Fallacies of Relevance, 1
Ad hominem, force, pity

Philosophy and Logic
Section 6.4
Fallacies: Family Tree

I. Formal Fallacies

II. Informal Fallacies
   A. Fallacies of Clarity
   B. Vacuous arguments
   C. Fallacies of relevance

III. Statistical Fallacies
II. C. Fallacies of Relevance

These persuade by manipulating some psychological factor, distinct from reasoning processes, which is typically tied to beliefs.

– Emotional reactions are most commonly used: reactions to personal characteristics, trust in authority, hopes or fears.

– These arguments are fallacious if the emotional reactions are the only grounds cited for a conclusion.


Validity and Emotion

• The mere presence of emotional language within an argument is not sufficient for the fallacy; one must show that the only reason given for conclusion $P$ is the emotional reaction associated with $P$.

• But if the only reason given for the conclusion $P$ is the emotional reaction, then the argument is invalid.
  – Emotions are not relevant to the question of whether or not the belief is true
Fallacies of Relevance

- Ad Hominem
- Appeal to Force
- Appeal to Pity
- Appeal to the People
- Appeal to Authority
- Appeal to Ignorance
Ad hominem (Latin, "against the man")

Attack the author of the argument rather than the argument itself.

Do not consider the grounds or evidence for believing $P$.

Instead, attack the character, personality, motives, morals, lifestyle, or habits of those who believe or argue for $P$. 
Common Ad Hominem Tactics

• CHARACTER or MORALS of the person:

  “Pay no attention to that excellent argument for \( P \); after all, only a really bad person could believe \( P \).”
Common Ad Hominem Tactics

• MOTIVES of One’s Opponent:

  “Unlike you, they are not interested in genuine reform; their goal is only to protect their own income and the income of other millionaires and billionaires.”
Common Ad Hominem Tactics

• LIFESTYLE or HABITS of Opponent:

“They only believe such things because they do not live like decent people. They sleep late, earn no money, earn too much money, believe in personal salvation, do not believe in personal salvation, etc..”
Common Ad Hominem Tactics

• GROUP AFFILIATIONS of Opponent:

  “They are far-right Republicans, far-left Democrats, extremists, cult members, gun nuts, liberals, conservatives, militia members, feminists, sexists, chauvinists, perverts, sinners, holy rollers, fundamentalists…” und so weiter
Some classic examples

“It just goes to show what kind of trash turns up if you drag a hundred dollar bill through a trailer park”

– James Carville’s response in 1993 when Paula Jones filed her harassment suit against Bill Clinton
“Ken Starr is out of control. He’s just out to get the President. It’s a witch-hunt. Those thugs over there want me to shut up and stop defending the President, but they can’t stop me. It’s a free country. I challenge those thugs to just try to stop me from talking.”

---James Carville, on CNN All Politics, March 1998
Problem: what is or is not a relevant personal trait?

Sometimes “character testimony” is relevant
– the credibility of a witness
– the reliability of testimony
– the qualifications of an expert
The basic test

The witness testifies that P is true.
If P is true, then there is some fact that makes it true.
Consider the chain of events between that fact and
the testimony of the witness.

QUESTION: Does knowing this (given) personal characteristic of the witness render that chain any less reliable?

IF SO, the characteristic is relevant;
IF NOT, then you have an *ad hominem*.
Appeal to Force
(argumentum ad baculum)

The *only* reason given to adopt the conclusion: if you do not, the author will hurt you in some way (fire you, report you to the office of diversity and equity, prosecute you, exile you, send you to a gulag, have you shot, shell your neighborhood, etc.)
Definition: argumentum ad baculum

An argument in which the *only* reason given for the adoption of conclusion $P$ is the implicit or explicit statement that if you do not accept $P$, the author will hurt you in some way.
Examples

• Vital to answering the endless series of “why?” questions asked by two-year-olds. “Because if you don’t, you will be sent to your room”

• Among adults the use of force is (usually) more disguised
How Nazi publishers in the Third Reich responded to individuals who had let their subscriptions lapse:

Our paper certainly deserves the support of every German. We shall continue to forward copies to you, and hope that you will not want to expose yourself to unfortunate consequences in the case of cancellation.

R. Grunberger, A Social History of the Third Reich
Howard Baker, opening a staff meeting when the Attorney General was under attack:

The President continues to have confidence in the Attorney General and I have confidence in the Attorney General and you ought to have confidence in the Attorney General, because we work for the President and because that’s the way things are. And if anyone has a different view of that, or any different motive, ambition, or intention, he can tell me about it because we’re going to have to discuss your status.

- Washington Post, 29 April 1988
Brutal Violence Marks Zimbabwe Politics

Opposition Says Mugabe Is Desperate To Keep Power

By ANN M. SIMMONS
SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — Tension is boiling over in Zimbabwe after a recent wave of attacks against the government's political opponents and the introduction of stringent laws apparently designed to entrench the ruling party's power ahead of next year's presidential poll.

The attacks targeting the Movement for Democratic Change, or MDC, come during a period of great instability. Past weeks have brought fresh violence, against white-owned commercial farms. Harassment of the media and members of the judiciary is widespread. And a general breakdown of the rule of law is terrifying average Zimbabweans, especially in Bulawayo, the southern African nation's second-largest city.

The building was stoned and hit with gasoline bombs by pro-government militants, who were protesting the killing of Cain Nkala, a ruling party ally who has helped lead violent occupations of 1,700 white-owned farms. MDC supporters avenged the destruction of their offices by burning a college owned by a former ruling party legislator and Mugabe crony.

The government says that the MDC was behind Nkala's abduction and strangulation, a claim the party denies.

After Nkala's body was found in a shallow grave outside Bulawayo last week, police arrested 16 opposition activists and an MDC member of parliament on charges of murder. Two reporters for the country's only independent daily newspaper were released Tuesday after their weekend arrests on charges of involvement in an "insurrection spirit of the people," said MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai as he toured the bombed-out building Monday. "If at all, they will reinforce the spirit of the people."

On Monday, MDC officials and supporters used pitchforks and shovels to clear the charred remains of the party's Bulawayo headquarters. Dozens of women dressed in head scarves and men in gardening overalls cleared the piles of bricks that once comprised the building's structure.

The workers sang as a Zimbabwean flag was hoisted in the property's front yard. Supporters said that graffiti painted on remaining sections of the building's shattered facade bore testimony to their determination not to be defeated: "Last Days of a Dying Horse." "Forward Forever, Backward Never." "This Crime Will Never Break Our Spirit." "End of ZANU."

Such dissent is something Mugabe is determined to avoid, political analysts say.
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The attacks targeting the Movement for Democratic Change, or MDC, come during a period of great instability. Past weeks have brought fresh violence against white-owned commercial farms. Harassment of the media and members of the judiciary is widespread. And a general breakdown of the rule of law is terrifying average Zimbabweans, already beaten down by poverty.
More than 100 opposition supporters and 10 white farmers have been killed within the past two years. State-sponsored killings and torture are on the rise, according to local human rights groups.

The most recent attack on opposition targets came Friday with the destruction of the MDC headquarters in Bulawayo, the southern African nation's second-largest city.

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Appeal to Pity

(*argumentum ad misericordiam*)

An argument in which the *only* reason the author gives you for believing the conclusion $P$ is that if you don’t, the author will be hurt in some pitiful way.
Only pity

If you don’t embrace the belief that $P$, someone else’s feelings or life situation will be hurt in a way which arouses or should arouse your sympathies.

The piteous consequences must be tied to your rejection of the belief that $P$.

(if you reject the belief that the candidate is qualified, he'll become depressed, and his family will starve. )
Reason + pity v. pity alone

• Citing consequences which arouse pity does not suffice to show this fallacy has been committed

• Perhaps there is a valid argument, and the conclusion happens to be appalling
  – Consequences which happen to arouse pity vs.
  – Using pity alone as an argument
Peter Singer’s argument for vegetarianism

If we can avoid it, it’s better to avoid doing something that causes more pain than pleasure. Probably the pain caused when we slaughter an animal is greater than the pleasure we gain when we eat its dead flesh.

(Show videos of slaughter in process, blood-drenched floors, animals squealing in terror, etc)

It is possible to maintain health without eating meat. Ergo, it would be better to avoid slaughtering animals just in order to eat them.
Schopenhauer’s view

“A quick test of the assertion that enjoyment outweighs pain in this world, or that they are at any rate balanced, would be to compare the feelings of an animal engaged in eating another with those of the animal being eaten.”

“On the suffering of the world”, Essays and Aphorisms, 1851
Reason + pity?

• We have what claims to be a valid argument
• The claim that animals feel pain is relevant (or is claimed to be relevant) to the morality of killing and eating them
• Perhaps it is only if that fact is made very vivid to you (by descriptions that evoke strong emotions) that you would consider changing ingrained habits such as diet
End of pity