✦ IDEA · CHEAT CARD · PHILOSOPHY

Hitchens's razor

The rule that a claim offered without evidence may be rejected without evidence, because whoever makes a claim must support it.

How it works

1. Someone makes a claim, for example that people use only ten percent of their brains.
2. The person who makes a claim has the duty to support it with evidence.
3. If no evidence is offered, the listener may set the claim aside.
4. Setting a claim aside means not accepting it, not proving it false.

Example

The ten percent brain claim at dinner

- A friend says people use only ten percent of their brains, citing no study.
- → The friend has to support the claim, and you owe no disproof.
- → Brain scans show the claim is false, but checking that was extra work.

Use it for

- ✓ Judging an advert that says a supplement doubles your memory
- ✓ Answering "customers want this" in a meeting: which customers, and how do we know?
- ✓ Deciding whether a dramatic post without a source deserves sharing or a reply

Watch out

- ✗ Dismissing a claim without evidence does not prove that the claim is false.
- ✗ Weak evidence, such as one witness, is still evidence and deserves a look.

Remember Before you argue against a claim, ask what evidence supports it.