UGRC 150
CRITICAL THINKING &
PRACTICAL REASONING

Session 12 – POLEMICAL TRICKS AND RHETORICAL PLOYS

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Session Overview

• It is the expectation of philosophers and, indeed, all humans that reasons are provided for the positions or conclusions that are held. However, people sometimes pretend to provide reasons for their conclusions in an attempt to persuade or manipulate. Various ways in which this occurs are discussed in this session.

• Goals and Objectives
  At the end of the session, the student should
  1. Be able to explain what a fallacy is.
  2. Be able to distinguish between polemic and rhetoric.
  3. Understand the three broad categories of fallacy.
  4. Understand the fallacy of equivocation, begging the question, appeal to pity, grandstanding, ad hominem, appeal to force, hasty generalization, illegitimate appeal to authority.
The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

• **Topic One:** INFORMAL FALLACIES

• **Topic Two:** THE THREE BROAD CATEGORIES OF FALLACY
  
  Sub topic 1. *Fallacies of manipulating language.*
  Sub topic 2. *Fallacies of changing the subject.*
  Sub topic 3. *Fallacies of manipulating data.*
Reading List

• Log onto the UG Sakai LMS course site:
  http://sakai.ug.edu.gh/XXXXXXXXX

• Read Unit 10 of Recommended Text – pages 203-221

• Watch the Videos for session 12- Polemical Tricks and Rhetorical Ploys.

• Visit the Chat Room and discuss the Forum question for session 12
Topic One

INFORMAL FALLACIES.
What is a FALLACY.

• A fallacy is an **error in reasoning or an argument that renders the reasons or premises given to support the conclusion to be misleading.**

• If the **premises of a fallacious argument attempt to persuade**, the reasoning is **RHETORIC** but if the premises **attempt to manipulate**, the reasoning is called **POLEMIC.**
Topic Two

THE THREE BROAD CATEGORIES OF FALLACIES.
Informal fallacies are grouped into three broad categories. These are,

1. **Fallacies of manipulating language**:- under this we will be looking at *fallacy of equivocation and begging the question*

2. **Fallacies of changing the subject**:- under this we will be looking at *grandstanding, ad hominem, appeal to pity, appeal to threat, and illegitimate appeal to authority.*

3. **Fallacies of manipulating data**:- under this we will be looking at only the *fallacy of hasty generalization*.
Sub Topic one.

FALLACIES OF MANIPULATING LANGUAGE.
Fallacy of manipulating language occurs when the arguer manipulates or plays on words to give the impression of saying something which actually has not been expressed or established.

(A). The first of the fallacies of manipulating language to be discussed is EQUIVOCATION:- This fallacy occurs when a word is used in two or more different senses within a single argument in an unclear manner.

• EXAMPLES.

1. The priest said I should have faith. I have faith that my son will do well in exams this year. So the priest must be happy with me.
2. Noisy children are real **headache**. Two tablets of aspirin will make a **headache** go away. So two tablets of aspirin will make noisy children go away.

- **The first example is equivocating on the word** faith. The meaning of ‘faith’ in the first premise **means religious faith**. But the second usage of faith is not religious but a **faith that the parents have based on previous academic performance of the Son**.

- **For the second example, the equivocating word is** headache. In the first premise it means how uncomfortable and nerve racking living with noisy children can be. While the second usage means headache as illness.

- **NB. Thus ambiguous usage a word more than once, going back and forth on its connotation will result in equivocation.**
The second fallacy of manipulating language is **CIRCULARITY OR BEGGING THE QUESTION**: This fallacy occurs in an argument **when the conclusion is part or among the premises either explicitly or not**. Rejecting the conclusion will result in rejecting the whole argument and vice versa. **Such an argument gives no insight.**

- **Examples:**
  1. The belief in God is **universal** because **every on believe in God**.
  2. You should drive on the right side of the road because **that is what the law says, and the law is the law.**
  3. Martin Luther was a **great communicator** because he had the knack of **talking effectively** to the people.
In example 1, universal and every one belief in God means the same thing.

In example 2, we are being asked to obey the law (drive by the right side of the road) because that is the law. This is circular because the reason why that is a law and ought to be followed has not been given. Probably the arguer could have said: driving by the right side of the road will prevent pedestrians from being knocked down by vehicles.

In example 3, great communicator is the same as talking effectively so that is also circular.

NB. In a circular argument no independent reason or different reason is given to support the conclusion other than the conclusion itself.
Sub topic two

FALLACIES OF CHANGING THE SUBJECT.
Fallacy of changing the subject occurs when in an attempt to make the listener accept one’s conclusion, a change is made in the subject matter between the premises and the conclusion of an argument.

(A) The first of fallacy of changing the subject to be discussed is GRANDSTANDING also called APPEAL TO THE MASSES OR CONSENSUS: this fallacy occurs when the premises talk about the fact of how very many people believe or embrace the conclusion as reason to justify the acceptance of the conclusion.

Examples:
1. **Increasingly**, people are coming to believe that Eastern religions help us to get in touch with our true inner being. Therefore, Eastern religions help us to get in touch with our true inner being.

2. The black stars failed to get to the semi-finals of the world cup because they are all selfish. **Ask everyone.**

3. I read the other day that **most people** really like the new gun control laws. I was sort of suspicious of them, but I guess if **most people** like them, then they must be okay.
The second fallacy of changing the subject is **AD HOMINEM OR ATTACKING THE PERSON**: this fallacy occurs when instead of focusing on the content of the conclusion, the premises dwell on facts about the person advocating the conclusion. The facts could be about the **private life of the person**, **character** or **behavior** etc.

There are two types of AD HOMINEM

1. **Eulogistic**: when the premises dwell on **positive or pleasant facts** about the person.
2. **Dyslogistic**: when the premises dwell on **negative or unpleasant facts** about the person.
• **Examples:**

1. My opponent suggests that lowering taxes will be a good idea and this is coming from a woman who eats ice cream each night! *(DYSLOGISTIC)*

2. You cannot believe anything he says especially about health care. This is because his brother in law was involved in a law suit against a hospital where his wife died and he was found guilty of not paying his taxes in 1985 on some property that he owned just at the time he was speaking against the government’s health care policy. *(DYSLOGISTIC)*

3. Nana Addo says he can be a good president. I believe him because he is intelligent, speaks very good English and he is very calm gentleman. *(EULOGISTIC)*
(C) The third fallacy of changing the subject is **ILLEGITIMATE APPEAL TO AUTHORITY**: This fallacy occurs when the premises **dwell on an authority who has no relevance on facts presented in the conclusion of an argument**.

- **Examples**:
  1. This is certainly the best automobile available on the market. Just look at Michael Essien’s official website and notice the car he has chosen to buy; he can afford any car he wants but this is the brand he picked. So that proves it. **The mistake is that Essien is a footballer and not a car expert. He probably bought that car because that has been his dream car or maybe his team mates are all using the same car.**
2. The Executive committee of the national council of churches unanimously approved this *new food crop programme as an environmentally sustainable police* so clearly it should be implemented immediately.

3. Bill: "I believe that abortion is morally acceptable. After all, a woman should have a right to her own body."
Jane: "I disagree completely. Dr. Johan Skarn says that abortion is always morally wrong, regardless of the situation. He has to be right, after all, he is a respected expert in his field." *He's the guy that won the Nobel Prize in physics for his work on cold fusion.*
Bill: "I see. Does he have any expertise in morality or ethics?"
Jane: "I don't know. *But he's a world famous expert, so I believe him.*"
The fourth fallacy of changing the subject is **APPEAL TO THREAT OR FORCE**:- this fallacy occurs when individual(s) are coerced or force to accept a conclusion as a result of what will happen to them if they do not believe or accept the conclusion. They probably will be harmed or denied some benefits or privileges or some negative consequences will befall them.

**Examples:**

1. You know, Professor Smith, I really need to get an A in this class. I'd like to stop by during your office hours later to discuss my grade. I'll be in your building anyway, visiting my father. He's your dean, by the way. I'll see you later.
2. You must believe that God exists. After all, if you do not accept the existence of God, then you will face the horrors of hell.

3. Our student leader has our best interest at heart. Otherwise he would not have been elected into office to represent us. If you do not support his programme for resisting the university authorities, then people will take you for a coward or toady who always sides with the university authorities. Then you will never have friends and later after you graduate you would not be able to get a good job in town.
(E) The last of the fallacies of changing the subject is **APPEAL TO PITY OR EMOTIONS**: This fallacy occurs when a person substitutes claim intended to invoke *sympathy* as evidence to support the conclusion.

**Examples:**

1. I am positive that my work will meet your requirements. I really need the job since my grandmother is sick.

2. I really deserve an “A” on this paper, professor. Not only did I study during my grandmother’s funeral, I also passed up the heart transplant surgery, even though that was the first matching donor in 3 years.
Sub Topic Three.

FALLACIES OF MANIPULATING DATA
Fallacies of manipulating data deal with the quality of evidence or information gathered to support facts present in our conclusions. An example of such a fallacy is the fallacy of hasty generalization.

**HASTY GENERALIZATION:** This fallacy occurs when conclusions are based on premises that present samples that are insufficient in size to support the entire population of the conclusion.

**Example:**

1. I lived with a roommate from the eastern region and all the time there was a question about who was stealing things. There was six of us in the room. It caused a lot of tension. So I will never share a room with anyone from Eastern Region again.
2. Kwame knows that students at Pentagon Hostel are students from University of Ghana. One day when he was passing by Pentagon Hostel, he saw **two ladies** in provocative dress and concluded that **all the female students from University of Ghana are promiscuous**.

- *The problem with this argument is that Kwame saw only two ladies who are too small to represent the entire female student population of University of Ghana and secondly, how sure is he that those two ladies are students from University of Ghana. They may not be. So he was in haste to generalize without checking his facts well.*