

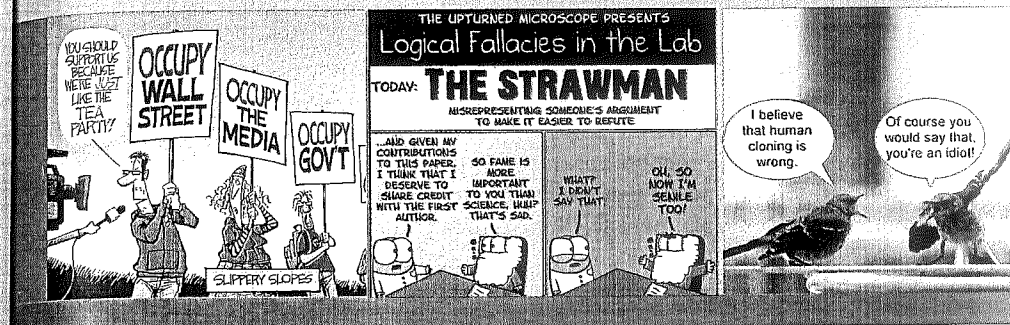
new, competing sculpture, *Fearless Girl*, removed on the basis of legal precedents supporting the rights of visual artists. Sculptor Arturo Di Modica's assertion,

that Visbal's work infringes on his own, is unlikely to hold sway, under recent readings of the Visual Artists Rights Act. . . . The argument that *Fearless Girl* modifies or destroys *Charging Bull* by blocking its path would represent a leap that courts have been reluctant to take even in clearer cases.

—Kriston Capps, "Why Wall Street's *Charging Bull* Sculptor Has No Real Case against *Fearless Girl*"

You'll encounter additional kinds of logical structures as you create your own arguments. You'll find some of them in Chapter 5, "Fallacies of Argument," and still more in Chapter 7 on Toulmin argument.

Fallacies of Argument



LEFT TO RIGHT: Nate Beeler, The Columbus Dispatch/Cagle Cartoons, Inc.; The Uprturned Microscope

Do these cartoons ring a bell with you? The first panel skewers slippery slope arguments, which aim to thwart action by predicting dire consequences: "occupy" enough spaces and the Occupy movement looks just like the Tea Party. In the second item, an example of a straw man argument, the first author of an academic paper puts down his coauthor by shifting the subject, saying that the coauthor is an egotist who cares only for fame, not what the coauthor had said at all. And the third image provides an example of a very common fallacy, the *ad hominem* argument, in which a speaker impugns the character of an opponent rather than addressing the arguments that person raises. Rather than argue the point that human cloning is wrong, the bird says, simply, "you're an idiot."

Candidate Donald Trump made something of a specialty of the *ad hominem* argument. Rather than address their arguments directly, he attacked the characters of his opponents: Marco Rubio was always "little Marco," Hillary Clinton was always "crooked," Elizabeth Warren was "goofy," and Cruz was always "Lyin' Ted." Early on in the campaign, when

asked about rival candidate Carly Fiorina's plans, he said, "Can you imagine that, the face of our next president? I mean, she's a woman and I'm not supposed to say bad things, but really, folks, come on." Classic *ad hominem*, and oftentimes such tactics work all too well!

Fallacies are argumentative moves flawed by their nature or structure. Because such tactics can make principled argument more difficult, they potentially hurt everyone involved, including the people responsible for them. The worst sorts of fallacies muck up the frank but civil conversations that people should be able to have, regardless of their differences.

Yet it's hard to deny the power in offering audiences a compelling either/or choice or a vulnerable straw man in an argument: these fallacies can have great persuasive power. For exactly that reason, it's important that you can recognize and point out fallacies in the work of others—and avoid them in your own writing. This chapter aims to help you meet these goals: here we'll introduce you to fallacies of argument classified according to the emotional, ethical, and logical appeals we've discussed earlier (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4).

Fallacies of Emotional Argument

Emotional arguments can be powerful and suitable in many circumstances, and most writers use them frequently. However, writers who pull on their readers' heartstrings or raise their blood pressure too often—or who oversentimentalize—can violate the good faith on which legitimate argument depends.

Scare Tactics

Politicians, advertisers, and public figures sometimes peddle their ideas by frightening people and exaggerating possible dangers well beyond their statistical likelihood. Such ploys work because it's easier to imagine something terrible happening than to appreciate its rarity.

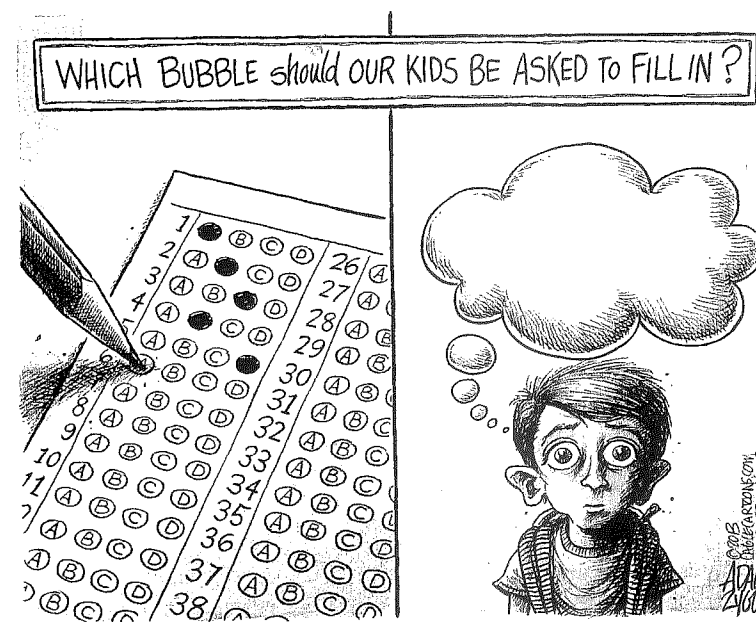
Scare tactics can also be used to stampede legitimate fears into panic or prejudice. Laborers who genuinely worry about losing their jobs can be persuaded to fear immigrants who might work for less money. Seniors living on fixed incomes can be convinced that minor changes to entitlement programs represent dire threats to their well-being. Such tactics have the effect of closing off thinking because people who are scared

often act irrationally. Even well-intended fear campaigns—like those directed against smoking, unprotected sex, or the use of illegal drugs—can misfire if their warnings prove too shrill or seem hysterical. People just stop listening.

Either/Or Choices

Either/or choices can be well-intentioned strategies to get something accomplished. Parents use them all the time ("Eat your broccoli, or you won't get dessert"). But they become fallacious arguments when they reduce a complicated issue to excessively simple terms (e.g., "You're either for me or against me") or when they're designed to obscure legitimate alternatives. Here, for example, is Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian representative to the United Nations, offering the nation of Israel just such a choice in an interview on PBS in January 2014:

It is up to them [the Israelis] to decide what kind of a state they want to be. Do they want to be a democratic state where Israel will be the



A false choice? © Adam Zyglis/Cagle Cartoons, Inc.

state for all of its citizens? Or do they want to be a state for the Jewish people, therefore excluding 1.6 million Palestinian Arabs who are Israelis from their society? That debate is not our debate. That debate is their debate.

But Joel B. Pollak, writing for Breitbart News Network, describes Mansour's claim as a "false choice" since Israel already is a Jewish state that nonetheless allows Muslims to be full citizens. The either/or argument Mansour presents, according to Pollack, does not describe the realities of this complex political situation.

Slippery Slope

The **slippery slope** fallacy portrays today's tiny misstep as tomorrow's slide into disaster. Some arguments that aim at preventing dire consequences do not take the slippery slope approach (for example, the parent who corrects a child for misbehavior now is acting sensibly to prevent more serious problems as the child grows older). A slippery slope argument becomes wrongheaded when a writer exaggerates the likely consequences of an action, usually to frighten readers. As such, slippery slope arguments are also scare tactics. In recent years, the issue of gun ownership in America has evoked many slippery slope arguments. Here are two examples:

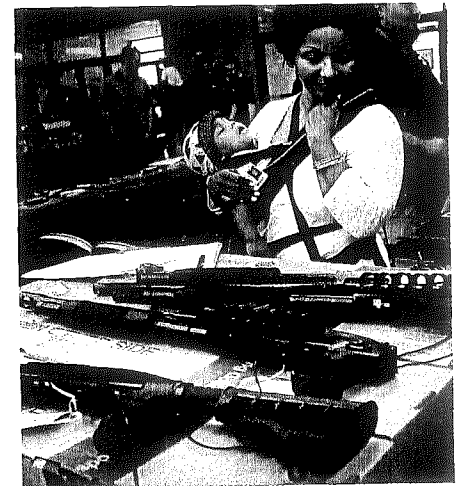
"Universal background checks will inevitably be followed by a national registry of gun-owners which will inevitably be followed by confiscation of all their guns." Or, "A ban on assault-style weapons and thirty+ round magazines will inevitably be followed by a ban on hand guns with ten-round magazines...."

—Michael Wolkowitz, "Slippery Slopes, Imagined and Real"

Social and political ideas and proposals do have consequences, but they aren't always as dire as writers fond of slippery slope tactics would have you believe.

Overly Sentimental Appeals

Overly sentimental appeals use tender emotions excessively to distract readers from facts. Often, such appeals are highly personal and individual and focus attention on heartwarming or heartrending situations that



The first image, taken from a gun control protest, is designed to elicit sympathy by causing the viewer to think about the dangers guns pose to innocent children and, thus, support the cause. The second image supports the other side of the debate. Tim Boyle/Getty Images; Spencer Platt/Getty Images

make readers feel guilty if they challenge an idea, a policy, or a proposal. Emotions can become an impediment to civil discourse when they keep people from thinking clearly.

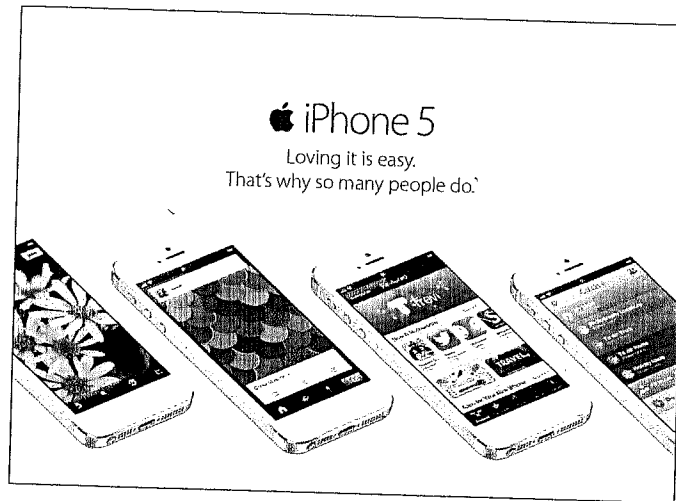
Such sentimental appeals are a major vehicle of television news, where tugging at viewers' heartstrings can mean high ratings. For example, when a camera documents the day-to-day sacrifices of a single parent trying to meet mortgage payments and keep her kids in college, the woman's on-screen struggles can seem to represent the plight of an entire class of people threatened by callous bankers and college administrators. But while such human interest stories stir genuine emotions, they seldom give a complete picture of complex social or economic issues.

Bandwagon Appeals

Bandwagon appeals urge people to follow the same path everyone else is taking. Such arguments can be relatively benign and seem harmless. But they do push people to take the easier path rather than think independently about what choices to make or where to go.

Many American parents seem to have an innate ability to refute bandwagon appeals. When their kids whine, *Everyone else is going camping without chaperones*, the parents reply, *And if everyone else jumps off a cliff (or a railroad bridge or the Empire State Building), you will too?* The children groan—and then try a different line of argument.

Advertisers use bandwagon appeals frequently, as this example of a cellphone ad demonstrates:



Unfortunately, not all bandwagon approaches are so transparent. In recent decades, bandwagon issues have included a war on drugs, the nuclear freeze movement, campaigns against drunk driving—and for freedom of speech, campaigns for immigration reform, bailouts for banks and businesses, and many fads in education. All these issues are too complex to permit the suspension of judgment that bandwagon tactics require.

Fallacies of Ethical Argument

Because readers give their closest attention to authors they respect or trust, writers usually want to present themselves as honest, well-informed, likable, or sympathetic. But not all the devices that writers use

to gain the attention and confidence of readers are admirable. (For more on appeals based on character, see Chapter 3.)

Appeals to False Authority

Many academic research papers find and reflect on the work of reputable authorities and introduce these authorities through direct quotations or citations as credible evidence. (For more on assessing the reliability of sources, see Chapter 19.) **False authority**, however, occurs when writers offer themselves or other authorities as sufficient warrant for believing a claim:

Claim	X is true because I say so.
Warrant	What I say must be true.
Claim	X is true because Y says so.
Warrant	What Y says must be true.

Though they are seldom stated so baldly, claims of authority drive many political campaigns. American pundits and politicians are fond of citing the U.S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights (Canadians have their Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and Britain has had its Bill of Rights since the seventeenth century) as ultimate authorities, a reasonable practice when the documents are interpreted respectfully. However, the rights claimed sometimes aren't in the texts themselves or don't mean what the speakers think they do. And most constitutional matters are debatable—as volumes of court records prove. Likewise, religious believers often base arguments on books or traditions that wield great authority in a particular religious community. But the power of such texts is often limited to that group and less capable of persuading others solely on the grounds of authority.

In short, you should pay serious attention to claims supported by respected authorities, such as the Centers for Disease Control, the National Science Foundation, or the *Globe and Mail*. But don't accept information simply because it is put forth by such offices and agencies. To quote a Russian proverb made famous by Ronald Reagan, "Trust, but verify."

Dogmatism

A writer who asserts or assumes that a particular position is the only one that is conceivably acceptable is expressing **dogmatism**, a fallacy of character that undermines the trust that must exist between those who make and listen to arguments. When people or organizations write dogmatically, they imply that no arguments are necessary: the truth is self-evident and needs no support. Here is an extreme example of such an appeal, quoted in an *Atlantic* story by Tracy Brown Hamilton and describing an anti-smoking appeal made by the Third Reich:

"Brother national socialist, do you know that your Fuhrer is against smoking and thinks that every German is responsible to the whole people for all his deeds and omissions, and does not have the right to damage his body with drugs?"

—Tracy Brown Hamilton, "The Nazis' Forgotten Anti-Smoking Campaign"

Subjects or ideas that can be defended with facts, testimony, and good reasons ought not to be off the table in a free society. In general, whenever someone suggests that even raising an issue for debate is totally unacceptable—whether on the grounds that it's racist, sexist, unpatriotic, blasphemous, insensitive, or offensive in some other way—you should be suspicious.

Ad Hominem Arguments

Ad hominem (Latin for "to the man") arguments attack the character of a person rather than the claims he or she makes: when you destroy the credibility of your opponents, you either destroy their ability to present reasonable appeals or distract from the successful arguments they may be offering. During the 2016 presidential primary, Marco Rubio criticized rival candidate Ted Cruz for not speaking Spanish: was that a valid argument for why Cruz would not make a good president? Such attacks, of course, aren't aimed at men only, as columnist Jamie Stiehm proved when she criticized Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor for delaying an Affordable Care Act mandate objected to by the Little Sisters of the Poor, a Catholic religious order. Stiehm directly targets Sotomayor's religious beliefs:

Et tu, Justice Sonia Sotomayor? Really, we can't trust you on women's health and human rights? The lady from the Bronx just dropped the ball on American women and girls as surely as she did the

sparkling ball at midnight on New Year's Eve in Times Square. Or maybe she's just a good Catholic girl.

—Jamie Stiehm, "The Catholic Supreme Court's War on Women"

Stiehm then widens her *ad hominem* assault to include Catholics in general:

Sotomayor's blow brings us to confront an uncomfortable reality. More than WASPs, Methodists, Jews, Quakers or Baptists, Catholics often try to impose their beliefs on you, me, public discourse and institutions. Especially if "you" are female.

Arguably, *ad hominem* tactics like this turn arguments into two-sided affairs with good guys and bad guys (or gals), and that's unfortunate, since character often really *does* matter in argument. Even though the norms of civic discourse were strained to the limit during and after the 2016 presidential election, most people still expect the proponent of peace to be civil, a secretary of the treasury to pay his or her taxes, the champion of family values to be a faithful spouse, and the head of the Environmental Protection Agency to advocate for protecting the environment. But it's fallacious to attack any of these people for their traits, backgrounds, looks, or other irrelevant information.

Stacking the Deck

Just as gamblers try to stack the deck by arranging cards so they are sure to win, writers **stack the deck** when they show only one side of the story—the one in their favor. In a 2016 *New Yorker* article, writer Kathryn Schulz discusses the Netflix series *Making a Murderer*. Schulz notes that the filmmakers have been accused of limiting their evidence in order to convince viewers that the accused, Steven Avery, had been framed for the crime:

Ricciardi and Demos have dismissed the idea, claiming that they simply set out to investigate Avery's case and didn't have a position on his guilt or innocence. Yet . . . the filmmakers minimize or leave out many aspects of Avery's less than savory past, including multiple alleged incidents of physical and sexual violence. They also omit important evidence against him, . . . evidence that would be nearly impossible to plant. . . . Ricciardi and Demos instead stack the deck to support their case for Avery, and, as a result, wind up mirroring the entity that they are trying to discredit.

—Kathryn Schulz, "Dead Certainty: How *Making a Murderer* Goes Wrong"

In the same way, reviewers have been critical of documentaries by Michael Moore and Dinesh D'Souza that resolutely show only one side of a story or prove highly selective in their coverage. When you stack the deck, you take a big chance that your readers will react like Schulz and decide not to trust you: that's one reason it's so important to show that you have considered alternatives in making any argument.

Fallacies of Logical Argument

You'll encounter a problem in any argument when the claims, warrants, or proofs in it are invalid, insufficient, or disconnected. In theory, such problems seem easy enough to spot, but in practice, they can be camouflaged by a skillful use of words or images. Indeed, logical fallacies pose a challenge to civil argument because they often seem reasonable and natural, especially when they appeal to people's self-interests.

Hasty Generalization

A **hasty generalization** is an inference drawn from insufficient evidence: because my Fiat broke down, then *all* Fiats must be junk. It also forms the basis for most stereotypes about people or institutions: because a few people in a large group are observed to act in a certain way, *all* members of that group are inferred to behave similarly. The resulting conclusions are usually sweeping claims of little merit: *women are bad drivers*; *men are slob*s; *English teachers are nitpicky*; *computer jocks are . . .*; and on and on.

To draw valid inferences, you must always have sufficient evidence (see Chapter 18) and you must qualify your claims appropriately. After all, people do need generalizations to make reasonable decisions in life. Such claims can be offered legitimately if placed in context and tagged with sensible qualifiers—*some*, *a few*, *many*, *most*, *occasionally*, *rarely*, possibly, *in some cases*, *under certain circumstances*, *in my limited experience*.

Faulty Causality

In Latin, **faulty causality** is known as *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, which translates as “after this, therefore because of this”—the faulty assumption that because one event or action follows another, the first causes

the second. Consider a lawsuit commented on in the *Wall Street Journal* in which a writer sued Coors (unsuccessfully), claiming that drinking copious amounts of the company's beer had kept him from writing a novel. This argument is sometimes referred to as the “Twinkie defense,” referring to a claim that the person who shot and killed San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk had eaten so many Twinkies and other sugary foods that his reasoning had been impaired. The phrase is now sometimes used to label the claims of criminals that their acts were caused by something beyond their control.

Of course, some actions do produce reactions. Step on the brake pedal in your car, and you move hydraulic fluid that pushes calipers against disks to create friction that stops the vehicle. In other cases, however, a supposed connection between cause and effect turns out to be completely wrong. For example, doctors now believe that when an elderly person falls and breaks a hip or leg, the injury usually caused the fall rather than the other way around.

That's why overly simple causal claims should always be subject to scrutiny. In summer 2008, writer Nicholas Carr posed a simple causal question in a cover story for the *Atlantic*: “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” Carr essentially answered yes, arguing that “as we come to rely on computers to mediate our understanding of the world, it is our own intelligence that flattens” and that the more one is online the less he or she is able to concentrate or read deeply.

But others, like Jamais Cascio (senior fellow at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies), soon challenged that causal connection: rather than making us stupid, Cascio argues, Internet tools like Google will lead to the development of “‘fluid intelligence’—the ability to find meaning in confusion and to solve new problems, independent of acquired knowledge.” The final word on this contentious causal relationship—the effects on the human brain caused by new technology—has yet to be written, and will probably be available only after decades of complicated research.

Begging the Question

Most teachers have heard some version of the following argument: You can't give me a C in this course; I'm an A student. A member of Congress accused of taking kickbacks can make much the same argument: *I can't be guilty of accepting such bribes; I'm an honest person.*

In both cases, the claim is made on grounds that can't be accepted as true because those grounds themselves are in question. How can the accused bribe-taker defend herself on grounds of honesty when that honesty is in doubt? Looking at the arguments in Toulmin terms helps to see the fallacy:

Claim	You can't give me a C in this course . . .
Reason	. . . because I'm an A student.
Warrant	An A student is someone who can't receive Cs.
Claim	Representative X can't be guilty of accepting bribes . . .
Reason	. . . because she's an honest person.
Warrant	An honest person cannot be guilty of accepting bribes.

With the warrants stated, you can see why begging the question—assuming as true the very claim that's disputed—is a form of circular argument that goes nowhere. (For more on Toulmin argument, see Chapter 7.)

circular reasoning
works because

Equivocation

Equivocations—half truths or arguments that give lies an honest appearance—are usually based on tricks of language. Consider the plagiarist who copies a paper word for word from a source and then declares that “I wrote the entire paper myself”—meaning that she physically copied the piece on her own. But the plagiarist is using *wrote* equivocally and knows that most people understand the word to mean composing and not merely copying words.

Parsing words carefully can sometimes look like equivocation or be the thing itself. For example, during the 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton was asked regularly (some would say she was hounded) about her use of a private email server and about whether any of the emails contained classified information. Here's what she said on February 1, 2016:

The emails that I was received were not marked classified. Now, there are disagreements among agencies on what should have been perhaps classified retroactively, but at the time that doesn't change the fact that they were not marked classified.

—NPR Morning Edition, February 1, 2016

Many commentators at the time felt that this statement was a clear equivocation, and this controversy continued to haunt Clinton throughout her campaign.

Non Sequitur

A **non sequitur** is an argument whose claims, reasons, or warrants don't connect logically. You've probably detected a non sequitur when you react to an argument with a puzzled, “Wait, that doesn't follow.” Children are adept at framing non sequiturs like this one: *You don't love me or you'd buy me a new bike.* It doesn't take a parental genius to realize that love has little connection with buying children toys.

Non sequiturs often occur when writers omit steps in an otherwise logical chain of reasoning. For example, it might be a non sequitur to argue that since postsecondary education now costs so much, it's time to move colleges and university instruction online. Such a suggestion may have merit, but a leap from brick-and-mortar schools to virtual ones is extreme. Numerous issues and questions must be addressed step-by-step before the proposal can be taken seriously.

Politicians sometimes resort to non sequiturs to evade thorny issues or questions. Here, for example, is Donald Trump replying to questions in a 2017 interview with Michael Scherer of *Time Magazine*:

Scherer: Mitch McConnell has said he'd rather you stop tweeting, that he sees it as a distraction.

Trump: Mitch will speak for himself. Mitch is a wonderful man. Mitch should speak for himself.

Here Trump does not respond to the claim the interviewer says Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has made, but instead abruptly changes the subject, commenting instead on McConnell, saying he is a “wonderful man.”

Straw Man

Those who resort to the **straw man** fallacy attack arguments that no one is really making or portray opponents’ positions as more extreme or far less coherent than they actually are. The speaker or writer thus sets up an argument that is conveniently easy to knock down (like a man of straw), proceeds to do so, and then claims victory over an opponent who may not even exist.

Straw men are especially convenient devices for politicians who want to characterize the positions of their opponents as more extreme than they actually are: consider obvious memes such as “war on women” and “war on Christmas.” But straw man arguments are often more subtle. For instance, Steven Novella of Yale University argues that political commentator Charles Krauthammer slips into the fallacy when he misconstrues the meaning of “settled science” in a column on climate change. Novella rebuts Krauthammer’s assertion that “There is nothing more anti-scientific than the very idea that science is settled, static, impervious to challenge” by explaining why such a claim is deceptive:

Calling something an established scientific fact means that it is reasonable to proceed with that fact as a premise, for further research or for policy. It does not mean “static, impervious to challenge.” That is the straw man. Both evolution deniers and climate change deniers use this tactic to misinterpret scientific confidence as an anti-scientific resistance to new evidence or arguments. It isn’t.

—Steven Novella, *NeuroLogica Blog*, February 25, 2014

In other words, Krauthammer’s definition of science is not one that most scientists use.

Red Herring

This fallacy gets its name from the old British hunting practice of dragging a dried herring across the path of the fox in order to throw the hounds off the trail. A **red herring** fallacy does just that: it changes the subject abruptly or introduces an irrelevant claim or fact to throw

readers or listeners off the trail. For example, people skeptical about climate change will routinely note that weather is always changing and point to the fact that Vikings settled in Greenland one thousand years ago before harsher conditions drove them away. True, scientists will say, but the point is irrelevant to arguments about worldwide global warming caused by human activity.

The red herring is not only a device writers and speakers use in the arguments they create, but it’s also a charge used frequently to undermine someone else’s arguments. Couple the term “red herring” in a Web search to just about any political or social cause and you’ll come up with numerous articles complaining of someone’s use of the device.

climate change + red herring

white supremacy + red herring

immigration reform + red herring

“Red herring” has become a convenient way of saying “I disagree with your argument” or “your point is irrelevant.” And perhaps making a too-easy rebuttal like that can itself be a fallacy?

Faulty Analogy

Comparisons can help to clarify one concept by measuring it against another that is more familiar. Consider the power and humor of this comparison attributed to Mark Twain, an implicit argument for term limits in politics:

Politicians and diapers must be changed often, and for the same reason.

When comparisons such as this one are extended, they become *analogies*—ways of understanding unfamiliar ideas by comparing them with something that’s better known (see p. 76). But useful as such comparisons are, they may prove false if either taken on their own and pushed too far, or taken too seriously. At this point, they turn into **faulty analogies**—inaccurate or inconsequential comparisons between objects or concepts. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos found herself in a national controversy following a statement she made after meeting with Historically Black Colleges and Universities presidents in Washington, when she made an analogy between HCBUs and her advocacy of “school choice” today:

They [African Americans] saw that the system wasn’t working, that there was an absence of opportunity, so they took it upon themselves

to provide the solution. HBCUs are real pioneers when it comes to school choice. They are living proof that when more options are provided to students, they are afforded greater access and greater quality. Their success has shown that more options help students flourish.

What commentators immediately pointed out was that this statement included a false analogy. HBCUs were not created to provide more choice for African American students (and thus be analogous to DeVos's push for charter schools and school "choice") but rather because these students had little to no choice; after the Civil War, African American students were barred from most white public institutions.

Paralipsis

This fallacy (sometimes spelled *paralepsis* and often compared with occultatio) has been so predominant in the last two years that we think it's worthy of inclusion here. Basically, this fallacy occurs when speakers

I'm not going to bring up
rumours of my opponent's
infidelities because I think
it would be unfair...



Martin Shovel/Creativity Works

or writers say they will NOT talk about something, thus doing the very thing they say they're not going to do. It's a way of getting a point into an argument obliquely, of sneaking it in while saying that you are not doing so. Although paralipsis is rampant today, it is not new: Socrates famously used it in his trial when he said he would not mention his grieving wife and children who would suffer so mightily at his death. In the 2016 presidential campaign and in the first years of his presidency, Donald Trump used paralipsis repeatedly. Here, for instance, he is at a campaign rally in Fort Dodge, Iowa, speaking about rival candidate Marco Rubio:

I will not call him a lightweight, because I think that's a derogatory term, so I will not call him a lightweight. Is that OK with you people?
I refuse to say that he's a lightweight.

Although he is the most conspicuous user of paralipsis today, Trump is by no means the only politician to use this fallacy. Here's a commentator reporting on presidential candidate Bernie Sanders at a 2016 town hall meeting in Iowa:

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) on Friday called Bill Clinton's sexual scandals "totally disgraceful and unacceptable" but said he would not use the former president's infidelities against Hillary Clinton. "Hillary Clinton is not Bill Clinton. What Bill Clinton did, I think we can all acknowledge was totally, totally, totally disgraceful and unacceptable."

—Reporter Lisa Hagen, *The Hill*

In saying he would not use the former president's scandalous behavior against Hillary Clinton, he in fact does just the opposite.

Finally, you may run across the use of paralipsis anywhere, even at the movies, as spoken here by Robert Downey Jr.'s character Tony Stark:

I'm not saying I'm responsible for this country's longest run of uninterrupted peace in 35 years! I'm not saying that from the ashes of captivity, never has a phoenix metaphor been more personified! I'm not saying Uncle Sam can kick back on a lawn chair, sipping on an iced tea, because I haven't come across anyone man enough to go toe to toe with me on my best day. It's not about me!

—Robert Downey Jr., *Iron Man 2* (2010)

You may be tempted to use this fallacy in your own writing, but beware: it is pretty transparent and may well backfire on you. Better to say what you believe to be the truth—and stick to it.