

Fallacies in “12 Angry Men”

APPEAL TO THE MAJORITY

J7 to J8: “11 people here think he’s guilty—what’s there to talk about?”

APPEAL TO EMOTION (pity)

J8: “The kid’s been kicked around all his life. Born in the slums. Mother’s dead since he was 9. Lived in an orphanage for a year and a half when his father was serving a jail term”

ARGUMENT FROM IGNORANCE

J2: He’s guilty because “no one has proved otherwise” Note: J8 also implicitly invokes the same type of argument, *but it is not fallacious in that instance*.

GENETIC FALLACY, RED HERRING

J10: “You can’t trust anything *they* say”

Also, J10, J3: “kid” (J3 also associates defendant with his wayward son.)

Also, J3, re: old man witness “half the time you can’t believe anything he says”

J4: income class

AD HOMINEM ARGUMENT

J7: previous crimes

CUM HOC; ERGO, PROPTER HOC

J6: “motive” is the key thing. He was slapped twice by father. J8: Hardly a motive for murder. J4: Perhaps two slaps too many.

APPEAL TO AUTHORITY

J10: “when these fellas [lawyers] don’t ask questions, it’s because they know the answers already” (J8: It’s also possible for a lawyer to be just plain stupid.)

ARGUMENT FROM FORCE

J6 to J3: “If you interrupt J9 one more time...” (Maybe a future interruption is apt.)

DUBIOUS DILEMMA

Either your opinion is that he is guilty or not guilty.

But what if we are unsure? Then no judgment may be best (and we should vote to acquit).
(Compare: *Either he is guilty or not guilty.*)

QUESTION-BEGGING

J7 to J11: “I just think he’s innocent”

Perhaps the most disturbing fact about the deliberations is the *psychological* factors that influence the jurors' opinions.

- Bias (racial, age, economic class)
- 3 Jurors thought “early on” he was guilty, or “from the start.” *Prior to hearing all the arguments!*
- J3 transfers his anger toward his son to the defendant.
- Aggressiveness of the debate.
- Entrenchment effect. It's a matter of pride vs. unearthing the truth.
- *Apathy*, J1 and J7!!! Remember J11's tirade!