

argument to be aware of what prejudices and interests the people involved bring to it.

*John Gummer MP, Centre for Policy Studies debate on *climate change, 23 February 2006.*

**Ad Hominem, Emotional Argument, Expertise, Interest, Special Pleading, Survivor Bias.*

SUBSIDIARITY. The principle, often advocated by the European Union, that decisions should be taken at the lowest practicable level. It sounds sensible, but it is in fact meaningless because the qualification (“practicable”, or its equivalents) can mean anything.

It can, for instance, be used to justify a slow-motion process of removing the *authority of *nations: decide on a supra-national (imperial) policy; eliminate any interference at the national level; leave it to the *regions to implement the policy by doing as they are told. In this way, subsidiarity’s claim to favour decision-making at the lowest possible level actually succeeds in capturing it for the highest possible level. Subsidiarity is a single word that contradicts itself, an oxymoron.

**Self-Denying Truth, Quibble, System Scale Rule, Localisation, Pull.*

SUCCESS. Do you really think we will get through the *climacteric, and come in due course to a time of *resilience, *manners and *harmonic order?

Don’t answer that question, for you may discover to your cost that your answer is either a *self-fulfilling or a *self-denying truth, and that both count against us. If we deny that there is a liveable future, then we will do little to secure one. If we affirm it, we come into other trouble, such as complacency, an optimistic view that what we are doing now is all that is needed, an *iconic focus on the simple solution, or the constant anxiety of life on the edge, between hope and doubt: positive thinking seems to be the right thing in the circumstances until you notice the wreckage.¹³²

Instead, think of what happened to Orpheus and Eurydice. Eurydice, you may remember, died after having been bitten by a snake, and Orpheus went down into the Underworld to recover her. The goddess Persephone agreed to let her go on condition that Orpheus did not look back at her as she followed him.

Unfortunately, he forgot about this condition—he did look back, with the result that Eurydice vanished forever and Orpheus was torn to pieces by angry women who threw his head into the river Hebros, where it floated downstream, still singing.

That is, make the intense commitment. At walking pace. Plod on. Climb steeply uphill, out of the Underworld. Keep your eyes fixed ahead. You never know—you might get there; you might even find out where “there” is, and you might inspire others to come with you. Just don’t look down . . .

We do not need to choose between hope and *expectation. What matters is to keep hope alive, which we won’t succeed in doing if we are constantly checking up on it. It is not *certainty that sustains our focus, but the ambiguity that comes to us, for instance, in the prayer from another ancient moment of commitment against the odds: “Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief.”¹³³
*Grim Reality.

SUMMARY GAMBIT, THE. The use of summary to introduce distortion into an argument.

Example: The case for intervening in a country whose government is committing gross outrages on its population (Iraq in the 1990/2000s was the subject being discussed, but Germany in the 1930/40s is another instance) is summarised: “We can’t simply say, ‘Oh, we don’t like your regime, we think you’ll be happier without it, so let’s invade you.’”¹³⁴

The gambit is defended on the grounds that “the essentials” of the argument are there: it is evident, however, that they are not. The assumption that they are is a case of *begging the question—using the conclusion for which the person is arguing as the assumption on which her argument is based: *of course* we can’t “simply say” that, but the whole point of the argument is about the actual reasons, not the parody which is passed off as summary.

The gambit is well defended because it can answer objections on its own terms: “So, you think we *can* simply decide to invade any regime that we don’t happen to like?” It is possible for the opponent to escape from the trap that has been set for him, but the other person gets the advantage of first-use.

**Devil’s Voice, Hyperbole, Special Pleading, Straw Man.*