Exercise 4.1
Informal Fallacies: Exercises

Identify the informal fallacy in each of the following arguments.

1. Civil disobedience must be justified because none other than Dr. Spock, the well-known authority on child growth and development, was an advocate of civil disobedience during the era of protest against the war in Vietnam.
   
   improper appeal to authority

2. Why are you so skeptical about ESP? Can you prove that it does not exist?
   
   appeal to ignorance

3. Six months after President Hoover took office in 1929, the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. He is therefore responsible for this tragic episode in our national history.
   
   post hoc, ergo propter hoc

4. Only short poems can be good, not long ones. Of course, many so-called poems, such as Paradise Lost, take up a large number of pages. But if they are any good, they must really be collections of short poems, because a long poem as such cannot be of any great value.
   
   begging the question – arguing in a circle type

5. You can't possibly accept his views that the employees need a raise. After all, he is the executive secretary of the labor union, and he is paid to make such statements.
   
   ad hominem - but one could make the case here the personal information about the executive secretary of the labor union is relevant, and hence this is not a fallacy

6. "Sen. Rudman advanced a 'pizza theory' to resolve disputes; budget negotiators were stalled for five hours but reached agreement 20 minutes after Rep. Aspin had pizza delivered." [Wall Street Journal, December 13, 1986]
   
   post hoc, ergo propter hoc
7. Opinion poll question: Do you favor more money for welfare programs, or do you feel we should let people starve on the streets?

   **false dilemma, or appeal to emotion**

8. "Former Treasury Secretary and Chairman of Democrats-for-Nixon, John Connolly, looks on the bright side. After his acquittal on bribery charges Connolly allowed that he might still be able to run for national political office. If the IRS, FBI, and special Watergate prosecutors couldn't find anything on him following 18 months of investigation, Connolly argued, he must be the most innocent politician in America." [Pester Passell, *How To*]

   **appeal to ignorance**

9. From Nixon's acceptance speech at the 1972 Republican Convention: "Let me illustrate the difference in our philosophies. Because of our free economic system, what we have done is build a great building of economic wealth and might in America. It is by far the tallest building in the world and we are still adding to it. Now, because some windows are broken, they say tear it down and start again. We say, replace the windows and keep building. That's the difference."

   **false dilemma, and/or straw man**

10. The Beatles were the best rock group of the 1960s--they sold more records than any other group.

   **appeal to popular opinion**

11. "I love you. Therefore I am a lover; all the world loves a lover. You are all the world to me. Consequently you love me." [J.G. Vivian]

   **equivocation** on the phrase “all the world”

12. All experiments in genetic therapy must be stopped. They will inevitably lead to positive eugenics.

   **slippery slope**
13. Nothing is better than good health and happiness. But a life of sorrow and toil is better than nothing. Therefore, a life of sorrow and toil is better than good health and happiness.

**equivocation** on “nothing”

14. Interviewer: "Senator, you voted for the B-1 bomber. Would you explain your reasons, particularly in light of criticisms about the effectiveness of the plane?"
Senator: "I'd be glad to. America needs a strong defense. We'd all like to live in peace with the other nations of this world, but we deceive ourselves if we think we can do that without being prepared to defend ourselves and our allies, our rights and our interests. It's a dangerous world out there, and I'd be derelict in my duty to the people of this nation if I allowed us to lie down and cry 'Uncle.'"

**red herring**

15. No one can criticize the Freudian theory unless he has been psychoanalyzed, for opposition to the theory is normally caused by unconscious resistance, arising from the Oedipal complex, that distorts one's thinking.

**begging the question**

16. "While most scientists are still studying the causes for the two successive harsh winters to hit North America, researcher George Stone believes he has found the answer. Stone, who claims to be a geologist and a weather expert, and to have worked secretly with the CIA, says that the abnormally cold weather was probably caused by the Soviet Cosmos satellite which crashed early this year in northern Canada. 'I feel that satellite may well have been controlling our weather all along the East Coast, and probably the other parts of the country,' he told the tabloid Star. 'The satellite that crashed in Canada in January was in just the right position to control our weather all along the East Coast, where the snowstorms hit .... I admit I have no hard evidence, but then there is no negative evidence either . . . .' [The Skeptical Inquirer, Fall 1978]

**post hoc, ergo propter hoc**, and / or **appeal to ignorance**
17. Maria says she loves me. I don't know whether to believe her or not. But I guess I do, because I don't think she would lie to someone she loves about something that important.

   **begging the question**

18. Salesman to customer: "I think you will find that those shoes are the ones you want. Shall I wrap them up, or would you prefer to wear them?"

   **begging the question**