

A Check List on Fallacies of Reasoning to be Avoided by Scholarly, Rational Persons

(Prepared by Dr. John N. Moore*)

1. **Poisoning the Wells Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone tries to discredit a source of evidence before even considering the evidence.
2. **Reductive Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone tries to "reduce" something complex to something very simple by saying, "This is nothing but...", and then concentrates on a limited aspect of the total phenomenon.
3. **Misuse of Authority Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone tries to use an expert to prove something unrelated to the expert's field of competence, or cites an expert on an issue and then assumes that the expert's judgment is infallible.
4. **Argumentum ad Populum Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone plays up to popular feelings, or tells listeners what they want to hear. (Also called *Misuse of Democracy Fallacy*).
5. **Misuse of Emotional Terms Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone uses words that are designed to cloud the issue emotionally, and not designed to contribute to clear thought.
6. **Chronological Snobbery Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone tries to refute something merely by dating it, usually dating it as very old. (This could be labelled, *Argumentum ab Annis*, or argument because of age.)
7. **Special Pleading Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone dramatizes the material that favors the position held, and ignores or belittles the material that weighs against that position.
8. **Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone reasons that something is the cause of something else merely because the former is earlier in time.
9. **Asserting the Consequent Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone affirms one cause for a known condition yet there may be many different causes. (When scientists seek to confirm a theory they must assert the consequent--I.e. some result--but they generally keep on searching for a cause [causes]; keep on experimenting for the only possible cause.)
10. **Argumentum ad Ignorantiam Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone reasons that since one position cannot be proved then the other position wins by default yet there may be more than two possible explanations and no independent evidence is available.
11. **Genetic Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone claims that something is "merely" or "nothing but" its genesis (its origin), or when someone demeans something because of humble or inauspicious beginnings.
12. **Misuse of Analogy Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone assumes--without any transition of explanation--that the same laws pertaining to one situation are equally true in application to any similar situation, as when the descriptive nature of scientific laws (natural laws) is confused with the prescriptive nature of societal laws (laws of society).
13. **Argumentum ad Baculum Fallacy:** This logical error is committed when someone substitute force or the threat of force for reason and argument (bullets instead of ballots, power rather than persuasion, voting instead of experimenting).

Identify which one of the previously stated fallacies of reasoning is committed by evolutionists when they:

1. stress that creationism is religion.
2. select only those elements of experience that can be weighed, measured, or numbered as the only reality.
3. claim that all competent, rational scientists accept evolution.
4. urge acceptance of evolution because so many people believe evolution.
5. use the terms "fundamentalist" or "anti-intellectual."
6. use the terms "pre-scientific", "nineteenth century" or "modern" " new" or "latest".
7. dramatize similarities (of skeletons, appendages, embryos, proteins, or blood) as bases for identifying relationships of organisms.
8. argue by circular reasoning to date rocks by fossils included and fossils by rocks in which they are found.
9. assert that life is here, and therefore spontaneous generation has occurred.
10. assert that special creation cannot be tested, and therefore evolution is the only scientific explanation.
11. apply uncritically the principle of natural selection to the problems of society by trying to explain the psycho-social by way of biological mechanisms.
12. assume struggle between animals is true for human communities.
13. teach evolution exclusively even though the problem of first origins is still an open question.

(thorough discussion of this topic is available in *Fallacies of Evolution* by Arlie J. Hoover, Ph.D., 1977. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids. \$2.50.

—An authoritative refutation of the arguments for teaching only evolution in the public schools.)

* John N. Moore, M.S., Ed.D., is professor of natural science, Department of Natural Science, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824.