

# LESSON 21 HIGHLIGHTS

## RHETORIC AND LOGICAL FALLACIES

### A. INTRODUCTION

I talked about the Biden–Trump debate and some logical fallacies..

### B. CLASS DISCUSSION

#### DISCUSSION OF ARGUMENTS

There are certain principles that speakers need to keep in mind when writing a persuasive speech, which include the following:

- *understanding the issues.* Speakers (and writers) not only has to understand (and define for the readers/audience) what the issue is and its subtleties, but to know clearly both sides, so as to not build straw man arguments.
- *engaging the audience.* If the audience is not engaged, the argument is lost. At all costs, the speaker make his argument clear, forceful and engaging. Employing rhetorical devices often achieves those ends.
- *understanding the audience.* The audience will determine the way in which the speaker argues. Are you speaking to those who are hostile to your argument, amenable to your argument or neutral? Also, knowing the age group, gender, social background, etc. will help in discussing the issue. If one is arguing for school vouchers, for example, knowing whether or not their are public school teachers in the audience would be helpful.
- *communicate the importance of the issue.* Speakers need to communicate the consequences of not supporting or understanding the truth of the position that that they are taking.
- *support views.* Speakers need to support their views through various means, avoiding logical fallacies.
  - \* *facts.* Speakers need to be well-informed about the issues that they are talking. Without knowing and understanding the facts of the issue at hand, they will not only appear uninformed and compromise their credibility, but also do a disservice to the public by arguing something that they do not know well enough. For example, if a speaker is trying to convince that a certain vaccine is dangerous or not dangerous, they must know and understand the ingredients of the vaccine, what the ingredients of the vaccine itself (antigen) are allegedly dangerous, as well as the additives, such as adjuvants, stabilizers and preservatives. They also need to know the studies and the validity of the studies.
  - \* *definitions.* How important it is to understand the words we use when we are trying to persuade others to our position, as well as and to ensure that our audience understands them as well. Saying that a president is a fascist, for example, is disingenuous, when what is meant is merely that the president supports preventing illegal drugs from

entering the country by strengthening the border. A fascist by definition is a anti-freedom nationalist totalitarian leader who will resort to violence to enact his ideas and to oppose opposition. Often speakers and writers deliberately use words vaguely or in a way that they are ordinarily are not used in order to win an argument. Their arguments are fallacious, as the words that they use are ambiguous. Orwell talks about this in his essay “Politics and the English Language” when he writes that certain words used in literary and critics are just about meaningless; no one can pin down what the words objectively mean—words such as *romantic, plastic, values, human, dead, sentimental, natural, and vitality*, as used in art criticism.” To argue that an artist’s work is inferior because it lacks vitality becomes an invalid argument because the word *vitality* has not been defined. This, of course, becomes an even more serious problem in the public realm with political speeches.

“The word *Fascism* has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies “something not desirable.” The words democracy, socialism, freedom, patriotic, realistic, justice have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like democracy, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using that word if it were tied down to any one meaning.”

- \* *statistics*. Reliable statistics, including graphs, and other visual aids are helpful in persuading others.
- \* *examples*. Through inductive reasoning, speakers can illustrate the truth of what they are saying. The examples will give concrete illustrations as well as evidence for the speakers’ position on the issue.
- \* *deductive reasoning*. Speakers can argue using deductive reasoning. If one is trying to show how certain chemicals in water cause cancer, not only facts, but deduction from those facts will help persuade an audience to one’s position.
- \* *draw analogies*. Sometime the issues being discussed can be complex, and unless one has had time to read about, study and think about the facts, examples, statistics, etc., an audience might be overwhelmed and not immediately understand the point being made. Often analogies can help make the issue simpler to comprehend. However, the onus is on the speaker not to give faulty analogies that do not represent the issue accurately.
- \* *delivery*. Delivery will often make or break a formal speech. Some considerations include volume, tone, pitch, dynamics, and formality of language.
- *avoiding and recognizing fallacies*. We will be going over formal and informal fallacies. This week we will go over what they are with some examples, but week by week go over the right and wrong way to make an argument.
  - \* *sound argument*. The formal fallacy is found in deductive arguments, called syllogism. The most famous syllogism is the following. In this argument, both the premises are true, and therefore the conclusion must be true. It is called a *sound* argument.

#### SOUND ARGUMENT

*Premise 1.* John is a man.

*Premise 2.* All men are mortal.

*Conclusion.* Therefore, John is mortal.

- \* *valid argument.* However, if the premises are not *a priori* true or their truth is doubtful, we say that is a valid argument in that it *could be true*, as it has the form of a good argument. Notice that the argument below is a valid argument, but not a sound one, as the fault lies in the truth of the premise rather than the structure of the syllogism. Here, the premise that the current president *can never* fail in promoting a successful policy is obviously dubious, although some may be led to believe so.

#### VALID ARGUMENT

*Premise 1.* The current President can never fail in promoting successful policies.

*Premise 2.* The policy now being considered by Congress was promoted by the President.

*Conclusion.* Therefore, if Congress passes the policy now being considered, it will be successful.

- \* *affirming the antecedent.* Often arguments involve *if-then* statements. In the study of logic, the clause that follows the *if* is called the antecedent, and the clause that follows the *then* is called consequent. A valid argument in which the second premise restates the antecedent of the first is called *modus ponens*, or “affirming the antecedent.”

#### MODUS PONENS

*Premise 1.* If John is in a rush, he always forgets the keys.

*Premise 2.* John was in a rush yesterday.

*Conclusion.* Therefore, John forgot his keys.

- \* *affirming the consequent.* When the second premise restates the consequent of the first premise, the argument is called *modus tollens*, or “denying the consequent.”

#### MODUS TOLLENS

*Premise 1.* If John is in a rush, he always forgets the keys.

*Premise 2.* John did not forget his keys yesterday.

*Conclusion.* Therefore, John was not in a rush.

- \* *fallacies* Two fallacies result when the deduction is inverted in denying the antecedent and affirming the consequent, as illustrated in the following.

#### DENYING THE ANTECEDENT

*Premise 1.* If John is in a rush, he always forgets the keys.

*Premise 2.* John is not in a rush.

*Conclusion.* Therefore, John did not forget his keys.

#### AFFIRMING THE CONSEQUENT

*Premise 1.* If John is in a rush, he always forgets the keys.

*Premise 2.* John forgot his keys.

*Conclusion.* Therefore, John was in a rush.

#### ARISTOTLE

Let us just briefly discuss what Aristotle said concerning persuasive speech.

- There are three of what Aristotle calls πίστις (*pistis*), a means of persuasion or argument (plural, πίστεις, *pisteis*): appeal to intellect (λόγος, *logos*), to emotion (πάθος, *pathos*), and to common values demonstrated by the speaker (ἦθος, *ethos*). These three means of argumentation may seem arbitrary, but it seems as though they are related to something that he said regarding all speeches; that is, with all speeches, there are three necessary ingredients: the speaker from which comes the ἦθος, *ethos*—his character and his credibility; the speech itself (πίστις, *pistis*) and the audience (πάθος, *pathos*), who are addressed according to their emotional state.

#### LIST OF FALLACIES

The list of formal fallacies, which is shorter than that of informal fallacies, are a result in faulty reasoning. Informal fallacies, on the other hand, are a result of false premises. The following is a list of some formal and informal fallacies—ten in total. For the next several weeks we will be going over ten.

#### FORMAL FALLACIES

Remember that formal fallacies are faults in reasoning, meaning one statement does not follow another.

- *denying the antecedent and affirming the consequent.* These two formal fallacies have been discussed above.
- *affirming a disjunct.* Arguments may be made on the basis of only one factor involved in the point being made, when in actuality two *disjunct*, (separate and distinct) factors are actually involved. Let us take the example of the argument on the legalization of drugs. *Premise 1:* The argument may go like this for those in favor of legalization: the blackmarket of drugs may be eradicated if drug users may purchase drugs legally and there is no more need for a blackmarket. *Premise 2:* The government makes drugs legal. *Conclusion:* The black market is eradicated. There is more than one factor in eliminating the blackmarket, such as making it so there is not need for it. Therefore, just making drugs available for certain people and making it cheaper, does not ensure that it will eradicate the black market.
- *probability fallacy.* The probability fallacy is an argument made which says that because it *can* be, it *will* be. An example of this would be because literacy rates may fall if we support school vouchers which take away funding from public schools, that they *will* fall with school vouchers.

#### INFORMAL FALLACIES

Remember that informal fallacies are based in false premises, not on non-sequiturs.

- *red herring.* The red herring fallacy is an attempt to oppose another person's argument with irrelevant points. For example, during the Trump–Harris debate,

Harris was asked why the Biden administration imposed strict asylum restrictions but only six months before the election. Harris replied that Trump in his previous term had killed the bill that would have added “1,500 more border agents on the border to help those folks who are working there right now over time trying to do their job.” In finishing her answer she stated that “And I’m going to actually do something really unusual and I’m going to invite you to attend one of Donald Trump’s rallies because it’s a really interesting thing to watch. You will see during the course of his rallies he talks about fictional characters like Hannibal Lecter. He will talk about windmills cause cancer. And what you will also notice is that people start leaving his rallies early out of exhaustion and boredom.”

- *ad hominem*. Attacking a person rather than argument is one of the most common debate tactics, which constitutes an *ad hominem*. It is a kind of red herring fallacy, as it distracts the attention away from the argument.
- *straw man argument*. Straw man arguments occur when one attempts to make a point by presenting the opposition’s argument inaccurately. *Example*: A person argues for the banning of all guns or stricter regulation of them by saying that the opposition wants *no* regulations on guns, putting them in the hands of the mentally ill. The fact is, however, most people who are pro-second amendment recognize the need for at least *some* regulation of gun sales and ownership.
- *expert fallacy*. Opinions by those who studied a subject for many years should carry more weight in an argument, but their expertise does not ensure their arguments’ validity. For example, On October 19, 2020, it was said fifteen days before the election that the material published regarding the Hunter laptop “has all the classic earmarks of a Russian information operation.” And in their “expert opinion, ‘the Russians are involved in the Hunter Biden email issue.’” Biden used this letter by 51 former intelligence officials in a debate with Donald Trump, which might have helped him win the election. The fact is that none of the officials had seen any material from the laptop or bothered asking for it, but their letter, instigated by, signed and delivered to Politico by Democratic operative and former John Brennan aide Nick Shapiro, killed the story stone dead. It got candidate Joe Biden off the hook for the corrupt influence-peddling scheme his family had been running through the eight years of his vice presidency.” Just because experts say it, does not mean it is true.
- *fallacy of composition*. Sometimes people will say that because something is true regarding the part of something, the whole is true. Arguing that because many people in the government are corrupt that all are corrupt would be making this fallacy.