Logical fallacies 2._Fallacies of faulty authority

Fallacies of faulty authority.

**Appeal to a flawed authority:** making an argument for authority, without disclosing the nature of that authority (*flawed authority*), and therefore making flawed inferences. Resorting to an authorised source to make a point is a reasonable thing to do, however that authorised source must be in fact legitimate (through its proven *existence, expertise* and *impartiality*). By appealing to a flawed authority, we are using a flawed version of a good form of reasoning.

Examples:

1. “I heard *somebody* saying that…” *Somebody* is not an identified authority, therefore lacks *existence*.
2. “I read *somewhere* that…” *Somewhere* is not an identified authority, therefore lacks *existence*.
3. “A saw on *TV* that…” *A TV* is a device, therefore is not an *existent, experienced and impartial* authority, although we may find occasionally a valid authority speaking on it. The absence of a reference to the source makes this argument invalid.
4. “I saw on the *internet* that…” (the *internet* is a platform, a communication network, not an authorised source in itself, therefore is not an *existent, experienced and impartial* authority, although we may find occasionally a valid authority writing or speaking on it. This is the same case as the previous one (“A saw on *TV* that…”).

**Appeal to common opinion:** Assuming that something is true because is widely believed, without independent factual evidence. We take general agreement as evidence of truth. By using this logical fallacy, common misconceptions are presented as facts on the grounds of the popularity of the misconception. Usual logical fallacies of common opinion are *stereotypes* or *common beliefs*, which don’t require of factual evidence for its assumption.

Example: Every time that Donald Trump says “A lot of folk say that…”

**Appeal to tradition:** Assuming that something is true because we have thought it to be for a long time. By using this logical fallacy, also common misconceptions are presented as facts on the grounds of the misconception’s length over time. Experience can give us sound basis for rational appeal to authority, however this authority coming from experience needs to be supported by the necessary independent evidence to make it valid. Intellectual inertia is not by itself a valid argument. Not because we’ve always done something in a certain way it means that it is the best or most valid way to do so and we should keep on doing so that way.

**Fallacy of novelty:** Very common in publicity and advertising. Asserting and assuming that something being new is enough evidence for it being true or better than whatever came before.

**Fallacy of faulty analogy:** Resorting to a valid analogy to make a point is a reasonable thing to do, we do this in science all the time, for instance. However, that analogy must be in fact valid (*the systems selected to be analogue do share structural similarities to the system being modelled in the proposition*). By appealing to a faulty analogy, we are using a flawed version of a good form of reasoning. (Watch example from 19:08)

Examples:
Logical fallacies 2

**Fallacies of faulty authority**

1. "Frogs are green and bounce. Some tennis balls are green and bounce. Green tennis balls are made of frogs."
2. "Frogs are green and bounce. Some tennis balls are green and bounce. The check you sent is green, so I won’t accept it because it is likely to bounce." (this is a double logical fallacy of faulty analogy and equivocation (see previous sheet: “Informal logics”)

Sometimes we can find **more than one logical fallacy** in one assertion.

**Example:** “Exclusive: Shock poll. 1 in 5 Brit Muslims’ sympathy for Jihad.”

Apart from the appalling grammar (lack of verb in a sentence) and the obvious ambiguity of the sentence (sympathy), here we can potentially identify two types of logical fallacies in one assertion: a fallacy of novelty (“Exclusive: Shock...” which implies new, exclusive information) and an appeal to a flawed authority (“...poll.”) By referencing a poll, this argument is appealing to an alleged scientific authority (statistics, as a branch of mathematics), and by stating that is exclusive, shocking (therefore a new discovery, something that did not exist before and therefore we did not know) it is an appeal to novelty. But we should consider the sources and the methodology of this alleged “new poll”. Who has conducted this poll? How has this poll been conducted? What variables have been used and what variables have been ignored? Just because it is new, and it is a poll, is not a valid argument, since this statement lacks of the evidence to support it.

The IPSO ruled the article breached Clause 1 of the Editor's Code, which relates to accuracy.

An IPSO spokesman said: "The newspaper had provided various interpretations of the poll result which conflated important distinctions between those travelling to Syria and those already fighting in Syria; between ‘sympathy’ for these individuals and ‘support for their actions’; and between individuals attracted by the ideology of Isis, and the ideology of Isis itself...The Complaints Committee deemed that the newspaper had failed to take appropriate care in its presentation of the poll results, and as a result the coverage was significantly misleading in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy)."

The Sun published the adjudication on page 2 of the paper on Saturday, as instructed to by IPSO: "The newspaper had failed to take appropriate care in its presentation of the poll results, and as a result the coverage was significantly misleading, in breach of Clause 1," The Sun admitted.