

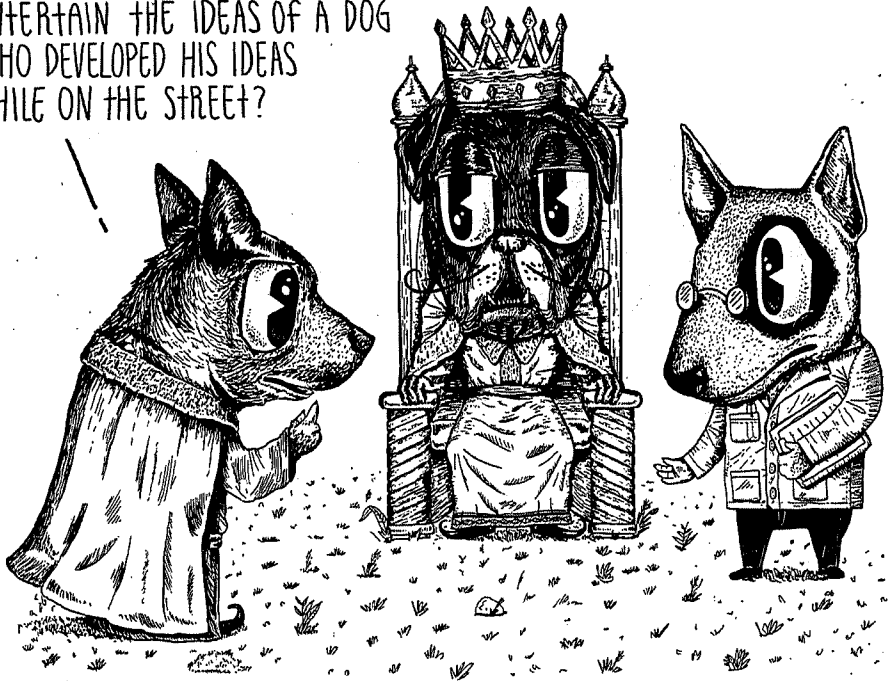
PECULIARLY, PROFESSOR CHIMP, THE WORLD'S MOST DISTINGUISHED LIVING CHEMIST, IS OFTEN QUOTED ABOUT MATTERS OF FIDELITY.

APPEAL TO IRRELEVANT AUTHORITY

An *appeal to authority* is an appeal to one's sense of modesty, which is to say, an appeal to the feeling that others are more knowledgeable [Engel], which may often—but of course not always—be true. One may reasonably appeal to *pertinent* authority, as scientists and academics typically do. A vast majority of the things that we believe in, such as atoms and the solar system, are on reliable authority, as are all historical statements, to paraphrase C. S. Lewis. An argument is more likely to be fallacious when the appeal is made to an *irrelevant* authority, one who is not an expert on the issue at hand. A similar appeal worth noting is the *appeal to vague authority*, where an idea is attributed to a faceless collective. For example, "Professors in Germany showed such and such to be true."

One type of appeal to irrelevant authority is the *appeal to ancient wisdom*, in which a belief is assumed to be true just because it originated some time ago. For example, "Astrology was practiced in ancient China, one of the most technologically advanced civilizations of the day." This type of appeal often overlooks the fact that some things are idiosyncratic and change naturally over time. For example, "We do not get enough sleep nowadays. Just a few centuries ago, people used to sleep for nine hours a night." There are all sorts of reasons why people might have slept longer in the past. The fact that they did is insufficient evidence for the argument that we should do so today.

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT
YOUR HIGHNESS, HOW CAN WE
ENTERTAIN THE IDEAS OF A DOG
WHO DEVELOPED HIS IDEAS
WHILE ON THE STREET?



GENETIC FALLACY

A *genetic fallacy* is committed when an argument is either devalued or defended solely because of its origins. In fact, an argument's history or the origins of the person making it have no effect whatsoever on its validity. As T. Edward Damer points out, when one is emotionally attached to an idea's origins, it is not always easy to disregard those feelings when evaluating the argument's merit [Damer].

Consider the following argument: "Of course he supports the union workers on strike; he is, after all, from the same village." Here, the argument supporting the workers is not being evaluated based on its merits; rather, because the person behind it happens to come from the same village as the protesters, we are led to infer that his position is worthless. Here is another example: "As men and women living in the twenty-first century, we cannot continue to hold these Bronze Age beliefs." Why not, one might ask. Are we to dismiss all ideas that originated in the Bronze Age simply because they came about at that time?

Conversely, one may also invoke the genetic fallacy in a positive sense, by saying, for example, "Jack's views on art cannot be contested; he comes from a long line of eminent artists." Here, the evidence used for the inference is as lacking as in the previous examples.