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Equivocation

(also known as: doublespeak)

Description: Using an ambiguous term in more than one sense, thus making an argument misleading.

Example #1:

I want to have myself a merry little Christmas, but I refuse to do as the song suggests and make the yuletide gay. I don't think sexual preference should have anything to do with enjoying the holiday.

Explanation: The word, "gay" is meant to be in light spirits, joyful, and merry, not in the homosexual sense.

Example #2:

The priest told me I should have faith. I have faith that my son will do well in school this year. Therefore, the priest should be happy with me.

Explanation: The term "faith" used by the priest, was in the religious sense of believing in God without sufficient evidence, which is different from having "faith" in your son in which years of good past performance leads to the "faith" you might have in your son.

Exception: Equivocation works great when deliberate attempts at humor are being made.

Tip: When you suspect equivocation, substitute the word with the same definition for all uses and see if it makes sense.

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References:

Parry, W. T., & Hacker, E. A. (n.d.). *Aristotelian Logic*. SUNY Press.

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Mike
hanigan

Tuesday, October 03, 2017 - 03:16:13 AM

In your second example you said "without sufficient evidence." What's the criteria to judge evidence as sufficient or not in this case?

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4 replies

1 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Tuesday, October 03, 2017 - 10:22:26 AM

That doesn't matter. What does matter is that the level of evidence is significantly different in the two cases. Another example: "I have faith that when I martyr myself I will get 72 virgins in paradise. You have faith that your chair won't collapse when you sit in it. See, we both have faith, therefore, both propositions are equally reasonable."

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2 votes



Mike
hanigan

Monday, October 16, 2017 - 06:37:46 PM

@Bo Bennett, PhD: ironically enough you've actually fell into another logical fallacy by offering that example which is known as a faulty comparison. The priest having faith in god because of the countless miracles he sees around him can actually show greater empirical evidence than a student that has a few

years of good grades. Also, we don't sit on a chair and have faith that it will not collapse, we know it will not collapse because that's part of the physical reality; the problem is you're conflating the physical with the metaphysical. For example (I am going to use your trick here) "I have faith that last night I dreamt about an elephant. You have faith that you're currently imagining my face while reading this comment" no empirical evidence can prove either fact, but they cannot be dismissed as "without sufficient evidence." Thank you.

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0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Monday, October 16, 2017 - 06:48:56 PM

@Mike hanigan: Mike, you just confirmed what I have been saying; you just said it another way. One use of faith is metaphysical and the other is physical. These are two very different uses of the word "faith," thus equivocation. You seem to want to debate that your kind of faith is all about empirical evidence. I am sure you can find plenty of debate sites for that.

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1 votes



Christopher
Owens

Thursday, August 09, 2018 - 07:44:08 PM

@Mike hanigan: I'm Quite Certain the Mentioning, in more than once or twice, In retort to and along with the Authors' comments/posts regarding his original "Answer given". The Redundancy and Homestly Childish Manor in the continued `Corrections about the examples used and their context - Just became Annoying, Seemingly Pointless after a multitude of Criticism (none of which seems led constructive, yet desctructive and disruptive much more than helpful to any of us! The Author, in attempts to educate people further and offer aid, grammatical assistance and more, seemed as if he was merely a dart board in which, I'll let your mind wonder around about, The context therein, I found helpful to say the least and for that I am grateful- The arguments and silly back and forth about technicalities, which are Important, in this case just seemed like a d1€* measuring contest - Not on his part. I do apologize if I mistook anything in that OR perhaps you guys/gals all know one another and we're mucking about, but if not, that would be the absolute fastest way to drive people away from a site. I felt the need to make a statement, not to be Crude, disruptive or demeaning toward anyone and I truly hope that the maturity level here takes it as just that - Constructive Criticism not something else! Thank you all for your time! I do enjoy this site and the information herein if comments are made about my thoughts, which I imagine there will be, I look forward to discussions, after all that is the idea of open forums.
Cheers

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0 votes



Joe Walker

Explanation for example #2 is a fallacy in itself. *Saturday, January 21, 2017 - 02:04:50 PM*
The priest is not using the term to mean blind faith or leap of faith as you suggest. The term faith means hope, that is to say - the priest, is is telling the woman to have faith, hope and joy in Jesus the Christ, that we may know that He made the way for Christians to be forgiven. In the Greek language, one word can have several different meanings like the word love, love could be, the love of God, love for a child, love for a spouse, etc... so you must have the proper context to understand what the word is implying such as is the case for the word faith.

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2 replies

0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Saturday, January 21, 2017 - 02:55:36 PM
Exactly. That is why I used it as an example of this fallacy.

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2 votes



Anthony

Friday, April 27, 2018 - 11:50:42 PM
You're nitpicking. The point being made as for that particular example is that the way the word 'faith' was being used by the priest is different from the way it was used by the person the priest talked to.

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0 votes



Krista
Neckles

Hello Sir,

Saturday, March 17, 2018 - 11:46:13 AM

I notice that in one of Lady Gaga's famous songs, "Bad Romance", there are the lyrics "You and me could write a bad romance" as in writing a book that fits into the romance genre, and "oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh caught in a bad romance" as in caught in a bad relationship. Would the shift in meaning of the word romance be an example of equivocation?

On another more serious note, what songs have you listened to that do not contain many logical fallacies? I know that it may be impossible to encounter a song without one.

Thank you Sir.

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2 replies

0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Sunday, March 18, 2018 - 03:40:44 PM
Logical fallacies are errors in reasoning. When used in songs, these are often just poetic. Fallacies are about bad reasoning, and rarely are serious arguments being made in songs. If people use song lyrics in arguments, that's another story.

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0 votes



Krista
Neckles

Sunday, March 18, 2018 - 06:29:47 PM

@Bo Bennett, PhD: Thank you
for your reply.

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0 votes



Matthew
Nichols

Friday, January 19, 2018 - 09:49:30 PM

A: No Cat has 8 tails.
B: A Cat has one more tail than No Cat.
∴ A Cat has nine tails.

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0 replies

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