

a concern Dave Chappelle had about his show – that people might laughing too hard and for the wrong reasons at his jokes – and one of the reasons he gave for canceling it in his *Academy Award Studio Interview*. Which raises the question – given the potential for abuse, is it okay for people to produce this kind of comedy for public consumption? The short answer is that (1) the kind of humor that cause racism to exist (so without it there would still be racism) and (2) without this kind of humor we lose a very effective way of not only making fun of racists but also getting rid of them (as the joke at Peter's stupidity and stupidity to realize their own folly really laughing at). While it might seem to cover some people's heads, it not like our society is devoid of more straightforward condemnation of racism, sexism, or anti-semitism. If it were, then the context of this comedy would be very different – and even though the people who produced it might view it as a parody, there would be very little reason for the general audience to do so. Admittedly, this kind of humor requires a bit of wit and a little more than a simple pun or knock-knock joke, but that's what makes it more rewarding (and therefore a valuable addition to the repertoire of comedy). Take that, Ken Tucker!

NOTES

- 1 Ken Tucker, "DVD Review: *Animaniacs Dad* Vol. 1," *Entertainment Weekly* April 2, 2006.
 - 2 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Part II, Chapter 6, p. 43.
 - 3 Freud explores this in his 1905 work *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (London: Penguin, 2002).
 - 4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press), Section 40, p. 54.
 - 5 For another comprehensive view of humor that makes use of its function, see Simon Critchley's *On Humor* (New York: Routledge, 2002), though he sees the function of humor as being about self-understanding than social control.
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1985), Book I, Chapter 7.

THINKIN' IS FREAKIN' SWEET! FAMILY GUY AND FALLACIES

ROBERT ARR

If Liza Is Wrong, Then I Don't Want
To Know What Right Is

In the episode "Peter Griffin: Husband, Father . . . Brother?" Peter shows Chris a family album. Believe it or not, one of Peter's relatives was a philosopher. Complete with shabby clothes, goatee, and hand rested under chin, Peter's relative is deep in contemplation when his wife asks, "Aren't you going to go look for a job?" The philosopher lifts his hand up in the air as if to make some profound claim, stares into the heavens, and responds, "Why?" The scene is hilarious – even to philosophers – because it plays on a stereotypical view of a philosopher. Philosophy is a useless endeavor for lazy people who just want to sit around doing nothing but contemplate why-questions.

However hilarious they might be, stereotypes can be harmful both morally and logically. The moral harm comes from assuming that "if one or a few are like that, then they must all be like that." Quagmire evidently had a couple of one-night stands, and now he seems to think that all women want sex (worse yet, sex with him!). The members of the KKK following Peter and Cleveland around in the episode "Death Lives" (Peter thinks they're ghosts) incorrectly think that all non-white people are wicked or subhuman. Think of all of the racism, sexism, ageism, and every other negative "ism" that results from people inappropriately jumping to the conclusion that "they're all like this or that." Recall Diane Simmons' claim, "Well, Tom, I just plain don't like black people" ("I Never Met the Dead Man").



The logical harm of stereotypes is that the conclusion one draws is not supported by the reasons given for that conclusion. The conclusion that “they’re all like that” or “they all must have that same feature, quality, or characteristic” does not follow from and cannot be fully supported by reasons having to do with one or a few instances being “like that” or having the certain feature, quality, or characteristic. Sure, I’ve met my share of professional philosophers who sit around and do nothing, but I could never legitimately draw the conclusion that they *all* sit around and do nothing. In fact, contrary to popular opinion, the vast majority of professional philosophers either have jobs as professors or are looking for such jobs. Likewise, not *all* women want sex (especially with Quagmire), and to the dismay of the KKK not *all* non-white people are wicked. Stereotyping is simply bad thinking.

So, the scene depicting Peter’s philosopher relative is hilarious for most people because of their incorrect perception of philosophers as lazy people, while I suspect it’s hilarious for philosophers because of the absurdity associated with the flawed thinking. Logicians (people who study the principles of correct reasoning) have a term for the kind of bad thinking involved in our lazy philosopher example. They call it a fallacy and the thinking involved, fallacious reasoning. A fallacy occurs when we inappropriately or incorrectly draw a conclusion from reasons that do not support the conclusion.

Fallacious reasoning is all too common. Racists think that just because they have had a bad experience with a person of a particular race, creed, or color, then “they must all be like that.” You might believe that since a famous person thinks that something is right or true, then it must be, the way Peter does when he makes the claim that “If Liza [Minnelli] is wrong [about the positive effects of taking “performance-enhancing” drugs], then I don’t want to know what right is” (“Brian: Portrait of a Dog”). Instead of seeking to become an authority in a particular matter ourselves, we too often blindly accept what someone tells us as “The Gospel Truth” because we perceive them to be an authority concerning that particular matter. Think of the episode “Holy Crap” where Peter’s dad, Francis Griffin, is introduced as a strict Catholic who thinks that masturbation is unnatural and evil just because the bishops of the Catholic church say so. Or, we might even conclude that all the dinosaurs died out

because Peter touched himself at night as a child, as the man at the museum tells Peter in the episode “Wasted Talent.”

On reflection, we can see we’re not justified in concluding that “they’re all like that” it’s true because Liza says so, masturbation is unnatural and evil (thank God!), or that the dinosaurs died out because Peter touched himself at night. In these cases, the conclusions that we draw do not follow from the reasons that are given as supported support. In other words, these are all examples of fallacies.

Lois, Listen to Reason . . . and All of These God-Damned Definitions!

This chapter is a kind of lesson in logic. We’re going to use *Family Guy* as a way to become better at reasoning (“what the deuce!?”). To do this, we’re going to have to get clear on some basic terminology (I know, you weren’t expecting any homework). So here goes:

Logic is the study of the principles of correct reasoning associated with the formation and analysis of arguments. An argument has two or more claims, one of which is known as the conclusion and it – the conclusion – is supposed to follow from and be supported by other claims known as premises.

Wow. Two sentences and four definitions. But we’re really just giving names to some familiar things. Arguments pop up all the time – so we’re constantly dealing with premises, conclusions, and their relation to each other. In “A Hero Sits Next Door,” Joe and his family move in next to the Griffins. Peter reasons that Joe will make a great baseball player for Peter’s company’s team because he sees Joe’s baseball awards. Peter’s reasoning could be put into the form of an argument with two premises leading to a conclusion:

Premise 1 If Joe has baseball sports awards, then he is good at baseball.

Premise 2 If he is good at baseball, then he’ll be good on my company’s baseball team.

Conclusion Therefore, if Joe has baseball sports awards, then he’ll be good on my company’s baseball team.

Where do our premises and our conclusion come from? How do we form arguments? Well, arguments are composed of claims, a



concluding claim (the conclusion) and at least one supporting claim (the premise). A claim is a statement, proposition, declarative sentence, or part of a declarative sentence, resulting from a person's beliefs or opinions, that communicates that something is or is not the case about your self, the world, states of affairs, or reality in general. (Try to say that ten times fast!) Claims are either true or false, and again, are the results of beliefs or opinions that people have concerning any part of what they perceive to be reality. We make our beliefs and opinions known in the form of claims. For example, "I am typing this chapter in a coffee shop" and "Cartoons, like *Family Guy*, are pictures" are claims that happen to be true, whereas "Peter Griffin was the 40th president of the US" and "Stewie is Meg's illegitimate crack-addicted baby" are false claims (although it's true that Peter was the first president of Petoria).

A claim is shown to be true or false as a result of evidence, which can take the forms of either direct or indirect testimony of your senses, explanations, the testimony of others, appeal to well-established theories, appeal to appropriate authority, appeal to definitions, and good arguments, among others. So, that I'm typing in a coffee shop is shown to be true by the direct testimony of my own senses, that cartoons are pictures is true by definition of a "cartoon," that Peter was president of the US is false because of the testimony of the senses of others and authorities, and that Stewie is Meg's illegitimate crack-addicted baby is false, presumably, because of paternity tests linking Stewie to Lois, among other forms of evidence. Some claims are difficult, or impossible, to show true or false with evidence. Claims like "God exists," "Abortion is always immoral," and "I have an immortal soul" would fall into this ambiguous category, and that's one reason why ideas, issues, and arguments surrounding these claims are considered "philosophical."

We appeal to evidence on a daily basis. In doing so, we are offering arguments with premises and conclusions. In "DaBoom" Peter thinks that his family should get into a bomb shelter in their basement for the arrival of the year 2000 because he thinks that Y2K will cause all kinds of computer malfunctions, leading to the launch of nuclear warheads and a nuclear disaster. If asked why his family should get into the bomb shelter, Peter's argument might look like the following:

- Premise 1* Y2K will cause nuclear weapons to be launched in 2000, likely killing anyone not in a shelter.
Premise 2 The bomb shelter likely will keep us safe.
Premise 3 We should do what will likely keep us safe.
Conclusion My family should get into the bomb shelter for the arrival of 2000.

Dinduction?

The argument we've just analyzed is a deductive argument. Deductive arguments are arguments in which the conclusion is meant to follow from the premises with absolute certainty. In other words, if all of the premises are true in a good deductive argument, then the conclusion is inescapable. We can extract a deductive argument from the episode "Wasted Talent." Before actually attempting to locate one of the winning scrolls for the Pawtucket Pete Brewery tour that has been hidden in a beer bottle, Peter and Brian probably thought along these lines:

- Premise 1* If we drink this truckload of beer, then we'll find the scroll.
Premise 2 And if we find the scroll, then we can go on the brewery tour.
Conclusion It follows that if we drink this truckload of beer, then we can go on the brewery tour.

Provided that the two premises are true, the conclusion absolutely must be true. There is no other conclusion that could possibly be drawn from these premises. In fact, you know exactly what the conclusion of this argument is before even seeing it, from looking at the premises alone.

But deduction isn't the only game in town. Inductive arguments ("what? More definitions? I think I need to take notes!") are arguments in which the conclusion is meant to follow from the premises with a degree of probability. In a good inductive argument, if all of the premises are true, then the conclusion is *probably* true — but only probably.

In "Wasted Talent" after Peter and Brian sneak drinks of Pawtucket Pete's forbidden "beer that never loses its carbonation," they start to float up toward the fan in the ceiling (much to their dismay as they think they will be killed by the fan's spinning blades).

Brian farts and notices that this release of gas causes him to descend away from the deadly fan in the ceiling. He then reasons that if Peter farts, he too will start to descend. Brian's reasoning might look like this:

Premise 1 I farted and then descended.

Premise 2 Peter is in a similar situation and is like me.

Conclusion If he farts, then, it's likely Peter will descend too.

We can see that, given the premises, the conclusion probably or likely will be true, but not definitely. It makes sense to conclude that Peter will descend, given that Brian has descended. But the truth of Brian descending because of farting doesn't guarantee that, with absolute certainty or without a doubt, Peter will descend. It's still possible that Peter will not descend, so the conclusion is merely probable or likely. It just so happens to be the case that in the episode Peter does descend, but he needn't necessarily have descended. I just farted right now, but I'm not descending (although the other people in the coffee shop are moving. Now I can really spread out).

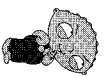
Consider anytime in a *Family Guy* episode where someone asks, "Remember the last time you tried doing something like this?" and then they show a flashback to that actual time where something embarrassing, hurtful, immoral, or just plain downright stupid has occurred. Usually this question is asked in reference to Peter as he is about to do something incredibly embarrassing, hurtful, immoral, or stupid. The idea is that if Peter engages in this activity, then it will have the same unfortunate outcome that it had the last time. The reasoning involved is inductive because the conclusion that "This time the unfortunate thing X will happen" is supported with a premise that relies upon a past occurrence where that unfortunate thing X has happened. But we can never know *for sure, for certain, or with absolute certainty* that the future will be just like the past, so we temper our conclusion by saying *it is likely that, it is probably the case that, or most likely* this or that will happen. Again, even if it's true that some stupid thing happened to Peter in the past, it doesn't follow with absolute certainty that the same stupid thing will happen to Peter in the future. In fact, in numerous *Family Guy* episodes the future becomes the present and the past, and the stupid thing that happened to Peter in the past *does not* happen to Peter again. So, the conclusion turns out to be false.

A Compelling Argument . . . You've Swayed Me, Woman

There are good arguments and there are bad arguments in both the deductive and inductive realms. A good argument, in either realm, is one where (a) the conclusion does follow from the premises and (b) all of the premises are true. If either one of these conditions is not met, then the argument is bad and should be rejected. In the deductive realm, that a conclusion follows from premises means that the argument is valid (it is invalid if the conclusion does not follow). When an argument is valid and all the premises are true it is called a sound argument. This will make it so that the conclusion absolutely, positively, without a doubt, is true, and this is a good thing! In the inductive realm, that a conclusion likely will follow from premises means that the argument is strong (it is weak if the conclusion likely does not follow). When an argument is strong and all the premises are true in the inductive realm, the argument is called a cogent argument. This will make it so that the conclusion most likely or probably is true, and this is a freakin' sweet thing too!

So we must always go through this two-step procedure of checking our own arguments and the arguments of others to see if (a) the conclusion follows from the premises (is the argument deductively valid or inductively strong?) and (b) all of the premises are true. If the argument fails to meet either (a) or (b) or both, then we should reject it, thereby rejecting the person's conclusion as either absolutely false or probably false.

For example, Brian and Peter's argument concerning the brewery tour probably is a bad one because Premise 1 seems false, given the information. It's not true that if they drink a truckload of beer, then they'll necessarily find the scroll. After all, there are probably numerous truckloads of beer. On the other hand, the farting argument was a good one. It was true that when Brian farted, he descended. And given this fact, along with Peter's similar predicament and bodily functions, Brian had a strong case for drawing the conclusion that Peter would descend as well. (Some guy just sat down next to me, so I'm going to fart again right now. Let's see if it works. Yeah, he's moving. That'll teach him.)



The Conclusion is Obvious: I Must Destroy All Vegetables!

Unfortunately, people will often try to convince us of the truth of claims in order to deceive us, or sell us something, or get us to vote for them, or become part of their group, or share their particular ideology. They will also try to convince us that a conclusion follows from a premise or premises when, in fact, it does not, kind of like what happens when we think that all philosophers are lazy and useless. As we've seen, deceptive arguments in which the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises are called fallacies.

One of the most common fallacies is hasty generalization. In a hasty generalization, a person incorrectly draws a conclusion about characteristics of a *whole group* based upon premises concerning characteristics of a *small sample* of the group. Most times, when we think to ourselves "they're all like that" in talking about anything – people, cars, philosophers, vegetables – based upon a small sample of the group we're talking about, we commit a hasty generalization. There is usually no way *definitely* to conclude something about the characteristics of an entire group since we have no knowledge of the entire group. The next member of the group we encounter may turn out to have different characteristics from members of the group we know thus far. Any form of prejudice and stereotyping, by definition, involves a hasty generalization. Consider the way Jews and African Americans are stereotyped, how Mexicans and philosophers are typecast as lazy, and gays are *all* flamboyant in *Family Guy*.

The writers of *Family Guy* play on people's hasty generalizations to make their points in episode after episode. In "A Picture is Worth 1,000 Bucks," Peter hastily generalizes that *all* of Chris's works of art will make lots of money, because *one* of his art pieces has made lots of money. Relying on this hasty generalization, he uproots his family and transports them to New York thinking they'll be rich and be able to live a New York kind of lifestyle: "My son here is gonna be the best thing to happen in New York since Mayor Giuliani had all the homeless people secretly killed." In the end, Chris's artwork bombs out! Unlikely as it seems, even Stewie sometimes commits the fallacy of hasty generalization. In "I Never Met A Dead Man," after being forced to eat his broccoli, Stewie assumes that all vegetables must be

this bad and concludes that *all* vegetables must be destroyed. To recast a cliché: "One bad vegetable doesn't spoil the whole bunch."

Another common fallacy is the ad hominem. In this fallacy, someone concludes that a person's claims or arguments are false or not worth listening to because of premises that concern an attack on the actions, personality, or ideology of the person putting forward the claim or argument. In other words, instead of focusing on the person's issue, claims, or argument, one attacks the person (ad hominem is Latin for *to the man*). This strategy is used when we try to discredit a person's argument by discrediting the person. But notice, the person and the person's arguments are two distinct things – to attack one isn't necessarily to attack the other.

For example, in the episode "Running Mates" Peter smears Lois's good name by spreading rumors about her: "[Our children] deserve a school board president who doesn't leave her feminine ointments in the fridge next to the mustard. That was the worst sandwich I ever ate! She flosses in bed. She snores like a wildebeest. She freed Willie Horton. She nailed Donna Rice . . . [She] eats babies." People conclude, without even listening to her claims, that she must have nothing good to say, or that what she has to say is automatically false. What does Lois's personality – even if she was the biggest murdering, raping, *snooring* slut on the planet – have to do with the truth or falsity of the claims she makes about how to hold a civil office? The answer is: absolutely nothing! The conclusions that "she must have nothing good to say, or that what she has to say is automatically false" just do not follow from claims about her personality.

Here's another example. If Mayor West claims that smoking is wrong and wants to tell you why it is so, *and* he has a cigarette hanging out of his mouth when he is telling you this, you cannot conclude automatically that what he has to say is worthless or false. You could accuse Mayor West of being a hypocrite, but you cannot conclude that what he is saying is worthless or false without first hearing his argument!

An argument from inappropriate authority is just what it freakin' sounds like, incorrectly drawing a conclusion from premises based upon a non-credible, non-qualified, or illegitimate authority figure. The best way to avoid this fallacy altogether is to become an authority concerning some matter yourself by getting all of the relevant facts, understanding the issues, doing research, checking and double-checking



your sources, dialoguing with people, having your ideas challenged, defending your position, being open to revising your position, and the like. But since we can't become authorities on everything, we need to rely upon others.

In the episode "Holy Crap," Chris's grandfather thinks that Chris is masturbating in the bathroom when, in reality, he just needs to go number 2. Grandpa Griffn claims that what he thinks Chris is doing (masturbating) is a sin and that Chris will go to hell for it. Now, what authority does Chris's grandfather have to make such pronouncements about who will go to hell or not? Is he a priest? You might say that anyone who knows Catholic church doctrine can become an authority on issues such as masturbation and hell. But if you investigate church doctrine, you can see that no human being – pope, priest, or layperson – can make pronouncements about who will go to hell or not. So Chris's failure to recognize this fallacy gets him to accept the idea that he'll go to hell if he poops/masturbates.

Jumping to Conclusions and Jumping for Joy That This God-Damned Chapter is Coming to a Close

So, now that we've gone through this little logic lesson, there's a couple of things to keep in mind. The most important thing is to not jump to conclusions. Remember that every single chapter in this book will kick ass. Why? Well, it's because this chapter kicks ass, of course. Even if this chapter *didn't* kick ass, all the others still would. Also, I wouldn't listen to anything that any university professor says because *you know* they're all liberal, closeted commie pinkos. Listen to George Bush, especially when it comes to military strategy, the teaching of Creation Science in public schools, and the fact that the Bible should be everyone's rulebook. That way, you'll definitely avoid the pitfalls of bad reasoning.

THE SIMPSONS ALREADY DID IT! THIS SHOW IS A RIP-OFF!

SHAI BARMAN AND WILLIAM J. DEVLIN

Let's begin with a trivia question. What TV cartoon focuses on a dysfunctional family of five? Hint: the members of the family include an overweight, dimwitted father accompanied by a stable and supportive wife (who he does not love), three children (an oddball son who doesn't seem to fit in, a precocious daughter, and a baby), and, of course, a dog? If you're from the USA. Until January 31, you've just won a weekend in SHAI BARMAN AND WILLIAM J. DEVLIN's 1999 *The Simpsons* was the only cartoon to answer to this question. But then Fox introduced America to *Family Guy*, a TV show that fits this description like Homer fits into a pair of puffy clown pants. People who watch both shows cannot help but experience almost embarrassing déjà vu: same characters, same relationships, same plotlines, same settings, same characters, same relationships between the members of the family and the town, and similar plotlines. Both series have the same nuclear family structure. Both have a set of secondary characters, neighbors, and friends (from Flanders, Moe, Lenny, and Carl, to Cleveland, the nephews, and Joe) who contribute to the plot developments. And both series have peripheral characters who play a role in the functioning of society. From Mayor Quimby, Homer's boss Mr. Burns, and news-anchor Kent Brockman, to Mayor Adam West, Peter's one-time boss Mr. West, and news-anchors Tom Baker, Diane Simmons, and Tricia Takana. *Family Guy* mimics plotlines and backdrops from *The Simpsons*: life in a suburban mansion, post-nuclear war survival, a family in political dealing with obesity, drinking problems (including losing a job due to such problems), enrolling in the witness protection program, and so on. The commonalities don't end there.