

Week 15

Fallacies: the art of mental trickery and manipulation

**Three types of thinkers:** uncritical persons/ skilled manipulators/ fair-minded critical persons

**Mistake  $\neq$  fallacies**

**No exhaustive list of fallacies**

**Faulty generalizations**

Don't say all when you mean most

Don't say most when you mean some

Don't say some when you mean a few

And don't say a few when you mean just one

Practice

Make a list of 10 perfectly reasonable generalizations that you use in your thinking.

As examples: the earth will continue to rotate around the sun. When I go to work tomorrow, my desk will still be in my office. My car will start when I turn the key.

Note that these assumptions are so basic that we almost never state them. We unconsciously take them for granted.

**Post hoc generalizations**

Example: the last time we had a major strike of teachers, a student died in a fight. That just shows you the irresponsibility of teachers striking.

Comment:

Example: last time I had dinner at Jack's house, I had a bad stomachache the very next day. The food at Jack's house must have been bad."

Comment:

Analogies and metaphors

Example: "Life is like a beautiful and winding lane, on either side bright flowers, beautiful butterflies and tempting fruits, which we scarcely pause to admire and taste, so eager are we to hasten to an opening which we imagine will be more beautiful still."—G.A. Sala

Comment:

Example: "Life is the childhood of our immortality"—Goethe

Comment:

44 foul ways to win an argument

Dirty trick 1: accusing you opponent of doing what he/she is accusing you of (or

worse)

Dirty trick 2: accuse him/her of sliding down a slippery slope (that lead to disaster)

Dirty trick 3: appeal to authority

Dirty trick 4: appeal to experience

Dirty trick 5: appeal to fear

Dirty trick 6: appeal to pity

Dirty trick 7: appeal to popular passion

Dirty trick 8: appeal to tradition or faith

Dirty trick 9: assume a posture of righteousness

Dirty trick 10: attack the person (and not the argument)

Dirty trick 11: beg the question

Dirty trick 12: call for perfection

Dirty trick 13: create a false dilemma

Dirty trick 14: devise analogies (and metaphors) that support your view (even if they are misleading or "false")

Dirty trick 15: question your opponent's conclusions

Dirty trick 16: create misgivings

Dirty trick 17: create a straw man

Dirty trick 18: deny or defend inconsistencies

Dirty trick 19: demonize their side, sanitize yours

Dirty trick 20: evade questions, gracefully

Dirty trick 21: flatter your audience

Dirty trick 22: hedge what you say

Dirty trick 23: ignore the evidence

Dirty trick 24: ignore the main point

Dirty trick 25: attack evidence (that undermines your case)

Dirty trick 26: insist loudly on a minor point

Dirty trick 27: use the hard-cruel-world argument (to justify doing what is usually considered unethical)

Dirty trick 28: make sweeping, glittering generalizations

Dirty trick 29: make much of any inconsistencies in your opponent's position.

Dirty trick 30: make your opponent look ridiculous ("lost in the laugh")

Dirty trick 31: Oversimplify the issue

Dirty trick 32: raise nothing but objections

Dirty trick 33: rewrite history (have it your way)

Dirty trick 34: seek your vested interests

Dirty trick 35: shift the ground

Dirty trick 36: shift the burden of proof

Dirty trick 37: spin, spin, spin

Dirty trick 38: talk in vague generalities

Dirty trick 39: talk double-talk

Dirty trick 40: tell big lies

Dirty trick 41: treat abstract words and symbols as if they were real things

Dirty trick 42: throw in a red herring (or two)

Dirty trick 43: throw in some statistics

Dirty trick 44: use double standards (whenever you can)