

Additional Resources

Daniel Kahneman, one of the pioneering researchers on cognitive biases, presents an excellent overview of some of his work in a lecture titled “Biased Biases” at the History and Rationality Lecture Series at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. You can find the lecture at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CWm3i74mHI>.

Antiracist essayist, author, and educator Tim Wise has done a significant amount of work on white anxiety and resentment regarding changing demographics. You can find his website with a variety of resources at <http://www.timwise.org>. Wise also gave a talk at Google titled “White Like Me: Reflections of a Privileged Son,” which is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=oV-EDWzJuzk.

For some historical background on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and equal employment, see the National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act/>.

5 | Logical Fallacies

Ad Hominem: The Common Variety

In chapter 4 we established that cognitive biases are habits we form when taking in and processing information. These habits have advantages in some contexts but can also prevent us from examining evidence that is not already within our web of belief. In this way, cognitive biases can become bad habits that limit our critical thinking abilities. In this chapter we will consider logical fallacies, which are common argument patterns we rely on when expressing the reasons we have for our point of view. Like cognitive biases, these patterns are not always bad. However, in contexts where a common pattern relies on unacceptable or irrelevant evidence and distracts our attention away from what is relevant, the pattern is a logical fallacy.

Philosopher and argument theorist Christopher Tindale in his book *Fallacies and Argument Appraisal* provides an excellent overview of fallacy research and notes:

One thing the recent literature has made very clear is that fallacies are far more complex, and thus deserving of much fuller analyses, than the traditional textbook treatments have suggested. Two things have reinforced the recognition of how complex fallacies really are: The first of these is the appreciation that many of the fallacies are failed instances of good argument schemes or forms. Hence, we cannot dismiss all *ad hominem* arguments or *Slippery Slopes*, for example, because there are circumstances under which such reasoning is appropriate. The second feature that reveals the complexity of fallacious reasoning is the recognition that to evaluate fallacies fully we need to consider aspects of the context in which the argumentation arises. In many instances this involves the details of a dialogue between participants in an argumentative exchange. In other cases we must sift through what is available of the background to a dispute, such as the history of exchanges between the participants or the beliefs of the audience.¹

What we learn from Tindale is that fallacies are, first, argument patterns that are problematic in some contexts but actually reasonable in others. Second, context includes the arguer's background, her or his history of arguing related to the topic, as well as the beliefs of those evaluating the argument. In this way, fallacy analysis is complex and context sensitive and benefits from self-awareness, an understanding of privilege and power, and a commitment to cooperative reasoning. These are all skills that as intellectually empathic critical thinkers we work to develop. And because fallacies have this complexity, as we work through this chapter we will first consider the problematic contexts that give rise to a fallacy and then consider a context where the same pattern would not be logically fallacious. This kind of analysis, which forces us to move from simple fallacy labeling to thinking about fallacies in a dynamic and context-sensitive way, provides us with more opportunities for thinking critically and empathically.² Our focus will be on ten of the most common logical fallacies that occur when people reason and debate about social differences.

The first and arguably the most common fallacy we will consider is *ad hominem*, which was introduced in chapter 2 and is Latin for "to the man" or "to the person." Because this fallacy is so prevalent and so easy to commit, there are several variations. For our purposes, we will consider just two of the basic varieties. The first and most obvious variety occurs when an arguer attempts to refute another argument by simply attacking the source of the evidence rather than the evidence itself. When the attack is directly related to the personal characteristics of the source, then it is an *ad hominem-abusive attack*. An *ad hominem-abusive attack* occurs when someone tries to refute another's argument by calling that person "stupid," insulting the person's appearance, or putting down the person's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., rather than reasons. As we saw in the case of Anita Sarkeesian, the feminist blogger described in chapter 3, much of the comments aimed at her by critics were in the form of *ad hominem-abusive attacks*.

The second variety is *ad hominem circumstantial*. A person who tries to refute another's argument by claiming that the opponent's circumstances and social standing are relevant to an argument commits an *ad hominem-circumstantial fallacy*. For instance, if there is a question of whether or not a particular business practice is unfair to women and a woman argues that it is, any person who said that the woman's argument must be wrong, just because she has something to gain, would commit the fallacy. Similarly, if an initiative has been proposed to benefit women and a particular woman did not support it because she did not like the details, any person who

claimed that she should support it because she is a woman would commit an *ad hominem-circumstantial fallacy*. The lesson to learn here is that a person's particular characteristics and social identity are irrelevant to the reasons the person has given in support of her or his position. It is the responsibility of any arguer to address the reasons in an argument and not the person giving the reasons. This is because as in the cases just described, a woman can give good reasons for why a policy might negatively impact all women even if she stands to gain from overturning the policy. Similarly, even a woman can object to a policy that seems to benefit women on the basis of the problems she finds in the reasons given to justify the policy. Just because someone stands to gain or lose if we accept her or his conclusion, it is still irrelevant to whether or not the reasons the person gives are credible, relevant, and justifying.

Credibility and Ad Hominem Circumstantial

It is worth taking a moment here to say something about credibility. We said in chapter 3 that the first step in evaluating an argument is to judge whether the premises are acceptable or believable. I want to add here that we also need to evaluate whether the source for the evidence is credible. For instance, if you claim that drinking cow's milk is tantamount to drinking poison and I ask you for the source of that claim, I am asking for a credible reference. If you reply that the claim comes from your vegan friend who feels so much better since cutting out dairy, then the source does not measure up to the weight of the claim. In other words, even if your vegan friend does feel so much better after eliminating dairy from his diet, it does not follow that drinking cow's milk is tantamount to drinking poison. To substantiate that claim, the source must include evidence from a large sample of many more individuals, controls for different digestive systems, and repeatable studies over time that demonstrate the effects of cow's milk on the human body. The source for such a broad claim that is inconsistent with what many people take to be common knowledge (that milk is generally good for the human body) should meet our very strictest standards for careful long-term study. This is not to say that it can't turn out to be true that cow's milk is tantamount to drinking poison (I am not making this claim, only mentioning it for the purposes of this example!) but only that it would require more than your friend's testimony to be believable. Another way of thinking about this is that your friend is not an expert on the matter of the effects of cow's milk on the human body.

However, it is also a mistake to think that just because the claim runs counter to common sense and is so broad and far-reaching as to require expert credibility, any expert will do. We would need to appeal to experts whose area of expertise is directly relevant to the claim in question. In addition, there would have to be a certain amount of objectivity to these experts in terms of their investment in the truth of their expert judgment. So, for instance, assuming that their methodologies are sound, a biochemist whose salary is paid exclusively by the dairy industry and argues for the safety of cow's milk could be deemed less credible than a biochemist who does independent research, earns a living from grant money, and argues for the safety of cow's milk. This is because the dairy industry biochemist has a stronger vested interest in her conclusion being right. Her salary depends on it. The independent researcher is not tied to a single for-profit source of funding. Of course, all of this is not to say that the dairy industry biochemist cannot be right and the independent researcher wrong; it is just that our standard for evidence should go up when the source's credibility goes down. It would be reasonable for us to want to see more corroborating evidence for the dairy industry's research as compared with the independent research.

It may seem that our demand to weigh the credibility of a source runs counter to what we said about the *ad hominem*–circumstantial fallacy. Wasn't the point of that discussion that we can't refute a claim just because a person may benefit from our accepting her or his claim? Isn't it wrong to be skeptical about the dairy industry biochemist because we are addressing her circumstances rather than her conclusions? The answer is that it is not fallacious to be skeptical about the dairy industry's biochemist and to require further evidence. Rather, we commit the fallacy when we decide that the dairy industry's biochemist is wrong (rather than doubtful or less credible). That is the difference between assessing credibility and committing the *ad hominem*–circumstantial fallacy. In the case of credibility, we want to determine if the source of the claim is sufficient for establishing the likelihood of the claim. For that reason, we need to determine if the source has the relevant experience and in some cases expertise for making the claim. However, to rule out the source as not credible simply because he or she will gain from our accepting the claim is to commit the fallacy.

Now, how does all of this connect to social identity and intellectual empathy? I wanted to make the distinction between credibility and *ad hominem*–circumstantial because when the argument has to do with social issues and social identity, many people can easily slip from assessing a speaker's credibility to flat out denying that a speaker has any credibility at all. For instance, in numerous cases in my classroom where social

difference is the topic, I have seen students report an incident to the class where they believed they faced racism or sexism or some other form of bias and discrimination, only to have their classmates deny it. Given that the rest of the class was not present for the incident and that the person offering the example experienced it firsthand, why is it so typical for so many members of the class to deny the speaker's experience?

One explanation for what is going on is that the students who deny the experience are sliding from a reasonable assessment of a source's credibility to an unreasonable *ad hominem*–circumstantial fallacy. Just because individual circumstances may directly relate to someone's argument, it does not follow that the person's claim should not be believed. Rather, if the person has a history of reliability, if we do not have direct evidence that runs counter to the person's claims, and if her or his evidence is based on firsthand direct experience, the person should be believed. To see this more clearly, consider again the claim that dairy is tantamount to poison. We said that such a broad claim required much more evidence than your friend's experience to make it believable. However, if the claim was "My friend said that drinking milk *for him* is tantamount to drinking poison" and it was based on his direct firsthand experience with drinking milk, then his claim should be believed unless we have evidence that he does not reliably tell the truth, unless we know that dairy has not been a problem for him, or if we find out that he has not really kept track of how he has felt before and after ingesting dairy. If none of these conditions hold, then your friend should be considered credible. In fact, the standard in logic and critical thinking is to assume that people are credible unless we have a reason to believe otherwise. And this is a standard that most of us use ordinarily in our day-to-day lives. If I ask a man on the street what time it is and he tells me "It's 4:45," then I believe him unless it seems highly unlikely that it is 4:45. But if that sounds about right, I don't demand further evidence or judge that he is probably lying or delusional.

Yet when people report on direct firsthand experiences of bias and discrimination, they are often met with knee-jerk reactions of doubt and dismissal. So why do these kinds of reports raise such high demands for credibility? I believe that the answer is twofold. First, hearing about bias and discrimination triggers the blame-guilt dichotomy we discussed earlier in chapter 2. When we hear that someone with a social identity different from our own has been discriminated against, we wonder whether we are being included in the problem. Since we don't feel (or at least like to feel) like we are part of the problem, it is easier to conclude that the discrimination didn't really happen. It is easier to chalk it up to a mistake on the part

of the person reporting it than to take on blame and guilt for something we were not directly involved with. However, when listening to reports of bias and discrimination, we need to remain aware of the fact that blame/guilt and denial are not the only reactions available to us. While we may not have directly contributed to the bias or discrimination, we are still part of a social system where bias and discrimination operate. Just because we may not directly see it does not mean it is not there. Remember that social privilege is often invisible, and many people tend to socialize and spend time with people who share many of their social characteristics. For these reasons we can fall under the mistaken assumption that since we are not affected by something, it does not really exist. That is why those with different social characteristics often meet reports of bias and discrimination with skepticism. If my web of belief does not include injustices on the basis of my gender or race or religion or sexuality or ability, then recognizing that others are so affected means revising my web of belief. Given that these beliefs lie closer to the core of our web since they are connected to our identity, it may be easier for some people to simply deny the reports and leave their web intact. For others, they might make minor revisions in their belief system by judging the report to be true but deciding that it is just a single case of a sensitive person encountering a sexist, racist, etc., jerk. This judgment leaves the majority of the web intact, since it does not require thinking systemically and holistically about bias and discrimination. This judgment also allows us to avoid considering how we might be playing a role in such a system so we can avoid blame/guilt.

Second, it seems that very few people are sympathetic to someone who is “complaining.” A person sharing a story of discrimination is often heard by others as blaming other people for her or his own problems. This can be true even for those people who belong to the same social groups as the speaker. Remember Cassandra in chapter 2 who developed diversity fatigue after participating in various social justice groups. Those who do not share the speaker’s social identity and even those who do can be too quick to blame the person rather than the social system. Of course, this is understandable given American culture. We have all inherited a “pick yourself up by your bootstraps” ethos whereby if you work hard enough and remain disciplined, you can accomplish anything. While that characteristic of our culture has produced some great successes, it obscures the way that merit alone is often not enough, especially when there are intentional roadblocks and checkpoints for some people and not others (think of the EZ Pass we talked about in chapter 2 and the denial of equal opportunity in our country’s history). Furthermore, the bootstrap ethos makes

dependency seem like a bad thing, when in fact dependency is just part of life. We are dependent as infants and children, we are dependent when we are ill or injured, we are dependent as we get older, we are dependent when we need help. We depend on and trust our family and friends, coworkers, food producers, health professionals, teachers, law enforcement, fire and safety professionals, and on and on. Dependency and mutuality are essential for thriving, and yet dependency often gets stigmatized in the American culture of independence. This is not to deny the value of independence, but it should not come at the cost of devaluing our need for each other. Furthermore, it should not come at the cost of failing to see how erosions in that dependency and trust are often misinterpreted as complaining or being too sensitive.

The automatic doubt we have about the person we interpret as “complaining” about bias and discrimination may have more to do with our resistance than the person’s lack of credibility. Philosopher Miranda Fricker calls this kind of doubt a “*testimonial injustice*” and describes it as when “a speaker receives an unfair credibility deficit on the part of the hearer due to a prejudice on the hearer’s part.”³ What Fricker is describing are those cases where we dismiss a person’s claim of discrimination because we prejudge the person to be trying to gain something or because we judge the person to be a whiner. However, such prejudgments cause a double harm to the person who has actually been discriminated against. The person now has to face both the experience of discrimination and our skepticism or denial of that experience, thereby leaving the person doubly harmed. Fricker says that when we are doubted with regard to our firsthand direct experiences, we suffer not simply as arguers but even more fundamentally as humans.⁴

As intellectually empathic critical thinkers, we will avoid inflicting this kind of double harm and injustice by being attentive to our capacity for knee-jerk dismissals of those who report discrimination and bias. Does this mean that we can never judge someone to be “playing the race card” or “the gender card” or that sometimes people really do fail to see how their personality and communication style might be causing more problems than their race or gender or religious identity? It does not. However, as intellectually empathic critical thinkers, we should come to that conclusion only after we have reflected on our own potential for bias as well as any evidence related to the person. Relevant evidence would only become apparent after we answered questions such as the following:

Does this person have a history of unreliably reporting their experiences?

Does the person attribute racist, sexist, homophobic, etc., motives to everyone uniformly rather than to more specific contexts and individuals?

Does the person lack allies? That is, does the person dismiss others who may not share the same social identity but who nevertheless act to support the person's struggles?

Does the person lack self-awareness?

Does the person never admit that he or she might be wrong?

The answers to these questions require time and careful consideration, but if they turn out to be mostly "yes," then there might be good reason to doubt such an individual's report of bias or discrimination. However, notice how much more information, history, and consideration would go into making that judgment. It is far from the automatic "What a whiner" or "It was probably just you" that so many reports of discrimination are met with. And even if there is good reason to question the speaker's credibility, it would still be fallacious to conclude that her or his claim is simply false. Even people who lack credibility may sometimes be right. For that reason, assessing a source as lacking credibility means that we are justified in seeking out more evidence to determine if the claim is credible. It does not mean, however, that we are justified in denying the claim just because the person has something to gain (which would be the fallacy of *ad hominem circumstantialis*).

Finally, it is worth noting that skepticism and doubt about reports of bias and discrimination are often given much more attention than actual cases of bias and discrimination. In a recent study looking at ten years of reported sexual assaults on a college campus, the data showed that only 5.9 percent of reported cases turned out to be false allegations.⁵ Even though 94.1 percent of reports turned out to have merit, many people still focused on the few false reports. Why do so many people seem to focus on false reports rather than on legitimate cases of sexual assault and harassment as well as racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination? The answer, I believe, has to do with the guilt-blame response that so many people feel is both inevitable and unfair. Remember that most people with social privilege have a hard time not only seeing their privilege but also feeling that their privilege gives them any real power. In many cases when privilege intersects with disadvantage, as in the case of Eric described in chapter 2 who is a white male but is also working class and not college educated, his social power is contextual and situational rather than consistent and ever present. If Eric hears a black coworker report an instance of racism perpetuated by another white coworker, Eric's identity as a white person is now highlighted.

It is not surprising, then, that accepting the report will somehow feel personal for Eric, as if he too is somehow implicated. Yet Eric has done nothing wrong as far as he can see, so why should he feel bad? Moreover, from Eric's standpoint, everyone has it tough. Why should we be so sensitive to race issues when every day Eric feels that he faces indignities from his boss, his neighbors, and the culture at large. Finally, Eric knows that there are policies protecting people from racial discrimination at his company, and he realizes that if such an accusation were made against him, it could mean public humiliation and even the loss of his job. Balancing these considerations, it is easier for many people to blame the person making the report than it is to accept it. The focus on false allegations serves to reinforce this choice because it protects the status quo and draws attention away from the more significant number of reports that have merit.

So to reiterate, as intellectual empathic critical thinkers we will treat reports of bias and discrimination the way we would treat all firsthand reports of direct experience, as credible and with a presumption in favor of their truth. We will work against defensive reactions of guilt-blame and denial and be open to hearing the evidence that a person presents. We will keep in mind that social privilege often obscures social disadvantage so that even if we have not seen or experienced what someone else reports, this does not mean it does not exist. Our goal in these cases is to become what philosopher Miranda Fricker calls "virtuous hearers," meaning that we hear reports of bias and discrimination with an awareness of the moral costs of denying their truth. We "reinflate" credibility to where it should be without our biases and defensive reactions.⁶ In chapter 7 we will return to the notion of virtuous hearing and consider how the skills of intellectual empathy can play a role in developing this virtue.

Similarly, when reporting our own experiences of bias and discrimination, though we may face resistance from our hearers, we should do what we can to reduce their guilt-blame response and their tendency toward denial. Of course, this is not to say that we should be taking care of people who doubt us by making sure they feel safe. Doing so can just reinforce the power differentials that lead to biases and discrimination. Rather, what I am suggesting is that as intellectual empathic critical thinkers we recognize that when social differences are the issue, defensive reactions can often get in the way of seeing and hearing the evidence. If we start by assuming that people who are not like us can *never* see what we see or that they are too biased to ever admit that there is a problem, then we close off the possibility of thinking critically together. It is all too easy for things to get personal when we recount our experiences of bias and discrimination, but this can

go both ways. While someone hearing a report of bias can often take it too personally, the reporter is also capable of transferring her or his anger and pain onto the hearer. This is especially so if the hearer shares social characteristics with the original offender. This kind of transference only heightens the climate of defensiveness. So, just as we need to be virtuous hearers, we also need to be responsible reporters. And just as we should assume that a speaker is credible unless we have demonstrated evidence otherwise, we should also assume that a hearer is sincerely interested in justice unless we have evidence otherwise.

Thought Experiment: Credibility and Testimonial Injustice

Miranda Fricker in her book *Epistemic Injustice: Ethics and the Power of Knowing* argues that testimonial injustice undermines a person's capacity as a knower, contributes to broader systematic inequalities, distorts people's identity formation, undermines their self-confidence, robs them of potential knowledge, and stunts their intellectual development. Can you think of a time when someone did not believe something you knew to be true? What were the power dynamics involved? What did it feel like not to be believed? Can you think of a time when perhaps you did not believe someone because of that person's race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability rather than the evidence he or she gave? What do you think contributed to the credibility deficit that you assigned to that person? Are there times where you may have assigned a credibility excess to someone based on social factors?

Back to Logical Fallacies

Now that we have established some basic things about ad hominem fallacies and credibility, we can move on to the rest of our fallacy list. The second fallacy we will consider is *appeal to tradition*. This fallacy occurs when an arguer claims that a particular belief or practice is right because it has a long history and tradition. The reason this line of thinking is fallacious is that just because something has a long history and tradition does not justify why it should continue. When we call a belief or practice into question and ask whether or not it should continue, it is circular to answer by saying "Well, it has always been this way!" What the question demands is a reason for why it should continue. For instance, someone asks, "Should we reconsider our

public policy of educating children according to their age and instead look at other factors like interests or abilities?" The response is that "Our public educational system has always organized children by their age." Even if this is true, it is not a justification for why we should continue the practice. What we would need to adequately address the question is evidence that the practice itself makes sense relative to our educational goals.

Appeal to tradition makes our list of fallacies because it tends to come up in arguments about social differences and social identity. For instance, if someone argues that the changing demographics in the United States (an issue we considered in chapter 4) was a sign that the country was in decline and gave as the reason the fact that the United States has always been a majority white country, then that person would have committed an appeal to tradition. The fact that the country has historically been a majority white country is not a justification for why it should remain so unless the only goal for our country is to maintain a majority white population. Changing demographics are a reflection of changes in immigration (from European immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to more recent immigration from Mexico, Central America, and Asia).⁷ Though it is difficult for people who have long been a majority to imagine being in the minority or to have a belief or practice that has long been a source of benefit and comfort called into question, it is nevertheless fallacious to use that stability and comfort as a reason for why things should stay the same. This is especially true when the belief or practice provides stability and comfort for some while increasing the costs and discomfort for others. Many all-male domains such as universities, corporations, and sporting and economic clubs provided significant benefits and comfort to the men who were able to take advantage of them. In these spaces, mainly white middle-class and wealthy men were able to establish relationships and networks that helped to increase their wealth and public power. However, the fact that women and men of color were prohibited from participating as equals in these spaces meant that they could not access the same benefits and comforts. In addition, the benefits and comforts were often maintained through the labor of working-class and poor men and women as well as the mothers, wives, and daughters of the privileged men. When reforms were proposed to address the injustice of these practices, tradition was often invoked as a reason for why they should be maintained. Fortunately, tradition was not sufficient to justify "men only" and "whites only" policies that were understandably comfortable for some people but a source of suffering for others.

Keeping in mind Tindale's point about the complexity of fallacies, it is important that we understand how tradition can be appealed to in a

nonfallacious way. For example, if the issue in question is whether a certain practice was a tradition that was worth keeping, then appealing to the history of that practice and its value would not be fallacious. Some families and friends have a favorite movie that they watch together every year. If one year a person in the group wonders why they should all watch it again, considering that everyone has already seen it, the others may present evidence about how it has become a tradition. This kind of evidence would place a higher value on being together and sharing memories rather than on the quality of the cinematic experience. If everyone in the group agrees that traditions matter, then the issue is whether watching this movie annually is a tradition worth keeping. Unlike the case of a majority white population, where the issue was whether changing demographics were a sign of the nation's decline, in this case tradition is neither unjust nor irrelevant to the matter.

The next fallacy we will consider is *hasty generalization*. This fallacy occurs when an arguer reaches a conclusion about a group on the basis of a small or unrepresentative sample of that group. For instance, if I conclude that all Toyota cars are unreliable on the basis of the one Toyota I just rented or on the basis of several very old and worn models, then I have committed the fallacy. The point is that the target group in my conclusion, all Toyotas, is much larger and more varied than the small and unrepresentative sample in my premise.

When it comes to debates about social differences, hasty generalization is a common logical fallacy. For instance, if I concluded that the Muslim religion forbids women from wearing cosmetics in public based on what I was told by two Muslim friends, that would be a hasty generalization. Islam is a complex and varied religion, and there are differences among followers just as there are differences among practicing Christians and Jews and Buddhists. Religion, like gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, is a way of classifying large and diverse groups of people who, while they may share some things, are nevertheless multifaceted. To draw a conclusion about the beliefs and practices of the whole group based on a very small sample is to mismatch the weight of the evidence to the weight of the conclusion.

In the same way, to draw a conclusion about the whole group by appealing to an unrepresentative sample of that group would be another way to commit the fallacy. If you concluded that Americans positively support gay and lesbian relationships based on your experience talking to people in the Castro in San Francisco (one of the largest and most politically active gay communities in the country), then your generalization is hasty given the unrepresentative sample. The point, then, for our purposes is to pay special

attention to generalizations about social groups because they often hide the group's real complexity and variety. In many cases, arguers will selectively choose a subset of the group to defend a conclusion about the entire group despite the fact that the subset is either too small or unrepresentative.

Like cognitive biases, which can have practical value, hasty generalizations can also be an efficient way to reach a conclusion. In cases where the stakes are very high or the risk is great, it might be more practical to go with a small or biased sample rather than taking the time to acquire larger and more representative evidence. If I eat at a particular restaurant and get food poisoning, it does not seem unreasonable for me to cross the restaurant off my list of places to dine. However, it may have been just one ingredient in that one dish that caused the illness and not the food or kitchen quality overall. Still, the vivid memory of the food poisoning and its association with the restaurant will outweigh the logical demand to obtain more representative evidence. This is understandable, but it does not mean that further evidence could not and should not be obtained if, for instance, the restaurant was undergoing an inspection. In that case, eating one meal in the dining room would be insufficient to determine the overall quality of the food and the kitchen management. So, while we may reach hasty generalizations in our own lives when it comes to very good and very bad experiences, we should not forget that an undue reliance on this argument pattern is logically problematic and insufficient if we explore issues beyond our own pleasure or displeasure.

The fourth fallacy on our list—*fallacy of anecdotal evidence*—is related to hasty generalization because it deals with generalizations and unique or unusual personal examples. Fallacy of anecdotal evidence occurs when an arguer denies the truth or plausibility of a generalization based on her or his knowledge of a counterinstance. For example, a person who denies that smoking causes lung cancer and other serious health problems because Uncle Joe smoked three packs a day and lived to be ninety commits the fallacy. While it may be true, the case of Uncle Joe does not falsify the truth that in general, smoking does cause lung cancer and other serious health problems. Generalizations and percentages reflect patterns across groups. This does not mean that the pattern is true for every member of the group but rather for a statistically significant number. The fact that there are members of the group for whom the pattern does not hold is not evidence that the pattern is false.

This fallacy often comes up in debates about social issues when a statistical generalization is made that challenges people's biases and stereotypes. If you hear that unemployment is generally higher among blacks than whites

even in cases where both groups share the same educational level and you respond “But I know this black guy that got a job over a white guy,” the objection is fallacious. This is because individual counterinstances are not sufficient to falsify a general pattern. Of course, because we may not like what the generalization or pattern suggests, our minds seem to naturally go to the counterinstance. This is another form of defensiveness in an effort to protect our web of belief. However, before we do the work of objecting to an uncomfortable generalization, it would be worth our while to consider why we find it uncomfortable.

What work does the availability of that counterinstance do to sustain other beliefs we have? In the case of the person who is ready to tell us about Uncle Joe’s long life as a smoker, what does the example provide in terms of preserving the person’s web of belief? If the person is a smoker, knowing that it is possible to escape smoking’s deadly effects most likely offers some comfort. However, by overemphasizing Uncle Joe’s case rather than the large body of data on smoking, the person avoids looking at the much more likely fact that smoking will cause significant harm. Similarly, thinking that things are not as bad as the studies show because “I know a case where . . .” can be comforting but can also blind us to the real harms that are perpetuated regularly in our society. Anecdotal evidence provides a way to avoid integrating uncomfortable (but relevant) data into our web of belief.

When is anecdotal evidence not fallacious? In some cases where a very broad generalization is put forward, anecdotal evidence can narrow the generalization to reveal its actual scope and limits. For instance, if someone claims that “Every woman wants to be a mother” and then hears from a variety of different women who report that they do not have that desire, their reports, while anecdotal, still undermine the generalization about “every woman.” Generalizations that begin with “all” and “every” are referred to as “universal” in logic and critical thinking. The problem with these kinds of generalizations is that they can be undermined with one counterexample. Keeping in mind that we want to practice cooperative reasoning (our third major skill as intellectually empathic thinkers), we will be wary of both making such broad universal generalizations and shutting down an argument because we can raise one counterexample. If we shift to modifiers such as “many” or “most” and specify that we are referring to our own experience, we can work together to make sense of the generalizations and particular experiences that make up our belief systems. The person above who made the claim “Every woman wants to be a mother” could have said instead “Most of the women I know have said they wanted to be mothers.” A woman hearing this claim but who does not have this desire could point out

her different view without shutting down the dialogue. By explaining that this does not hold true for every woman, she could still seek out reasons for why the person who made the claim found it worth reporting. Similarly, the person who made the claim could consider how it might feel for someone to be subjected to a generalization that does not feel accurate. When generalizations are made about social groups, we should always consider these three questions:

Who benefits from the generalization?

Who is marginalized or left out?

How does this perpetuate existing inequalities?

The next fallacy we will consider is *straw person* (or “straw man” as it was traditionally called), and this occurs when someone reformulates another person’s argument in such a way that it is more vulnerable to objections and harder to defend. The idea is that a straw person is very easy to knock down. So, for example, if Sue argued for increasing our use of public transportation by reducing our reliance on personal automobiles and if I, upon hearing her, objected by saying “So, Sue wants to take away our cars so that we have to depend entirely on public transportation,” I would have committed the straw person fallacy. Sue’s original claim was that we should use public transportation more and personal automobiles less. But this is a much more modest proposal than Sue wanting to take away our cars and make us completely reliant on public transportation. This unfair interpretation of her claim makes it much more vulnerable to objections and counterexamples as compared with what Sue proposed in her original statement.

The straw person fallacy is unfortunately all too common when the issue involves social differences and social identities. For example, a news story about a transgender first grader who was born a boy but identifies as a girl reported that the child was initially prohibited from using the girls’ restroom at her school. Michael Silverman, executive director of the Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund, argued that “By denying the child the right to use the little girls restroom like all the other little girls at school it created an environment that was hostile, discriminatory and unsafe. . . . [The child] wants the same dignity, respect and opportunity, and deserves that, as every other student.”⁸

In an online news and opinion website about the story, one commenter said that the argument amounted to “FORCING people to embrace and celebrate others’ sexual/gender alternative lifestyles and that is NOT ‘equality.’”⁹ However, Silverman’s original argument did not advocate for embracing or

celebrating a transgender identity. Rather, he called for “dignity, respect, and opportunity.” There is nothing inconsistent with affording another person dignity, respect, and opportunity while at the same time not embracing or celebrating that person’s identity. By reinterpreting a group’s demand for equal respect and opportunity as a demand for embracing and celebrating that group, the commenter makes the argument much less defensible.

Consider the difference between providing some meatless options at an important business luncheon for a coworker who does not eat meat versus everyone at the meeting embracing and celebrating vegetarianism. The first accommodation is respectful and affords an equal opportunity, while the second is just silly and excessive. And in the first case the accommodation requires very little effort and presents no obstacles to the rest of the attendees, while the second would require major challenges and life changes.

Even minimal accommodations, however, can feel like big sacrifices when groups with social privilege have to make room for equal opportunity. This difficulty is compounded when the people who are demanding equal access are perceived as being immoral or out to destroy what is good. Enslaved people who demanded freedom, women who demanded equal rights, LGBT people who demand respect and equal protection, people with disabilities who demand equal opportunity, and religious minorities who demand freedom from persecution are all examples of groups seeking equal access and opportunity and not mass conversion or social destruction. This shift from social reform to social destruction, which has a long history in debates about social identity and difference, leads us into a discussion of our next fallacy.

The next fallacy, the *slippery slope*, occurs when an arguer claims that accepting a certain position will soon lead to greater and greater disastrous outcomes, although there is no evidence connecting the position to this terrible outcome. Say, for instance, you ask a friend whether you might borrow his car. You have a good driving record, no history of stealing things, and are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. However, your friend says no because he believes that you will not drive carefully and will wind up in an accident, thereby wrecking his car. Your friend has committed the slippery slope fallacy.

The slippery slope fallacy crops up in arguments about social differences because it reflects the anxiety and fear associated with social change and reform. As we saw with appeal to tradition as well as the status quo cognitive bias, even reasonable requests for accommodations and change can feel like major destabilizing overhauls to the people who have not had to make changes. Operating with a win-lose or zero-sum framework, many people

who have not had to pay attention to their privilege will interpret a request for social change as an effort to strip away their rights. Extending “special rights,” as they are often negatively described, means that those with “ordinary” rights will have to lose something. We see this in former senator Rick Santorum’s claim that legalizing gay marriage will lead to the legality of “man on child, man on dog, or whatever the case may be.”¹⁰ We also see it in the argument by former Colorado governor Richard Lamm that “multiculturalism and encouraging immigrants to maintain their own culture and believing that all cultures are equal” will eventually lead to “the destruction of America,” since no nation can withstand competing languages and cultures.¹¹ Both examples rest on the assumption that rights and opportunities afforded to some will mean a loss of morality and security for all.

Yet there is easily available counterevidence to both arguments that get lost as we slide down the slippery slope. In the case of gay marriage leading to pedophilia or bestiality, there is the obvious point that the latter cases do not involve consenting adults. In addition, Santorum compares the right to marry (which is legal for heterosexuals) to illegal sexual acts. One is a positive right available to some, while the other is a prohibited act restricted for all. For these reasons, the slide from extending that positive right to permitting generally illegal acts is unjustified.

In Lamm’s argument, the point that no nation can withstand competing languages and cultures ignores the fact that for most of American history, “competing” cultures and languages were the norm. In seventeenth-century Manhattan, Dutch and English were spoken alongside Native American Lenape languages (Munsee and Unami) and west African dialects. In nineteenth-century rural Pennsylvania, English, Dutch, German, and Irish dialects were spoken.¹²

Globally, nations including China, India, Malaysia, Switzerland, Belgium, Guatemala, Pakistan, New Zealand, and many more have multiple official languages and cultures.¹³ So, if there are obvious counterexamples to these arguments, why are they nevertheless put forward by seemingly reasonable people in positions of leadership? While we do not have access to the beliefs and motives of Santorum or Lamm, we can nevertheless try to make sense of their claims so that we might understand why slippery slope fallacies are so common. Clearly fear has persuasive power, since most of us actively avoid the things that frighten us or cause us harm. Many people are frightened of social changes even if the evidence fails to demonstrate a clear risk. Remember that with the status quo bias discussed in chapter 4, many people assume that change will bring about negative consequences, so they assume that the right thing to do is to maintain the status quo. In addition,

if social advantage and disadvantage is framed within people's belief system as a zero-sum game of us versus them, it is not surprising that extending rights to groups who have not had equal opportunity will be interpreted as a loss and a takeover. For these reasons the disastrous outcomes predicted in slippery slope arguments capture the fears and anxieties that many people have about social change, so the arguments seem reasonable from an emotionally charged standpoint. Similarly, because many people feel that rights should not be extended to those they judge to be living an immoral life, public support is interpreted as an abandonment of the entire moral system. The fear that gay marriage will erode all sense of right and wrong is a prime example of this kind of reasoning. How might intellectually empathic thinkers counter these kinds of fears and draw attention back to the relevant evidence?

For starters, we should understand that these fears are close to the core of many people's belief systems, including perhaps our own. They are connected to and reinforced by the things that give significant meaning to people's lives, such as family, morality, religion, patriotism, and tradition. To give up or revise a belief about one of these areas means a radical revision within a person's web of belief. Given our human tendency to be conservative about changes in our web of belief, it is understandable that people become very protective and very afraid of changing even one or two of these core beliefs, since the revisions could be substantial. Yet we do know that people change these beliefs and in some important instances change them and still preserve their core commitments to morality or religion or patriotism.

For instance, a variety of recent longitudinal sociological studies each found that overall public opinion in the United States toward gay and lesbian people, starting with attitudes in the late 1970s, has become increasingly positive over time, with 2003, the last study, having the most positive responses.¹⁴ Does evidence of a change in public attitude mean that people have had to radically revise their belief systems and give up their core beliefs?

If we consider that during this same time period the concept of homosexuality itself was undergoing radical revision, we might gain some insight as to how it could be integrated into individual belief systems without radical changes in core beliefs. In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association published its first diagnostic manual and identified homosexuality as a disease and a mental disorder.¹⁵ The diagnosis reflected long-held beliefs in American society that homosexuals were social deviants. Given the intense negative perception of homosexuality, many gay and lesbian people remained closeted, unable to counter the misinformation for fear of retaliation. Yet by 1973 that diagnosis was rejected, and homosexuality was no longer

considered by mental health professionals to be a mental illness. During the 1970s the gay and lesbian rights movement gained momentum in the United States, and more gay and lesbian people came out. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s and into the new millennium, more Americans were introduced to gay and lesbian characters in television shows, films, and novels. More gay and lesbian people in a variety of prominent and popular public roles also came out and revealed their sexual identity. More Americans came to know someone in their own personal lives who identified as gay or lesbian. Integral to bringing the issue of equal rights and protections for gay and lesbian Americans to national attention were the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, in which 75,000 people gathered in support of gay rights; the 1980 Democratic National Convention, where Democrats added the equality of gay and lesbian people to their platform; and the 1994 Employment Non-Discrimination Act. These created multiple and more accurate sources of information about gay and lesbian people, as compared with the very limited and distorted information available only three and four decades previously. In this way, the very concept "homosexual" went through a radical public reconceptualization, and this required Americans not to radically revise their core values but instead to replace a false belief with a true one in light of better evidence. While this kind of change requires some adjustments to the web of belief, it does not have to lead to the radical overthrow of core beliefs that one might suspect.

To see this more clearly, imagine that I believed that bird-watchers suffered from some kind of mental illness that caused them not only to watch birds but to also kidnap babies (this is a thought experiment, so please excuse the strangeness of the example). If I believed this, it would be reasonable and ethical for me to want to restrict bird-watchers' rights and keep them far from places where they could do harm. If someone objected by saying that "Bird-watchers should have equal rights and should be able to teach in our schools, work in our hospitals, run for public office, own businesses, etc.," I would be understandably outraged. How could we put so many small children at risk? What kind of moral and social order could make sense of giving rights to known kidnappers? To accept the plea for equal rights for bird-watchers would mean radically revising so many of my beliefs about what is moral, socially acceptable, and safe. Yet if I came to find out that I was wrong about bird-watchers being kidnappers, that it had been based on years of misunderstanding and limited evidence, and if I came to personally know a variety of different bird-watchers who had no kidnapping tendencies whatsoever, I would have good reason to change my negative belief about bird-watchers. Notice that in so doing I would not be

required to make changes to my whole moral system. I could still believe that we should restrict kidnappers' rights and that it is right for me to avoid kidnappers. The revised belief is just that bird-watchers do not fall into the category of kidnappers, not that I have to see kidnapping as something deserving of equal rights.

In the same way, I would suggest that the majority of Americans who now support gay and lesbian rights have revised not their entire moral system but rather the false belief that a loving relationship with a person of the same sex is a sickness, or a deviance, or a public threat. What we can learn from this change in attitude is that some efforts at social justice are actually efforts at getting the evidence right rather than a requirement to destroy people's core values or overhaul their entire web of belief.

Following Tindale and keeping consistent with our efforts to understand the complexity of fallacies, when is the kind of reasoning employed in slippery slope patterns nonfallacious? Reasoning that links causes to effects is an important form of *induction*, a process whereby we try to find strong (but not certain) evidence for our conclusions. So, when we claim that one thing will lead to another and we have strong evidence for this, we are not arguing fallaciously. For example, if I don't return a library book, then I will accumulate fines on my account. If I accumulate enough fines, my borrowing privileges will be revoked. If my borrowing privileges are revoked, then I will not be able to take out new books when they come to the library. Because this chain of events is likely to occur, I decide to return my library book. Of course, the chain is not guaranteed. It could turn out that there is some glitch in the library's account system that deletes a record of my having taken out the book. This kind of possibility, though, is less likely than the library's system functioning properly. So based on the evidence, it is reasonable for me to return the book.

The difference between a strongly justified causal chain argument and a slippery slope fallacy is that in the case of slippery slope, there is a lack of evidence between the causes and the effects. In addition, slippery slope fallacies often predict disastrous outcomes that are not justified by the available evidence.

The fallacy we will consider next is *false dilemma*, which occurs when an arguer presents two options as if they are the only ones, while obvious alternatives are easily available. An actual dilemma is one where only two options exist. Either you are pregnant or you are not. You vote either guilty or not guilty. You either accept the job offer or decline it (assuming you cannot put the offer on hold). In these cases, there is no wiggle room, or possibility, for negotiation or alternative outcomes.

The fallacy of false dilemma occurs when an arguer treats a case that has a variety of alternatives as if there are only two possible options. For instance, if a student receives a failing grade on an exam and says "Well, this is the result of either my lack of intelligence or the poor environment in which I grew up," she commits the fallacy of false dilemma. There is an obvious third alternative: the student may not have studied and done the work needed to pass the exam. However, by presenting the two options as if they are the only ones, the student gives the impression that the failure cannot be the result of anything else.

The fallacy of false dilemma comes up in dialogues and debates about social issues and contributes to the false dichotomies described in the introduction. Like zero-sum games, either-or options oversimplify the available evidence and restrict the ways we can think about social identity and social issues. When someone says "America, love it or leave it," they are presenting us with a false dilemma. There are obvious alternatives, such as remaining in the country and working to change the things you may not love. There is also the option of leaving and nevertheless still loving America. However, by setting up the choice as loving or leaving, the claim makes no room for dissent from within. The false dilemma in this case is an effort to silence that third alternative.

One recent example of false dilemma in debates about social identity and social difference is the argument that if you fail to support a particular policy of President Barack Obama, then you are a racist. Louisiana Democratic Party chairwoman Karen Carter Peterson said on the floor of the Louisiana Senate in May 2013 that opponents of the president's Affordable Care Act are motivated by racism.¹⁶ The problem with this objection is that it fails to consider the obvious possibility that critics are motivated by shortcomings with the plan itself. By leaving out this option as if it is not even a possibility, Peterson reduces the complexity of the debate to an oversimplified either-or scenario.

Why do seemingly reasonable people resort to false dilemma, especially when third and fourth options are so obvious? One way of making sense of the appeal of false dilemma is that when a person is in the grip of an argument, the adversarial nature of that context breeds a "you are with me or against me" dichotomy. As discussed in chapter 3, we have inherited the metaphor of argument as war. If an argument is perceived as a war, then there must be just two sides and two causes. To counter this oversimplification, intellectually empathic critical thinkers should recognize the grip of false dilemma while reminding the arguer that another less polarizing option is available. Similarly, when we find ourselves in the grip of an

either-or presentation of the evidence, we should remain mindful of the fact that we may be overlooking some third important alternative.

The next fallacy to consider is *appeal to ignorance*, which occurs when someone argues for a particular conclusion on the basis of an absence of evidence. For instance, if I argue that cancer will never be cured because no one has found a cure, I have committed the fallacy of appeal to ignorance. It is worth noting with this fallacy that two opposing conclusions can be drawn from the same evidence. I could have just as well drawn the conclusion that since no one has yet proven that cancer cannot be cured, a cure is certain to exist. What we should conclude when the evidence is inconclusive is that the issue remains an open question. The logical thing to do, then, is to suspend judgment until relevant evidence is found.

We see the fallacy of appeal to ignorance come up in debates about social identity and social difference when arguers try to force conclusions on the basis of inconclusive evidence. For example, some non-Muslim Americans have argued that because Muslim Americans have not publicly condemned certain violent actions by radical Muslims, they must therefore support those violent actions. Yet an absence of condemnation is not the same thing as support. Along the same lines, to conclude that Muslim Americans oppose the violent actions of radical Muslims on the basis of their not publicly coming out in support of those actions would also be an appeal to ignorance. It would be more reasonable to conclude that most people do not support violence because it causes harm than to conclude that they do not support violence because they have not publicly voiced their support for it. The point is that a lack of evidence should not be used as evidence for any conclusion. So, why is this fallacy so common in the context of social issues?

One reason may be that when there is an absence of evidence, it is very easy for arguers to impose their point of view, since there is no counterpoint. If a particular conclusion is important to me and I see that no one has disproven it, it is easy enough for me to take that as a justification, since I already believe that the conclusion is true. Sentiments such as “silence is consent” and “a failure to work against something is working for it” reflect the judgment that by not taking a position, one actually does take a position. However, this is not entirely fair, especially since in many circumstances the relevant evidence may not be available to people. Calling people “sheep” because they do not take a stand on an issue fails to consider that they may not have the relevant evidence. Rather than resorting to name-calling, the intellectually empathic thinker should actively seek out this evidence and make it available for everyone’s consideration.

Along the same lines, a failure to articulate a position on an issue may be the result of it seeming so obvious that people do not feel the need to voice their concerns. If a murderer is apprehended and happens to be a female professor, I would not feel the need to make clear that as a female professor, I do not condone her actions. My silence is not consent but instead is a result of my believing that there is no need to make such a statement, since being a female professor was not the cause of her committing murder. In the same way, many social groups are surprised when they are expected to come out against a terrible action perpetrated by someone who identifies with their group. Murderers who kill in the name of God are in fact murderers and are not acting on behalf of everyone who practices the same religion. Yet, Muslims are asked to account for murderers who happen to identify as Muslim. The Ku Klux Klan had an explicitly Christian ideology and stated its goals as “reestablishing Protestant Christian values in America by any means possible.”¹⁷ Yet many Christian Americans saw the Klan as a terrorist organization that had no connection to their values or their Christian faith.

Similar to false dilemma is *complex question*. This fallacy occurs when an arguer embeds a controversial assumption in a question so that a response to the question will confirm the assumption. For example, if I ask you whether you will finally admit that you are a drug user and you say “no,” you have implied that you will continue to hide your drug use. Of course, if you say “yes,” you imply that you will now admit your drug use. The problem is that I have not established whether or not you have concealed a drug habit; instead, I have merely assumed that in my formulation of the question. Complex question is related to false dilemma because both fallacies falsely constrain the options within a dialogue.

We see complex question in arguments about social issues that use premises such as “Since men are naturally better at science and mathematics, shouldn’t we stop wasting resources on programs to get women into these fields?” and “Since illegal immigrants steal American jobs, shouldn’t we work harder to stop them from getting into this country?” or “Why are we so hated in the Arab world?” In all of these cases, the question embeds the controversial claim as if it were true rather than requiring evidence. Like false dilemma and even appeal to ignorance, the use of this fallacy may have more to do with the confidence the arguer has that the embedded claim is true as opposed to intentionally wanting to deceive or trick the hearer. Our response to complex questions should be to divide the question and point out that while the speaker may be confident in the truth of the embedded claim, it still requires evidence. Similarly, we should be attentive

to the fact that when we are convinced of a controversial claim, we too may smuggle it into a complex question, treating it as if the evidence is obvious. As often as we can, we should make it a habit to identify and make explicit the reasons that support our beliefs about social issues and social identity.

The final fallacy on our list is the *perfectionist fallacy*, which is a special form of false dilemma because it limits our options to either a perfect outcome or nothing at all. The perfectionist fallacy typically occurs when an arguer objects to a proposal on the grounds that the proposal will not lead to a perfect result. So, imagine that I was trying to choose the best option of care for my aging relative, and you suggested a nearby adult assisted living facility based on your knowledge of a resident's positive experience. If I asked whether his care was "perfect" and you replied "Well, it is pretty good" and I then rejected the facility on the grounds that it was not perfect, I would have committed the perfectionist fallacy. This is because perfection is an unrealistic demand when it comes to quality care. In fact, in most situations perfection is an unrealistic demand. The expression "The perfect is the enemy of the good" conveys the idea that quite often, a demand for perfection can often overlook what would actually be a good solution.¹⁸

This final fallacy comes up in arguments about social differences and social identity when proposals are put forward for solving social problems and are rejected because they will not provide a perfect solution. For instance, if someone argued against efforts at ending injustice and discrimination on the grounds that it was not going to solve all the problems of injustice and discrimination in the United States, the arguer would be committing the perfectionist fallacy. Even if it is true that the best efforts will not solve all these problems, it is still an open question as to whether those efforts can solve some of these problems. The arguer would need to provide evidence that addressed the inadequacy of the particular efforts rather than simply demanding perfection.

The appeal of the perfectionist fallacy may stem from the fact that it is easier to reject a proposal that calls for doing something about a big problem than it is to roll up our sleeves and get to work. Large-scale social problems can make people feel inadequate and overwhelmed. Just making a small difference can seem like more effort than it is worth, so why not focus on the insignificance of the effort? The problem with this way of thinking is that some good solutions that could make things better (but not perfect) get dismissed before they can even be implemented and assessed. As intellectually empathic thinkers, we should be committed to keeping an open mind about proposals for solving social problems. We should not let a demand for the perfect get in the way of our efforts to make things better.

Are there contexts where either-or reasoning is justified? If there are in fact only two options available, then it is not fallacious to appeal to just these two options. However, all too often when the issue involves social differences, either-or thinking gets in the way of our consideration of the variety of alternative possibilities and limits our potential to think critically and creatively.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 explored the different ways that people can aggressively make mistakes when arguing about social issues and social differences. We looked at the hostility in debates as well as our tendency to employ cognitive biases and fallacies in our thinking and reasoning. In the next chapter, we will see where there are opportunities for establishing common ground in dialogues and debates about social differences, and we will explore the last two skills involved in being an intellectually empathic critical thinker.

Questions for Review

1. What is the difference between wanting more evidence based on a source's circumstances as compared with committing the ad hominem–circumstantial fallacy?
2. What is testimonial injustice according to philosopher Miranda Fricker? How does it cause a double harm to people who face social disadvantages?
3. Why are people so prone to the slippery slope fallacy when the issue involves social change? Provide an example from your own experience.
4. How does the change in public attitudes about gay and lesbian relationships show that social justice does not require radically revising our values but does involve changing from a false belief to a belief that is more accurate?
5. Are the ten fallacies that we considered in this chapter fallacies in every context? Why or why not? How does relevancy play a role in answering this question?

Questions for Further Thinking and Writing

1. Give an example from your own experience when you (or someone you know) used one of the following fallacies when reasoning about social identity and differences:
 - Appeal to tradition
 - Hasty generalization
 - Anecdotal evidence
2. Find an example from a news article, a political speech or debate, or some other public forum where the speaker committed a straw person fallacy related to an issue of social identity and difference. Provide some analysis for why the person may have been susceptible to this fallacy.
3. What does the expression “The perfect is the enemy of the good” mean from your point of view? How does this relate to the perfectionist fallacy?

Additional Resources

The Australian science education resource service techNyouvids has created a series of six two-minute videos on basic logic principles, including fallacies. The videos are aimed at middle and high school students but are also designed to resonate with adults. The animation and presentation are fun and well designed. The first in the series of videos is at YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSZ3BUru59A>.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy has a very useful article titled “Falacies,” available at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fallacy/>.

Professor Christopher Tindale at the University of Windsor has a homepage at <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/ctindale/articles> with links to several of his papers, including research on fallacies.

Philosophy Bites, an online resource of interviews with the world’s philosophers, has an excellent interview with Miranda Fricker about her book *Epistemic Injustice*. A podcast of the interview is available at <http://www.philosophybites.libsyn.com/webpage/category/Miranda%20Fricker>.

6 | Finding Common Ground through Intellectual Empathy

What We Have Established So Far

So far we have established three of the five skills for becoming an intellectually empathic critical thinker:

1. Knowing that identity is intersectional,
2. Understanding that social privilege is often invisible, and
3. Working at reasoning cooperatively.

We also explored seven common cognitive biases that we are susceptible to when forming our beliefs about social identity and issues of social difference. In chapter 5 we considered ten common logical fallacies that are hard to resist when arguing about social identity and social differences. By paying attention to these cognitive biases and logical fallacies, we can more effectively employ the five skills of intellectual empathy. In this chapter we will add the last two remaining skills, and then in chapter 7 we will see how we can take intellectual empathy out into the world.

Everyone Has an Uncle Moe

At the beginning of any class I teach involving controversial social issues, I ask my students to raise their hands if they have a close friend or relative who would make them feel uncomfortable if the friend or relative came and spoke in front of our class about his or her views on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Invariably almost every single hand in the class will go up. When I ask students what would cause their discomfort, they say things like “My uncle is a good guy, but if you hear him talk about Mexicans you would probably think he is a racist” or “My cousin has a good