

AN EXISTENTIAL-LOGICAL ANALYSIS OF FALLACIES ON THE HUMAN PERSON

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ABSTRACT

In everyday discourse, arguments, which are expected to be logical and reasonable, are used to advance positions and to make statements. However, some arguments are known to be illogical and are generally referred to as fallacies which are errors in reasoning. These informal fallacies are known to have a psychological dimension in the pattern of illusions and deceptions that violate argument rules used in rational thinking or argumentation. The problem this paper deals with is that these fallacies are deceptive and unfortunately are sometimes deliberately used to deceive and mislead others. The deliberate intention to deceive, mislead or induce someone or people to accept a claim undermines human dignity and cannot allow for genuine dialogue and authentic communication. The question of the effect of fallacies in human communication and relationship has raised concerns. Using the existential theories of Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, and Karl Jaspers, this paper seeks to give an existential analysis of the influence of informal fallacies on the human person. Through the expository and analytical method, this paper concludes that the deliberate use of fallacies in communication and relationships to deceive others is an affront to human dignity and militates against authentic existence. By learning to recognize fallacies and having a critical thinking disposition, we can avoid being deceitful and being misled by others.

Key Words: Fallacies, Existence, Arguments, human dignity

INTRODUCTION

In logic, an argument consists of a set of statements, the premises, whose truth supposedly supports the truth of a single statement called the conclusion of the argument. An argument is deductively valid when the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion; that is, the conclusion must be true, because of the form of the argument, whenever the premises are true. Some arguments that fail to be deductively valid are acceptable on grounds other than formal logic, and their conclusions are supported with less than logical necessity. In other potentially persuasive arguments, the premises give no rational grounds for accepting the conclusion. These defective forms of argument are called fallacies. The term fallacy originated from a Latin word, *fallacia*, from *fallac-*, *fallax* which means deceitful, or *fallere* to deceive. Fallacies are sophisms or errors in reasoning which is connected with inferences as these errors sound reasonable and valid, however, their unreliability is vague. They are known to have a psychological dimension in the pattern of illusions and deceptions that violate argument rules used in rational thinking or argumentation.¹

In everyday speech, one may have heard someone refer to a commonly accepted belief as a fallacy. What is usually meant is that the belief is false, although widely accepted. A fallacy refers to a logically weak argument that is usually psychologically persuasive but logically weak and not a belief or statement that is widely used and successful. That is fallacious arguments work in getting many people to accept conclusions, that they make bad arguments appear good even though a little commonsense reflection will reveal that people ought not to accept the conclusions of these arguments as strongly supported. Although logicians distinguish between formal² and informal fallacies, our focus is on traditional informal fallacies because they are patterns of mistakes that are made in the everyday use of language.

Informal fallacies are fallacies that are expressed in ordinary language and are common in everyday affairs which may be

psychologically persuasive but logically flawed. It is an important concept among students as well as the public at large because some parts of human thinking deceives itself while deceiving others. These fallacies are highly persuasive and deceptive, hence their widespread use in everyday dialogues. It is the point of this paper that these fallacies, which are manipulative and tricky, go against the existentialist thesis of existence and others because they denigrate the dignity of the human person who is to be treated as wholly an Other.

Nature of Informal Fallacies

Informal fallacies are defined as reasoning errors with three features: (1) the reasoning employs an implicit cogent (deductively valid or inductively strong) pattern, (2) the fallacy results from the presence of one or more false premises, and (3) there is some degree of culpable ignorance or deception associated with the falsity of the premises. Thus, the source of fallaciousness is the falsity of the premises and not the invalidity of the reasoning, unjustified appeals to "irrelevant" reasons, incorrect moves (rule violations) in argumentative discourse, or anything else specified in other accounts of informal fallacies.³ They are errors in reasoning that we fall into because of carelessness or inattention or because we want to trick others into accepting our position based on convictions that are not factual. Informal fallacies are fallacies that can be detected through analysis of the content of the argument (or content of discourses) and they take many forms and are widespread in everyday discourse. Very often they involve bringing irrelevant information into an argument or a discourse, wrong use of language, or they are based on assumptions that, when examined, prove to be incorrect – informal fallacies are more dependent on misuse of language and evidence.⁴

Informal fallacies are concerned not with the form but with the content (and possibly the intent) of the reasoning. They are "proofs that appear at first glance to be sound but are fatally flawed in their reasoning or construction. And from a psychological perspective, "a fallacy is often defined as a mistake in the reasoning used for deceptive purposes." While this certainly is not categorically true of all informal fallacies, many of the informal fallacies are often used in the manipulation of opinion. Informal fallacies can also be

difficult to identify. For instance, a slippery-slope argument often straddles the line between being persuasively plausible and fallaciously exaggerated. A fallacious argument is either inductively very weak, contains an unjustified premise, or ignores relevant, available evidence that the arguer should know about, and the argument can be used to persuade.⁵ Informal fallacies are persuasive tools that tend to induce errors in the way that other people process and think about information, and they are used to manage what people perceive and eventually believe. They are known to have a psychological dimension in the pattern of illusions and deceptions. They violate argument rules used in rational thinking or argumentation. According to Shamala, informal fallacies are elucidated for violations of the rules for dispute resolution through rational discussion and are used for arguments that are psychologically persuasive but logically incorrect. In other words, these fallacies persuade humans when it is not supposed to.⁶

The two most fully developed theories of fallacy so far are the pragmatic theory and the pragma-dialectical theory. According to the pragma-dialectical theory, a fallacy is a violation of a rule of a critical discussion where the goal is to resolve a difference of opinion by rational argumentation. In other words, it is a speech act that prejudices or frustrates efforts to resolve a difference of opinion. For the pragmatic theory, a fallacy is a failure, lapse, or error that occurs in an instance of an underlying, systematic kind of wrongly applied argumentation scheme or is a departure from acceptable procedures in a dialogue, and is a serious violation, as opposed to an incidental blunder, error, or weakness of execution. The weakness of these theories is that neither theory has fully taken into account that longstanding intuition, very much evident in Aristotle's treatment of the *Sophistici Elenchi*, that fallacies are deceptive. They are not just arguments that prejudice efforts to resolve a difference of opinion, wrongly applied argumentation schemes, or departures from acceptable procedures in a dialogue, although they are all that. They are arguments that work as deceptive stratagems. They are arguments that seem correct but are not.⁷

Informal fallacies have always been part of human history but they became noticeable in fifth-century B.C. Athens, when a class of

teachers known as the Sophists became the center of attention with "their claim to teach 'excellence' or 'virtue' both in mastering one's affairs and in providing leadership in the city that makes them popular. The Sophists were teachers of rhetoric: the fundamentals and art of persuasive speaking, including how to present a case, marshal arguments, and appeal to the audience's emotions. Most relevant to the present topic was the Sophists' claim to teach "the ability to use the spoken word to persuade the jurors in the courts" and how to make the weaker argument stronger. The Sophists were trained at manipulating other people's perceptions and inducing errors in their thinking to manage what they perceive and eventually believe. They also indoctrinated in their students the view of skepticism that the individual can never get at the truth, and thus the only reasonable response is to suspend judgment on all issues and to adopt a theory of relativism, which holds that truth is relative to the individual, the culture, or the time. Philosophers have generally disagreed with the Sophists' ideas of skepticism and relativism because the philosopher's end goal is to reach the ultimate truth. Unfortunately, because the art of rhetoric had become so bound up with the Sophists' underlying beliefs, philosophers have tended to reject rhetoric as a legitimate method to get at the truth. Beginning with Aristotle, philosophers began to develop well-reasoned and systematic tools for uncovering sophisms, or fallacious arguments that look good but are not.⁸

Aristotle played a pivotal role in logic as the father of logic. In his *Sophistical Refutations*, (Latin: *De Sophisticis Elenchis*), he identified thirteen types of informal fallacies or absurdities, as he used to call them, and classified them into linguistic fallacies, that is, those dependent on language and non-linguistic fallacies, that is, those outside language. Under linguistic fallacies, we have Accent, Amphiboly, Figure of speech, Equivocation, Composition, and Division. Under non-linguistic fallacies, we have Ignorance of refutation, Many questions, Unqualified generalizations (Accident), Hasty generalizations, Wicked circle (Circular reasoning), False cause, and Affirming the consequent.⁹ Thus, philosophers were trained at recognizing the Sophists' manipulations and are the ones who labeled their rhetorical tactics logical fallacies. While Aristotle focused mostly on formal logic, he also recognized some informal

fallacies as mentioned above. Modern philosophers and logicians have greatly expanded upon Aristotle's foundational work and have developed a much broader understanding of informal fallacies. A list of more than 100 fallacies has been developed. There is thus no precisely exact number of informal fallacies.

Classification of Fallacies

Informal fallacies are numerous and can therefore be best understood if they are grouped into categories, each with clearly identifiable features. This classification of fallacies is a controversial matter in logic. There is no one correct taxonomy of fallacies. Logicians have proposed lists of fallacies that vary greatly in length; different sets have been specified, and different names have been given to both the sets and the individual fallacies. The grouping of fallacies mentioned here is borrowed from Patrick Hurley which is not exhaustive and does not encompass the fallacies developed by logicians. The aim here is to provide a comprehensive scheme within which the most common informal fallacies can be helpfully identified—and avoided.

Fallacies of Relevance,

As the name suggests, they are informal fallacies with premises that are logically irrelevant to the conclusion. There are two major causes of fallacies of relevance: the use of emotional appeals as evidence and introducing evidence that shifts focus away from the thesis being considered. However emotional evidence is said to be dangerous for two reasons: it is unstable and it is subjective. These fallacies are also known as material fallacies. These are fallacies that depend, for their appeal, upon mistakes concerning the truth by the premise(s) or the possibility of such truth being known. Stated differently, material fallacies or fallacies of relevance refer to arguments that fail to prove the material truth of that being argued about; the premise(s) of such arguments is/are logically immaterial or irrelevant to, and therefore, incapable of establishing the truth of the conclusion.¹⁰ They include appeal to the populace, appeal to emotion, red herring, straw man, attack on the person, appeal to force, accident, and missing the point.

Fallacies of Weak Induction

Fallacies of weak induction are not committed because the premises are irrelevant to the conclusion; they are committed when the premises are not strong enough to justify the conclusion. The emphasis here is derived from the name “weak”: the premise(s) is/are in connection with the conclusion but the connection is loose or weak. The premises of the argument, although relevant to the conclusion, are so weak and ineffective that relying on them is a blunder.¹¹ They often involve emotional grounds for believing a conclusion. They include arguments from ignorance, appeal to inappropriate authority, hasty generalization, false cause, slippery slope, and weak analogy.

Fallacies of Presumption

Fallacies of presumption occur when an argument contains premises that assume what they (the premises) purport to prove, or when an unwarranted assumption is used to draw a conclusion. In such flawed reasoning, the conclusion rests upon certain assumptions not explicitly stated in the premises. Such assumptions are false, or at least uncertain, implausible, or unjustified so that the premises do not strictly support the conclusion. Explicating the lurking assumption usually suffices to demonstrate the argument's insufficiency, either due to a lack of relevant information or unacceptable premises.¹² They include begging the question, false dichotomy, and suppressed evidence.

Fallacies of Ambiguity

Fallacies of ambiguity refer to an error in a reasoning due to unclear or imprecise use of language. It often arises because of confusion in the meanings of words or the handling of an idea. The arguer normally makes use of a word, a phrase or a sentence that has two or more possible meanings or an event that has more than one interpretation. In this case, the listener may or may not realize that more than one interpretation is possible, so, he may arbitrarily have to select one of the possible choices. This lack of clarity may lead to the misinterpretation of an idea and an unwarranted conclusion. The fallacies of ambiguity include equivocation and amphiboly.¹³

Fallacies of Grammatical Analogy

These fallacies are arguments that are grammatically similar to other arguments that are good in every respect. Because of this similarity in linguistic structure, such fallacious arguments may appear good yet bad.¹⁴ They include composition and division.

Existence and Inter-Personal Relationships

In the existentialist thesis, authentic existence can only be realized in and by the solitary individual. Nevertheless, authentic existence cannot do without a world and the others. Existence requires not only a worldly environment but also a personal environment. The existent so to speak lives in constant interaction with other existents. These other existents are not objects belonging to the world but are persons. In other words, they are co-existents. Following from this, it means that existence is *being with others*.¹⁵ Existence fulfills itself and becomes authentic in genuine communication.

The experience of the Other (when written with a capital 'O') is the experience of another free subject who inhabits the same world as a person does. Essentially, it is this experience of the Other that constitutes inter-subjectivity and objectivity. Inter-subjectivity occurs when people agree on a given set of meanings or a definition of the situation. It refers to the shared meanings constructed by individuals in their relations with one another and used as an everyday resource to interpret the meaning of elements of social and cultural life. This is because each thought community is unique and shares social experiences that are different from that of other thought communities. It is through inter-subjectivity that one experiences oneself as different from the other and at the same time available to him/her.

Different existentialists of inter-subjectivity in their teachings emphasize the dignity of the human person. The human person is a mystery to behold and ought to be treated as a Thou, an Other. This implies respect and love and is devoid of manipulation, arrogance, and insincerity. Martin Buber, a Jewish-German existential philosopher; theologian, and Biblical translator, in his theory of existence, revolves around a concept of relation. Persons and things are seen to exist only in relation to other things and persons.¹⁶

Relation, as an event or action, occurs between two entities, that is, between a person, whose attention is completely turned toward someone or something other than himself, and another person or thing who confronts him. Buber says that the essence of man which is special to him can be directly known only in a living relationship. The individual is a fact of existence in so far as he enters into relationships with other individuals. He defines man as a creature capable of entering into living essential relations with the world and things.¹⁷

According to Buber, the principle of human life is not simple but twofold, being built up in a twofold movement that is of such kind that one movement is the presupposition of the other. He calls the first movement the primal setting at a distance and the second, entering into relation. In other words, one can only enter into relation with that which is not himself - an independent other, a being that has been set at a distance. The primal setting at a distance involves the self-understanding itself as being separate and apart from the being which is not the self: the self identifies the other as an Other. Identifying the other as an Other allows the self to enter into a relationship with it. This setting at a distance that makes entering into relation possible is proper to the human category.¹⁸

The underlying principle in Buber's philosophy is the idea that man has two modes available to him through which he can engage the world. The first mode (I-It) is that of experience, while the other mode (I-Thou) is that of relation/encounter.¹⁹ These two primary word pairs according to him, represent the two modes of existence. An individual becomes human only in a relationship, and these paired terms describe two possible ways of relating. The 'I-Thou' relationship is one of intimacy, mutuality, sharing, and trust. While on the contrary, the 'I-It' relationship is one of having, using, manipulating, and exploiting. To put it differently, the 'I-It' relationship is unidirectional moving only from the subject to the object, from 'I' to the thing. But the 'I-Thou' relationship is a form of relating in which the 'I' gives and receives from the 'Thou'. When we relate to another person as a 'Thou', we do not treat that person as a thing or an object. This is what Buber means when he says, 'when I confront a human being as my Thou and speak the basic word I-Thou to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of

things'.²⁰

Buber believes that authenticity can be gained only in the genuine dialogue between two individuals - a dialogue in which the experiencing senses and the real fantasy which supplements them work together to make the other present as a whole and one. For this, dialogue to be real, one must not only focus on the other, but also involve oneself, and that means truly expressing what one thinks about the matter in question. Genuine dialogue can thus be either spoken or silent. Its essence lies in the fact that 'each of the participants has in mind the other or the others in their present and particular being' and turns to them intending to establish a living mutual relation between himself and them.' The essential element of genuine dialogue, therefore, is 'seeing the other' or experiencing the other side'. 'Experiencing the other side' means to feel an event from the side of the person one meets as well as from one's side. It is the inclusiveness that realizes the other person in the actuality of his being.²¹

Another existentialist that upholds the dignity of the human person is Gabriel Marcel, a French philosopher, dramatist, and one of the foremost thinkers of the 20th century who sought a philosophical position, which was immediately relevant to the deepest concerns of human life. These include love, loyalty, hope, faith, death, communication, and community.²² Marcel's philosophy of existence is tied to his problem of being. His existentialism is based on the development of the individual's concrete existence, the restoration of mutual respect, and trust in human relationships; recognition of the true worth of man in relation to his fellow man in the feeling of *bondness*. And as such, he holds the position that the question of man's existence is not a problem but a mystery. Marcel makes a distinction between a problem and a mystery. A problem is a conceptual difficulty that can be attacked with the appropriate technique. Furthermore, a kind of distance exists between the individual and a problem such that it is possible to solve a problem or withdraw from it. A mystery, on the other hand, is something a person is intimately involved with and which can neither be solved nor is any withdrawal from it possible. The unfortunate tendency of philosophy in the mid-twentieth century was to turn all mysteries into problems.

This degradation of philosophy results when human beings are objectified among other objects.²³

According to Marcel, the most appropriate relationship to what is most intimately associated with us is *being* which is clear in the relationship with our bodies. Our mode of being in the world is to be embodied such that through our bodies, we extend ourselves into the world and actualize our intentions. Although we are not identical with our bodies, they, however, become the means through which we can become a part of the objective world of nature. There is a transcendent dimension to our experience that can be described only as the mystery of Being. For Marcel, it is through the experience of faith, hope, and love that man can open himself up to the mystery of Being. These distinctions point us beyond ourselves to relationships with others. A fundamental fact of human existence involves inter-subjective relations with others. These relationships with others are defining moments in our selfhood.²⁴

For Marcel, the meaningfulness and the authenticity of one's existence as an individual is totally conditioned by the generosity with which the person makes himself/herself available in mutual love, fidelity, faith, and responsibility to the other. It is absolutely anchored on one's genuineness, and openness to the other, and it does not give much confidence for being exceptionally sensitive, thoughtful, and honest without the other; one has to establish a loving and mutual relationship with other human beings to ensure and live a meaningful and authentic existence.²⁵ When one treats the being of another as a mystery, one does so with a sense of humility and respects the fundamental dignity of the other. This leads to abandonment of one's self, dynamic openness, and fidelity to others. In this way, Marcel calls for greater responsibility to others, not merely through the traditional notion of doing good deeds, but also primarily by being humbly present and open to others with one's whole being. Through this availability, a dynamic and creative encounter happens between people, with which they make contact. A person's relationship with others which develops this way helps one to be open to the transcendent.²⁶ We relate to God precisely by turning towards the other and find the eternal thou through the finite. When this is realized there would be peace in society.

Marcel also points out two ways of comporting oneself towards others that can be used as barometers for intersubjective relationships; *disponibilite* and *indisponibilite* which can be translated as availability and unavailability. Pride is an example of *indisponibilite*, although the same state of non-availability would also exist in a person who has come to view himself in functional terms, or who is blinded by a purely technical worldview. To be *disponibilite*, (available) to the other is to be present for the other, to put one's resources at his/her disposal, and to be open which will lead to peace and greater responsibility to others.²⁷

Karl Jaspers is another existentialist who says that existential communication occurs between two selves that are not interchangeable. This communicative relation is unique, singular, historic, and unrecognizable from without, and in it lies the assurance of selfhood. It means to say, a person cannot be his free self unless the other is and wants to be himself - and that person is with him. The necessity of existential communication is one of freedom only. And as such, it is objectively incomprehensible for that which is existential lies outside the objective realm of a person's purposive volition. Existential communication is a whole that does not arise utilizing an individual gaining something in addition to his/her finished being. 'It is the person who comes to be in it.'²⁸

According to Jaspers, authentic existential communication requires equality, mutual recognition, affirmation, solidarity, questioning, abandonment of ego protection, no quest for victory, unlimited clarification, and no sophistry while inauthentic existential communication has several defective modes, including affectation, insincerity, deceit and lying, and "pseudo-communication" arising from shyness, fear, suspicion, prejudice, self-centeredness, presumed superiority, callousness, combativeness, bad will, and continually idle talk (Gordon 113).²⁹ Communication cannot be achieved simply by the goodwill of the purposive intellect. It is attainable through the commitment of self-being. It is only in communication that an individual comes to himself/herself. In other words, communication is a source of *Existenz*. *Existenz* stands for the non-empirical, non-objective actuality of self-being and true self-hood. It is the authentic ground of human beings, exemplified by the intimate dimension of

personal autonomy, existential freedom, authenticity, and undetermined moral decisions. It is the absolutely unique inner core of the individual that creates the authenticity of the person.³⁰

From the above, authentic being with others is precisely that mode of relation with others that promotes existence in the full sense while inauthentic being with others suppresses and manipulates the genuinely human and personal and imposes insincerity, deceit, and brutishness. Authentic relations between two existents require respect, trust, equality, recognition, availability, and so on.

Negative Effects of Fallacious Statements on Inter-personal Relationships and their Implication for Formation

Fallacies are errors that occur in discourses. It has been affirmed in this paper that fallacies are erroneous forms of reasoning that can obstruct the validity of an argument. Strictly speaking, a fallacy is a mistake in reasoning. One commits a fallacy when the reasons advanced or accepted in support of a claim fail to justify its acceptance. A fallacy can be committed either when one is deciding whether to accept a claim based on a fallacious argument with which one has been presented or when one is presenting the fallacious argument oneself. Committing flaws in reasoning is very common. Sometimes fallacies just pass unnoticed. But sometimes they are intended, whether because the arguer is uninterested in being reasonable or wishes to induce someone else to make a rational error; they mislead people to accept faulty reasoning or arguments as correct or good reasoning. And that is the point of this paper, that a deliberate intention to deceive, mislead or induce someone or people to accept a claim undermines human dignity and is an affront to the human person.

Buber says entering into relation means entering into an I-Thou relationship, and at the same time one cannot identify distance with I-It. The 'I-Thou' relationship is one of intimacy, mutuality, sharing, and trust. While on the contrary, the 'I-It' relationship is one of having, using, manipulating, and exploiting. Deliberating deceiving or misleading a person is not entering into an I-Thou relationship which implies trust, respect, and sharing. Rather, it is having an I-IT relation that involves using, manipulating, and

exploiting. Intentionally using fallacies to trick someone into accepting an argument is reducing the person to an It; seeing the person as an object to be used for one's purpose. Mental trickery is devoid of mutuality and reciprocity, which are characteristics of dialogue, and cannot allow for genuine dialogue.

Marcel teaches us that it is through the experience of faith, hope, and love that a person can open himself/herself up to the mystery of Being. The meaningfulness and the authenticity of one's existence as an individual is totally conditioned by the generosity with which the person makes himself/herself available in mutual love, fidelity, faith, and responsibility to the other. It is absolutely anchored on one's genuineness, and openness to the other, and it does not give much confidence for being exceptionally sensitive, thoughtful, and honest without the other; one has to establish a loving and mutual relationship with other human beings to ensure and live a meaningful and authentic existence. When one treats the being of another as a mystery, one does so with a sense of humility and respects the fundamental dignity of the other. A deliberate use of these informal fallacies to trick others to accept a claim does not give room for openness and growth in the authenticity of one's existence. It has within it a trait of arrogance and lack of respect for the mystery of being and the fundamental dignity of others and is an example of unavailability (*indisponibilit e*) which has pride as one of its characteristics.

According to Jaspers, authentic existential communication requires equality, mutual recognition, affirmation, solidarity, questioning, abandonment of ego protection, no quest for victory, unlimited clarification, and no sophistry while inauthentic existential communication has several defective modes including affectation, insincerity, deceit and lying, and "pseudo-communication" arising from shyness, fear, suspicion, prejudice, self-centeredness, presumed superiority, callousness, combativeness, bad will, and continually idle talk. A deliberate intention to deceive and manipulate people through these fallacies portrays inauthentic existential communication which is characterized by insincerity, deceit, and lying. Authentic existential communication needs no sophistry, no quest for victory, no manipulation, and so on.

As is clear from existentialists' teaching, deliberately deceiving or misleading a person or persons to accept a conclusion is belittling and demeaning. There are times that unconsciously, we fall into these fallacies. But efforts must be made to come out of them once we recognize that we've fallen into it. Buber notes that most encounters (I-Thou meetings), unfortunately, cannot last very long - they are necessarily fleeting. Eventually, an individual comes to reflect on the Thou, to see it for its various qualities, to analyze it. Once this is done, the Thou dissolves into an It, and man falls back into the realm of experience. The I-Thou relationship, therefore, needs to be ever actively re-established and renewed - it demands constant effort. The I-It situation can also be reverted to I-Thou by a change of attitude.³¹ In other words, being in the I-Thou relationship requires effort. Sometimes, the person may fall into I-It mode due to human nature. But through constant effort, the person returns to I-Thou mode. In the same vein, we may fall into these fallacies without knowing them. But as soon as we become aware of it, we ought to extricate ourselves from it rather than indulging in it to the detriment of human dignity.

We must make a conscious effort to avoid deliberately using these fallacies to deceive, mislead, attack, show superiority, or dominate others. Philosophy is not studied to intimidate people or put others down. It is a search for truth. Human beings must cultivate a disposition toward critical thinking. It is noted that critical thinking skills do not stand alone for one to become a good critical thinker. It needs to be accompanied by good habits of thinking which are termed as "critical thinking disposition". Critical thinking disposition can be traced back to education philosopher, Robert Ennis, who defines it as a tendency to do something given certain conditions. To qualify as a thinking disposition, the disposition must be exercised reflectively.³² The dimension of critical thinking disposition has seven conceptually non-discrete constructs which emphasize developing the habitual intention to be truth-seeking, open-minded, systematic, analytical, inquisitive, confident in reasoning, and mature in making judgments. Dispositions are thought to be a critical spirit, a probing inquisitiveness, and a keenness of mind that weak critical thinkers generally lack. A person can be positively or negatively disposed

toward certain thinking skills but not toward all dispositions equally.³³

According to Shamala,

Truth-seeking involves intellectual integrity and a courageous desire to strive for the best possible knowledge, asking probing questions, accepts reasons and shreds of evidence although they are against the person's beliefs. Open-minded refers to a person who has tolerant divergent views and is sensitive to biases, a person who respects others' opinions. An analytical person is habitually alert to potential problems and alert in predicting consequences. A systematic person is always orderly, focused, persistent, and diligent in problem-solving. They are confident in their reasoning skills which produce good judgments. A person, who yearns to be well-informed and wants to know how things work is termed inquisitive. A judicious person has the cognitive maturity to distinguish between black and white as well as able to make judgments in an uncertain context.

It is important to note that in every rule, there may be an exception. When it comes to the question of justice and saving a life, things are not always straight. According to Cory, informal fallacies should not be viewed to completely avoid them—at least not in the law. Truth and justice hold a unique place together in the legal world. This is why the lawyer has a different end goal than both the sophist and the philosopher: the lawyer's attempt to seek justice for his client is presumed to be in line with the truth. And the skilled, persuasive lawyer knows that pure appeals to reason alone using deductive reasoning and syllogisms are not sufficient to win his client's case. Informal fallacies may help to persuade the listener to care about the outcome of a case and to see things the way the lawyer sees them.³⁴

This is further buttressed in the story about Socrates:

Socrates asked his friend Euthydemus if he thinks that cheating is immoral. Of course, it is, answered Euthydemus. However, what happens, replied

Socrates, if your friend, feeling terrible, wants to commit suicide and you steal his knife? There is no doubt that you cheat him in that case, but is this immoral? No, said the embarrassed Euthydemus. Here Euthydemus followed the statistical way of thinking since in most cases cheating is considered to be an immoral action. Socrates, however, taught him to combine it with critical thinking. It is recalled that critical thinking is considered to be a higher mode of thinking by which the individual transcends his subjective self to arrive rationally at conclusions substantiated using valid information.³⁵

But in all, seeking truth, the primary purpose of studying fallacies is to avoid falling foul of them and using them in deceiving others. By showing why and when a certain way of reasoning does not support the truth of the conclusion, that is, does not offer enough convincing evidence for it, the study of fallacies becomes inescapable. Further, identifying these fallacies requires more than relying upon formal logic; it also involves a good deal of discourse analysis. That is, we are required to ask key questions related to the content of the relevant arguments: Who speaks? To whom? From which perspective? With what purpose? For this reason, the study of fallacies must take into account not only failures in logic but misuses of argumentative techniques. What is argumentatively appropriate in one context may not be in another. The appropriateness will depend on, among other things, the purpose of the argument and the intended audience.

We must pay attention to three basic characteristics of good reasoning:

1. A good argument is *logically* well-framed. This is the minimum requirement: the premises of a good argument offer reasons for the conclusion. However, different individuals can have different ideas about what counts as a good reason or not—good reasons for one person can be inadequate for another. So, while necessary, this requirement isn't sufficient.
2. As there may be disagreement about the premises, a good argument starts from *acceptable* premises, or premises that

are warranted, and not only for the reasoner but mainly for the *audience*. Of course, even though not true or plausible at all, certain premises may be acceptable, depending on the audience or even on the function of the argument in a given context. Considerations of form *and* content necessarily have to be taken together then.

3. The premises must contain *relevant information* for the conclusion—if not *all* that is relevant, at least enough to make the conclusion acceptable. Concealing relevant information is a well-known form of deceiving people, just as taking certain information for granted when it has been widely contested is a mistake.³⁶

Fallacies contain errors in one or more of the senses given above. Of course, there are uncountable reasons for accepting a conclusion, such as social, cultural, and psychological reasons. However, the criteria for identifying good arguments are nevertheless *logical* that is, they are rational criteria, publicly open to evaluation. So, anyone could identify fallacies by paying attention to the following:

1. Do the premises support the conclusion, or only offer very weak support for the conclusion?
2. Are the premises well-supported?
3. Do the argument's premises include all the important relevant information?³⁷

To avoid being fallacious, an argument must be able to answer all of these questions in a positive. Bearing this in mind, we do not need to attempt to provide an exhaustive list of every possible fallacy. All we must do is learn how to identify when and how those criteria are not met, so we can understand when and how arguments fail to be good.

Conclusion

This paper examined the nature of informal fallacies, the existentialist thesis of existence and interpersonal relationships and the negative impact the negative use of fallacies has on human dignity. It is obvious from the foregoing that the deliberate use of informal fallacies to deceive, manipulate or mislead people to accept

a conclusion militates against the dignity of the human person. It is belittling and shows disrespect and disregard for the individual.

As human beings striving after truth and excellence, we must cultivate respect for one another and learn to treat one another as Thous and not as an It (as something to be used for your purposes). Having that respect for one another and seeing one another as a mystery of being would guide our actions. We must also cultivate a critical thinking disposition, pay more attention to the study of fallacies, and learn to think in critical, analytical, and evaluative ways using mental processes such as attention, alertness, selection, and judgment. This will help in recognizing fallacies and avoid being deceitful and manipulative and also being misled by others.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Shamala, Ramasamy, *Informal Reasoning Fallacy and Critical Thinking Dispositions: A Univariate Study of Demographic Characteristics among Malaysian Undergraduate*, (Malaysia: Asia e University, 2011), 3.
- 2 A formal fallacy is any violation of any of the six rules of the categorical syllogism or the rules of the hypothetical or disjunctive - alternative syllogism. It is an argument whose conclusion could be false even if all its premises are true. It can be detected merely by examining the form (hence its name) or structure of the argument.
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- 24 Gabriel, Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, Reflection Mystery*. Vol. 1. (New York: Regney Gateway Inc., 1978), 2.
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- 26 Gabriel, Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 34.
- 27 Adesewa, Ogundele C., *An Essay on*, 6.
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- 30 Onyenuru, Okechukwu, *The Theme of Existence in the Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*. (Ibadan: Dominican Institute, 2014), 6.
- 31 It is important to note that although the I-Thou and I-It relationships seem to be radically opposed to each other; though the I-Thou is an ideal relation, the I-It relation is an inescapable, but also a vital, one.
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