

From *Wonderful Tricks of Psychology*:

PROFOUNDLY ANTI-SOCRATIC

But damn good if you want to win an argument
or keep your brain well washed and stuffed.



W. C. Fields

If you can't dazzle them with brilliance,
baffle them with bull.

- 1.** Play the ad hominem and genetic fallacy cards---two cheap ways to avoid ever having to seriously consider the merits of an opposing argument. Just throw nasty names to shame and bully, or dismiss the argument by demonizing the source.
- 2.** Create an abominable straw man. Simple, and another cheap shot. Argue vigorously against an easily countered argument the other side never made.
- 3.** Cherry pick, exaggerate, minimize. Only present evidence that supports your position, and exaggerate its relevance and validity. Minimize the relevance and validity of evidence presented by the other side, and be sure and always call them a bunch of cherry pickers.
- 4.** Interrupt when the other side is making a good point or on a roll. Ask them to define a word they just used, or to please repeat what they just said. Drop a pencil on the floor. Start coughing. Trigger your cell phone. Anything to interrupt the flow.
- 5.** Double Standard. Couldn't be simpler. You demand the other side do none of the above. You do them all.

PROFOUNDLY PRO-SOCRATIC

Open-minded and tolerant

But take care. Only for those who are independently wealthy, courageous, and don't mind losing all their friends.

1. Acknowledge and seriously consider alternative points of view. To summarize John Stuart Mill:

a. Your point of view may be wrong. To believe otherwise is to assume you are infallible.

b. Your opinion almost certainly does not contain the whole truth, and alternative points of view may have valid elements. If you have the honesty and self-confidence to recognize them, understanding increases, and the presentation of your point of view more powerful.

c. Even if the other point of view is completely wrong it is important to listen carefully and present your position vigorously and honestly. Otherwise your point of view will lose its vitality and freshness, and become dead dogma, mere rhetoric.

2. Commit to rationality. If you or the other side ignores basic logic, you or they are stupid, corrupt, or a hopeless ideologue. Don't waste your time.

3. Acknowledge a valid point or criticism. Good move. You've learned something, and greatly increased the other side's willingness to listen to what you have to say.

4. Recognize and question your assumptions and biases. There is no human on earth whose opinion is not heavily based on a mess of assumptions and bias. Objectivity is an illusion because an observation cannot be made without an observer. Even hard data is meaningless until interpreted, and the interpretation is dependent upon the assumptions and biases of the interpreter.

5. All points of view have weaknesses. Congratulations if you can acknowledge the weaknesses of your own. You are wiser and more honest than 99.9% of the rest of us.

Serious thinkers want to have their opinions challenged by competent and forceful proponents of opposing views. Let me know if you find one.