

Article: Skepticism Triggers -- Signs of Poor or Deceptive Arguments | OpEdNews

Notebook: General

Created: 7/23/2015 11:27 AM

Updated: 7/23/2015 11:37 AM

URL: <http://www.opednews.com/articles/Discerning-Stinking-Thinking-by-Richmond-Shreve-S...>

Signs of Poor or Deceptive Arguments

As readers and editors we often need to make judgments about the veracity of an author's assertions on topics where we lack personal knowledge and expertise. Here is my list of **signs and signals** that herald an argument that is not well grounded in objective fact:

1. *Extreme or absolute phrasing. (Words like always and never which allow for no exceptions.)*
2. *Characterizations. Adjectives that attribute merit or adjectives that demean without factual support. (Outstanding authority John Smith". Discredited activist judge Jim Jones ')*
3. *Citation of anonymous authority. (A nationally famous physician states ')*
4. *Absence of contrary information. (Writer withholds or fails to discuss dissenting opinion and conflicting data.)*
5. *Ad-hominem arguments that appeal to feelings rather than reason. (Many rants are passionate and evoke prejudices while lacking factual substance.)*
6. *Ad-hominem phrasing that attacks the character of an individual.*
7. *Innuendo, insinuation an indirect statement that implies something without actually asserting it.*
8. *Metaphors and similes that grossly oversimplify, usually diverting attention from the*

inconvenient complexity of reality. (A great way to finesse flawed logic.)

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9. Denial. The refusal to even consider well known conflicting information, dismissing it or ignoring it.

10. Sophism. Clever or fallacious argument that leads to a wrong conclusion. Sophism can look like a rational, reasonable argument, but usually ignores some facts and embellishes others to make a case. Connecting some of the dots, omitting others, to show a false pattern. Patternicity that imagines or creates meaning from noise.

11. Misapplied authority Seeking to attribute authority to the opinion of someone whose expertise does not extend to the topic. (Medical opinions of a Disk Jockey)

12. Fear mongering.

13. Hate.

14. Sensational assertions.

15. Too good or too bad to be true.

16. Arguments that assert a conspiracy that would be hard to conceal -- one that would require the silent complicity of a large number of diverse people. (In real life, leaks happen, whistle-blowers surface, etc.)

17. Writing that sounds like a sales pitch. (one sided and persuasively phrased. infomercial-speak.)

18. You infer a hidden motive or agenda. (Political mud slinging.)

19. Absence of obvious questions that an objective author would raise and answer.

20. Absence of independent sources and externally verifiable fact patterns. No references.

21. Use of a false name or handle to obscure author's identity and avoid accountability.

22. *Extrapolation of a peripheral issue to discredit or embellish a core issue. (The sexual behavior of a judge or authority as evidence to question his competence in law.)*

23. *Anecdotes as evidence of a generalized truth. ("My cousin got the flu after he was vaccinated.")*

You will find plenty of examples on Fox News, and regrettably, in much of what is available from internet blogs and similar sources. My list is by no means complete, and I invite you to contribute your own items -- send me a message here on OEN.

-- *Richmond Shreve, Senior Editor OEN*