

Logic Lesson 10b: Ambiguities - Answers

In the first act of the mind we have been noting ambiguities in terms. Most logical fallacies are due to these ambiguities. In the following sentences explain and resolve the ambiguities.

1. The end of a thing is its purpose and perfection, and death is the end of life, therefore death is life's purpose and perfection.

“End” is used ambiguously, first as “aim” or “goal” and then as “cessation” or “last point in time.”

2. Cancer is made of human cells, and whatever is made of human cells is human, and what is human should not be killed, so cancer should not be killed.

“Human” is used ambiguously, first as an adjective and then as a noun. Parts or products of human beings are “human” but they are not humans.

3. *Innuendo* is an Italian suppository.

A pun (suppositories go “in your end” and Italian words tend to end in “o”).

4. Condemned prisoner to judge: “But I don't *feel* guilty.”

Guilt feelings, like all feelings, are subjective. Courts try to judge real guilt, objective and impersonal truth about whether the accused is guilty in fact of violating a law. Judges deal with real guilt, real punishment; psychologists deal with guilt feelings, by “therapy.”

5. Condemned prisoner to judge: “You're a bad man, judge; you're terribly judgmental.”

A judge's *job* is to be “judgmental” in the sense of judging legal guilt or innocence. The prisoner confuses this with being “judgmental” in a wrong sense, such as (1) non-judges pretending to be judges, (2) judging with prejudice, (3) judging harshly, (4) claiming to be able to judge persons or motives as well as acts.

6. Condemned prisoner to judge: “You’re supposed to do justice, judge. But you’ve just done a bad thing, and a bad thing can’t be just, because justice is a good thing, not a bad thing.” “What bad thing have I done?” You’ve lowered my self-esteem in declaring me guilty. Self-esteem is good, and you’ve taken away something good, so you’re bad. You should be punished instead of me.”

“Good” is used ambiguously. Self-esteem may be *psychologically* good, in aiding happiness; but a judge’s verdict is *legally and morally* good if it is legally and morally just. Was it “good” that Hitler had so much self-esteem?

7. There shouldn’t be laws against drugs, because the people who use drugs don’t believe there should be laws against them, and that means the country doesn’t have consensus about it, and laws should reflect the people’s consensus.

“The people who use drugs” are not “the country” but a minority within the country. “Consensus” need not mean “100%” but could mean only “a majority” or a “large majority.”

8. Philosophy is a kind of love—the love of wisdom. Therefore philosophy teachers who accept salaries are mercenary lovers. They’re intellectual prostitutes; they sell their love for money.

“Love” is analogical. Love of wisdom is not the same as love king of love as sexual love. (However, Socrates would probably still press the point that the two have some principle in common, one of which is that pure love of any kind should not “sell itself” for money. He would probably call professional philosophers prostitutes.)

9. Antigravity should be easy. We disobey all kinds of laws, even the law of non-contradiction, so we should be able to disobey the law of gravity.

The law of gravity is *descriptive* law about what *does* happen in *nature*. Laws we can obey are *prescriptive* laws about what *should* happen in *human behavior*.

10. How can we claim to define ambiguity? It can’t be done, because to define anything is to take its ambiguity away. But if you take ambiguity away from ambiguity, it won’t be ambiguity any more.

“Ambiguity” is ambiguous: first it is used nominally, then really; it refers first to the *words* ‘ambiguity’ and then to real ambiguity.

In Him,

Pastor Don