

are bad things, but then remind your opponent that they are not what the debate is about.

To sum up:

- Only introduce issues that are relevant to the motion
- If your opponent introduces irrelevant issues, don't engage with those issues; simply point out that they are not relevant to the debate in hand, and then return to the central issues of the debate in hand.

7 Equating correlation to causation

These are long words, and you may not know what they mean (or maybe you do).

In case you don't:

- **Correlation** means one thing following another.
- **Causation** means one thing causing another.
- **Equating** means assuming two things are the same.

Another, perhaps easier, way of expressing this logical fallacy is as follows:

The fact that A is followed by, or happens at the same time as, B does not prove that B is caused by A.

In your last Maths test you got 90%, your best ever result. You also wore red socks that day. You've got another Maths test tomorrow. How should you ensure you get 90% again? Obvious! Forget revision - just wear red socks!

Of course, most people aren't that stupid. But you do see variations on this logical fallacy used in debates.

For example, in a debate on the motion 'This house would ban violent computer games', the proposition argue:

'Violent computer games have never been more popular. At the same time, levels of knife crime amongst young people have never been higher. We need to ban these games now to keep our children safe!'

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Knife crime is indisputably a bad thing. Its growth may be happening at the same time as a growth in downloads of violent computer games. But that doesn't, in itself, prove that violent computer games cause knife crime. To do that, you would have to find specific examples of acts of violence that were directly inspired by computer games.

So what should you say to rebut this? You can start by pointing out the logical fallacy:

'Horrific though knife crime is, you have not provided any evidence that it is connected with the use of violent computer games.'

Or, you can turn the connection between the two factors round so that the correlation works in your favour:

'Millions of young people play violent computer games every day, and only a tiny minority engage in acts of violence; this is surely compelling evidence that playing these games is harmless.'

To sum up:

- One thing being followed by, or happening at the same time as, another thing does not mean that the second thing is caused by the first.
- If your opponent tries to use this argument, expose the lack of connection between the two factors.

8 Excessive demand

'I had my first ever German lesson today.'

'What's the teacher like?'

'Completely useless! I just watched a German film without subtitles and I couldn't understand a word of what anyone was saying!'

That's a bit harsh, isn't it? However keen you might be to learn the language, even the most brilliant German teacher ever might need a little more time than an hour to get you fluent. But you still see this unfair tactic being used in debating, often in rebuttal.

Let's take an example.

The motion is: 'This house would ban single use plastic.' A speaker for the opposition makes this point of information:

'We need to reduce our carbon emissions to zero by 2025 to

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thing
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first