

Big fat fallacies

In this chapter we're going to be looking at bad arguments: what's wrong with them; how not to use them; how to attack your opponents if they use them.

Debating is about making arguments, but it is also, equally and just as importantly, about critiquing arguments.

'Critiquing' something is not the same as to criticising it; it means analysing it, seeing what works and what doesn't. You need to learn how to critique your opponents' arguments, but you also need to learn how to critique your own arguments, testing them out, finding what are the strong points and what are the weak points.

A very helpful way of critiquing arguments is to be able to detect logical fallacies. A logical fallacy is an argument that looks as if it makes sense, but in fact does not. Once you know about logical fallacies, you start detecting them everywhere. Then you can make sure you don't use them yourself, and attack your opponents when they do.

In this chapter, we're going to be learning:

- What some of the most common logical fallacies are.
- What's wrong with them.
- How to respond if your opponent uses them.

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Simple assertion

There are some situations in life - choosing your lunch, deciding what to wear to a party, getting married - when it is better not to go into all the reasons. Doing so can waste a lot of time, and even end up pushing you into the wrong decision.

Debating, however, is not one of those situations.

You must have a reason for everything you say. Always. **Always, always, always.**

This is where our first logical fallacy comes in: **unsupported assertion.**

What is 'unsupported assertion'?

It's when you say something is true without saying why it is true.

Supposing you say in a debate, 'Obviously co-educational schools are a better preparation for life,' and leave it at that. You don't explain how or why. You don't consider the arguments against them being a good preparation for life. You don't show why those arguments are less strong than yours.

What you just did was **unsupported assertion**. You have not proved that what you said is true. And proving that what you say is true is what debating is all about. Assertion is only the starting point; everything depends on the proof. Unsupported assertion is like writing the title of an essay, but not writing the essay; it's like

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