

Comment: Few people think of this metaphor when patriotic music is playing and the troops are marching off to wage war. Do you agree or disagree with the metaphor and/or the point behind our comment on it?

44 FOUL WAYS TO WIN AN ARGUMENT

If you want to become aware of how politicians, the news media, the advertising industry, public relations experts, government officials, and assorted friends and enemies use the arts of manipulation and con artistry against you, enter their point of view! Learn the art of intellectual dirty tricks so that, if necessary, you can outthink the tricksters.

First, remember that those who strive to manipulate you want something from you: your money, your vote, your support, your time, your soul—something! But they also need you to be unaware of what they are about. They have something (often a lot) to hide. Their goal is not the use of sound evidence and valid reasoning. They insult our intelligence by assuming that a manipulative trick will work on us, that we are not insightful enough to see what they are doing.

Your goal should be to recognize fallacies for what they are—the dirty tricks of those who want to gain an advantage. Fallacies, therefore, are stratagems for gaining influence, advantage, and power (over the “sheep” of society). You will withstand their impact more effectively when you know these fallacies inside and out. When you come to see how counterfeits of good reasoning pervade everyday life (and are the lifeblood of the mass media), you are better able to resist their influence. When you are inoculated against fallacies, your response to them is transformed. You ask key questions. You probe behind the masks, the fronts, the fostered images, the impressive pomp and ceremony. You take charge of your own mind and emotions. You become (increasingly) your own person.

Let us now turn to some of the most prominent fallacies in thinking. As you read through these dirty tricks, imagine yourself instructing unscrupulous people in the art of manipulating the sheep of the world. Imagine yourself in the “business” of seeking influence over others. You want to get their vote, support, money, or what have you. Something is at stake that you care about. You face some opposition. You want to win the argument, gain the influence. And you don’t care (at some level) what you have to do to achieve your goal.

What can you do? Use any one or more of the 44 foul ways to win an argument described next. If you don’t mind being unscrupulous, you can manipulate and control the simple-minded. And these foul ways work even with otherwise highly sophisticated persons. You can observe the practices of politicians (and other propagandists) successfully using them every day. And don’t worry about feeling guilty. Your instinctive skill in self-deception most likely will keep you from noticing that you are doing something unethical. Here is your battery of strategies for overcoming your conscience.