

Description of _____ Fallacy

Key word: **source** or **origin**.

The genetic fallacy makes the mistake of supposing that the source of an argument affects its validity. Every time you dismiss an argument or opinion because you dislike its source, you commit the genetic fallacy.



When thinking of the Genetic Fallacy, don't think in terms of DNA genetics. This is broader than that. This fallacy is committed whenever someone condemns an argument because of where it began, how it began, or who began.

Also the Genetic Fallacy is different from *Ad Hominem* because it does not necessarily attack the person directly, but instead attacks the origins for the position they are proposing. Stereotypes are examples of this fallacy – such as, “you say that because you are a Fundamentalist.”

A Genetic Fallacy has the following form:

1. The origin of a claim or thing is presented.
2. The claim is true (or false) or the thing is supported (or discredited) based on its source.

For example: "Bill claims that $1+1=2$. However, my parents brought me up to believe that $1+1=254$, so Bill must be wrong."

Another example: “The separation of church and state is not really an American principle but is found in Article 53 of the constitution of the old Soviet Union. We don't really want to follow a principle created by a totalitarian communist regime, do we?” Unfortunately for this argument, the premise is not entirely accurate; but even if it were correct, the argument still commits the Genetic Fallacy. How? Because it presumes to conclude that if the origin of the principle of the separation of church and state comes from a totalitarian and/or communist system, then it must automatically be bad. Even an evil, totalitarian regime could, in theory, come up with a positive idea that is useful for a free country.

It should be noted that there are some cases in which the origin of a claim is relevant to the truth or falsity of the claim. For example, a claim that comes from a reliable expert is likely to be true (provided it is in her area of expertise).

Examples:

1. "The idea of resurrection has many parallels in pagan mythology. Jesus didn't rise from the dead. It's just another story."

2. "The current Chancellor of Germany was in the Hitler Youth at age 3. With that sort of background, his so called 'reform' plan must be a fascist program."
3. Responding to a quotation from Richard Nixon on the subject of free trade with China by saying, "We all know Nixon was a liar and a cheat, so why should we believe in free trade with China?"
4. "I was brought up to believe in God, and my parents told me God exists, so He must."
5. "Sure, the media claims that vice presidential candidate was taking kickbacks. But we all know about the media's credibility, don't we."
6. "Atheists typically have strained and difficult relationships with their fathers, thus leading to their difficulty in accepting the authority of their Heavenly Father. This, then, is why they don't believe in God."
7. Christians shouldn't learn karate. It started out in China—a communist country.
8. "Who told you all that stuff about the White Witch?" he asked.
"Mr. Tumnus, the Faun." said Lucy.
"You can't always believe what Fauns say." said Edmund, trying to sound as if he knew far more about them than Lucy.
"Who said so?" asked Lucy.
"Every one knows it," said Edmund.
9. "The teaching that God damns certain individuals to hell was a teaching of John Calvin. But Calvin was responsible for un-Christian conduct and reprehensible behavior in the city of Geneva! How can anyone hold to his teachings?"
10. From a political TV commercial: "Bob McDonnell for Virginia Attorney General? Bob received his law degree from Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network University. He's taken \$36,000 from Pat Robertson. Vote for me Creigh Deeds. Don't say no to progress and hope."
11. "Most Christians are believers because their parents were. Therefore Christianity is not true."
12. "The Nazi regime developed the Volkswagen Beetle. Therefore, you should not buy a VW Beetle because of who started it."
13. Frank just got out of jail last year and since it was his idea to start the hardware store, it's got to be a bad idea.





Description of Tu Quoque

Key word: **inconsistent**.

Tu Quoque (pronounced *tōō kwō'kwē*) in Latin means "you too." *Tu Quoque* is dismissing someone's viewpoint on an issue because they are inconsistent (hypocritical) in their words or actions or because they had a different viewpoint in the past.

This type of "argument" has the following form:

1. Person A makes claim X.
2. Person B asserts that A's actions or past claims are inconsistent with the truth of claim X.
3. Therefore X has to be false.

The fact that a person makes inconsistent claims or has inconsistent actions does not make any particular claim they makes false. The fact that a person's claims are not consistent with his actions might indicate that the person is a hypocrite, but this does not prove his claims are wrong.

However, as a diversionary tactic, *Tu Quoque* can be very effective, since the accuser is put on the defensive, and frequently feels compelled to defend against the accusation and the valid arguments for a viewpoint are forgotten.

Examples of *Tu Quoque* :

1. Bill: "Smoking is very unhealthy and leads to all sorts of problems. So take my advice and never start."
Jill: "Well, I certainly don't want to get cancer."
Bill: "I'm going to get a smoke. Want to join me Dave?"
Jill: "Well, I guess smoking can't be that bad. After all, Bill smokes."

2. Cartoon about President Bush being against religious fundamentalism in Iraq, but having religious fundamentalists in his cabinet or promoting fundamentalist ideas.

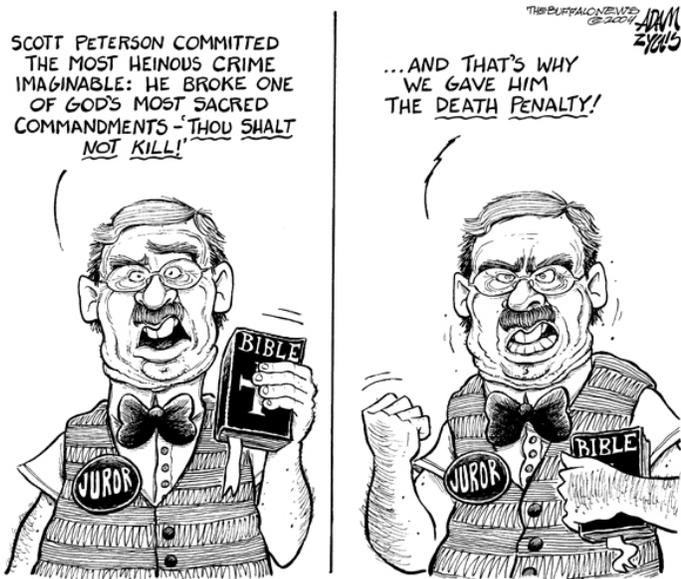
3. President Clinton and his administration argued that there was nothing wrong with having sex with his intern Monica Lewinsky because other public



officials had done similar things. (It turns out they had not, but even if the charge was true, it is irrelevant.)

4. "You say people should learn to live within their means, but you are in debt yourself and make no effort to get out of it." [This is a *Tu Quoque* fallacy, but it is also called by some people an *Ad Hominem circumstantial*, since it brings in the circumstances of the claimant when they are not relevant to the claim at issue. You will find that fallacy categories often overlap. The important thing is to recognize false reasoning, even when people use different names for the fallacy.]
5. "You say I shouldn't drink, but you haven't been sober for more than a year."
6. Peter: "Based on the arguments I have presented, it is evident that it is morally wrong to use animals for food or clothing."
Bill: "But you are wearing a leather jacket and you have a roast beef sandwich in your hand! How can you say that using animals for food and clothing is wrong?"

7. Cartoon about capital punishment: "If people kill, they should be killed." There is a seeming inconsistency on the part of people who are against murder and for the death penalty, but this doesn't invalidate the argument that the death penalty is right.



8. **Question:** "Now, the United States government says that you are still funding military training camps here in Afghanistan for militant, Islamic fighters and that you are a sponsor of international terrorism.... Are these accusations true? ... "



Osama Bin Laden: "At the time that they condemn any Muslim who calls for his right, they receive the highest top official of the Irish Republican Army at the White House as a political leader, while woe, all woe is the Muslims if they cry out for their rights. Wherever we look, we find the US as the leader of terrorism and crime in the world. The US does not consider it a terrorist act to throw atomic bombs

at nations thousands of miles away, when it would not be possible for those bombs to hit military troops only. These bombs were rather thrown at entire

nations, including women, children and elderly people and up to this day the traces of those bombs remain in Japan. The US does not consider it terrorism when hundreds of thousands of our sons and brothers in Iraq died for lack of food or medicine. So, there is no base for what the US says and this saying does not affect us....”

Source: CNN March 1997 Interview with Osama bin Laden

Notice that Bin Laden never addresses the questions of whether he funds military camps in Afghanistan or whether he sponsors terrorism. Instead he simply turned the accusation back against the accuser. This is a *Tu Quoque* tactic designed to distract the audience from the question at issue. Even if all of Bin Laden's accusations are true, they have nothing to do with the question, and thus are irrelevant.



9. “You say that pornography is a bad thing, but didn’t Jimmy Swaggart say the same thing before he was caught with pornographic magazines in his car?”

10. The Mayor said the biggest problem for the city administration has been fighting people who have protested such things as industrial development.

"We've had people fight highways, the school corporation and county zoning," he said. "I didn't notice any of these people coming up here on horses and donkeys. They all drove cars up here, spewing hydrocarbons all over the place."

Source: *Terre Haute Tribune-Star*. The fact that these people drive cars that spew hydrocarbons may make them hypocritical, but it isn't really an argument against their position on industrial development. This is a *Tu Quoque* fallacy.

11. From a Muslim debating a Christian: “How can you criticize the Qur’an? Look at the problems with your own Bible!”

12. From a Mormon: “Why do you question whether or not the Book of Mormon is God’s Word? Weren’t there questions in the early church about which books of the Bible were God’s Word?”

