

Straw men, slippery slopes and other tricks that sound like arguments

Upcoming episode

Why do bad arguments sound so convincing? A walk through the most common fallacies – straw man, ad hominem, false dilemma, slippery slope and the rest – with everyday examples, and with the cases where they are not fallacies at all.

MAIN TOPICS

- What a fallacy actually is, and what it is not
- The straw man – answering something the other person did not say
- Ad hominem, and when it is actually relevant
- The false dilemma
- The slippery slope, and when it is not a fallacy
- The appeal to authority, and why it is usually fine
- Circular arguments and shifting the burden of proof
- Whataboutism
- No true Scotsman
- Appeals to nature and to tradition
- Hasty generalisation, and correlation that is not cause
- The Gish gallop and motte-and-bailey
- The fallacy fallacy

QUESTIONS THIS EPISODE ANSWERS

- What is a logical fallacy?
- What is a straw man?
- Is ad hominem always a fallacy?
- When is it acceptable to cite an authority?
- What is a false dilemma?
- Is the slippery slope always wrong?
- What is whataboutism?
- Who carries the burden of proof in a disagreement?
- Does a bad argument make the conclusion false?
- How do you answer a rhetorical trick without becoming insufferable?

KEY POINTS

- A fallacy is an error in the argument, not in the conclusion.
- The straw man is the most common trick, and the easiest to commit without meaning any harm.

- Ad hominem and the appeal to authority are only fallacies when the trait is irrelevant to the question.
- A slippery slope with a real causal chain is a perfectly valid argument.
- Whoever makes the claim carries the burden of proof. You do not have to prove a negative.
- Someone arguing badly does not mean they are wrong. That is a fallacy of its own.

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Douglas Walton – Informal Logic (2nd ed. 2008)

AI is used as a tool in producing the text, and everything is read through before it is published. Errors can still occur.