

10 common false views

Buddhists often have and hold

[Previously published as fb210831 Piya Tan]

(1) Ad hominem

This is when we directly attack the person making the statement instead of criticizing the statement itself.

For example:

“He is wrong because he’s always attacking monks, talking bad about others. Don’t listen to anything he says. Moreover, I hate him.”

(2) Straw man

The original statement is misquoted, selectively quoted, or distorted (the straw man), claiming that this is what was said (when this is not so).

For example:

“Buddha was a woman-hater: he left his wife behind, and lived with the men monks!”

(3) Appeal to authority

Asserting that something must be true because it is spoken or backed by someone who is an “authority” and holds a powerful status.

For example:

“He spoke against the Chief High Priest; therefore, he is wrong and evil.”

(4) Slippery slope

Taking an argument from the first, sensible premise to an undeeable or extreme conclusion by way of a number of hastily connected steps.

For example:

“If we listen to P, then, there will be no monks. That will be no more Buddhism!”

(5) Bandwagon

When something is said to be true or good simply because it is popular.

“He’s neither famous nor popular: nobody cares for whatever he says.”

(6) Appeal to ignorance

When we claim that an argument must be true if it cannot be proven false, or false if it cannot be proven true.

For example:

“I’ve never seen my Guru do any bad things. He’s such a perfect man!”

(7) False dilemma

When we give only 2 choices about a matter, when, in fact, there are other alternatives.

For example:

“You better listen to our Guru or you have wrong views.”

(8) Hasty generalization

A general conclusion is drawn from a case that is too small.

For example:

“Why worry about suffering? I have a good job, a great house and a successful family. Live now!”

(9) Red herring

When someone tries to deliberately change the issue discussed to a new, irrelevant topic.

For example:

“Why trouble ourselves with difficult suttas when we have celebrity teachers who make us laugh and be happy! We should listen to them more often.”

(10) Appeal to tradition

When someone claims that something must be good or true because it has been practised for a long time.

For example:

“We should transfer merits because this was what we have been taught to do by the Venerable Sinhalese monks since they came to our country a hundred years ago.”

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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