Lesson 1: Ad Hominem

Attacking the Person · also called “against the man”

DEFINITION

Attacking the person who makes an argument instead of answering the argument itself.

The pattern Person A argues for X. Person A has some bad trait. So X must be false.

Example

Jada: “Our co-op should start fifteen minutes later. Most families are rushing and arriving late.”
Owen: “Why listen to Jada? She can’t even keep her own room clean.”

Why it fails

Whether Jada’s room is clean has nothing to do with whether a later start would help. An argument stands or falls on its reasons, not on the person who gives them.

Looks similar, but is fine

Questioning a witness who has lied under oath before is reasonable, because his honesty bears directly on his testimony.

A gracious reply

“That may be true about me, but what do you think of the reason I gave?”

Notes: in my own words

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