**LOGICAL FALLACIES IN RHETORICAL ANALYSIS**

Logical fallacies are lapses in logic that can reflect negatively upon an author's ethos. While many times certain fallacies can be rhetorically persuasive, the perceptive analyst will recognize these fallacies and point out the weakness in the argument. Logical fallacies may be categorized under four broad headings: fallacies of relevance, fallacies of false premises, semantic fallacies, and fallacies of inference.

**FALLACIES OF RELEVANCE**

Fallacies of relevance occur when the main premise of an argument is irrelevant to the conclusion. When encountering the following fallacies, the analyst should note not only the irrelevance of the premise but also where the strength of the opposing argument lies that leads the perpetrator to commit the fallacy.

<u>Ad Hominen</u>: an argument that attacks an individual's character or behavior rather than the issue at hand. For example, if you argue against gun control because the second amendment entitles US citizens the right to bear arms, and your opponent says that most people who defend the second amendment are ignorant, backwoods fanatics; that is an ad hominen fallacy. Aside from the irrelevance of the personal attack, this example shows that the issue of the second amendment is a threatening premise to the opposition.

<u>Guilt by Association</u>: an argument that attacks an individual or group based on an association with another individual or group. For instance, if you argue that vegetarianism is best for the environment, and your opposition replies that most pot-smoking hippies feel the same way, it is fallacious. The argument wrongly attempts to associate the negative aspects of one group with another. While some pot-smoking hippies are vegetarians, not all vegetarians are pot-smoking hippies.

<u>Red Herring</u>: an argument that contains an irrelevant premise in order to divert attention from what is being argued. For example, if you are debating the fuel efficiency of several different makes of car and your opposition introduces the importance of buying domestic vehicles; that is a red herring. The new premise diverts attention away from the issue of fuel efficiency.

<u>Ad Populum</u>: an argument that appeals to the emotions or prejudices of a particular group, despite being logically unsound. Advertisements employ this when their focus is on conveying the impression that "Everybody is doing it" without showing that "everybody" is a proper authority. Arguments based on popular trend or religious belief may be considered ad populum.

<u>Ad Misericordium</u>: an argument that appeals to pity. For example, arguing that a hectic schedule prevented you from completing an assignment is a fallacy of relevance.

**FALLACIES OF FALSE PREMISES**

These fallacies occur in arguments in which a premise is false or misleading. These fallacies can be extremely subtle. Be careful not to accept the truth of an argument's premises as given.

Non Sequitur: Literally translated to "It does not follow," this fallacy draws conclusions from premises that do not necessarily apply. For example, "Guns should be outlawed. My neighbor has a gun in his house and he is in favor of euthanasia." This would be a non sequitur. The two issues are unrelated enough that a conclusion about gun control cannot be drawn from a premise on euthanasia.

False Dichotomy: Otherwise known as the "either/or fallacy," this is an argument that makes the assumption that there are only two alternatives available when there may be many more. For instance, "Do we want a defense policy that relies on nuclear annihilation, or do we want one that is geared to reduce global tensions?" This is a false dichotomy because other options may exist. Nevertheless, be wary of arguments in which there really are only two alternatives.

Straw Man: an argument that misrepresents the opposition's view by putting it in terms that makes it seem more vulnerable. For example, if someone says, "those people who oppose rapid advances in technology want us to 'go back to the caves,'" it is a straw man fallacy. Someone who opposes rapid advances in technology would not likely claim such a premise.

**SEMANTIC FALLACIES**

Arguments with semantic fallacies involve premises that contain an ambiguous, loaded, or incomplete use of language.

Begging the Question: an argument containing a premise that is really a restatement of the conclusion. If someone is arguing that marijuana should be legalized, and one of the premises is that "naturally growing plants should not be restricted," that premise is begging the question. These fallacies can be extremely subtle.

Poisoning the Well: This highly accepted fallacy occurs when loaded or emotionally laden language is employed to sway audiences. For instance, words like "delinquent," "faction," or "manifesto" carry strong connotations that can be misrepresentative. Of course, sometimes such a word can be accurate. Practically every word carries some kind of emotional attachment with it. It is the responsibility of the analyst to judge when a fallacy is being committed.

Equivocation: an argument in which the conclusion rests on the use of a word or phrase in two different meanings. For instance, "Bosses committing sexual harassment should be fired. Boss X should not be fired, though, because he did nothing sexual, he only made some comments on her physique." This conclusion is a fallacy because the word "sexual" in the premise may mean something more than physically sexual.

**FALLACIES OF INFERENCE**

Fallacies of inference are found in arguments that suggest valid links have been made when the links are actually weak or non-existent.

False Analogy: Arguments often employ analogies, the validity of which must be judged by the analyst. A statement such as, "experimental drugs like the abortion pill should not be distributed to the public; look what happened with Thalidomide" could be a false analogy. The two are different in almost every way except for the inference that they are labeled "experimental."

Hasty Generalization: Arguments can contain conclusions that are based on incomplete evidence or unrepresentative samples. Arguments that employ surveys are at risk of this fallacy. If an argument states, "based on a poll taken at the student union, most students eat on campus," the sample may not be representing the students who do not utilize the student union. Be wary of arguments that contain the words "always" or "never."

Post Hoc, Ergo Procter Hoc: Literally translated as "after this, therefore because of this," this fallacy occurs when an argument assumes causation based on the succession of time. For instance, someone might claim that since President Clinton entered the White House, crime in the United States has tripled, implying causation. When analyzed, however, it may be found that, while the statement is true, the two premises are entirely unrelated.

Ad Ignoratium: an argument that claims something is true (or false) because there is no evidence to prove otherwise. For instance, if someone argues that the crop circles in Great Britain were created by extraterrestrials because "there is no other explanation," that is ad ignoratium. Just because an argument cannot be disproved does not make it logically valid.