

CHAPTER 5:

**PERSUASION THROUGH
RHETORIC**

WHAT IS RHETORIC?

RHETORIC

- Rhetoric denotes a broad category of linguistic techniques people use when their primary objective is to influence beliefs and attitudes and behaviors.
- It is the art of persuasion.

ARGUMENT?

- Notice that no argument is made, that is, no reasons are given to accept the claim being made.

RHETORIC AND ARGUMENTS

- An argument's persuasive force can be effectively enhanced by the use of rhetoric, but the argument is not made by rhetoric.

INFLUENCE

- Rhetorical force may be psychologically forceful, but by itself it adds nothing. If we allow our attitudes and beliefs to be affected by sheer rhetoric, we fall short as critical thinkers.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND LOGICAL FORCE

- While there is nothing wrong with using rhetoric, we must be able to distinguish the *argument* contained in what someone says or writes from the *rhetoric*; we must be able to distinguish the *logical force* of a set of arguments from their *psychological force*.

EUPHEMISM

- Euphemism: A neutral or positive expression instead of one that carries negative associations.
- a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.

EUPHEMISM

- Example: We will fund this program through revenue enhancements from the sale of beer and cigarettes.

EUPHEMISM: TRUE OR FALSE?

- It is fair to say that euphemisms can sometimes be helpful and constructive.
- True!

DYSPHEMISM

- a derogatory or unpleasant term used instead of a pleasant or neutral one.
- Example: Rush Limbaugh said: “The basic right to life of an animal’ – which is the source of energy for many animal rights wackos – must be inferred from the anticruelty laws humans have written.”

RHETORICAL COMPARISON

- Rhetorical comparison: A comparison used to express or influence attitudes or affect behavior; such comparisons make use of images with positive or negative emotional associations. “He had a laugh like an old car trying to start.”

RHETORICAL DEFINITION

- Rhetorical definition: A definition used to convey or evoke an attitude about the defined term and its denotation. It uses loaded language while supposedly trying to clarify a term: “Animals are our fellow conscious beings.”

RHETORICAL DEFINITION

- Example: A “provost” is the head academic officer in a university, whose chief function is to dream up work for faculty committees to do.

RHETORICAL EXPLANATION

- Rhetorical explanation: An explanation intended to influence attitudes or affect behavior. They use loaded language while pretending merely to tell the reason for an event. “She lost the fight because she’s lost her nerve.”

RHETORICAL EXPLANATION

- Example: “Smokers unite! The reason the antismoking crowd doesn’t want you to smoke can be summed up in a single word: dictatorship.”

STEREOTYPE

- A stereotype is a popularly held image of a group that rests on little or no evidence. Rhetoric uses stereotypes to associate a usually negative image with the point being made.

STEREOTYPE

- Language that reduces people or things to categories can induce an audience to accept a claim unthinkingly or to make snap judgments concerning groups of individuals about whom they know little.

STEREOTYPE

- Example: Handguns are made only for the purpose of killing people.

INNUENDO

- Innuendo is a form of suggestion. An innuendo works by implying what it does not say. Sometimes an innuendo suggests while pretending or even claiming not to: “Far be it from me to call my opponents liars.”

INNUENDO

- Innuendo lies between the lines.
- Example: I don't know what my opponents will base their speeches on; I'm basing mine on love for my country.

LOADED QUESTION

- A **loaded question** or complex **question** fallacy is a **question** that contains a controversial or unjustified assumption
- A loaded question follows the logic of innuendo, illegitimately suggesting something through the very existence of the question. “Have you stopped beating your wife?” rests on the assumption that the person asked has in the past beaten his wife

LOADED QUESTION

- A loaded question is a rhetorical device that is phrased as a question that rests upon one or more unwarranted or unjustified assumptions.

WEASELERS

- Weaselers are linguistic methods of hedging a bet. As a persuasive device it aims at shielding a claim from criticism by qualifying it.
- An oversimplified generalization about the members of a class or culture.
- Definition. an expression used to protect a claim from criticism by weakening it

WEASELERS

- Words like “perhaps” and “possibly,” and qualifying phrases like “as far as we know” or “within reasonable limits,” most commonly signal the work of weasellers.

WEASELERS

- Example: Yes, well, in a way I agree with you.

WEASELERS

- Claims that might otherwise convey strong and specific information, but possibly be false, can be made more nearly true through the use of weasellers: “She is quite possibly one of the most gifted students I am now teaching.”

WEASELERS

- Weasely words can also plant an innuendo:
“It’s not impossible for him to have ulterior motives.”

WEASELERS

- It is important to be watchful when qualifying phrases turn up. Is the speaker or writer adding a reasonable qualification, insinuating a bit of innuendo, or preparing a way out?

WEASELERS

- You need to assess the speaker, the context, and the subject to establish the grounds for the right judgment.

DOWNPLAYERS

- Downplaying is an attempt to make someone or something look less important or significant.
- Certain words like “merely” “so-called” and putting words in quotation marks can all signal the use of downplayers.

DOWNPLAYERS

- Example: Open this envelope and you'll get a check for three million dollars. If your name appears on our list of winners.

DOWNPLAYERS

- Example: Yes, of course, we must protect the rights of innocent people - up to a point. The main thing is to make the streets safe again. Something must be done to reduce crime.

THE HORSE LAUGH

- The horse laugh, ridicule, or sarcasm are rhetorical devices used to avoid arguing about a position by laughing at it.
- Satire is a form of ridicule. Satire is a way of making fun of people by using silly or exaggerated language.

THE HORSE LAUGH

- Example: One may laugh at another claim that reminds us of the first (“Support the Equal Rights Amendment? Sure, when the ladies start buying the drinks! Ho, ho, ho!”).

THE HORSE LAUGH

- Example: We can also tell an unrelated joke, use sarcastic language, or simply laugh at the person who is trying to make the point.

THE HORSE LAUGH

- Being funny might be entertaining, but it is not making an argument!

HYPERBOLE

- Hyperbole is extravagant overstatement. It's when the colorfulfulness of language becomes *excessive*—a matter of judgment—that the claim is likely to turn into hyperbole.

HYPERBOLE

- Example: Marilyn French said: “All men are rapists.”

PROOF SURROGATE

- An expression used to suggest that there is evidence or authority for a claim without actually citing such evidence or authority is a proof surrogate.
- Such a proof or evidence may exist, but until it has been presented, the claim at issue remains unsupported.

PROOF SURROGATE

- Example: Chewing tobacco is not only messy, it is also unhealthy (just check the latest statistics).
- Example: That the latest proposal before us is a good one is, surely, obvious.

EXERCISES

- Isolate and discuss rhetorical devices that appear in these passages.
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- *“Not everyone” implies that most do—innuendo. The parenthetical remark is a proof surrogate. “Even now” insinuates (innuendo) that by this time hardly anyone has regard for Helms or for a Helms endorsement. “One or two” is a weaseler. “Lust after” belittles the desire for a Helms endorsement: It cheapens both Helms and those who want his support.*

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- *Note especially how quotation marks around “religious leaders” serves to question the credentials of those individuals.*

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 - *“Bickering” belittles the nature of the controversy.*

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- Maybe it's possible, after all, to sympathize with the Internal Revenue Service. The woes that have piled up in its Philadelphia office make the IRS look almost human.
- *“After all” suggests that the IRS usually deserves no sympathy; “almost human” implies that the IRS is actually inhuman.*

EXERCISES

- We clearly can't trust the television networks, not when they've just spent two days interviewing young children on their feelings about the recent shootings at the elementary school. This attempt to wring every drop of human interest from the tragedy is either frighteningly cynical or criminally thoughtless regarding the damage that can be done both to the children interviewed and to children who see the interviews.

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- *“Wring every drop” is a cliché and an exaggeration; the adverbs “frighteningly” and “criminally” approach hyperbole, especially the latter.*

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- *This trades on a stereotype; it's an excellent opening for a straw man.*

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- *Euphemism*

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- *Innuendo, downplayer (“but”)*

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- George Will
- *A rhetorical comparison*

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- *The phrase “do you honestly believe” is almost always used to refute without argument the claim that follows it. It isn’t a type of slanter discussed in the text, though you might get away with calling it a proof surrogate.*

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- *The height of downplaying, as it were, although the remark is clearly designed more to amuse than to persuade.*

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- *You’ll recognize this as primarily a piece of pseudoreasoning (false dilemma), but the phrase “will have died for nothing [or in vain]” is a highly charged cliché.*

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- *Loaded question*

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- *Jones's credentials regarding evaluation of the commission's findings are impugned (innuendo), and the significance of his comments is downplayed.*

EXERCISES

- I simply won't go into those cowboy bars; they're full of guys who disguise their insecurities with cowboy boots and hats.

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- *Stereotyping*

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- *Rhetorical definition. Notice the switch in this one: Usually the slant is against the word or idea being defined; here the object of the attack occurs in the definition.*

EXERCISES

- “Any person who thinks that Libya is not involved in terrorism has the same kind of mentality as people who think that Hitler was not involved in persecuting Jews.”
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- *Rhetorical comparison*

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- *Downplayer: “although”*

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- Voting is the method for obtaining legal power to coerce others.
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- *Rhetorical definition*

EXERCISES

- “To those who say that the analogy of Hitler is extremist and inflammatory in reference to abortion, I would contend that the comparison is legitimate. . . . The Supreme Court, by refusing to acknowledge their personhood, has relegated the entire class of unborn children to a subhuman legal status without protection under the law—the same accorded Jews under the Third Reich.”
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- *Loaded question*

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- *Both "strongman" and "kingpin" are slanters, and the second sentence is a rhetorical comparison.*

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- *“Holier-than-thou” is a clichéd slanter; and the “let’s hear it for apartheid” epithet is a jeer, regardless of the fact that Falwell supported apartheid in South Africa. The whole is, of course, a rhetorical comparison.*

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- “The people who [fought] the Soviet-backed government in Nicaragua [were] freedom fighters just as George Washington was in our country.”
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- *Rhetorical comparison*

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- *“Mere” is a downplayer.*

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- In March 1997, thirty-nine members of the so-called Heaven's Gate cult committed suicide in Rancho Santa Fe, California. The event was connected with the Hale-Bopp comet, which was at that time making its brightest appearance to observers on earth. The cultists believed a spaceship following the comet would “take them away” from earthly matters, provided they had undergone sufficient “spiritual metamorphosis.”

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- *“So-called” is a downplayer, used sarcastically here. “Take them away” and “spiritual metamorphosis” may simply be direct quotations from remarks made by the cultists, but they may also be sarcastically intended, in which case they are downplayers.*

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- *Innuendo—insinuates that her changed mind on the proposal was politically motivated and unprincipled*

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- *Innuendo* ☞