

Exercise 9 Solutions

Note: In some of these cases, more than one fallacy is being committed. Discuss alternative answers with your tutorial group.

1. Society is obliged to grant the privileges of adulthood to its members once they are mature enough to accept the corresponding responsibilities. But science has established that physiological development is completed in most persons by age seventeen. Hence, the maturing process has been completed by most seventeen-year-olds and therefore, these citizens should be granted all of the privileges of adulthood.

Equivocates with respect to the concept ‘mature’. Being mature enough to accept the responsibilities of adulthood is different from maturity in the sense of physiological brain development.

2. Sociologist: The claim that there is a large number of violent crimes in our society is false, for this claim is based upon the large number of stories in newspapers about violent crimes. But newspapers are more likely to print stories about violent crimes, since such crimes are very rare occurrences.

This is a question begging argument, since the reasoning assumes that violent crimes are very rare, which is what the conclusion is supposed to establish.

3. Public housing advocates claim that the many homeless people in this city are proof that there is insufficient housing available to them and therefore that more low income apartments are needed. However, many apartments in my own building and in many other buildings in this city are currently vacant. Since apartments clearly are available, homelessness is not a housing problem. Therefore, homelessness can only be caused by people's inability or unwillingness to work to pay the rent.

The argument equivocates on the term ‘available’. It responds to a claim in which ‘available’ is used in the sense of ‘affordable’ by using ‘available’ in the sense of ‘not occupied.’

4. "I used to think that way when I was your age."

A personal attack (ad hominem).

5. I bet D is fudging the numbers. She's a lawyer and defends criminals for a living. She's not going to be squeamish about massaging the facts.

Guilt by association: appeals to the bad reputation of criminal defence lawyers to cast suspicion on an individual.

6. There is no genuinely altruistic behaviour. Everyone needs a sufficient amount of self-esteem, which crucially depends on believing oneself to be useful and needed. Behaviour that appears to be altruistic can always be interpreted as motivated by the desire to reinforce that belief, a clearly self-interested motivation.

The argument is based on the assumption that any behaviour that can be *interpreted* as self-interested is in fact self-interested. But this is what the argument is meant to show, so it's begging the question.

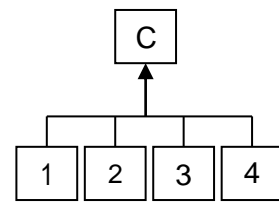
7. America is the best place to live, because it's better than any other country.

Circular reasoning. The conclusion is supported by a single premise, which restates the conclusion.

8. The new perfume Aurora smells worse to Joan than any comparably priced perfume, and none of her friends likes the smell of Aurora as much as the smell of other perfumes. However, she and her friends must have a defect in their sense of smell, since Professor Jameson prefers the smell of Aurora to that of any other perfume and she is one of the world's foremost experts on the physiology of smell.

Analysis

1. The new perfume Aurora smells worse to Joan than any comparably priced perfume.
2. None of Joan's friends likes the smell of Aurora as much as the smell of other perfumes.
3. Professor Jameson prefers the smell of Aurora to that of any other perfume.
4. Professor Jameson is one of the world's foremost experts on the physiology of smell.



Therefore:

C. Joan and her friends must have a defect in their sense of smell.

Evaluation

The argument clearly fails because it involves an illegitimate appeal to authority (Premise 4). The fact Prof. Jameson is an expert on the physiology of smell does not make her opinions about the relative merits of various perfumes and her own personal preferences any more relevant than anyone else's. It certainly does not show that Joan and her friends must have a *defect* in their sense of smell. This would be like arguing that because a certain person is an optometrist, and therefore someone who knows a lot about how the eye works, they are therefore a better judge of works of art than people who are not. The fact that someone is an expert in one area does not make them an expert in other unrelated areas.

9. The reason everyone wants the new "Slap Me Silly Elmo" doll is because this is the hottest toy of the season!

Circular reasoning.

10. A: I am against the war!

B: Since you are against the war, you must be against our troops!

A false dichotomy. Assumes that there are just two choices: "You're either for the war or against the troops." It is implausible that there is no middle ground.

Assume A also said: "Actually, I do not want our troops sent into a dangerous war."
This would mean that B is also distorting A's position and arguing against a straw man.

11. X says that pay cuts will be unavoidable. He's a politician, so what can you expect.

Guilt by association.

12. A circular definition is a definition that goes in circles.

Circular definition because it restates the term being defined in the slightly different terms.

13. In the debate on whether the Simpsons character Apu should be eliminated because he's too offensive, The Value CMO's Brian Talbot pointed out the following: "If you're going to eliminate Apu, or eliminate all the characters that might be offensive, they might end up eliminating the show."

Slippery slope.

14. Politician in a debate about same-sex marriage: "I have repeatedly demonstrated that I am an open minded individual. I voted to expand educational opportunities for all children."

This is a red herring: the politician is trying to distract attention from their (close-minded) stance on same-sex marriage.

15. In home schooling, discipline is essential. If you make any exceptions, the child will find more and more excuses. These may seem like small exceptions at first, but it won't be long before there is no schedule whatsoever and any attempt to get through the material is doomed.

Slippery slope – seemingly small steps lead to significant negative outcomes.

16. "Thermometer readings have uncertainty which means we don't know whether global warming is happening."

Equivocates between two readings of uncertainty: uncertainty in thermometer measurements and uncertainty about global warming. These two kinds of uncertainty are on completely different scales: uncertainty of thermometer readings does not undermine our ability to know global warming is happening.

17. There is no expert consensus on climate change. Over 30,000 Americans with a science degree signed a petition saying humans aren't disrupting climate.

Appeal to authority. Just because someone has a science degree does not mean they are an expert on climate change.

18. "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, and hate leads to suffering. I sense much fear in you."

Slippery Slope, uttered by Jedi Master Yoda in Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace.