**1. Hasty generalization**

- Making assumptions about a whole group or range of cases based on a sample that is inadequate (usually because it is atypical or too small). Stereotypes about people (“librarians are shy and smart,” “wealthy people are snobs,” etc.) are a common example of the principle underlying hasty generalization.

Example:

 “My roommate said her philosophy class was hard, and the one I’m in is hard, too. All philosophy classes must be hard!” Two people’s experiences are, in this case, not enough on which to base a conclusion.

**2. Missing the point**

- The premises of an argument do support a particular conclusion— but not the conclusion that the arguer actually draws. Example:

 “The seriousness of a punishment should match the seriousness of the crime. Right now, the punishment for drunk driving may simply be a fine. But drunk driving is a very serious crime that can kill innocent people. So the death penalty should be the punishment for drunk driving.” The argument actually supports several conclusions—”The punishment for drunk driving should be very serious,” in particular—but it doesn’t support the claim that the death penalty, specifically, is warranted.

**3. Post hoc (also called false cause**)

- This fallacy gets its name from the Latin phrase “post hoc, ergo propter hoc,” which translates as “after this, therefore because of this.”

- Assuming that because B comes after A, A caused B. Of course, sometimes one event really does cause another one that comes later—for example, if I register for a class, and my name later appears on the roll, it’s true that the first event caused the one that came later. But sometimes two events that seem related in time aren’t really related as cause and event. That is, correlation isn’t the same thing as causation.

Examples:

 “President Jones raised taxes, and then the rate of violent crime went up. Jones is responsible for the rise in crime.” The increase in taxes might or might not be one factor in the rising crime rates, but the argument hasn’t shown us that one caused the other.

**4. Slippery slope**

**-** The arguer claims that a sort of chain reaction, usually ending in some dire consequence, will take place, but there’s really not enough evidence for that assumption. The arguer asserts that if we take even one step onto the “slippery slope,” we will end up sliding all the way to the bottom; he or she assumes we can’t stop partway down the hill.

Example:

 “Animal experimentation reduces our respect for life. If we don’t respect life, we are likely to be more and more tolerant of violent acts like war and murder. Soon our society will become a battlefield in which everyone constantly fears for their lives. It will be the end of civilization. To prevent this terrible consequence, we should make animal experimentation illegal right now.” Since animal experimentation has been legal for some time and civilization has not yet ended, it seems particularly clear that this chain of events won’t necessarily take place. Even if we believe that experimenting on animals reduces respect for life, and loss of respect for life makes us more tolerant of violence, that may be the spot on the hillside at which things stop—we may not slide all the way down to the end of civilization. And so we have not yet been given sufficient reason to accept the arguer’s conclusion that we must make animal experimentation illegal right now.

Like post hoc, slippery slope can be a tricky fallacy to identify, since sometimes a chain of events really can be predicted to follow from a certain action. Here’s an example that doesn’t seem fallacious: “If I fail English 101, I won’t be able to graduate. If I don’t graduate, I probably won’t be able to get a good job, and I may very well end up doing temp work or flipping burgers for the next year.”

**5. Weak analogy**

**-** Many arguments rely on an analogy between two or more objects, ideas, or situations. If the two things that are being compared aren’t really alike in the relevant respects, the analogy is a weak one, and the argument that relies on it commits the fallacy of weak analogy.

Example:

 “Guns are like hammers—they’re both tools with metal parts that could be used to kill someone. And yet it would be ridiculous to restrict the purchase of hammers—so restrictions on purchasing guns are equally ridiculous.” While guns and hammers do share certain features, these features (having metal parts, being tools, and being potentially useful for violence) are not the ones at stake in deciding whether to restrict guns. Rather, we restrict guns because they can easily be used to kill large numbers of people at a distance. This is a feature hammers do not share—it would be hard to kill a crowd with a hammer. Thus, the analogy is weak, and so is the argument based on it.

If you think about it, you can make an analogy of some kind between almost any two things in the world: “My paper is like a mud puddle because they both get bigger when it rains (I work more when I’m stuck inside) and they’re both kind of murky.” So the mere fact that you can draw an analogy between two things doesn’t prove much, by itself.

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