an impeachable offense to keep the confidence of my advisors and do whatever is necessary to preserve the national security. I swear to you all by Almighty God that I have done nothing which every President of this century has not done. Democrat or Republican, every man who has held this great office has enjoyed the principle of confidentiality and has done everything in his power to preserve the national security. Those who single me out are doing so, not in the spirit of correcting a moral wrong, but in the spirit of partisan politics. They have an ax out for me personally, and they do not have the interest of the people at heart." (Richard M. Nixon)

"Peter Arnett - Q: Now, the United States government says that you are still funding military training camps here in Afghanistan for militant, Islamic fighters and that you're a sponsor of international terrorism.... Are these accusations true? ...

"Osama Bin Laden- A: ...At the time that they condemn any Muslim who calls for his right, they receive the highest top official of the Irish Republican Army at the White House as a political leader, while woe, all woe is the Muslims if they cry out for their rights. Wherever we look, we find the US as the leader of terrorism and crime in the world. The US does not consider it a terrorist act to throw atomic bombs at nations thousands of miles away, when it would not be possible for those bombs to hit military troops only. These bombs were rather thrown at entire nations, including women, children and elderly people and up to this day the traces of those bombs remain in Japan. The US does not consider it terrorism when hundreds of thousands of our sons and brothers in Iraq died for lack of food or medicine. So, there is no base for what the US says and this saying does not affect us...."

29. IGNORATIO ELENCHI

Whether consciously or unconsciously, an advocate will often misinterpret what his or her opponent says and argue for this misinterpretation. Usually the misinterpretation centers on an equivocal word (usually a value term). The advocate then uses *their own* understanding of a word such as "progress" or "moral" rather than the definition intended by the opponent he refuses. In the process, he usually suggests that his opponent is addled for having suggested an absurdity.

“The man who said ‘Miracles don’t happen’ is as blind as a mole in a tar barrel. I guess he never heard of penicillin. Television is unknown to him. The news about men walking on the moon hasn’t reached him yet. He doesn’t know that he’ll live longer, thanks to medical miracles, than any of his ancestors. I tell you this is an age of miracles. I could name a thousand more.”

Gilda Radner’s *Saturday Night Live* character, Emily Patella, was based on a version of the *ignoratio elenchi* when she would develop outraged arguments predicated on absurd misinterpretations. Of course, this Emily Patella’s virtue was that she would back off when the mistake was pointed out with her signature “Never mind!”

Group VII: Strategic Fallacies

This group is distinct from all others except the propaganda devices in that the advocate knowingly and purposively commits the following fallacies. He does so to achieve a strategic advantage over an opponent, knowing full-well that the opponent will concentrate energies where he *wants* the argument to center, where he *wants* the opponent to center an attack. Technically, these are “fallacies,” but they are fallacies easily dispelled with additional development or additional evidence. One engages them as strategum only when it is known that an opponent will have opportunity to refute, and the advocate to reply. They are so common in adversary situations (and especially in political campaigns) that we cannot even think of them as fallacious until the *complete argument* (including refutation and rebuttal) has been heard.

30. EVIDENCE TRAP

A sound argument will be constructed with all of the necessary propositions (fact, value, and policy) in proper sequence. Rather than offer a strict proof for each proposition, however, the advocate will “sand bag” the *stronger* arguments, leaving them unproven or only barely proven, thus inviting an opponent to focus his attack on what in reality is the stronger point. By leaving out necessary evidence, the advocate also encourages his opponent to attack at the evidentiary level, paying scant attention to the sense of the whole case or to the structure of the particular sequence.

31. KITCHEN SINK

The advocate will confuse propositions of fact, value, and policy, putting together a series of arguments that *could be* turned into a *prima facie* case, but which, as they stand, are not *prima facie* because they lack any or sufficient proof. In effect, the advocate makes an *evidence trap* out of literally every point introduced. Observe that this is a strategum that works *only if it is known that one’s opponent will be faced with time or space limitations*. If there is to be no direct and immediate refutation, or if one’s opponent has unlimited time in which to reply to the kitchen sink, the strategum will not work.

32. RED HERRING

Named after the dubious behavior of participants in the British Fox Hunt by which one would drag a dead, red herring across the path of an opponent’s dog so as to distract it from the scent of the fox, the “red herring” argument is one that entices one’s opponent to divert their attention to an irrelevant issue or point. Often, the red herring is phrased in language intended to provoke an emotional response from an opponent, getting her or him to lose their cool.

33. GROUNDSHIFT

Primarily a refutative or rebuttal strategum, the ground shift is employed when one has lost an argumentative sequence, when an argument is no longer defensible. While maintaining the original assertions, the advocate subtly shifts from defending them to a defense of other related but unnamed assertions. The ground shift used by a skilled advocate can be difficult to catch.

The shift will often be slight enough to appear reasonable, but important enough to make an indefensible point appear defensible.

“Now let me say this about that: I have never tried to escape responsibility for what happened at the Watergate. I am the President. I am the boss. The buck stops here. Yes, I take full responsibility. I understand why it happened. It was the action of a few overzealous supporters who were infected by the spirit of the times. You remember those times. There we were trying to conclude a peace with honor in South Vietnam, and while secret negotiations were going on – negotiations which *had* to be secret – some members of this Administration were leaking vital information to the public press. Now, I have nothing against newsmen. I want the people to know all the truth. But our boys’ *lives* were on the line! *American soldiers* could have been killed if secret information reached the enemy through American newspapers. *Every word!* So to preserve the principle of confidentiality and to preserve our national security, I ordered that a stop be put immediately to all leaks of information. I mean it. I am firm about it. Any person who is caught leaking vital information to the press will be summarily dismissed from his appointment with the Administration. That word has been passed down through all the departments of this Administration. I can guarantee to the American people that the principle of confidentiality is preserved intact, and so long as I remain President of the U.S., you can rest easy at night knowing that our national security is being protected.”

Notice here how President Nixon shifts the ground from a defense of the Watergate break-in (which was motivated by electoral politics) to a defense of American troops in Vietnam and national security in general.

34. SLIPPERY SLOPE

The slippery slope fallacy is an attempt to divert attention away from a question at issue by *claiming without specific evidence* that a certain decision, if made, would set in motion a series of increasingly severe consequences. The effect is then presented as the consequences of the question at hand, rather than as the consequences of a series of future decisions that may or may not be made.

“If we start to ban extremely violent and sexually explicit speech, we will open the doors to a flood of censorship that will never stop. First, we will ban images of violent sexuality, *Penthouse* and *Playboy* will be next, then James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Chaucer, Byron, and Shakespeare. Before long, we will be living in a fascist state where nobody has any rights at all.”

“If we pass legislation to ban the sale of semi-automatic weapons, it won't be long until we ban other kinds of weapons: handguns, hunting rifles, butter knives, lawn mowers. Before long, everything with a sharp edge will be illegal, and we will be living in a fascist state where nobody has any rights at all.”

35. PART-WHOLE COMPOSITION

To minimize the effects of an opposed program or policy, an advocate will often refuse to look at the over-all effects of the program. Instead, he breaks the program into its component parts, asserting that each part *alone*, working by itself, is inadequate to solve the whole problem. As, for example, “Tom can’t lift the desk. George can’t lift the desk. Sally can’t lift the desk. Therefore, Tom, George, and Sally can’t lift the desk. (Or worse still, that the desk cannot be lifted.) Compare this with the fallacies of composition and division. Notice too that it is the counterpart of the fallacy of multiple composition, part (b).

“I have shown you that the Manpower Development and Training Act will not solve the problem of unemployment, that private training and retraining programs are ineffective, that public works projects currently undertaken by the Federal Government have no impact on the unemployment problem, and that unemployment compensation programs have no significant effect in eliminating the problem of unemployment. We can safely conclude, therefore, that the government’s scattered and capricious approach to the problem of unemployment is ineffective.”

36. AD IGNORANTUM

This argument fallaciously mistakes lack of evidence for evidence of the contrary. So, for example, if there is no proof that hand gun legislation will reduce crime, we can only conclude that outlawing handguns would be an ineffective measure. Abandoning the obligation to prove a case *positively*, advocates thus sometimes assert that the propositions are proven by their opponent’s inability to refute them. “You can’t prove me wrong, so I must be right.” This seems to be the Bush Administration’s response to the failure to produce weapons of mass destruction in Iraq: “You can’t prove that there are no weapons there, therefore they must be there. We just haven’t found them yet.”

Always remember that knowledge of the negative *does not* presuppose knowledge of the affirmative.