Appeal to Ignorance, Slippery Slope, Begging the Question

Critical Thinking
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Appeal to Ignorance

This fallacy involves drawing a conclusion on the basis of absence of evidence against that conclusion.

This fallacy reverses the burden of proof.
Appeal to Ignorance
What to watch out for:

• Is this a legitimate case of negative evidence? (For example, when testing a scientific hypothesis or during a court trial?)
• Is a conclusion being drawn that something is or is not the case on the basis of an absence of evidence showing otherwise?
• Has there been a reasonable effort to search for evidence, or is the absence of evidence for or against something really negative evidence arising from the attempts to show otherwise?
• Are the expectations for what should count as evidence reasonable in the context?
Appeal to Ignorance
The easiest examples to recognize:

The absence of evidence disproving the existence of ghosts is proof for the claim that ghosts exist, on the grounds that if they did not, someone would have shown this by now.

“If the tobacco industry truly believed it could commission a study to prove that advertising tobacco products does not affect consumption, it would have done so by now. Thus, advertising tobacco products does affect consumption.”
WHEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
ISSUED A WAIVER, IN 1992, ALLOWING
WISCONSIN TO REDUCE THE ADDITIONAL
BENEFITS IT HAD BEEN GIVING TO
WELFARE MOTHERS FOR HAVING MORE
THAN ONE CHILD, THE GOVERNOR OF
WISCONSIN WAS ASKED IF THERE WAS
ANY EVIDENCE THAT UNWED MOTHERS
WERE HAVING ADDITIONAL CHILDREN
SIMPLY IN ORDER TO GAIN THE ADDED
INCOME. HIS REPLY WAS THIS: “NO,
THERE ISN’T. THERE REALLY ISN’T, BUT
THERE IS NOT EVIDENCE TO THE
CONTRARY, EITHER.”
ON THE SENATE FLOOR IN 1960, JOE MCCARTHY ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAD PENETRATED “TRUMAN’S IRON CURTAIN OF SECRECY.” HE HAD 81 CASE HISTORIES OF PERSONS WHOM HE CONSIDERED TO BE COMMUNISTS IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT. OF CASE 40, HE SAID, “I DO NOT HAVE MUCH INFORMATION ON THIS EXCEPT THE GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE AGENCY THAT THERE IS NOTHING IN THE FILES TO DISPROVE HIS COMMUNIST CONNECTIONS.”
Slippery Slope:

that which predicts a negative causal outcome for a proposed action, perhaps on the basis of an expected causal consequences.

First, when the state sanctions homosexual relationships and gives them its blessing, the younger generation becomes confused about sexual identity and quickly loses its understanding of lifelong commitments, emotional bonding, sexual purity, the role of children in a family, and from a spiritual perspective, the “sanctity” of marriage. Marriage is reduced to something of a partnership that provides attractive benefits and sexual convenience, but cannot offer the intimacy described in Genesis. Cohabitation and short-term relationships are the inevitable result. Ask the Norwegians, the Swedes, and the people from the Netherlands. That is exactly what is happening there.
Slippery Slope

1. Is each of the causal steps plausible?
2. Could one stop and go back, or is the “slope” clearly slippery?
3. Is the alleged outcome really negative?

CHAIN REACTION (NOT LIKELY TO OCCUR)
Who can deny that the body contact between the sexes and the bodily movements associated with dances to modern rock music lead to sexual arousal? In fact, some advocates of dancing stress such to be an outlet for sexual urges. The whole range of the modern dance is designed to express or convey a message, namely, “love-making” and is calculated to be sexually stimulating.

It is understood, of course, that the sex urge is God-given and is not sinful per se. Yet, God-given desires must have God-appointed boundaries; the righteous fulfillment of the sex urge is limited to the marriage relationship (I Corinthians 7:1-9). To engage in any activity which produces lewd emotions or excites unlawful sexual desire is “lasciviousness” and stands condemned by God (Galatians 5:19-21).
Let none be deceived; the basic appeal of the modern dance, as admitted even by its proponents, has its foundation in human passion. Obviously, not every person who engages in dancing ends up a prostitute or a fornicator, yet many who have come to immoral ends began their journey by way of the dance.

Let none be deceived, the fruit of the modern dance has never increased purity and spirituality, but the destruction of all that relates to human happiness and eternal salvation.

http://www.bible.ca/s-dancing/htm
Immediate steps should be taken to outlaw pornography once and for all. The continued manufacture and sale of pornographic material will almost certainly lead to an increase in sex-related crimes such as rape and incest. This will in turn erode the moral fabric of society and result in an increase in crimes of all sorts.

Attempts to outlaw pornography threaten basic civil rights and should be summarily abandoned. If pornography is outlawed, censorship of newspapers and news magazines is only a short step away. After that there will be censorship of textbooks, political speeches, and the content of lectures delivered by university professors.

BOTH OF THESE ARE SLIPPERY SLOPES
Begging the Question:
when a speaker assumes in the premises the very thing she is asserting in the conclusion. Since the same statement cannot be used to prove itself, the argument is circular.

Note: complex questions will often be in question form, but usually when we beg the question, no grammatical question is actually asked.

Note: you can be guilty of begging the question in a perfectly valid argument. All truly circular arguments are valid. For example:

Premise: All men are mortal.
Conclusion: Therefore, all men are mortal.

But, we only use “begging the question” to refer to those arguments that try to hide a missing premise, or disguise the conclusion as a new piece of information.
Begging the question?

Premise: People have a right to smoke in public places.
Conclusion: Therefore, I am perfectly entitled to smoke in public places if I wish to do so.

Premise 1: The Bible is the word of God.
Premise 2: God speaks the truth.
Premise 3: According to the Bible, God created human beings and the earth itself.
Conclusion: Therefore, God exists.

To allow every man unbounded freedom of speech must always be, on the whole, advantageous to the state; for it is highly conducive to the interests of the community that each individual should enjoy a liberty, perfectly unlimited, of expressing his sentiments.

Why conclude that the laws of nature will operate in the future in the same way as they have in the past? Because, in the past, the laws of nature have always operated in a uniform manner.
Begging the question?

In a motion picture featuring the famous French comedian Sacha Guitry, some thieves are arguing over the division of seven pearls worth a king’s ransom. One of them hands two to the man on his right, then two to the man on his left. “I,” he says, “will keep three.” The man on his right says, “How come you keep three?” “Because I am the leader.” “Oh, But how come you are the leader?” “Because I have more pearls.”

A heavier-than-air craft could never fly because in order to lift up and travel over distance a machine would have to be lighter than the environs surrounding it.

God is the only perfect being and perfection includes all the virtues. So, we know that God is benevolent.

Murder is morally wrong. This being the case, it follows that abortion is morally wrong.

I just can’t face the prospect of living my life without the possibility of a heavenly reward. Therefore, I know a heavenly reward awaits me at death.
Begging the question?

Capital punishment is justified for the crimes of murder and kidnapping because it is quite legitimate and appropriate that someone be put to death for having committed such hateful and inhuman acts.

Ford Motor Company clearly produces the finest cars in the United States. We know they produce the finest cars because they have the best design engineers. This is true because they can afford to pay them more than other manufacturers. Obviously they can afford to pay them more because they produce the finest cars in the United States.
A contradiction to my theory of dream produced by another of my women patients (the cleverest of all my dreamers) was resolved more simply, but upon the same pattern: namely that the nonfulfillment of one wish meant the fulfillment of another. One day I had been explaining to her that dreams are fulfillments of wishes. Next day she brought me a dream in which she was traveling down with her mother-in-law to the place in the country where they were to spend their holidays together. Now I knew that she had violently rebelled against the idea of spending the summer near her mother-in-law and that a few days earlier she had successfully avoided the propinquity she dreaded by engaging rooms in a far distant resort. And now her dream had undone the solution she had wished for; was not this the sharpest contradiction of my theory that in dreams wishes are fulfilled? No doubt; and it was only necessary to follow the dream's logical consequence in order to arrive at its interpretation. The dream showed that I was wrong. *Thus it was her wish that I might be wrong, and her dream showed that wish fulfilled* (italics original)

1. The decision as to what courses should be required of all university students should be left to the faculty senate. If students are given a voice in this matter it won’t be long before the students dictate who should be hired and fired. In no time they’ll take over the administrative functions as well, and the university will collapse.

2. The use of contraceptives is immoral because anything that violates nature is immoral.

3. The secretaries have asked us to provide lounge areas where they can spend their coffee breaks. This request will have to be refused. If we give them lounge areas, next they’ll be asking for spas and swimming pools. Then it will be racquetball courts, tennis courts, and fitness centers. Expenditures for these facilities will drive us into bankruptcy.

4. Probably no life exists on Venus. Teams of scientists have conducted exhaustive studies of the planet’s surface and atmosphere, and no living organism has been found.

5. We don’t dare let the animal rights activists get their foot in the door. If they sell us on the idea that dogs, cats, and dolphins have rights, next it will be chickens and cows. That means no more chicken or prime rib. Next it will be worms and insects. This will lead to the decimation of our agricultural industry. The starvation of the human race will follow close behind.

6. It’s obvious that the poor in this country should be given handouts from the government. After all, these people earn less than the average citizen.
1. In his History of the American Civil War, Jeffry Noland argues that the war had little to do with slavery. However, as a historian from Alabama, Noland could not possibly present an accurate account.

2. Televangelist Jerry Falwell said that God’s anger with feminism led to the destruction of the World Trade Center. Given Falwell’s closeness to God, we have no alternative than to blame the feminists for this atrocity.

3. No one has ever proved that the human fetus is not a person with rights. Therefore, abortion is morally wrong.

4. This administration is not anti-German, as it has been alleged. Germany is a great country. It has contributed immensely to the world’s artistic treasure. Goethe and Schiller made magnificent contributions to literature, and Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms did the same in music.

5. Duane Richards, CEO of the Western Fuels Association, an organization that supplies coal to electric utilities, says that there is no evidence that burning fossil fuels causes global warming. In view of Mr. Richards’s wealth of expertise in the area of fossil fuels, we must conclude that what he says about global warming is true.

6. We’re all familiar with the complaint that over 40 million Americans are without health insurance. But America’s doctors, nurses, and hospitals are among the best in the world. Thousands of people come from abroad every year to be treated here. Clearly there is nothing wrong with our health care system.