

# UGRC 150

## CRITICAL THINKING & PRACTICAL REASONING

### Sessions 11 & 12 – INFORMAL FALLACIES

Instructor: **Dr. Richmond Kwesi**

Dept. of Philosophy & Classics, UG

Contact Information: [rkwesi@ug.edu.gh](mailto:rkwesi@ug.edu.gh)



## UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

College of Education

**School of Continuing and Distance Education**

2020-2021 Academic Year

# Outline

- **Rhetorical Ploys and Polemical Tricks**
- **Informal Fallacies**

1. Equivocation
2. Begging the Question
3. Appeal to Force
4. Appeal to Pity
5. Appeal to the People
6. Ad Hominem
7. Appeal to Unqualified Authority
8. Hasty Generalization
9. Misplaced Vividness
10. Genetic Fallacy
11. Pseudo-Precision
12. Semi-Attached Figure

**REQUIRED  
READING:  
UNIT 10**



# Rhetorical Ploys and Polemical Tricks

- If the speech is designed to argue a point with the intent to manipulate the listener or reader into believing there is a legitimate basis for dissent but in fact provides none, then the argument is called polemic and the reasoning is described as polemical
- Sometimes we are moved to accept or reject claims based on psychological inducements: something is said in connection with a claim that elicits or is intended to elicit a psychological response of some sort—a desire, fear, some feeling of emotion—that may well induce acceptance of the claim

# Informal Fallacies

- **Formal fallacies:** patterns or structures of arguments which make purely logical mistakes and are invalid.
- **Informal fallacies:** Errors and mistakes to do with the content of inductive arguments. Defective arguments that often use rhetorical ploys

# Kinds of Informal Fallacies

- **Fallacies of Relevance:** where the premises are not logically relevant to the conclusion; changes the subject
- **Fallacies of Weak Induction:** where the premises *are* relevant to the conclusion, but they do not support the conclusion in the way intended.
- **Fallacies that manipulate language and statistics:** fallacies to do with how we use language, mathematics, or data to deceive others to accept our claims

# 1. Equivocation

- The use of more than one connotation of a word in the same context without any signal of the shift with the intention to manipulate or to persuade is called **equivocation**.

## Example 1:

- **Interviewer:** In this job, we need someone who is responsible
- **Applicant:** Then I'm the one you are looking for. In my last job, every time anything went wrong, they said I was responsible

# Equivocation....Examples

## **Example 2:**

*Happiness is the end of life. The end of life is death. Therefore, happiness is death.*

## **Example 3:**

*I want to have myself a merry little Christmas, but I refuse to do as the song suggests and make the yuletide gay. I don't think sexual preference should have anything to do with enjoying the holiday.*

## **Example 4:**

*Noisy children are a real headache. Two aspirin will make a headache go away. Therefore, two aspirin will make noisy children go away.*



## 2. Begging the Question

AKA: Circular Reasoning; *Petitio Principii*

- Begging the question is an attempt to prove the conclusion of an argument by using that conclusion as a premise
- It involves reasoning in a circle

**Premise(s):** A statement, or set of statements, which either explicitly or implicitly claims that *X* is true.

**Conclusion:** *X* is claimed to be true (but usually in different words).





# Begging the Question....Examples

## **Example 1:**

The Book of Mormon is true because it was written by Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith wrote the truth because he was divinely inspired. We know that Joseph Smith was divinely inspired because the Book of Mormon says that he was, and the Book of Mormon is true.

## **Example 2:**

The Bible says that God exists. The Bible is true because God wrote it. Therefore, God exists (Vaughn 2010: 194).

## **Example 3:**

People who lack humility have no sense of beauty because everyone who has a sense of beauty also has humility.



# Begging the Question....Caution!

## **Begs the Question:**

The Bible says that God exists. The Bible is true because God wrote it. Therefore, God exists (Vaughn 2010: 194).

## **Does NOT Beg the Question:**

Everything the Bible says is true. The Bible says that God exists. Therefore, it is true that God exists.



### 3. Appeal to Force

AKA: Appeal to Threat/Fear/Consequences; Scare Tactics;  
*Argumentum ad Baculum*

- Coercing you to believe or accept a conclusion by shifting the focus away from the belief or conclusion's veracity, and instead drawing attention to what will happen to you if you don't believe or accept it

**Premise(s):** You can avoid being harmed by accepting this statement (or argument).

**Conclusion:** This statement is true. (Or, this argument is good).

# Appeal to Force....Examples

## Example 1:

Lately there has been a lot of negative criticism of our policy on dental benefits. Let me tell you something, people. If you want to keep working here, you need to know that our policy is fair and reasonable. Anybody working here who doesn't know this will have to be let go (Howard-Snyder & Wasserman 2009: 153).

## Example 2:

I know that some of you oppose the president's nomination of Kuffour as the new DCE. Well, do you still want the government to continue with the Free SHS policy? Do you want the president to bring development projects to our district? If Kuffour is not approved, it may become necessary to stop the Free SHS and other projects in the district.

# Appeal to Force....Examples

## Example 3:

Johnny, of course I deserve the use of your bicycle for the afternoon. After all, I'm sure you wouldn't want your mother to find out that you beat your little sister today.

## Example 4:

Either you marry me right now or I'll be forced to leave you and never speak to you again. I'm sure you wouldn't want me to do that. Therefore, you'll marry me right now.

## 4. Appeal to Pity

AKA: Appeal to Emotion/Sympathy/

*Argumentum ad Misericordiam*

- The attempt to persuade solely by the use of emotive language or by arousing someone's feelings, rather than presenting relevant reasons to support a conclusion

**Premise(s):** You have reason to pity this person (or group).

**Conclusion:** You should do X for the benefit of this person (or group), although doing X is not relevant to the reason given

//

**Premise(s):** We feel sorry for X or X has been in a bad situation

**Conclusion:** X cannot possibly be guilty

# Appeal to Pity....Examples

## Example 1:

Please Sir, I deserve a better mark than an F for UGRC 150. Look, my parents just got a divorce. If they see that I got an F, they will just blame each other, the fighting will start all over again, and I'll be very sad.

## Example 2:

You really ought to vote for Jane Mahama as MP for Ayawaso West. Poor Jane has faced one adversity after another her whole life. She was born into dire poverty, both her parents died when she was a child, and two years ago she was diagnosed as having diabetes



# Appeal to Pity....Examples

## Example 3:

Members of the jury, surely you can find it in your heart to acquit the defendant of burglary. This poor man has lived his whole life without the benefits most of us take for granted. When he was a kid his parents never bought him stuff or even gave him a hug. He has to fend for himself all these years. Surely he is not guilty of this crime.

## Example 4:

Nkosi Johnson, 11 years old, made the keynote speech for the opening ceremony of the 13th International AIDS Conference in Durban. Just look at how sweet and innocent he is, doomed to die in only a few months, yet so courageous and selfless. And indeed he died within that same year. So certainly whatever he said about how the most important thing to do for Africans with AIDS is to administer anti-retroviral drugs must be true.





# 5. Appeal to the People

AKA: Grandstanding; Bandwagon; Appeal to the Masses; Appeal to Consensus; *Argumentum ad Populum*

- The acceptance of a claim (or practice) solely on the basis of its acceptance by a large number of people.
- The justification or defence of an action on the grounds that everybody or most people do it or know it.

**Premise(s):** Most or all people accept this claim (or argument).

**Conclusion:** Therefore, the claim must be true (or the argument must be good).

**NB:** Not a fallacy if conclusion appeals to the beliefs of a majority of authorities (experts).

# Appeal to the People....Examples

## **Example 1:**

You should read Manasseh Azuire's latest novel right away. It's sold over a million copies, and practically everyone in the media is talking about it.

## **Example 2:**

Jane, I can't believe you don't have a smart phone yet. Why, practically everybody today has one. Surely you'll buy one right away

# Appeal to the People....Examples

## Example 3:

But officer, I don't deserve a ticket; everyone goes this speed. If I went any slower, I wouldn't be going with the stream of traffic.

## Example 4:

It is well recognized by most people that the present technological revolution has affected the ethical basis of the nation's institution of education. Since this belief is so widely held, there can be little doubt of its accuracy.



## 6. Ad Hominem

AKA: Argument against the Person/Man; Attacking the Person

- The fallacy of attacking the character or circumstances of an individual who is advancing a statement or an argument instead of trying to disprove the truth of the statement or the soundness of the argument.
- Responding to someone's argument by making an attack upon the person, rather than addressing the argument itself

**Premise(s):** X—someone who advances a statement or argument—is a bad person.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, the statement advanced by X is false. (Or, the argument advanced by X is a bad one.)

# Ad Hominem....Examples

## **Example 1:**

Don't mind what he says. You know that he is a lying, ignorant NPP man who has a personal interest in the matter.

## **Example 2:**

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy is not worth the paper it's printed on. Nietzsche was an immoral reprobate who went completely insane from syphilis before he died.

## **Example 3:**

Professor Addison's arguments in favour of the theory of evolution should be discounted. Addison is a cocaine-snorting sex pervert and, according to some reports, a member of the Communist party.

# ‘You too’ // ‘look who is talking’

- Reject someone’s claim on grounds that s/he is inconsistent or guilty of that which s/he criticizes

**Premise(s):** X makes claims about Y.

**Premise(s):** However, X does not practice or live according to his/her claims about Y.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, X’s claims about Y are false.



# ....Examples

## Example 4:

Dad tells me I shouldn't lie. He says lying is wrong because it makes people stop trusting one another. But I've heard my Dad lie. Sometimes he calls in "sick" to work when he isn't really sick. So, lying isn't actually wrong.

## Example 5:

That representative from China has argued that our trade policies violate human rights. But China's own record on human rights is abominable! China regularly executes prisoners just to salvage their body parts. That representative should keep his mouth shut!

# Dyslogistic and Eulogistic Ad hominem

- If the facts cited about the person associated with the conclusion are negative and detracting from the person's integrity or worthiness of confidence, then the fallacy is called **dyslogistic ad hominem**
- If pleasant and laudatory facts are cited about the individual responsible for or associated with the conclusion, then the fallacy is called **eulogistic ad hominem**.





# ....Examples

## Example 6:

Christine has argued persuasively that Parliament should support stem cell research involving fetal tissue. But Christian has no morals at all. She has sex with any man who walks through the door, and she has had 3 abortions. No one with morals should listen to her. **[Dyslogistic]**

## Example 7:

The Finance Minister, Mr. Ken Ofori Atta is the most honest and eloquent person to hold this office. Therefore, his argument for increasing taxes cannot possibly be flawed.

**[Eulogistic]**

# 7. Appeal to Unqualified Authority

AKA: Illegitimate Appeal to Authority; *Argumentum ad Verecundiam*

- The fallacy occurs when we make an unjustified (illegitimate) appeal to an alleged authority but such an appeal is unjustified either because his/her area of competence lies outside the field in which the matter falls or he/she is not adequately informed.
- The fallacy of appealing to the testimony of an authority outside his/her special field



# Appeal to Authority....Examples

## Example 1:

Our pastor says that prayer in public schools is not unconstitutional. Therefore we must conclude that such prayer is perfectly legal.

## Example 2:

Prof. Ebenezer Oduro, the highly respected Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, and professor of entomology has recommended chloroquine for the treatment of corona virus. And Prof. Oduro is also a learned scholar and researcher. Therefore, chloroquine should be used to treat the corona virus.

# 8. Hasty Generalization

AKA: Jumping to a Conclusion

- A hasty generalization is an inductive argument in which one makes a fallacious inference from a relatively small number of cases to a generalization about a class of instances
- When few members of a group of people or items are observed and their qualities are extended to the entire membership of the group



# Hasty Generalization....Examples

## Example 1:

Yesterday two students were diagnosed as contracting the corona virus. Today two more were given the same diagnosis. It is obvious we have an epidemic. Everyone on campus has corona virus.

## Example 2:

The actress Jackie Appiah, the journalist Abeiku Santana and the influential man of God, Pastor Otabil, have all endorsed Mahama for President in the 2020 elections. I think that settles it. Every famous person intends to vote for Mahama.

# Hasty Generalization....Examples

## Example 3:

On our first date, Richie had his hands all over me, and I found it nearly impossible to keep him in his place. A week ago John gave me that stupid line about how, in order to prove my love, I had to spend the night with him. Men are all alike. All any of them want is sex.

## Example 4:

Officers of the AMA Task Force assaulted the family of John Addo at Makola, killing his wife, and they were also involved in the destruction of the Melcom building at Accra, with great loss of life. The conclusion is clear that the AMA Task Force officers are just a pack of killers.



# 9. Misplaced Vividness

- When an emotional impact causes a person to jump to a conclusion or hastily generalise from their experience
- A small number of dramatic and vivid events are taken to outweigh a significant amount of statistical evidence.
- It deflects attention by focusing too much on a particularly vivid and provocative case.



# Misplaced Vividness....Examples

## Example 1:

**Anne:** I am giving up extreme sports now that I have children. I think I will take up golf.

**Bill:** I wouldn't do that. Do you remember Charles? He was playing golf when he got hit by a golf-cart. It broke his leg, and he fell over, giving himself a concussion. He was in hospital for a week and still walks with a limp. I would stick to paragliding.





# Misplaced Vividness....Examples

## Example 2:

**Jane:** I've been thinking about getting a new laptop.

**Bill:** What sort of laptop do you want to get?

**Jane:** Well, it has to be easy to use, have a low price and have decent processing power. I've been thinking about getting an rlg laptop. I read in that consumer magazine that they have been found to be very reliable in six independent industry studies.

**Bill:** I wouldn't get the rlg laptop. A friend of mine bought one a month ago to finish his master's thesis. He was halfway through it when smoke started pouring out of the CPU. He didn't get his thesis done on time and he lost his financial aid. Now he's selling bofrot on the street.

**Jane:** Ei! I guess I won't go with the rlg laptop then.



# Misplaced Vividness....Examples

## Example 3:

Yes, I read the side of the cigarette pack about smoking being harmful to your health. That's the Surgeon General's opinion, him and all his statistics. But let me tell you about my uncle. Uncle Sam has smoked cigarettes for forty years now and he's never been sick a day in his life. He even won the Milo Marathon in his age group last year. You should have seen him running from Tema to Dansoman. He smoked a cigarette during the award ceremony, and he had a broad smile on his face. I was really proud. I can still remember the cheering. Cigarette smoking can't be as harmful as people say.



# 10. Genetic Fallacy

- When the origin, source or history of a conclusion/claim/idea is used as basis for accepting or rejecting the conclusion/claim or idea
- Attempts to discredit or support a claim or an argument because of its origin (genesis) when such an appeal to origins is irrelevant
- It fails to assess the claim on its own merit or within its current context or meaning



# Genetic Fallacy....Examples

## **Example 1:**

The phone you are using was manufactured in China so it must be a fake one.

## **Example 2:**

The new undergraduate system is a copy of the American University system, so it must be an improvement over what we had before

## **Example 3:**

You're not going to wear a wedding ring, are you? Don't you know that the wedding ring originally symbolized ankle chains worn by women to prevent them from running away from their husbands? I would not have thought you would be a party to such a sexist practice.



# Genetic Fallacy....Examples

## Example 4:

He was born to Catholic parents and raised as a Catholic until his confirmation in JHS. Therefore, he is bound to want to defend some Catholic traditions and, therefore, cannot be taken seriously.

## Example 5:

Yes sure, the media claims that former President Mahama is 'Government Official 1' in the Airbus Scandal. But the media you are referring to is Peace Fm. And we all know Peace Fm's credibility, don't we? Peace Fm doesn't like NDC. So, my bro we should dismiss this claim coming from them.

# 11. Pseudo-Precision

AKA: Over-Precision; False Precision; Misplaced Precision; Mathematical Mystification

- Exact statistical figures are used to characterize notions that cannot be expressed in exact or numerical terms.
- The application of figures to indicate precise quantities where, to date, no measurement can be feasibly expected.
- This is often done to awe or impress people with numbers



# Pseudo-Precision....Examples

## Example 1:

In a recent two year survey, 75.38% of students at University of Ghana were discovered to be spiritually motivated. So we can confidently suppose that over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Legon students on campus today are spiritually motivated.

## Example 2:

A tour guide at a museum says a dinosaur skeleton is exactly 100,000,005 years old, because an expert told him that it was 100million years old when he started working there 5 years ago.



# 12. Semi-attached Figure

- A statistic/figure is attached to a conclusion but it is irrelevant to the attribute featured in the conclusion or indirectly related to it.
- When the sample is not relevant to the hypothesis the figures provided may just be partially related to the hypothesis.
- This is done to deflect attention from the subject matter and create the impression that the conclusion has been meticulously researched.





# Semi-attached Figure....Examples

## Example 1:

If you want to sell your alcoholic drink as a cure for Covid-19, but can't actually prove that it works, then simply publish your laboratory report demonstrating that half an ounce of your drink killed 99% of germs in a test tube in under seven seconds. Now all you need is a photo of a handsome doctor, and your advertisement is ready to go!

## Example 2:

Ghanaian university students are more intelligent than Nigerian students. A research team from Boston College discovered that at Legon, over the 3 year period 2001-2004, 75% of enrolled students had As in English Language. But in Ibadan over the same period, only 58% of the students had As in English Language.

# Multiply-flawed Reasoning

## Example 1:

The terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center really shouldn't be blamed for their actions. They came from poor, struggling families oppressed by religion. You argue that terrorists should be punished, but you've always been a mean-spirited, stingy guy with no sympathy for anyone.

1. **Appeal to Pity**
2. **Ad Hominem**



# Multiply-flawed Reasoning

## Example 2:

You say it's wrong for me to download music from the Net without paying for it. That's crazy. Everybody is doing it. You know what's really wrong? It's all these kayayei who are being prosecuted for stealing from the electronic store. These innocent women are living difficult lives and sometimes they barely make GH¢10 a day. How do you expect them to buy mobile phones?

1. **Appeal to the People**
2. **Appeal to Pity**



# Multiply-flawed Reasoning

## Example 3:

Honey, either you buy me that five carat emerald ring, or I'll have nothing to wear on this awfully bare finger. You do want to make me happy, don't you? Give me that ring, and I will love you for life. Every good husband buys their wives emerald rings. Look at my friend Akos. She is very happy now that her husband bought her the ring. And Serwaa too. You see, wives become unhappy because their husbands refuse to buy them emerald rings.

1. **Appeal to Threat**
2. **Appeal to the People**
3. **Hasty Generalization**

# Conclusion

- A critical thinker will not be duped if armed with an awareness of the different ways there are to provide a *motivation* to believe a conclusion instead of being provided good *logical reasons* to believe that conclusion
- To accept a claim on the basis of some irrelevant psychological inducements – fear, emotions - cultural beliefs, personal biases, linguistic and statistical manipulations, is to fall short as a critical thinker.

**THANK YOU**