Rhetoric and Informal Fallacies

Language provides all sort of tools to make what one says sound agreeable, tempting, and persuasive. We offer bargains, promise sweetness, give encouragements, tell stories, and deliver commands, just to name a few ways to sway others to think the way we want them to. Persuasion takes many forms. When others understand what we want them to believe, but they need to hear some extra information before they begin to agree, what we choose to say to them becomes crucially important. That extra "because..." is the additional ingredient that could bend their agreement over to us, instead of someone else's idea. There is a contest that gets underway, a contest of ideas in people's thoughts. If we can plant some different ideas there, we may be able to swing their beliefs over to agreement with us. When we engage in that contest among competing ideas making people think, we are undertaking a specific kind of persuasive talk called an "argument."

Don't only angry people argue with each other? Already my attempt to help you think about 'argument' has run into a problem that is very typical of argument. No matter how I choose my words, you will usually hear just what you are ready to hear. So I have to repeat that 'argument' has a wider meaning that we use here: when a person tries to make a position more believable by adding some sort of explanation why it should be believable, an argument gets started. An argument can keep going if other people bring up their own thoughts why that position actually doesn't seem so believable. An organized argument can get underway if two people each take a position contrary to the other, and not only offer reasons in support of their own view, but additionally explain why the other person's ideas shouldn't be persuasive. If an audience of persuadable people are observing that organized argument between two opponents, a public debate happens.

Effective criticism in general should be prepared for an argumentative response, so designing criticism wisely is never a waste of time. Anyone on

the receiving end of criticism from an opponent has every incentive to complain about any poor reasons given in that criticism, deflecting attention away from whether one's own position is valid. Audiences also shouldn't be impressed by bad reasons. A general rule of thumb for winning debates is simple: "don't give bad reasons." Criticism in the form of argumentation – bringing up reasons why a position is wrong about its claims and wrong for people to follow – should try to avoid depending on bad reasons, or what can be called bad reasoning in general.

The simplest way to register a complain about bad reasoning is to protest, "That's a non-sequitur!" Pointing at a 'non-sequitur' or an 'ignoratio elenchi' are Latin ways of saying "It just doesn't follow." This is the ultimate miscellaneous category for all fallacies, in which a reason given for a position can't actually have much if anything to do with whether that position may be right. However, effective criticism can persuade people that a position is wrong even if that criticism doesn't meet standards of good reasoning. Likewise, that position's defenders can be extremely persuasive without meeting those high standards either.

Everyone should understand the limitations of rhetorical argument, the types of bad reasoning, and the fallacies of reasoning to try to avoid. Studies of argumentation and fallacies, to which this chapter is indebted, are provided by S. Morris Engel, *With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies*, 5th edn (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); John Woods, *The Death of Argument: Fallacies in Agent-Based Reasoning* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 2004); Douglas Walton, *Informal Logic: A Pragmatic Approach*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Frans H. Van Eemeren, *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse: Extending the Pragma-Dialectical Theory of Argumentation* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010). Advanced studies in inference and reasoning include Jonathan E. Adler and Lance J. Rips, ed., *Reasoning: Studies of Human Inference and Its Foundations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Ken Manktelow, *Thinking and Reasoning: An Introduction to the Psychology of Reason, Judgment and Decision Making* (New York: Psychology Press, 2012). Collections of fallacies are explained by Diane F. Halpern, *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*, 4th edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008); Julian

Baggini, *The Duck That Won the Lottery: 100 New Experiments for the Armchair Philosopher* (New York: Penguin, 2009); and Rolf Dobelli, *The Art of Thinking Clearly* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013). Accusing people of holding fallacious views is one thing; accusing them of delusional thinking is quite another. Consult Lisa Bortolotti, *Delusions and Other Irrational Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

1 Subjective Emotion

If an argument has a logical structure, the reasons provided actually have some relationship with the position being supported. Rhetorical arguments may lack logical structure. They can be classified into two primary kinds: (1) the arguments that actually don't have an argumentative structure because the reason(s) given have nothing to do with the position; and (2) arguments that have some sort of argumentative structure but the reason(s) given don't successfully provide rational support.[2]

Rhetorical arguments lacking argumentative structure only arouse distractions and diversions, making one's own position look better while casting the opposed position is a bad light. For our limited purposes, we focus on two subtypes: (1a) arguments that raise distractions by arousing one's emotions, and (1b) arguments that raise diversions with concerns about other people. Later sections examine arguments having some logical structure that commit additional distinctive kinds of fallacies.

Arousing distracting emotions can be an effective way to persuade people that you are right. Emotional distractions work because people often do let their emotions control what they ought to think. These distractions help to make an argument subjectively "personal" instead of objectively rational. The general fallacy is:

> Appeal to emotion: A broad category for non-arguments that manipulate positive or negative emotions, in order to persuade people to agree with your position. Specific examples are listed below.

These specific fallacies appeal to positive emotions people like to feel about themselves:

Appeal to flattery: making an argument more persuasive by reminding supporters how good and proud they should feel about themselves. "Our position is the best, because we are such fine people."

Appeal to trends: making a position seem more reasonable just because it is newer, enjoys recent growth, sound more contemporary, and/or accepted by younger people.

Appeal to pity: making an argument look stronger by pointing out how people who think that way deserve compassion and sympathy. "Of course you couldn't be so heartless as to suggest they might be wrong."

Wishful thinking (pragmatic fallacy): making an argument seem persuasive by appealing to what people need, desire, or hope for. "You'd be smart to accept this view, so you'll get what you really want."

These specific fallacies make people feel negative emotions:

Appeal to force: where an argument only amounts to intimidation, coercion, raising threats, or inflicting harms. "You'd better believe it, or suffer the consequences!"

Appeal to fear: making an argument look stronger by raising prejudices and anxieties about those holding the opposed position. "We are surely right, because our opposition is determined to harm us."

Appeal to spite: making an argument persuasive by drawing attention to feelings of bitterness or vengeance against those holding the opposed position. "Our side has the better argument, since they don't deserve to even defend their view."

Ad hominem (poisoning the well): making your position look stronger by insinuating that the people who defend the opposed position are bad people with bad motives, so no one should listen to them.

Tu quoque: insinuating that the opposed position is weak by claiming that its defenders don't consistently follow it themselves.

Appeal to ridicule: making the opponent's position look weaker by depicting it as silly, naïve, or childish.

Guilt by association: making reasons for a position look much weaker because they are somehow connected to something or someone very unpopular now. "You wouldn't keep agreeing with that position, if you knew how those horrible people once had a reason to believe it."

Appeal to class: insinuating that people who hold the opposed view only find it reasonable because of their social or financial status. "Believe us instead of them, since they believe what they do only because they are poor (or rich)."

2 Public Conformity

The second subtype of rhetorical fallacies to discuss is: (1b) diverting attention to concerns about what other people happen to think. These diversions can be very affective because people let what others may think get into their heads and affect what they themselves will believe. These distractions help make an argument "public" instead of rational.

This initial set of fallacies brings up the influence, positive or negative, of many people:

Argumentum ad populum ("appeal to a majority"): making an argument for a position look stronger just because there are many people who already accept that position. "You couldn't have any good reason to disagree, since most everyone already agrees."

Appeal to tradition: making a position seem more reasonable on the grounds that a long tradition of people have agreed with it in the past. "So many people in the past down to the present surely couldn't be mistaken, so don't think you have reason to disagree."

Appeal to nature: making a position seem more reasonable on the grounds that it agrees with the (alleged) nature of people or the general ways of nature. "You can't accept that way of thinking, since that's never been natural for people to do." (Hint: bring up how "it was good enough for grandma" or "good enough for our cave-dwelling ancestors.")

Chronological snobbery: making a position look weaker by pointing out that reasons for that position date back to a past time when people had many wrong beliefs. "You can't accept those reasons for that view, since people thought of them during such bygone ignorant times."

The next set of fallacies bring up important sources of information which can seem influential, but perhaps they shouldn't.

Appeal to loyalty: making an argument seem persuasive by pointing out how people truly loyal to the group (the tribe, the company, the religion, the nation, etc.) already believe it. "Surely you wouldn't betray our group by thinking about disagreeing with us."

Appeal to authority: making a position appear stronger by pointing out how reasons for that position are already believed by people in powerful offices (even though no relevant expertise comes with those positions). "Surely you must agree with our position, since those executives already think it is right."

Appeal to fallibility: arguing that a position is weak because it relies on information from a relevant authority who made a mistake before. "You can't take that information seriously, since its source was wrong once."

False attribution: making it appear that a 'fact' given in an argument comes from a reliable source of information, but this 'source' isn't identified, or the source lacks expertise or holds a bias. "It must be true, since a tabloid newspaper in another country said it is true." (Hint: substitute "an internet blog said it is true.")

3 Ignorance

We proceed to rhetorical arguments having an argumentative structure, but they misguide one's train of thought into a less than rational inference in order to make a position sound plausible. There are two subtypes arranged in the next two sections: (2a) arguments relying on some item of alleged ignorance, and (2b) arguments trying to change what the argument is really about. The general fallacy is:

Appeal to ignorance: the miscellaneous category for arguments relying on the insinuation that something isn't knowable, in order to suggest that a position is weaker, or stronger, than it really is.

This set of fallacies all rely on the way that (supposedly) no one really knows the answer, so one's position is secure.

Disprove the believer: the fallacy of supposing that it is more reasonable to believe something on the grounds that no one can prove it false. "No one has proven it wrong, so stop arguing that I shouldn't believe it."

Prove a negative: specifically arguing that until evidence proves something doesn't exist, people can keep believing that it does exist. "Until someone proves that it isn't real, let people believe what they want about it."

Absence of evidence: arguing that it has been proven that something doesn't exist just because no evidence for it has yet been detected. "Until some evidence for it is found, we can know that it isn't real."

Disprove the skeptic: the fallacy of supposing that it is more reasonable to disbelieve something, on the grounds that no one can prove it true. "We don't have to agree, since no one has solid proof that it is absolutely correct."

Shifting burden of proof: the fallacy of claiming that the opposed position needs to prove its correctness first, before there's any need to give reasons for one's own position. "Let people who think we are wrong first show us good reasons why they should be taken seriously."

Argument from silence (argumentum ex silentio): announcing that your belief is reasonable since you've never heard any reasons to not believe it. "I'm surely right, since no one has yet explained to me what could be wrong with my view."

Appeal to opinion: you have nothing to relevant to say against my belief, since each person is entitled to hold their own opinion, and only their own opinion. "You don't know how to tell me what to think, since I have a right to my opinion too."

Appeal to mystery: appealing to one admittedly mysterious matter in order to 'explain' some other equally mysterious thing. "This phenomena is so bizarre

that it must somehow be connected to this other curious phenomena." (Hint: insert 'quantum holism' alongside 'consciousness' to start playing the game.)

Continuum fallacy: making it look like an argument is weak for relying on a false distinction between two things since they lie on a continuum. "Those two things can't be so different, since no one knows where to draw the line between them." One specific version goes like this: "A difference in quality can't come from just a difference in quantity."

Slippery slope fallacy: rejecting a limited position on the grounds that once that position is accepted, no one knows how prevent the later acceptance of a dangerous broad position. "That risky idea can't be permitted now, since far worse things would become inevitable in the future." (Hint: insert "let terminally ill people die with dignity" alongside "killing off people when they get old.")

This next group of fallacies each relies on basically saying, "I can't know and I don't need to know."

Bad hypothetical: the fallacy of defending a position against the accusation that there is a possible problem, by claiming that this potential problem is too hypothetical to need any answer. "Such a wild hypothetical is so hard to conceive that there's no point to even considering it."

Arbitrary hypothetical: the fallacy of defending a position against possible alternatives by claiming that such hypotheticals are so arbitrary by contrast, implying that they are unreasonable. "We've taken our position and there's no point to considering other options, since those are just arbitrary ideas."

The Fallacy fallacy: making a position look weaker by pointing at one poor argument for it, insinuating that there's no good reasons to believe it. "That position cannot be acceptable, since one fallacious argument for it has been exposed and refuted."

Moving the goalpost (raising the bar): expecting good reasons before accepting a position, and after those reasons are established, dismissing that position by claiming that even more reasons are actually required. "Sure, they've established their point so far, but they don't realize how they actually need far more evidence." (Hint: repeat this fallacy as needed, so you never have to admit being wrong.)

Argument from incredulity: the fallacy of arguing that your belief must be true just because you can't conceive how it could be actually false. "There's no questioning my belief, since I've never been able to imagine otherwise."

Loki's Wager: making it look like an argument is weak since it mention a key term or concept which (allegedly) has no clear definition, so those reasons shouldn't be used. "Their bad argument keeps using a term that no one agrees about, so their position needn't be accepted." (Hint: to show how that term is so vague, keep repeating how you aren't sure what it means.)

4 Misdirection

These rhetorical arguments offer ways to insulating your own position against an opponent, by trying to change what people think the argument is really about.

This first set of fallacies sets up opportunities to get people to think that the opposed position is not really what its proponent had initially presented it to be. This weakens the opposed position and makes your position look improved by comparison.

Taking out of context: prejudicially distorting a statement of the opposed position by selecting out a phrase from that statement so it appears to have a different (and distracting) meaning.

Appeal to literal meaning: Imposing on an opponent's position only one meaning for something as it is most commonly or basically used. Example: "Pro-abortionists think that mothers should kill their own babies."

Appeal to technical meaning: Imposing on an opponent's position only one meaning for something as it is only used by specialists. Example: "Anti-abortionists think that zygotes are the same as people."

Equivocation: trying to make an argument sound more plausible by using a term having two or more meanings, without clarifying which is meant. Example: "If each form of life is 'made' to survive, as evolution says, then someone had to do the designing."

False support: making the opposition seem to support your position, by pointing out admissions by the opponent that there are points of agreement. "Evolutionists admit how comet collisions and great floods re-directed the course of evolution, so they can't deny how the Bible is right about God causing catastrophes."

Proof by intimidation: making the opposed position seem weaker by offering lengthy and complex arguments for your position, preventing an opponent from adequately responding to all the details. (Hint: try to take up most of the time in a debate.)

This next set of fallacies attempts to bring up a second, different argument and put one's opponent on the defensive there, getting people to forget about weaknesses in your own position.

Style over substance fallacy: making a position look weak by pointing out how arguments for that position have been presented in a controversial way. Example: "Why should children learn about evolution in schools when their teachers dogmatically explain evolution like it is a proven fact?"

Argument from repetition (argumentum ad nauseam): making a position look weak by pointing out how it has been debated so much already. Example: "People can't be expected to accept evolution now, since it has been vigorously debated for such a long time."

Complex question (loaded question): making the opponent's position seem weaker by challenging it with a "yes or no" question that presumes something misleading and unappealing. Example: "When will evolutionists stop trying to control our children's minds?"

Straw man argument: making the opposed position look weaker by selecting a simplistic version for easy criticism. "Evolution says that life comes from random chance, but we don't see monstrous creatures just appearing suddenly."

Red herring argument: making the opposed position look weaker by presenting a controversial argument against it which actually isn't relevant. Example: "If evolution were correct, then people would be allowed to kill off the unfit."

Double standard fallacy: judging the superiority of your position after holding the opposition to higher standards of justification than the standards you want your own position to meet. Example: "Evolution has poor explanations for monkeys turning into humans, but God making people from dust is easy to understand."

5 Formal Logic Fallacies

Formal fallacies occur when arguments displaying a logical structure appear to come close to fulfilling expectations for valid deductive reasoning, yet they fail to support their position due to an error in their logical form.

Basic formal fallacies include the following: Denying the Antecedent (if P implies Q, and not-P is true, therefore not-Q is true); Affirming the Consequent (If P implies not-Q, and Q is true, therefore not-P is true); Affirming a Disjunct (P or Q, and P is true, therefore not-Q is true); Improper Transposition (If P implies Q, then it is true that not-P implies not-Q); and Undistributed Middle (All things X are Y too, and all things Z are Y as well, therefore all Xs are Zs). There are many more formal fallacies, so this section only picks out the commonly encountered ones.

The following fallacies involve one premise of an argument that is playing a crucial role, yet it can't be taken seriously as a support for the argument's conclusion:

Begging the question (petitio principii): the truth of one of the premises depends on the truth of the argument's conclusion. Example: "There are people who encounter things that nobody else does, and those peculiar events can't be naturally explained, so paranormal events really do happen."

Special pleading: a premise requires an exemption to a general rule, a rule which is otherwise widely accepted, without justifying that exception. Example: "Religious experiences can't be trusted to confirm which religion is right, yet Hindus gain great faith through religious experiences, so Hinduism is probably the religion with the most truth."

False dilemma (false dichotomy): a premise assumes only two possibilities, yet there can be more options. Example: "There are true stories about people

recovering from terrible diseases, and their doctors can't exactly explain how, so the only explanation is that miracles really do happen."

Zero-sum fallacy (a version of false dilemma): a premise assumes a rigid relationship between two things so that one's gain must be the other's loss. "Protest to your congressional representative right away, since Congress is about to approve more funding for fighting heart disease, so finding a cure cancer has apparently been forgotten in Washington."

Modal scope fallacy: one premise says that all As must be Bs, while the next premise says that Bs must be Cs in a different sense of 'must'. "If people are having mystical experiences then these people must be religious, but if people must be religious then they live under a tyrannical theocracy, so therefore all mystics live under tyrannical theocracies."

These next fallacies occur when an argument tries to quickly jump from a premise to a desired conclusion without making sure that this jump clearly makes sense:

False analogy: an argument points out how two things are similar (or dissimilar) and presumes that they share other similarities (or dissimilarities) too. Example: "Mystical experiences are very hard to put into words, so their indescribable quality is what they all have in common, and therefore that unnatural quality must come from a divine source."

Four terms fallacy: a syllogistic argument is valid when it uses three terms, not more, so using the same words with two different meanings invalidates the argument. Example: "Voting for more money for education is what democrats like to do, and democrats are great defenders of the democratic way of life, so it is undemocratic to underfund education."

Fallacy of division: an argument suggests that a property of a thing must also be found in some or all of its parts. Example: "Climate scientists claim that the earth is getting warmer, but we've had some really cold winters lately in our region, so all that climate science must be making some big mistakes."

Fallacy of composition: an argument suggests that a property of a thing's parts must be its own property as a whole as well. Example: "Both sodium and chloride are harmful substances to allow into the body, so that's why avoiding salt must become a top dietary priority."

Reification (hypostatization): an argument arbitrarily assigns functions and powers to something as if it were real, when it is just an abstraction. Example: "Why should believing in miracles seem silly, when faith can move mountains!" (Hint: people really move things – faith is a label for how they feel.)

6 Inductive and Causal Fallacies

Induction is another kind of logical inference where premises about a small sampling from a large set of things or events finds a pattern in common to that sampling, and the conclusion says that this pattern will continue as more and more sampling continues. The conclusion can be expressed by assigning a probability to the odds that this pattern will continue (a number between, but not including, 0% and 100%). The estimated probability should depend on the sample size, the size of the large set sampled from, and the method used to choose the sample. Because we want to know how confident we should feel about a conclusion, its assigned probability typically gets treated as the degree of belief one ought to give it. However, inductive probability and degree of belief aren't the same thing.

Unlike an argument meeting the standards of deductive inference, no inductive argument can prove anything beyond doubt. Induction yields only probabilities, since any discovered pattern could alter or change completely at any time in the future so long as there is more to be sampled: this is the "problem of induction." Although induction cannot provide guaranteed truth, it remains essential to scientific knowledge, where scientific methods avoid crediting inductive inferences with more credence than they deserve. Induction is also involved with proposing causal hypotheses explaining relationships between sets of events. Despite dealing only in probable inferences, inductive and causal reasoning isn't automatically fallacious, when there are applied judiciously. Scientific methodologies have to restrain our natural cognitive biases that track our thoughts towards making hasty overgeneralizations, noticing the evidence which only fits our prejudices, and predicting what we want to happen.[4]

Inductive fallacies provoke excessive confidence in probabilities. In general, these fallacies discount the limitations to tracking a past pattern into

the future, or ignore the errors arising from making judgments based on limited sampling sizes.

Some prominent inductive fallacies include:

> Inductive fallacy: placing excessive confidence in the belief that an observed trend of events will continue to hold true for the next event. Example: "My cousin's prayers were answered last month, and then my sister's prayers were answered last week, so my prayers will surely work for me now."
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> Gambler's fallacy: placing excessive confidence in the belief that an observed trend of events will not continue to hold true for the next event. Example: "None of my prayers so far this year have been answered, so today's prayers must surely have a good chance of working."
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> Hasty generalization fallacy: inferring from a few observations about Xs having feature F, that all Xs must therefore have F too. Example: "I heard about some parents praying for their children who then miraculously got better, so everyone should be praying to save the lives of their own loved ones."
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> Sweeping generalization fallacy (fallacy of accident): applying a generalization that Xs usually have feature F to infer the conclusion that one particular X must have F. Example: "Miracles usually come from prayers, so somebody must have been praying for me when I somehow survived that accident."
>
> Base rate fallacy: start from the way that Xs have F with high probability while Ys have F with low probability, and then add that P has F, to fallaciously infer that P is more likely an X than a Y. Example: "Religious people meditate far more than nonreligious people do, so my friend Sam is religious since he meditates."
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> Weak analogy fallacy (false analogy): inferring that just because Xs are typically like Ys, and some Ys have feature F, then all Xs have F too. Example: "People's lives getting saved in hospitals just seems so miraculous, like Jesus bringing Lazarus back from dead, so Jesus must still be guiding the hands of doctors today."
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> Biased sample fallacy: placing too much confidence in an unrepresentative sample, in order to infer that N% of Xs have feature F, when in fact more Xs (or fewer Xs) have F. Example: "Churches are full of devout followers who believe

that miracles can happen to them, so religious people agree that God helpfully intervenes in their lives."

Cherry picking fallacy (confirmation bias): inferring from selected evidence that Xs typically have feature F, while ignoring other evidence that many Xs don't have F. Example: "Every day there's a news story that religious people miraculously survive tragedies, confirming how God looks out for the faithful."

Causal fallacies are attempts at causal explanations that fail to supply reasonably support. They mislead people into thinking that a causal relationship between two things is strong when it probably isn't. They can also mislead people into thinking that a minor necessary cause (it must be involved with only a small role) is actually a major sufficient cause (it can accomplish everything all by itself). Common causal fallacies include:

Post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy ('post hoc' fallacy): inferring that A is a cause of B simply because A happened before B. "Religion was extremely helpful to early science in Europe, since science arose within a culture which had been thoroughly Christian for a millennia." (Hint: don't let anyone ask why science was delayed for so many centuries.)

Cum hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy ('correlation can't imply causation'): inferring that A and B are causally related, or some third thing C is causing A and B, simply because A and B are happening at the same time. "Experimental science's growth during the 14th–15th centuries coincided with the domination of St. Aquinas's natural law theory, so science is indebted to Christian ideas." (Hint: don't draw attention to natural law theory's decline after experimental science gained credibility.)

Disaggregation fallacy: inferring that there is a causal relationship between two generalizations simply because they occurred around the same time. "During the rise of modern science, scientists holding university positions made great scientific discoveries, and they were devout Christians, therefore science and religion are compatible." (Hint: don't mention how only devout Christians were permitted to hold university positions back then.)

Single cause fallacy: inferring that one simple cause is sufficiently responsible for something, without considering other joint causes which may be mostly responsible. "Early science must have gotten the idea of a 'law of nature' from Christianity, since religion says that God's laws run the universe." (Hint:

hopefully your audience knows little about ancient Greek philosophy, or the Epicurean or Stoic philosophies of the Romans, which used that idea long before Christianity.)

Genetic fallacy: inferring that just because something began doing one thing, or was made for doing one thing, then it shouldn't be involved with doing anything else. "During the first few centuries of modern science, its discoveries were used to understand God's design for the universe, so there's no reason for science to contradict religion today." (Hint: hopefully your audience still thinks that the universe's 'design' is so magnificent that nothing better for us could be imagined.)

7 Moral Argument Fallacies

A moral argument offers reasons trying to justify what course of action is right and ought to be done, in the moral sense of 'ought' where moral praise or blame can be assigned to someone who acts (or fails to act) rightly. A typical moral argument about what should be done includes at minimum one premise that states a general rule of moral expectations, and another premise stating conditions about why this moral expectation applies to this particular case, so the conclusion can say what is right or wrong about a specific situation. Example: "Promises should be kept, and you did promise to deliver the package, so you should deliver it soon." Delivering the package soon would bring moral credit for doing what one ought to do. Another kind of typical moral argument is about something that has already happened, and the argument tries to rationalize what has happened and explain why moral blame should (or should not) be assigned. Besides all the fallacies listed in previous sections, some additional peculiar fallacies to moral arguments can easily make one's moral position seem more reasonable that it probably is.

An accusation that the "naturalistic fallacy" has been committed is often heard, and it usually listed among the many fallacies which can weaken moral arguments. The naturalistic fallacy says that an evaluative conclusion (that something is good or bad, useful or not useful, appropriate or not, prudent or imprudent, practical or not, etc.) cannot be adequately supported by a set of premises if they all describe just factual matters. As a general rule, this isn't a good general rule – this broad naturalistic fallacy isn't a fallacy

every time, since enough information about a situation may reasonably support an evaluation of that situation. Example: "Lightning often strikes tall trees, and people next to those trees would be injured, so seeking shelter under a tall tree in a big storm is a bad idea." The specific version of an evaluative argument about a moral conclusion is almost always a fallacy, so it is listed below as the "Is-Ought" fallacy. There is no standard classification of 'moral argument' fallacies in the literature about moral reasoning, so the list below represents a sampling of typical fallacies with handy assigned labels.[7]

The following fallacies occur because the argument appears to have the needed rational structure yet the moral conclusion cannot follow from the given premises.

Is-Ought fallacy: an argument having premises only describing factual matters, lacking any morally normative terms, cannot support a conclusion about moral matters. Example: "She is from a different country, where people follow certain traditions, so she shouldn't be living that way in our country now."

Moralistic fallacy ("perfect world" fallacy): an argument starting from claims about what ideally ought to be, and concluding with an assertion about current matters that ought to be recognized. Example: "Since there should be a permanent peace between those two countries, then their contending claims to disputed territories must be set aside."

Ought implies can fallacy: if a person ought to do action A, that person should be able to do A, so don't require actions impossible to do. It is a fallacy to demand actions from people that cannot possibly be performed just because they 'ought' to be done. Example: "Everyone in America should want to be a real American, and that means using our language, so immigrants must use English now."

Essentializing fallacy: an argument including a premise claiming that a person, or group of people, have an essential trait that can never change. Example: "When people of that ethnicity try to live in a democratic country, there will always be trouble, since they can't change their ways."

End justifies the means fallacy: an argument supporting a course of action on the grounds that the ultimate goal to be achieved entirely justifies the questionable means necessary to reach that goal. Example: "We must make our public schools safe again, so we need laws making it very hard to ever buy a gun."

Intention justifies the means fallacy: an argument defending a course of action, no matter how well or poorly it turns out, on the grounds that the intention behind it is quite good. Example: "We should be on the side of those who staunchly defend the right to own guns, since they are only trying to uphold our Constitution."

The next set of fallacies occur because the moral argument includes a premise arousing emotions or appealing to intuitions, but this premise isn't morally relevant enough to help support the conclusion.

Urgency of now fallacy ("we gotta do something" fallacy): supporting a position M by adding that unless something is done immediately, no matter how unwise or dangerous M is, then even worse consequences may happen. Example: "Unless we immediately take drastic action, we won't be able to show our enemies how we are taking this seriously."

Appeal to closure fallacy: supporting a position M by adding that unless M is done, further inaction will harm innocent people affected by this decision. Example: "By continuing to postpone doing the right thing about terrorists by conducting more interminable debate, they are preventing the survivors from getting on with their lives."

Fallacy from inertia ("stay the course" fallacy): arguing that doing M must continue despite its problems, because halting M is an admission of failure and wasted sacrifice with huge costs to our pride and prestige. Example: "The government's security programs at airports can't be modified or scaled back, since we have to prove that we learned something from those tragic disasters on our country's homeland."

Fallacy from paranoia: arguing that requiring M must continue despite its problems, because the alternative is to set loose dangerous people who would cause chaos or enslave us. Example: "The government's vast intelligence bureaucracies must stay well-funded, since dangerous enemies of our country are watching us carefully for any weaknesses."

Paralysis of analysis fallacy: arguing that changing course and starting to do M is wrong, because there won't ever be enough critical information required for this decision, so delaying a decision is wiser. Example: "The government must

continue to use drone strikes as much as possible in foreign countries, since it's impossible to say what we'd gain by letting up the pressure."

Perfect solution fallacy: arguing that it would be wrong to do M, because M wouldn't make everything better. Example: "Vegetarians have no right to ask that we eat less meat, since doing that couldn't end world hunger or save the environment."

Golden mean fallacy: arguing that the right thing must be M, because M feels like the moderate course of action between extreme alternatives. Example: "We shouldn't change the minimum wage right now, since we don't want to use government to control the economy, or force small businesses to have to shut down."

Personal solution fallacy: arguing that M can't be a moral duty, since one person doing M won't make things better until everyone is obeying M too. Example: "My environmentalist friends get so fanatical about how I should recycle, but that's silly, since it can't make any difference until everyone did it."

This additional set of fallacies have in common the feature that they distract attention towards a different moral situation or argument.

Existential fallacy: arguing that a person is wrong for making a personal choice to do something, on the grounds that this person's deed is really a claim that everyone should do the same wrong thing. Example: "When a woman wants the right to get an abortion, women everywhere are being told that they made the wrong decision to keep their baby."

Wrong message fallacy: claiming that something must be wrong on the grounds that if that is permitted, then some people may think that they can do another thing which is clearly wrong. Example: "Where abortion is permitted, you can also find mothers who will kill their born babies in their cribs."

Unintended consequences: claiming that if we allow people to do A, which later influences other people to do terrible thing B, then we become morally responsible for B too. "Permitting any reproductive freedom only encourages people to explore promiscuity, and we will be promoting infidelity, adultery, and every sexual perversity."

Personal experience fallacy: claiming that a person's judgment on the morality of something can be ignored, because that person hasn't yet been confronted with whether to do it personally. "Too many people are voicing their opinions about abortion, when they've never had to make that decision for themselves."

Proxy fallacy: claiming that a person's judgment on the morality of something can be ignored, because this person may not be able to do the same thing personally. Example: "People who argue that abortion should be legal probably couldn't bring themselves to kill their own baby if they were pregnant."

Fallacy from futility: arguing that something can't be morally required, since there's no realistic way to expect that everyone would conform. Example: "There's no point to asking young people to abstain from sex, since most of them will sooner or later have sex anyways."

The next set of fallacies arise when an argument is designed to supply an excuse for evading moral blame, but it relies on a premise that cannot justify the excuse.

Fallacy from normality ("just doing my job" fallacy): claiming that person can't be morally wrong for doing something, because this person's regular duties include doing it.

Fallacy from legality: claiming that a person can't be morally wrong for doing something, because it wasn't illegal to do that.

Fallacy from free choice: claiming that there's nothing morally wrong with a situation, because the people involved appear to be participating voluntarily.

No solution fallacy: claiming that what we are doing isn't so morally wrong, because even if we stopped doing it, someone else will do it instead.

Two wrongs make a right: claiming that doing something wrong is morally permissible in this situation, because that would somehow make up for a wrong deed already done.