



# Philosophy 104

Chapter 16 Notes

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# Fallacies of Vacuity

- Fallacies of vacuity result when a person's argument is just uninformative.
- Again, this can be the result of either deception or confusion.
- These fallacies are fallacies because they fail to provide reasons for believing what they purport to support.

# Circular reasoning

- The simplest way of characterizing circular reasoning is when the explanation *just is* the thing being explained (but usually in different words).
  - The reason that cigarettes are hard to give up is that they contain nicotine, which is addictive.
- If in an argument, circular reasoning is when one of the premises *just is* the conclusion, though sometimes restated.
  - The new highway is good for everyone because it would benefit everyone.

# Begging the Question

- This is subtly different from circular reasoning in that circular premises *just are* the conclusions (though sometimes restated) while premises in question-begging arguments are distinct from their conclusions, but cannot be believed without believing the conclusion.

# Self-sealers

- Self-sealers are arguments or explanations who have all of their proof built in already.
- The reason that this is a fallacy of vacuity is because any argument that can't be wrong in any circumstances doesn't tell us anything useful.

# Three kinds of self sealers

- Universal discounting: The person can always explain away counterevidence with the self-sealing feature of the argument or explanation.
- Ad-hominem: The person can level a personal attack on their critics which will apply to a person just for being a critic.
- Definition: When words are stipulated in such ways as to make someone's position true by definition.