

Apologetics Night Four: Informal Fallacies

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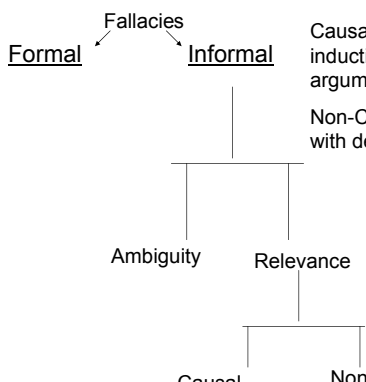
Formal Versus Informal Fallacies

- **Formal Fallacies:** Errors in the structure or “form” of the argument.
- **Informal Fallacies:** Errors in reasoning not related to the form of the argument.

Two Basic Groups of Informal Fallacies:

1. Ambiguity – Propositions that are unclear.
2. Relevance – Propositions that are clear, but do not address the issue at hand.

Informal Fallacies



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graph TD
    Fallacies --> Formal
    Fallacies --> Informal
    Informal --> Ambiguity
    Informal --> Relevance
    Relevance --> Causal
    Relevance --> Non-causal
  
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Causal: Have to do with inductive (scientific) arguments.

Non-Causal: Have to do with deductive arguments.

Ambiguity

Four Types of Ambiguity:

1. Equivocation – A word or phrase is used with two or more meanings.
2. Amphibole (Relationship) – The meaning of the word or phrase is clear, but not the grammatical construction.
3. Ambiguity of Accent – The emphasis of a word or phrase changes the meaning.
4. Ambiguity of circumstance – The conditions or circumstances change the meaning of words or phrases.

Examples of Equivocation

Mom: Wear your coat, it's cool outside.

Kid: I don't have to, I'm a cool cat.

Mark Shea - Catholic apologist responding to Bob Dewaay:

Evangelicals, like all orthodox Christians, vigorously affirm the Doctrine of the Incarnation – the faith of all Christians that God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary and became Man.

In Evangelical culture “incarnation” has tended to get prefaced with the definite article – “The Incarnation.” It's application in everyday Evangelical life usually has the character of a doctrine which is believed very firmly. But the Catholic way, while affirming the uniqueness of the Incarnation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, also tends to see “incarnation” as an eternal reality to be lived and breathed by the follower of Jesus.

Ambiguity of Amphibole and Accent Examples

Amphibole (Relationship):

- The airplane took off slowly with Mary on it, her nose hugging the ground.
- Save soap and waste paper.
- ...On the other hand, she had warts!

Accent (Emphasis)

“I love you?”

“I *love* you?”

“I love *you*?”

“I love you.”

Ambiguity of circumstance

- **Situation A:** A person on the street yells to his long time friend, "Hi Jack!" (Result: They got together for lunch and had a stimulating conversation.)
- **Situation B:** A person in the airport yells to his long time friend, "Hi Jack!" (Result: A missed flight, an arrest record, and a long interrogation by the "always jovial" TSA agents.)
- A five year old pointing to grandpa's pipe: "Fire in the hole!"
- A U.S. Marine throwing a hand grenade: "Fire in the hole!"

Fallacies of Relevance: Errors That Don't Address The Issues

Attack

- **Appeal To Force (Argument ad Baculum):** This argument does not attempt to be relevant. It says, "Accept this as true, or I'll hurt you!"
Example: Acts 5:40 They took his advice (from Gamaliel) and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus...
- **Abusive (Argument ad Hominem):** This argument attacks the character of a person. It says, "Reject their argument, their a bad person."
- Mark Shea – "...the truly strange case of Truly Reformed author Bob Dewaay who berates fellow Protestants at CT
- Example: Matthew 11:19 "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax gatherers and sinners!"

Fallacies of Relevance

Attack Continued

- **Argument ad Hominem (Circumstantial):** This is not an attack on a person's character, but on some special circumstance surrounding them.
Example: Why should we believe Solomon when he said, "Be content with the wife of your youth" (Proverbs 5:18)? He wasn't.
- **Inappropriate Authorities**
- **Argument from Ignorance (Argumentum ad Ignorantiam):** This fallacy says, "Believe this to be true because you can't prove it isn't true. Note: Ignorance proves nothing! All that can be concluded from nothing is nothing."
Example: The atheist reasons, "There cannot be a God because I have never seen any evidence for Him."

Fallacies of Relevance:

Inappropriate Authorities Continued

- Appeal to Pity (Argumentum ad Misericordiam): An emotional appeal that steers one away from the true relevant facts.

Examples: Luke 9:59 And He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."
If I don't have an abortion, I can never finish my college education and will die a poor woman.

- Appeal to elite popularity (Argumentum ad Populum): Accept this to be true because the "in crowd" accepts it as true.

Examples: Since inerrancy is a divisive doctrine, we should reject it.
The resurrection can't be true, the Sadducees didn't believe in it. (Matthew 22:23)

Fallacies of Relevance:

Inappropriate Authorities Continued

- Appeal to the Masses (Consensus Gentium): Accept this because most people believe it is true. This is different than ad populum because this is predicated on the majority holding the view.

Examples: But Columbus, no one believes the earth is round.
There are many paths that lead to God.
If we shut down Guantanamo Bay, "the world" will like us better.

- Appeal to Authority (Argument ad Verecundiam): Accept this just because some authority said it. (We should trust authority if we have good reason to do so.)

Examples: Global warming is true because Al Gore said it.
The "experts" say men and women are the same.
John 9:34 "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out.

Fallacies of Relevance

Inappropriate Authorities Continued

- Argument because of age (Argumentum ab Annis): This fallacy states that an argument is wrong just because it is an old argument.

Example: The belief in a creator is old fashioned.
Those old doctrines aren't relevant anymore.

- Argument to the future (Argumentum ad Futuris): Accept this view because future evidence will support it!

Example: Missing links might be found some day to support evolution.
Some day we might find proof of a "multiverse."

Fallacies of Relevance

Stacking The Deck

- Begging The Question (Petitio Principii) In this argument, the conclusion is sneaked into the premises. This is a “circular” argument where the conclusion becomes a premise.

Examples: The Bible is inspired because 2nd Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God...”

Catholics: The Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation is true because the Pope affirmed it ex – cathedra.

The sky is blue because the blueness makes it look blue.

Fallacies of Relevance

Stacking The Deck

- Straw Man: A false view or a caricature of the opponents view is made. This is a disingenuous act because it distorts the other person’s argument.

Examples: Conservative Christians have an escapist mentality and therefore care nothing for the poor and the downtrodden.

Creationists believe in an earth that was made in 4004 B.C.

1. Every thing needs a cause
2. God is a thing
3. God needs a cause

Straw Man Examples Courtesy Of A Catholic Apologist!

Examples: Mark Shea: “The emphasis on seeing the Incarnation as a single event two thousand years ago on the other side of the earth often makes Evangelicals tend to vaguely see the Incarnation as an episode which ended with the Ascension of Christ into heaven.”

...Evangelicals tend to reply to the Catholic confidence that God will use matter and people to communicate His grace by saying “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth” The assumption is that spirit is spirit and matter is matter and never twain shall meet (after the Ascension).

Fallacies of Relevance

Stacking The Deck

- **Special Pleading:** In this fallacy, only the evidence that supports one view gets a hearing. If there are ten studies that show your view is false, ignore them and make a big point about one that confirms your conclusion.

Example: The possibility of an eternal universe is ruled out by the following evidence:

1. Second Law of Thermodynamics
2. Motion of the galaxies
3. Background radiation echo
4. Gravitational pull insufficient to stop expansion
5. Center of mass consistent with big bang cosmology

Special Pleading: Maybe someday, some physical law or finding will refute your evidence!

Fallacies of Relevance

Diversion

- **Irrelevant conclusion (Ignoratio Elenchi):** An irrelevant conclusion gets the focus off of the point to be proved by substituting a related, but logically irrelevant point for it.

Example: Reincarnation is true because past-life regression therapy answers a lot of questions.

- It works, therefore it is true (Operat ergo veritat):

Example: Try Jesus 'cause it works. Geisler notes: "Christianity is true, regardless of what works, and the propositions that support its truth are not based on personal testimonies. (What does it mean for Christianity to "work" anyway? Does it mean being persecuted for your faith, dying to self, and losing all possessions, family and home for Christ's sake? That is what he promised.)"

Fallacies of Relevance

Diversion

- **Red Herring (diverting the issue):** This is the least sneaky way to divert the discussion. Just do it!

Examples: Telling a joke, pointing out anything that changes the subject. Doug Pagitt did this during the debate at Twin City Fellowship. He merely changed topic/categories when he could not handle the topic at hand.

Fallacies of Relevance

Generalization

- Fallacy of the general rule (Dicto Simpliciter): This fallacy applies a general rule to a specific case that deviates significantly from the normal situation in which the rule applies.

Examples: Proverbs 13:1 "A wise son accepts his father's discipline." This is a general principle and should not be applied to a case where the father is abusive.

- Hasty Generalization: Accept this general rule because some unusual case supports it. This fallacy confuses typical and atypical evidence.

Examples: "Since all religions offer the same kind of miracles to show that they are true, no claim of miracles really provides proof for any religion." David Hume affirmed this fallacy. He claimed that even if miracles existed, they prove nothing because all religions claim them. But this does not clarify between the unique miracles that the God of the Bible accomplishes!

Fallacies of Relevance

Generalization

- Cliché: These sayings suffer from overgeneralization. They often use popular maxims that do not accord with the facts of a given case. Cliché's never offer evidence for their conclusions.

Examples: "To err is human," therefore the Bible must err because it was written by humans.

I better not stand for Christ, after all, "better to be safe than sorry."

"War is not the answer." (It was the answer to the Nazi menace!)

Fallacies of Relevance

Reductive

- Nothing – Buttery: A reductive fallacy that argues things are nothing more than some aspect of those things.

Examples: Materialistic philosophers claim, "Man is nothing but matter in motion." (Men are made of matter, but they are far more than just matter.)

"The mind is nothing but the brain." (Certainly the mind uses the brain, but it is also more than just mere chemical reactions!)

- Genetic Fallacy: This fallacy demands that something or someone be rejected because they come from a bad source.

Examples: "Can anything good come from Nazareth" (John 1:46)?

Fallacies of Relevance

Reductive

- **Complex Question:** This type of questions asks simple “yes/no” type answers to complex questions. The question is unfair because multiple questions are actually being asked through the one question.
Examples: “When did you stop beating your wife?”
 “How can you believe in a God who hates people and sends them to hell?”
- **Category Mistake:** These are fallacies that confuse two different categories. They compare apples to oranges.
Examples: “What does blue taste like?”
 “Who made God?”
 “Who were Adam and Eve’s parents?”

Fallacies of Relevance

Reductive

- **Argument of the Beard:** This fallacy says, “Reject this because it differs only in degree from what you already reject.” This fallacy falsely blurs crucial distinctions between people or objects.
Examples: The U.S. military and terrorists are morally the same.
 Al-Qaida in Iraq are just like the Minute Men of the Revolutionary War.
 Since all people are sinners, there is no difference between Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill.

Other Fallacies

- **Faulty Dilemma:** Putting people in an “either or” situation when there are actually other alternatives.
Examples: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind” (John 9:2-3)?
- **Hypothesis Contrary to Fact:** This fallacy says, “Things would be different if this other hypothesis was true.” The problem is, the other hypothesis is not true!
Examples: If Adam never sinned, Jesus would not have to die.
 If we could believe that heaven and hell don’t exist, we could live just for today. (The Beatles made this fallacy!)

Other Fallacies

- Prestige Jargon: This fallacy is one of snobbery because the person says things in such complex jargon – no one can figure out what they are saying!

Examples: "They shed off their organic embodiment." (This was Leron Shults' way of saying "They died" in his book, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*.)

"Isn't the creation hypothesis bound to the reductionist pre-quantum notion of cause and effect?" (This is the fancy way atheists try to imply that nothing can do something!)

How Do We Know God Through Language?

- Univocal usage of language: This is a one to one direct correspondence of language to the thing signified.

Example: Bill *loves* his wife.

- Equivocal usage of language: This is a dissimilar usage of language so that the normal meaning of a term is changed.

Example: Bill *loves* to shoot ducks.

- Analogical usage of language: This is a similar but not an exact one to one usage of language. In this usage of language, meanings differ only in degree, not in kind.

Example: Bill *loves* his dog.

The Incomprehensibility of God

- Karl Barth and other Neo-Orthodox theologians claimed that God is "wholly other."
- The incomprehensibility of God does not mean that God cannot be known at all, but that he cannot be known *fully or exhaustively*.
- Psalm 145:3 "Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable."
- 2nd Peter 1:2-3, 5-6, Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence...Now for this very reason also, supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self control...
