

# Dangerous fallacies

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While there are a number of logical fallacies out there, I believe that the following four are the most dangerous ones that people continue to stick with: the appeal to emotion, dogmatism, no true Scotsman, and the strawman.

These come up so often, we may not even realize it, yet it makes it incredibly difficult to convey a message of truth or even discuss a topic rationally with a person of the opposite mindset. Appeal to Emotion- If in your English class, you've heard of pathos and ethos, this is where this fallacy stems from. Instead of presenting a logical argument, a person will pepper their speech with words that appeal to your emotion. The scary thing is while you might think that it wouldn't have much of an effect, it is actually one of the most persuasive ways of debating- and yet, it is a fallacy, because there is no logic, only pretty words. An example is Adolf Hitler, a leader who came into power purely through charisma, not actual proof.

“ As a Christian I have no duty to allow myself to be cheated, but I have the duty to be a fighter for truth and justice,” he said. Now what does that mean, really? Truth and justice signifies fairness, and when the leader of the time gives you a scapegoat and says, ‘ It's fair to punish them. It's justified,’ people just jump on the bandwagon. Was there any evidence of Jews hurting the German economy or public morality and welfare? No, but tell someone that if you oppose this group, you are fighting for truth, honor, patriotism, and freedom, and see who they choose to go against: the person who told them to do it, or the person they were told to go after. But wait, you say. That's Hitler.

He was a monster. No denying that. But look at the speeches of U. S. presidents, revolutionaries, leaders from all over history- even Martin Luther King, Jr.

Although they may have nothing in common with Adolf Hitler, they choose to use this method of arguing because appealing to emotion instead of logic works. Martin Luther King didn't give statistics; he talked of brotherhood and equality. Obama spoke of justice and freedom when he sanctioned the hunt for bin Laden. There isn't necessarily anything wrong with civil rights or going after terrorists, but look at how effectively these leaders convinced people, sometimes without saying a single fact. Dogmatism- Being so utterly unwilling to consider the other side that it's almost impossible to argue with you. I'm sure everyone here has either seen it or experienced it.

People who, despite being bombarded with evidence and statistics, absolutely refuse to see anyone else's point. There's a difference between stubbornness or devotion and dogmatism. I'm stubborn. My family is stubborn. It's probably pretty hard to change our minds.

But that doesn't mean we aren't open, it just means that it takes more to convince us. With dogmatism, it doesn't matter what you present. They're not budging. It's what I see in politics today. Neither side willing to compromise, both sides so set in their ways that ceding a single point to the other is almost considered insane. I look at the candidates this year and see that the only successful candidates are either far left or far right.

There's no compromise anymore. To put this in perspective, imagine an argument between someone saying that smoking is healthy and someone  
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who says it isn't. The person who says it isn't gives irrefutable facts: Around 8.6 million people have at least one serious disease caused by smoking, people who smoke knock 13 to 14 years off of their lives, and tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death (from something). They could give the other person fifty pounds worth of proof that smoking is detrimental to human health, and the person will look at it and say, 'I think smoking's perfectly fine, so I won't consider your argument.' This makes it incredibly hard to, a) prove a point, and, b) communicate and send a message among people with diverse mindsets.

No True Scotsman- Claiming that anyone or anything with negative traits or actions to their name is not truly part of a specific set after having stated a universal claim. I'm sure you've seen this one, too. Ever been in a debate and someone says, 'Well, they're not really this'? It can be anything. I've heard everything from the feminist movement to Christians. 'Well, the crazy women who go and call all men oppressors, they aren't actually feminists!' 'Well, the Christians who approved the Crusades, they weren't Christian! They just twisted the name!' My first question to you, if you do this: who determines who is a true feminist or a true Christian? Why are they the deciding party? Is it because you agree with them, or because they have any actual right to say who is and isn't part of some group? My next question for you: how is it in any way beneficial to claim that someone isn't part of some group? By denying it, all you do is slap a Band-Aid over the problem.

The infection is still there. By saying 'Oh no, they're not like the rest of us', you reject the negative part of things. It won't go away if you claim that they aren't like you. Have you ever heard the phrase about learning history so

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that it doesn't repeat itself? Same thing, really. Accept that every group has someone who will give it a bad name: Christians have the Westboro Baptist Church, the American South has the entire Confederacy, Muslims have the radicals who act as terrorists.

I'm not saying to bring up old history for no reason- not everyone in the South is a racist Confederate. But what I am saying is that by denying a part of something, you falsify your own group. Like it or not, the people who do give you a bad name are still part of that same group. Instead of saying, 'They're not truly [insert group here]', work to fix the issue instead of just rejecting any association with the darker aspects. Strawman- Also terribly difficult to argue with is someone who uses the strawman fallacy.

They twist your words, present a claim that you never made, and attack that instead. Like the appeal to emotion, this is used quite frequently in today's politics. Here is a quote from one of Obama's speeches: " Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity." No politician has said to completely shut off immigration; here, Obama makes it sound as if his opponents do not welcome any immigrants. From the same speech, I found this quote: " No single person can train all the math and science teachers we'll need to equip our children for the future, or build the roads and networks and research labs that will bring new jobs and businesses to our shores." What person suggested that one person could do all that? In this sentence, it's implied that in order to do these things, the government needs to step in.

Regardless of whether or not you agree, Obama has set up a strawman argument to make it sound as if his opponents are limiting education or labor. While a strawman argument can be hard to catch, it's definitely a misleading argument, even if it is a clever way to bolster your own side while pushing down someone else's. Instead of creating something that no one said, refute the actual point they made. Prove that your ideas deserve the merit they get instead of supporting your arguments on a facade. So in conclusion, these logical fallacies are hard to spot.

They're woven into arguments with mastery, slipped in here and there to raise someone's viewpoint up. Regardless of who is using them, fallacies like these are supposed to be detrimental to an argument, because a logical fallacy is like a plot hole: some part of an argument that just doesn't make sense or is invalid because it hasn't been or can't be proven. But they make it so easy to convince someone- just say that to do something is to go against morals or religion, or claim that the person over there isn't really one of you, because of some differing opinion, view, or action, and people will agree with it. Insane as it may sound, these can be astoundingly persuasive, and it's time for people to stop winning over minds with faulty logic.