

REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM FALLACY

WHAT IS REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM FALLACY?

The reductio ad absurdum fallacy is a type of fallacy which is used to create an argument whereby the speaker or writer disproves a proposition by making an absurd conclusion in relation to the logical implications of the proposal. Sounds complicated, right? It doesn't need to be. You might look at it in another way - whenever a universal argument containing the words never, always, nobody, everyone, etc is used, this becomes prone to becoming an example of reductio ad absurdum. The reason for this is that these types of arguments are left open to being reduced to an absurd conclusion, you might even think of reductio ad absurdum as being a way of exposing a fallacy. This type of fallacy will work only if there is already a falsehood in the claim.

Reductio ad absurdum will try to prove a claim by showing that the opposite would be absurd. Sometimes you may hear it being referred to by other names such as the following:

- · argumentum ad absurdum
- apagogical arguments

- appeal to extremes
- · negation introduction



EXAMPLES OF REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM

Now that we have a good understanding of this type of fallacy, we are going to take a look at some examples of how it might look in action.



"I am taking my driver's test tomorrow, so please do pray for me. If a lot of people pray about this then God will allow me to pass the test with ease."

Why this example shows us reductio ad absurdum is due to the fact that is we assume that the idea of 'a lot' of people praying about the issue that God will have mercy on the speaker. We would then assume that God only answers prayers that are 'popular' however if this were true then that would be unfair and certainly absurd. Due to the fact that God is never unfair, we conclude that he would not be able to answer prayers based on popularity, therefore proving that this claim is absurd.

- · Person 1: If I walk under a ladder, I will have bad luck.
- Person 2: So if you walk under the ladder you will become homeless, contract a terrible disease and break your leg.
- Person 1: "The sign says we should not pick the flowers but if I pick just one, it won't hurt.
- Person 2: If everyone were to take that attitude then there would be no flowers left at all.

We will now look at the example of how reductio ad absurdum would work in a conversation.

- . Person 1: I didn't want to steal the candy bar but my friend told me to.
- Person 2: If your friend told you to jump off a cliff, would you do it?

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Clemens Wendtner

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Table of Contents Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition

- 1. Understanding the eBook Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
- 2. Identifying Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
- 3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - User-Friendly Interface
- 4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition User Reviews and Ratings
 - Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition Free and Paid eBooks

- Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition Public Domain eBooks
- Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition eBook Subscription Services
- Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition eBook Formats
 - o ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition Compatibility with Devices
 - Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - o Interactive Elements Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
- 8. Staying Engaged with Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - o Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Setting Reading Goals Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Reductio Ad Absurdum English Edition
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development

- Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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