



Seven fallacies of thought and reason

by Jason Braithwaite PhD © 2006

There are many forms of logical fallacy, errors, and mistakes of reason. ... [S]even main fallacies are listed here All represent mind-traps in thinking that lead ultimately to either unsound thinking or a completely fictitious characterisation of science and the processes of legitimate scientific argumentation

#7 “I am entitled to my opinion” (when used to support the truth of the opinion)

A quite common outcome in arguments between science and pseudoscience is when the person holding the failing position resorts to saying “...well, that is my view and I am entitled to my opinion.” This is often recruited in support of the argument being made, thus implying that one’s entitlement is somehow important for the truth of the argument itself. Indeed they are entitled to their opinion, but their entitlements were never in question. We are all entitled to our opinions - but this has no consequence for the scientific truth of them and does not establish or justify the validity of them. So the problem here arises when one recruits the mere ‘entitlement’ (and no evidence) to a view, as some form of evidential support for the truth of the view. It is often used as a final defence mechanism when faced with quite strong counter-arguments and evidence.

The crucial point with this error in argumentation is that your individual entitlement to hold a view is no indication at all as to its validity or truth - indeed, it is completely irrelevant (a form of the non-sequitur fallacy). When having a scientific debate, discussing evidence and theory, it makes no sense to recruit your ‘entitlements’ in defence of any view. It shifts the focus from one of science, evidence, and reason to one of opinion (see Whyte, 2005). This is an irrelevant and unhelpful tangent. You are of course entitled to hold any view you please, but it becomes a fallacy of reason to recruit that mere entitlement as some form of evidence in support of the truth of that view.

Recruiting the ‘I’m entitled to my opinion’ stance in any debate is functionally equivalent to saying, ‘I am entitled to have a preference!’ Preferences do not establish truth. Our preferences are irrelevant to a scientific debate based on facts, evidence and reason. A scientist may be entitled to their opinion, but their entitlements do not make their opinions fact; data and evidence makes them fact.

For example, a scientist might believe that the boiling point of water is 100 degrees Celsius, but the entitlement to that view does not make the scientist correct. Only the facts gained from scientific study provide evidence, and evidence exists independent of anyone’s preference.

The reason why being entitled to our own opinions has no consequence for scientific truth is because opinions are not based on scientific truth. Opinions are opinions, they are not based on scientific evidence.

Braithwaite is talking about what Professor Stokes categorized as the second use of "my opinion (e.g., "views [that should be] grounded in technical expertise."

Braithwaite's arguments here apply to when "my opinion" is used in that second category (e.g., "views [that should be] grounded in technical expertise," not when "my opinion" is used in the first category (e.g., "tastes or preferences."