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Red Herring

Ignoratio elenchi

(also known as: beside the point, misdirection [form of], changing the subject, false emphasis, the Chewbacca defense, irrelevant conclusion, irrelevant thesis, clouding the issue, ignorance of refutation)

Description: Attempting to redirect the argument to another issue to which the person doing the redirecting can better respond. While it is similar to the avoiding the issue fallacy, the *red herring* is a deliberate diversion of attention with the intention of trying to abandon the original argument.

Logical Form:

*Argument A is presented by person 1.
Person 2 introduces argument B.
Argument A is abandoned.*

Example #1:

*Mike: It is morally wrong to cheat on your spouse, why on earth would you have done that?
Ken: But what is morality exactly?
Mike: It's a code of conduct shared by cultures.
Ken: But who creates this code?...*

Explanation: Ken has successfully derailed this conversation off of his sexual digressions to the deep, existential, discussion on morality.

Example #2:

- Overwhelming Exception
- Package-Deal Fallacy
- Poisoning the Well
- Political Correctness Fallacy
- Post-Designation
- Prejudicial Language
- Proof by Intimidation
- Proof Surrogate
- Proving Non-Existence
- Psychogenetic Fallacy
- Quantifier-Shift Fallacy
- Quantum Physics Fallacy
- Questionable Cause
- Rationalization
- Red Herring
- Reductio ad Absurdum
- Reductio ad Hitlerum
- Regression Fallacy
- Reification
- Relative Privation
- Retrogressive Causation
- Righteousness Fallacy
- Rights To Ought Fallacy
- The Fallacies: Sc-Wi <

Billy: How could the universe be 6000 years old when we know the speed of light, the distance of astronomical objects (13+ billion light years away), and the fact that the light has reached us^[1]?
Marty: 6000 years is not a firm number. The universe can be as old as about 10,000 years.
Billy: How do you figure that?...

Explanation: Marty has succeeded in avoiding the devastating question by introducing a new topic for debate... shifting the young-earth creation timeline where it does not necessarily coincide with the Bible.

Exception: Using a *red herring* to divert attention away from your opponent's *red herring*, might work, but do two wrongs make a right?

Tip: Impress your friends by telling them that there is no such fish species as a "red herring;" rather it refers to a particularly pungent fish—typically a herring but not always—that has been strongly cured in brine and/or heavily smoked.

References:

Hurley, P. J. (2011). *A Concise Introduction to Logic*. Cengage Learning.

[1]The most distant object yet confirmed in the universe is a self-destructing star that exploded 13.1 billion light years from Earth. The object is a gamma-ray burst (GRB) – the brightest type of stellar explosion. The burst is dubbed GRB 090423 for the date of its discovery.

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Jeremy Hinken

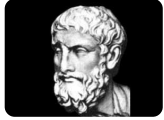
Tuesday, February 26, 2019 - 12:03:48 PM

Example #2 is interesting because in Nov. 2016, an article published in Physics Review D offers excellent evidence for the theory of Variable Light Speed, which states that light has significantly slowed down from almost instantaneous at the beginning of our universe to what we now observe. It would completely turn physics on its head and change the dates of everything.

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George
Shirewill

Friday, September 07, 2018 - 08:14:18 PM

Quite interesting. Much appreciated Bo Bennett!

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Anthony

Friday, October 20, 2017 - 12:05:37 PM

I do not fully agree with you as for the second example. Yes, Ken does change the subject, but that doesn't make it fallacious. Sometimes it is needed to clear things up(elucidate) or understand where someone is coming from first, before touching upon the crux of his/her argument.

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1 reply

2 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Friday, October 20, 2017 - 12:13:16 PM

Understood. The assumption in the examples is that the initial question is never addressed. That is what makes it fallacious.

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3 votes

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