

11 Misidentified solution

This is the sister, as it were, of the misidentified problem. It supports the action of the motion by attributing to it benefits which are either irrelevant or trivial, when the speaker should be focusing on the essential, substantial benefits. It's a bad argument that can only really be made by the proposition.

So, for example, speaking in favour of the motion: 'This house would make voting in General Elections compulsory':

'If voting was compulsory, there would be more votes to count, and more people would be needed to count them. This would provide extra income to the counters, which would boost the economy.'

What's wrong with this? It misses the essential, substantial point of the motion, which is about the benefits to the democratic process of making voting compulsory. As well as being irrelevant to the development of democracy, the benefits of the extra employment for counters would be trivial; elections usually only take place once every five years, and counting only takes place over one night, so the income generated would be very small.

How should you respond to the misidentified solution if you are the opposition?

One thing you should not do is mirror the misidentified solution with a misidentified problem of your own. In the compulsory voting example, that would mean complaining about the cost to the taxpayer of printing extra ballot papers / hiring extra counters. This would trap you in the same error of irrelevance and triviality.

Instead, point out how the solution the proposition have given is irrelevant and / or trivial. Do this briefly and briskly, though. As soon as possible, steer the debate back to the essential solution implied in the motion, and show how it is flawed. If you spend too long attacking weak arguments, you will not show your own strength; but if you are unafraid to attack your opponent at their strongest point, you will be able to demonstrate the strength of your own arguments to the judges.

So, you might say:

'The benefit of extra employment for vote counters would be extremely small, as that employment would only be available on

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