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A HANDBOOK OF LOGICAL FALLACIES

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AD FIDENTIA (Against Self-Confidence)

If you cannot directly refute someone's principles, you strike indirectly with an attack on their confidence in those principles. Question their certainty of the principles' validity:

"How can you be sure you're right?"

AMBIGUOUS COLLECTIVE

The use of a collective term without any meaningful delimitation of the elements it subsumes. "We" "you" "they" and "the people" are the most widely used examples. This fallacy is especially devastating in the realm of political discussion, where its use renders impossible the task of discriminating among distinctly different groups of people. I

often challenge those who commit this fallacy to eliminate from their discussion vocabulary all general collective terms, and each time they want to use such a term to use instead a precisely delimiting description of the group the term is intended to subsume.

An antecedentless pronoun is an example in the singular of the Ambiguous Collective fallacy.

Here are two examples of the Ambiguous Collective fallacy:

"Last November, 77% of us voted in favor of term limits."

In this statement, who exactly are the "us"? The speaker wants to convey the idea that term limits are very widely supported, but if in fact the 77% refers only to those who voted, that subgroup may well be a quite small percentage of the total population.

"We need to train doctors to teach us how to get and stay healthy."

In this statement, who are the "we" and who are the "us"? Is the speaker trying to promote socialized medicine by advocating government control of the medical schools? When he says "we need to" does he really mean "the government should"? And is the "us" merely a subtle way of saying "me"?

ARGUMENTUM AD POPULUM (bandwagon fallacy)

"All societies require military service. We are a society. Therefore we should require military service."

ARGUMENTUM AD VERECUNDIAM

The appeal to authority. Whose authority? If an issue is to be resolved by such an appeal, the authority must be one recognized by both parties. A justice system which does not recognize the rights of the individual will not provide a satisfactory solution. The only way to make this a viable resolution is if both parties can agree on a completely neutral, objective authority to decide the issue. Where does one exist? Only in the facts of reality.

ARGUMENT FROM INTIMIDATION (The Virtue of Selfishness, chapter 19)

"Only the most degenerate, morally depraved, cretinous imbecile could fail to see the truth of my argument."

ASSUMPTION CORRECTION ASSUMPTION

He assumes (implicitly) that I will correct his mistaken assumptions.

BAREFOOT

"If government didn't exercise control over the manufacture, distribution, price and sale of shoes we would all go barefoot!" If

"shoes" doesn't suit you, just substitute "police" or "fire protection" or "mail delivery" or anything else the government claims to provide.

Nothing the government claims to provide cannot be provided in a more humane, just, and economical manner by free associations of individual people.

ELEPHANT

"Hey, mister, you better buy a bottle of my Elephant Repellent. If you don't buy it, the elephants will come into the neighborhood and trample you! My proof that this stuff really works is that there are no elephants around here." for "Elephant Repellent" substitute the word "Government" and for "elephants" substitute the word "crime" or "Russians" or "poverty" or "chaos" or anything else the government claims to prevent.

Nothing the government claims to prevent cannot be prevented in a more humane, just, and economical manner by free associations of individual people.

BARKING CAT (From "Free To Choose" by Milton Friedman)

What would you think of someone who said, "I would like to have a cat provided it barked"? Yet your statement that you favor a government provided it behaves as you believe desirable is precisely equivalent. The biological laws that specify the characteristics of cats are no more rigid than the political laws that specify the behavior of government agencies once they are established. The way the government behaves and the adverse consequences are not an accident, not a result of some easily corrected human mistake, but a consequence of its constitution in precisely the same way that a meow is related to the constitution of a cat.

BEGGING THE QUESTION

A question that implies and/or uses its answer. "Why should you be good to people?" (He expects me to be good to him by answering his question.)

BOOLEAN SYNDROME

Choosing to view a continuum as represented by only its extremities. It consists in dividing a range of options exhaustively into the two extremes and then insisting that a choice be made between one or the other extreme, without regard to any of the intervening alternatives.

FANTASY PROJECTION - CONTEXT IMPOSITION

An attempt to impose his own intellectual or moral context on another person by someone who has closed his mind to reality and manufactured his own fantasy, then expects others to share it and help him sustain it. He ignores the objective realities of the situation, concentrating

instead on subjective perceptions that are false.

"If you were terminally ill, you too would advocate life preservation."
"There are no atheists in foxholes." By naming her opinion in advance he would make her unable to alter it.

Imposition of the Slave Mentality: "Aren't you thankful that they allow this?" (I am expected to limit myself to the context of "their" allowables.) The proper answer is, "No, I am resentful that they forbid other freedoms I should possess."

They have a six-inch knife and have stuck it four inches into me. Should I be thankful they have not shoved it in the final two inches? Or resentful that they have shoved it in four inches? (I am expected to accept their behavioral context and to judge my situation from within that context.)

I-CUBED

You assume that your adversary is Ignorant, Incompetent, and/or Inexperienced and then impose this context on the discussion. I almost always encounter this from astrologers, who admonish me to "examine this before you reject it!" They always assume I have not done so.

PIGEONHOLING

An attempt to subsume something into a frame-of-reference that is too small to incorporate the thing.

You call me a name so you don't have to see me - you just see the name that you call me.

DISCARDED DIFFERENTIA

Define by using the Genus only.

DONUT

A form of false dichotomy. Insists that all donuts be divided into two piles: large donuts and sugar donuts.

ECLECTIC FALLACY

Eclecticism consists of selecting the good parts from a set of ideas and discarding the bad parts. But this process implies that you already know how to do the selecting, and have a standard of judgment to use for evaluating the ideas.

If you in fact do, then there is no problem and eclecticism is a valid intellectual process. But if you approach a set of ideas in a state of ignorance then you are not intellectually equipped to pick and choose from among them. You could not know whether what you accepted is true or false.

Herein lies the danger of eclecticism - if you are going to pick and choose you must already have enough knowledge to do the selecting.

SPURIOUS SUPERFICIALITY

When a disputant allows himself to be sidetracked by irrelevancies, ignoring his opponent's logic and evidence. He cannot grasp the whole of the issue - or the principle underlying it - so he focuses on some small part (usually just one word) and directs his rebuttal to an attack on that tiny bit which is all he can perceive. "What do you mean by -----?" Where ----- is any word included in your presentation, usually a quite ordinary word which your opponent uses without any difficulty in other contexts. He views things through his specialized eyes, extracts a part of the truth and refuses to see more, sometimes quoting your least significant statements, in order to make it appear that you have said nothing better.

Some Ad Hominem arguments probably have the same source: He can't see your ideas so he directs his rebuttal at your person. Or will simply start talking about something he CAN understand - the result being a jarring change-of-subject in the discussion.

He seizes upon one instance and constructs a generalization from it: Observing that I don't like clams, he concludes that I have an aversion to sea food in general. She sees something happen once or twice and concludes that it is a regularly-occurring phenomenon.

These responses are not consciously deliberated, but result from his inability to perceive the focal idea of the discussion. His only alternative to one of these responses would be bovine immobility - unless he possessed a sufficient degree of intellectual acumen to realize his lack of comprehension, and a sufficient degree of self-esteem to admit to it.

HOMILY AD HOMINEM

Appealing to a person's feelings or prejudices, rather than his intellect, with a trite phrase designed to reinforce a subjective rather than objective view of a situation. If the homily is not accepted in answer to the situation, the next thing that will be done is to attack the person's character rather than answer his argument.

EMPHATIC FALLACY

To emphasize one element of a set at the expense of other equally significant elements. Or to place emphasis on a spurious aspect of a situation. You see this when people react violently to comparatively minor troubles but are seemingly unshaken by really serious ones. It is a sort of being at a loss for a proportionate emotional reaction - a shivering at shadows.

MEGATRIFLE

Take a small, inconsequential effect and magnify it to become all-encompassing in its supposed influence. These are people whose fear of the snake in the grass is so great that they are unable to see the bear that is about to eat them.

COMPLEXITY-SIMPLISTIC FALLACY

If someone comes up against a large bundle of particular facts, but has no general principles with which to integrate those particulars, and is not in the habit of thinking in principles, the multiplicity of facts will appear so complex to him that he will not be able to deal with the situation analytically. You will hear him say:

"This is too complex a situation to yield any easy solution!"

"Unfortunately, no easy answers exist. The solution to the problem will turn out to be as complex as the problem itself."

"That's a simplistic view of a complex situation."

For him it is indeed too complex - he has no way to sort the facts, to identify their distinguishing characteristics, and to grasp the fundamentals underlying them. Without integrating principles he just cannot cope. His solution will be an Ad Hoc solution that will fail to address more than a few of the particulars. He will manifest a Descriptive (rather than Analytical) intellectuality. (The descriptive person believes that his description IS an analysis.) He does not think in principles, but focuses his attention on the presentation of specific phenomena only.

Complexity does not make something unintelligible, any more than the complexity of the symptoms of a disease make the cause of those symptoms unintelligible. What makes the phenomenon unintelligible is the attempt to analyze it without reference to fundamental principle - to a unifying cause.

Abstraction offers a method for thinking about complicated issues in a precise way.

By resorting to particularizing rather than generalizing, pragmatists are left floundering in a mire of complexity. The contention that principles are simplistic is a spurious one; it is only by means of principles that man is able to retain and make use of the vast storehouse of knowledge relevant to any given issue. Concretes by themselves are meaningless, and cannot even be retained for long; abstractions by themselves are vague or empty. But concretes illuminated by an abstraction acquire meaning, and thereby permanence

in our minds; and abstractions illustrated by concretes acquire specificity, reality, the power to convince.

FLOATING ABSTRACTION

(Barbara Branden's lectures, Principles of Efficient Thinking - lecture #4) a generalization subsuming no particulars.

GOVERNMENT ABSOLUTIST

This consists of making comparative judgments (usually of people's behavior) that are based not on any moral or ethical principle but are made by reference to a government (invariably one's own government). The consequence is to make a spurious distinction between two people (or groups) who in fact manifest identical behavior.

Tom Clancy: "Terrorists don't relate to the people around them as being real people. They see them as objects, and since they're only objects, whatever happens to them is not important. Once I met a man who killed four people and didn't bat an eye; but he cried like a baby when we told him his cat died. People like that don't even understand why they get sent to prison; they really don't understand. Those are the scary ones."

What Clancy cannot see is that any policeman or any soldier of any country manifests exactly the same behavior that Clancy has condemned as terrorism.

William Buckley: "The Cold War is a part of the human condition for so long as you have two social phenomena which we can pretty safely denominate as constants. The first is a society that accepts what it sees as the historical mandate to dominate other societies - at least as persistently as microbes seek out human organisms to infect. And the second phenomenon, of course, is the coexistence of a society that is determined NOT to be dominated or have its friends dominated."

Buckley does not realize that a Soviet analyst would make precisely the same identification that Buckley has made, but with the roles reversed.

GRATUITOUS INCULPATION SPURIOUS CAUSATION

"The consumer will have to pay the bill for the oil spill."

"Scientists are responsible for the danger of nuclear war."

"The advance of modern medicine underlies the present population explosion."

"Henry Ford is responsible for air pollution."

"Taxpayers are forced to finance policies that many of them would

oppose."

The taxpayer does not do the financing - the government does. The statement implies that the taxpayer is performing some positive action, when in fact he is the passive victim.

These seem to be variants of the POST HOC fallacy. The selected element is contributory but is certainly not a sufficient cause. An attempt is being made to transfer blame onto someone who is only marginally (or not at all) responsible.

EXCLUSIVITY FALLACY

Trying to make an idea of limited applicability extend in its coverage to the inclusion of an overly large range: "All human experience can be explained by a study of energy flows."

FALSE ALTERNATIVE

Assuming that only one alternative exists in a given situation, when in fact, a second and usually more fundamental alternative exists.

OVERLOOKING SECONDARY CONSEQUENCES

To consider only the immediate results of an action, ignoring the long-term effects. Along with this is the fallacy of Ignoring Historical Example. People who do not look into the future beyond the end of their nose also do not look into the past beyond yesterday (and sometimes not even that far). If they did, they would readily see that the previous implementation of their schemes was invariably a failure. Not only do they fail to see that the scheme WOULD BE a failure, they fail to see that it HAS BEEN a failure.

FALSE ATTRIBUTION

The Straw Man syndrome. Present a false description of your adversary and then base your repudiation on that description. "Objectivism advocates infanticide, therefore Objectivism is evil."

FALSIFIABILITY

(Karl Popper) A conjecture or hypothesis must be accepted as true until such time as it is proven to be false.

Popper maintains that scientists approach the truth through what he calls "conjecture and refutation." In actuality, scientists approach the truth not through conjecture and refutation, but through conjecture and CONFIRMATION - the demonstration, by means of careful experiment, that a hypothesis corresponds to the facts of reality.

Until the phenomenon is proven TRUE there is no obligation to base my attitude toward it on the assumption that it MIGHT be true. If there were such an obligation, then I would be obliged to give serious

consideration to every crackpot notion that has ever been put forward.

FLAT EARTH NAVIGATION SYNDROME

Devoting a lot of time and energy to solving problems that don't exist, such as figuring out ways to navigate on a flat earth. Generalizing from a hypostatization. Looking for an easy way out of a dilemma that does not exist.

Theology is a study with no answers because it has no subject matter.

FROZEN ABSTRACTION

(The Virtue of Selfishness, chapter 10) Substituting a particular concrete for the wider abstract class to which it belongs - such as using a specific ethics (e.g., altruism) for the wider abstraction "ethics."

GOVERNMENT SOLIPOTENCE

If the government is not doing something about a problem, then nothing can be done about it. Only the government can solve society's problems.

GRAVITY GAME

This consists of demanding that an idea be proven over and over again indefinitely before its validity is acceptable. (The name was conceived while watching an infant throw her toy onto the floor over and over and over again.) An open mind does not grant equal status to truth and falsehood. Nor does it remain floating forever in a stagnant vacuum of neutrality and uncertainty.

INSTANTIATION OF THE UNSUCCESSFUL

To insist on implementing something which is known to have failed. "What we need is government control of the economy!"

MOVING GOALPOST SYNDROME

"Computers might be able to understand Chinese and think about numbers but cannot do the crucially human things, such as...." - and then follows their favorite human specialty - falling in love, having a sense of humor, etc. But as soon as an artificial intelligence simulation succeeds, a new "crucial" element is selected (the goalpost is moved). Thus the perpetrators of this fallacy will never have to admit to the existence of artificial intelligence.

NULL VALUE

A statement (or question) that gives (or elicits) no cognitively meaningful information: "Are you honest?" If he's honest, he'll say 'Yes' - but if he's a liar, he'll say 'Yes' You learn nothing in either case.

POST HOC NULLIFICATIO PRO TEMPERI

(Temporal nullification of a previous phenomenon) Unless you can specify the exact moment I made a certain statement, then you must concede my insistence that I never made that statement. "When did I say that?" For a clever (and bewildering) retort reply: "About 20 minutes past 2 on Thursday afternoon."

DICTUM EX POST FACTO

The alteration of history by personal decree. This is done by the sort of person who tries to rewrite history with his tongue.

PRETENTIOUS

Here the speaker assumes omniscience in respect to the subject under consideration. He assumes also that he speaks for the entire human race. "We don't know what life is" (or insanity, intelligence, etc). "We can't conceive of personal death." Any attempt to refute this fallacy will usually elicit its corollary, The Falsifiability Syndrome.

PRETENTIOUS ANTECEDENT

Having made a brief reference to a phenomenon, you later assert that the phenomenon has now been fully explained.

PROOF BY SELECTED INSTANCES

Richard Feynman: "Many years ago I awoke in the dead of night in a cold sweat, with the certain knowledge that a close relative had suddenly died. I was so gripped with the haunting intensity of the experience that I was afraid to place a long-distance phone call, for fear that the relative would trip over the telephone cord (or something) and make the experience a self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact, the relative is alive and well, and whatever psychological roots the experience may have, it was not a reflection of an imminent event in the real world. After my experience I did not write a letter to an institute of parapsychology relating a compelling predictive dream which was not borne out by reality. That is not a memorable letter. But had the death I dreamt actually occurred, such a letter would have been marked down as evidence for precognition. The hits are recorded, the misses are not. Thus human nature unconsciously conspires to produce a biased reporting of the frequency of such events. If enough independent phenomena are studied and correlations sought, some will of course be found. If we know only the coincidences and not the unsuccessful trials, we might believe that an important finding has been made. Actually, it is only what statisticians call the fallacy of the enumeration of favorable circumstances."

FALSIFIED INDUCTIVE GENERALIZATION

Restrict a wide abstraction to a narrow set of particulars and then conclude that an attribute of these particulars must be definitive of the abstraction, thus negating the entire principled structure underlying the abstraction.

A similar fallacy is that of equating opposites by substituting nonessentials for their essential characteristics.

"They concluded that a free market, by its nature, leads to its own destruction - and they came to the grotesque contradiction of attempting to preserve the freedom of the market by government controls; to preserve the benefits of laissez-faire by abrogating it."

PROVING A NEGATIVE (The Objectivist Newsletter, April 1963)

"Proving the non-existence of that for which no evidence of any kind exists. Proof, logic, reason, thinking, knowledge pertain to and deal only with that which exists. They cannot be applied to that which does not exist. Nothing can be relevant or applicable to the non-existent. The non-existent is nothing. A positive statement, based on facts that have been erroneously interpreted, can be refuted - by means of exposing the errors in the interpretation of the facts. Such refutation is the disproving of a positive, not the proving of a negative.... Rational demonstration is necessary to support even the claim that a thing is possible. It is a breach of logic to assert that that which has not been proven to be impossible is, therefore, possible. An absence does not constitute proof of anything. Nothing can be derived from nothing."

If I say, "Anything is possible" I must admit the possibility that the statement I just made is false. (See Self Exclusion)

Doubt must always be specific, and can only exist in contrast to things which cannot properly be doubted.

REIFICATION OF THE POSSIBLE

Regarding a possible effect as being a certainty, when making an evaluation of a cause. This has two significant variants: Reification of the Improbable, and Reification of the Existent, which consists of basing one's criticism of a scheme on the observation that one possible outcome of that scheme might lead to a state of affairs that already exists under the present circumstances.

RELATIVE PRIVATION

To try to make a phenomenon appear good, by comparing it with a worse phenomenon, or to try to make a phenomenon appear bad, by comparing it with a better phenomenon.

Consider junkfood. A very nutritionally-conscious person has a rather low opinion of junkfood. But what would be your attitude toward a greasy hamburger if you hadn't eaten for three or four days? You can malign junkfood because your nutritional standards are high enough to permit you to do so. But an Ethiopian would like nothing better than to

have access to MacDonald's, Hardee's or Wendy's and, in fact, such access would be the best thing that could happen to the Ethiopian. Because you have alternatives that the Ethiopian does not have, he is in a position of relative privation when compared to you.

In just the same way, the people who labored in sweatshops at the turn of the century were in a state of relative privation when compared to you. Because your alternatives are different (and much better), the sweatshop seems to you to be an abomination, but in fact the sweatshop was immensely preferable to the alternatives available to them.

"Eat your carrots! Just think of all the starving children in China."

"I used to lament having no shoes - until I met a man who had no feet."

The real danger from this last example of the fallacy is that if people believe that their own situation really is ameliorated by such a comparison, they will naturally conclude that their own situation can, in practice, actually BE ameliorated by MAKING somebody else worse off!

RETROGRESSIVE CAUSATION

An interview with a young woman who had seven children - all of them "crack babies":

Interviewer: "Didn't you ever think about the effect your drug use was having on your children?"

Woman: "Yeah, that thought entered my mind now and then. Whenever it did, I got high so that I wouldn't have to think about it."

The cause (drug use) has an effect (remorse). She invokes the cause in order to eliminate the effect. Thus the effect acts retrogressively to induce further implementation of the cause.

SELF EXCLUSION

This is a form of the Stolen Concept fallacy. It denies itself. "Nothing makes any difference." (including this statement?) "Music is the only genuine form of communication." (but this statement, meant to be a communication, is not music) "True knowledge is impossible to man." (but this statement is meant to be knowledge) "There are no absolutes." (except this one, of course) "Words have no validity." To say that "one should not make judgments" is to make a judgment.

"There are questions whose truth or untruth cannot be decided by men; all the supreme questions, all the supreme problems of value are beyond human comprehension." Nietzsche

David Kelley: "To assert 'what is known depends on the knowledge of it'

is to offer that very thesis as something known, and therefore as a statement that subsumes itself. But this is manifestly not what the proponent of the thesis intends. That facts depend on our belief in them, he implies, is objectively true, a fact of reality about consciousness and its objects, made true by the nature of things, not by his believing it. Otherwise he would have to allow that objectivity is a fact for the objectivist. He would have to allow that the primacy of consciousness is both true, because he believes it, and false, because the objectivist denies it. [But the Marxist multi-logic dialectic does indeed assert this very notion.] To avoid this, he must assert that the objectivist is wrong, which means asserting the primacy of consciousness as a fact he himself did not create. He thereby contradicts his own thesis. It is an inner or performative contradiction, like that of the person who denies the axiom of action - the denial itself being an action."

SHINGLE SPEECH

Agglomerating several different superficial aspects of a subject, in hopes that the resulting verbal structure will be comprehensible.

STOLEN CONCEPT (The Objectivist Newsletter, Jan 1963)

Using a concept while ignoring, contradicting or denying the validity of the concepts on which it logically and genetically depends. "All property is theft." "The axioms of logic are arbitrary." (something is arbitrary only in distinction to that which is logically necessary.) "All that exists is change and motion." (change is possible only to an existent entity) "You cannot prove that you exist." (proof presupposes existence) "Acceptance of reason is an act of faith." (faith has meaning only in contradistinction to reason)

SUPPRESSION OF THE AGENT

"During the economic crisis, millions of people were thrown out of work." Who threw them out? The first answer to this would probably be, "their employers." The statement certainly invites the readers to infer this. But in fact, government, which destroyed the unfortunate workers' industries by means of taxation and regulation, is the causal agent that the passive construction of the statement suppresses or banishes from the mind.

Dehumanization of the Action: "During the first two years of Garcia's administration, the economy grew rapidly." This sentence establishes a strong, though implicit, causal connection between Garcia's interventionist programs and good economic news. "But inflation escaped the government's control and the economy soon began to contract." Economic developments are now pictured as things with their own, non-human, principles of action. They are not caused by anything that humans like Garcia do, but proceed on their own way.

THOMPSON INVISIBILITY SYNDROME (Atlas Shrugged Part3 Chap8 pg1076)
Someone so far removed from your frame of reference that he is psychologically invisible.

TREE/FOREST Fallacy:

People who don't think in principles will not be able to see the principles underlying a philosophy. Usually, all they will be able to see is the behavior of individuals who call themselves adherents of that philosophy.

UNINTENDED SELF-INCLUSION (from James P. Hogan)

"The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts." - Bertrand Russell.

Why didn't he put "I think" at the end of it? By omitting the "doubt-qualifier" Russell is unintentionally describing his own attitude.

UNKNOWABLES (The Objectivist Newsletter, Jan 1963)

"That which, by its nature, cannot be known. To claim it unknowable, one must first know not only that it exists but have enough knowledge of it to justify the assertion. The assertion and the justification are then in contradiction. To make the assertion without justification is an irrationalism."

Branden's argument implies that the unknowable must be a particular, specifiable entity. I maintain that it can be merely an aspect of existence that consciousness cannot perceive.

To assert that all things CAN be known is to imply that existence is subsumed by consciousness.

I claim that there are unknowables. Not any particular, specifiable unknowable items (for that would indeed be the contradiction noted above), but merely aspects of reality that are unperceivable. (You cannot simultaneously perceive both sides of your cat.) My justification for this assertion is the primacy of existence over consciousness.

Thus Quantum Indeterminacy is a genuine phenomenon. It is the closest we can come to specifying an aspect of reality that is unknowable: the simultaneous perception of position and momentum.

VARIANT IMAGIZATION

Generating dissimilar images from similar concepts. Certain kinds of crops, such as corn, are "harvested", but other kinds, such as trees, are "slashed" or "devastated". Who would forbid farmers to "harvest" a

crop of beets? But who would willingly allow men armed with chainsaws to "devastate" the ecology?

WOULDCHUCK FALLACY

If you take the old tongue-twister: "How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" and make a slight homonymous substitution: "How much would could a wouldchuck chuck if a wouldchuck could chuck would?" you arrive at a description of a certain kind of dissertation made by people who are trying to "prove" an idea for which they have no factual corroboration.

This is a description of much of scientific belief before the time of Galileo. For instance, it was believed that if you dropped a 5-pound rock and a 10-pound rock simultaneously, the 10-pounder WOULD hit the ground first because, being heavier, it WOULD therefore be pulled down harder and WOULD therefore travel faster. Notice the use of the word "would" in those statements. This expression of conditional probability is chucked around as though it were an assertion of factual reality. Implicit to such statements is the assumption that what seems plausible is therefore true and requires no further proof.

I became acutely aware of this "Wouldchuck" argument while reading the Tannehills' book, "The Market For Liberty." The entirety of Part2, which sets forth in detail their view of a free-market society, consists of the Wouldchuck argument. Here is a typical example:

"This insurance would be sold to the contracting parties at the time the contract was ratified. Before an insurance company would indemnify its insured for loss in a case of broken contract, the matter would have to be submitted to arbitration as provided in the contract. For this reason there would be a close link between the business of contract insurance and the business of arbitration."

Sounds plausible, doesn't it? Yes... BUT, no proof of these conjectures is offered. They are nothing more than unsubstantiated hypostatizations.

The proponent of a program, through the use of this argument, can articulate a comprehensive framework within which the implementation of his program seems undeniably plausible. But if the framework itself has no other foundation than this WouldChuck supposition, the whole scheme rests on a very shaky basis.

APPEAL TO IGNORANCE

Assertions based on what we do NOT know: "No one knows precisely what would happen if a core was to melt down." And the compounding of arbitrarily asserted possibilities.

What COULD happen is what is possible. The burden of proof is on the skeptic to provide some specific reason to doubt a conclusion that all available evidence supports. It is not true that "coulds" and "maybes" are an epistemological free lunch that can be asserted gratuitously. The case against the skeptic is that doubt must always be specific, and can only exist in contrast to things which cannot properly be doubted.

SILENCE IMPLIES CONSENT

Consent to what? Just what is it I consent to when I do NOT vote? To the policies of Bush? To the policies of Clinton? To the policies of Marrou? To the policies of all those whose principled disagreement with the electoral system precludes their participation in it?

The process of implication contains a causal relationship. For one thing to imply another thing, there must be a causal sequence between the two things. People who make the assertion "silence implies consent" never propose any chain of logical connection between the silence and the consent. Precisely how does consent arise from silence? How can dead men be said to consent to anything?

If my silence does imply consent, then how far does that implication reach? Am I considered to consent to all things about which I am silent? Even those about which I am completely ignorant? To the fact that someone in Calcutta beats his wife? If I must express disapproval of all things with which I do NOT consent, for fear of reproach resulting from my silence about any of them, there would not be sufficient hours in the day for such a plethora of denials.

DETERMINISM (The Objectivist Newsletter, May 1963)

"The doctrine of determinism contains a central and insuperable contradiction - an EPISTEMOLOGICAL contradiction - a contradiction implicit in any variety of determinism, whether the alleged determining forces be physical, psychological, environmental or divine. In fact, Man is neither omniscient nor infallible. This means: (a) that he must work to ACHIEVE his knowledge, and (b) that the mere presence of an idea inside his mind does not prove that the idea is true; many ideas may enter a man's mind which are false. But if man believes what he HAS to believe, if he is not free to test his beliefs against reality and to validate or reject them - if the actions and content of his mind are determined by factors that may or may not have anything to do with reason, logic and reality - then he can never know if his conclusions are true or false....But if this were true, no knowledge - no CONCEPTUAL knowledge - would be possible to man. No theory could claim greater plausibility than any other - including the theory of psychological determinism."

One of the catches to determinism is that you cannot argue with it. To argue is to make an attempt to induce someone to alter the actions or

content of his mind. The determinist enters the argument with the claim that such alteration is impossible - that he has no power to volitionally change his state of consciousness. He says, and means literally, "My mind is made up - don't confuse me with the facts!"

Biologists have tacitly assumed that when they have understood the operation of each molecule in a nerve membrane, they will understand the operation of the mind. But both the digital and the analog paradigms of computation make it clear that this assumption is wrong. After all, a computer is built from a completely known arrangement of devices whose operation is understood in minute detail. Yet it is often impossible to prove that even a simple computer program will calculate its desired result or, for that matter, whether the computation will even terminate.

Wilder Penfield explored the brain with electrical probes. By stimulating different parts of the brain he could cause a subject to turn his head, blink his eyes, move his limbs and a host of other things. But though he could make the patient's hand move he could never make the patient feel that he had WILLED the hand to move. Penfield found that the effects of consciousness could be selectively controlled by outside manipulation. But however much he probed, he could not enter consciousness itself. He could not find the mind and invade its autonomy.

The fundamental question of free will does not involve Man's physical behavior but his psychological behavior. It concerns Man's ability to control the functioning of his own mind.

On the Determinist premise, men are not merely unfit for freedom, they are metaphysically incapable of it since they do not have fundamental control over the choices made in their minds. Political issues become matters of pure pragmatism: there is no right or wrong, but only effective or ineffective techniques of social manipulation.

JOURNALISTIC FALLACIES:

Some subtle methods of media distortion: use of emotionally loaded images, isolation of events from their historical context, limitation of debate to "responsible" options, framing of dissident viewpoints in ways that trivialize them, personification of complex realities (Saddam = Iraq), objectification of persons ("collateral damage")

SELECTIVE SAMPLING

"The death rate among American soldiers in Vietnam was lower than among the general population." But the soldiers in Vietnam were young and healthy. You are comparing them with a data base including non-young and non-healthy people.

IGNORING UNIT PERCENTAGES

"You are safer walking down a dark alley than sitting in your living room with friends, because most murders are committed in the victim's home by his acquaintances." This ignores the fact that most people spend much more of their time at home than walking down alleys.

Declaration of Public Domain-ness

The original author of this document, David King, wrote the following at the top of his Guide to the Philosophy of Objectivism, and I am reprinting it here:

It is my intention to present an introduction, from the perspective of a scientist, to the ideas of this philosophy, a guide to other sources of these ideas, and some applications of the ideas to important problems.

In order to promote the maximum dissemination of these ideas, I have decided to place all my writings into the Public Domain. I grant permission to anyone to use my writings, or any parts of them, in any way that may help to further the spread of reason in our society.

And in case my desires for this document matter in any legal sense: I hereby specifically declare that I grant permission to anyone to use this document, or any part of it, in any way whatsoever.

marsh