Slanting Fallacy

I. Lesson

In today's lesson, our discussion will be focused on the fallacy known as the slanting fallacy. The importance of recognizing this fallacy cannot be understated. More likely than not, you have encountered a use of this fallacious argumentation. Generally, the slanting fallacy can be defined as:

- **Slanting Fallacy:** A fallacy which involves the deliberate withholding or unjust overemphasizing of information in order to *slant* the argument in one's own favor.

For the most part, uses of this fallacy tend to take a couple of forms:

1. Exclusions of relevant pieces of information that are unfavorable to one's position.
2. Biased descriptions of items relevant to an argument.

Argumentative strategies of this variety are fallacious, as they purposefully utilize false, or only partially true, premises to build their arguments.

II. Examples

As the description given above could be seen as rather vague, the following two examples will be used to showcase the common forms of the fallacy of slanting discussed above.

i. Withholding of Information

Imagine one day you happen upon a local politician hosting a campaign rally. As you recently decided to get more involved in local politics, upon seeing the politician head towards the stage, you earnestly wait for their speech to begin. After a few minutes of introduction, the politician begins speaking, and in their declaration to the local townspeople they provide an argument that the redevelopment and beautification of older impoverished neighborhoods in your town is a good thing. See if you can find places where the politician excludes information that is unfavorable to their position. The argument goes as follows:

> We want to boost the economy and introduce jobs in these regions, as a better economy will help everyone. We know that if these regions look newly redeveloped, then wealthier people will want to move to these places. We also know that if wealthier people move to the regions, more businesses will open to cater to the new lucrative populations, so more jobs will become available. As the formerly impoverished areas will now have a wealthier population and a larger job market, the economy of the areas

> will be boosted. Therefore, in order to boost the economy, introduce jobs, and help everyone, we should redevelop and beautify the regions.

While such an argument seems to be sensical to your fellow townspeople, who believe that a better economy and an increase in jobs would generally be good for everyone including the residents of these areas, you know that the politician has neglected to mention a few very important details. In redeveloping the area and bringing in a new group of wealthier inhabitants, the owners of the properties in these regions will begin to raise the prices of rent for the inhabitants. This will occur as the owners now have the wealthier new influx of residents who can afford the steeper prices. Due to the fact that the original inhabitants of the regions were impoverished, many of them were renters (rather than homeowners) so the new increases will directly affect them. As the prices of their rent go higher and higher, many of the original inhabitants of the regions will become displaced, and a good percentage of this group will also become homeless. In excluding this information from the campaign rally, the politician has committed the fallacy of slanting, as they *neglected to inform* the townspeople that the better economy will actually *hurt* the people in these areas. In general, recognition of this form of the slanting fallacy involves an understanding of when some fact, relevant to any conclusion reached, has been excluded from an argument.

ii. Biased Descriptions

In a similar vein as the example above, imagine the same politician and the same campaign rally. Within the argument, which was paraphrased above, the politician also mentions the following sub-argument for the claim that the buildings are in need of redevelopment for wealthy individuals to occupy them:

> We want to introduce wealthy individuals into the area. We know that these buildings are a bit older and in need of repairs. We also know that wealthy individuals don't want to live in ugly-looking buildings. Therefore, we know that wealthy people don't want to live in these buildings.

The argument above is fallacious, as the politician has introduced a *biased description* of the buildings in order to reach the conclusion that wealthy people would not want to live in them.
Notice that the conclusion reached relies upon the fact that "wealthy individuals don't want to live in *ugly-looking buildings*", even though there was no premise introduced which established the buildings as being ugly. To reach this conclusion, the politician used a biased description of the buildings as if it were a predicate included in one of the premises, although the description was only introduced due to their own preferences. Recognition of this form of the fallacy involves identifying when a biased portion of a description, taking the place of a term, is used to reach a conclusion, as if it were a premise introduced into an argument.

III. Exercises

Exercise 1

Directions: Give two either real or imagined examples of the slanting fallacy in use.

Ex: See sec. II above.

1.)

2.)

Exercise 2

Directions: Determine whether the following are examples of the slanting fallacy and explain how you know this.

Ex. We know that the ice in the arctic is freshwater; we know the melting of this ice releases freshwater; and we also know that an abundance of freshwater is good for humans. Therefore, we know that the melting of the ice in the arctic is good for humans.

Answer: This is an example of the slanting fallacy, as the argument excludes the fact that the ice melts into the ocean and becomes saltwater, so it would not be available to humans. Besides this immediate fact, the negative consequences of the melting of the arctic are abundant.

1.) We know that an overpriced medication is vital to stop the progression of a certain disease. We know that the disease mentioned above is fatal if left untreated. Therefore, we know that the cost of living for those with this disease is overpriced.

2.) We know that after it rains there will be a rainbow. We also know that there were no rainbows present all day. Therefore, we know that it hasn't rained all day.

3.) We know that if the theory of evolution is true, then humans are somewhat related to sea creatures. We know that anything related to a sea creature is a sea creature. Therefore, as humans are not sea creatures, the theory of evolution cannot be true.

Exercise 3 (Challenge Question)

Directions: For the arguments determined as fallacious in the last section, create valid conclusions from the premises provided. (Hint: In examples of the withholding of relevant information, this withheld information can be included as a premise.)

Ex. We know that the ice in the arctic is freshwater; we know the melting of this ice releases freshwater; and we also know that an abundance of freshwater is good for humans. Therefore, we know that the melting of the ice in the arctic is good for humans

Answer: We know that the ice in the arctic is freshwater; we know the melting of this ice releases freshwater; and we know that this ice will melt into oceanic water; therefore we know that the freshwater ice in the arctic will melt into the ocean becoming saltwater.

1.)

2.)

3.)

IV. Conclusion

In this lesson, we went over the slanting fallacy, which more likely than not, you as a student have encountered in your daily life. It is because of the prevalence of this fallacious reasoning that it is so important that you be able to identify and avoid its use.

V. Learning Goals:

Following this lesson, students should be able to:

- both identify and avoid uses of the slanting fallacy.
- understand why the use of biased descriptions can be fallacious.
- understand why the withholding of relevant information can be fallacious.

Answer Key:

Exercise 1

Answers may vary, however each exemplifies either the withholding of information or biased description forms of the slanting fallacy.

Exercise 2

1. This is an example, as the biased description of the medication as overpriced was used in the argument as if it were the emphasized predicate of the premise into which it was introduced.
2. This is not an example of fallacious reasoning.
3. This is an example, as the withholding of information regarding the nature of the evolutionary relation between sea creatures and humans lead to the conclusion that this relation must mirror that of the relation between two sea creatures.

Exercise 3 (Challenge Question)

Answers may vary, however sample answers are provided below.

1. We know that an overpriced medication is vital to stop the progression of a certain disease. We know that the disease mentioned above is fatal if left untreated. Therefore, we know that the sufferers of this disease need this overpriced medication.
2. Non-fallacious argument.
3. We know that if the theory of evolution is true, then humans are somewhat related to sea creatures. We know that anything closely genetically related to a sea creature is a sea creature. Therefore, as humans are not sea creatures, we know that humans must not be closely genetically related to sea creatures.