Emotional Appeals

Critical Thinking
Emotions and Reasoning

- Emotions are an important part of our lives. They drive us to do things, and without them, we might just be sitting still.
- But how do emotions effect our reasoning?
- Sometimes this is ok, such as when the emotion is appropriate and relevant.
  - E.g. Can you please bring me to the hospital? I just broke my leg. (appropriate appeal to care/pity)
- However, emotions can also be used in an inappropriate way
  - E.g. Can you please get me an A on this HW? I just broke my leg. (inappropriate appeal to pity)
Emotional Appeals and Rhetorical Devices

• Many rhetorical devices are used to invoke certain kinds of emotions.

• Again, we have to ask ourselves:
  – Is the language used to invoke a type of emotion that is irrelevant to the issue? E.g. should we be doing something because ‘everyone’s doing it’?
  – Even if it is an appropriate type of emotion, is it unreasonably exaggerated? E.g. if something unpleasant is happening to us, should we really be ‘mad as hell’?
Some Common Emotions

- Fear
- Desire
- Anger / Outrage
- Humor / Laughter
- Guilt / Shame
- Pride
- Indignation
- Pity
- Disrespect
- Reverence
- Reciprocation
- Revenge
- Etc.

We can appeal to all these emotions in order to persuade someone to believe or do something
Appeal to Fear

• You should clean your room, because if you don’t, I’ll take away your allowance.

• While this may be a good practical or prudent reason to clean your room, it does not argue for why you *should* clean your room.

• Difficult case: cleaning commercial showing bugs everywhere. Is that an inappropriate appeal to fear, or is that an appropriate reason to do something about that?
  – I would say this is a matter of degree, depending on how does the commercial present these bugs? The ultimate point is: Is the evoked emotion interfering with clear thinking?

• Similarly: fear of God, fear of terrorism.
Appeal to Desire

• Any case of wishful thinking is an appeal to desire
• But also: scantily clad ladies in beer commercials!
Appeal to Anger / Outrage

• “Can you believe that those politicians don’t want to raise the minimum wage right after giving themselves a big pay raise?!”
• This is something to become real angry about, but their pay raise is really irrelevant to whether or not it is a good idea to raise the minimum wage
• A good example of people who appeal to anger are radio ‘shock jocks’.
Appeal to Humor

• Humor can work to persuade in several ways:
  – It can be charming / disarming
  – It can be distracting
  – It can give the audience a sense of ownership of the ‘reasoning’ taking place (“Ha, I get it!”)
  – It can be used to ridicule (sarcasm/irony/horse laugh)
Appeal to Guilt/Shame

• “I can’t believe you leave him hanging there, after all he’s done for you!”
Appeal to Pride / Vanity / Flattery

- “Smart people like you …”
- “You deserve …”
Appeal to Indignation

• An appeal to anger, but directed at someone rather than something, and thus often used to discredit whatever it is that this person is saying or claiming.
Appeal to Pity

• “If I don’t get an A, I can’t get to graduate school.”

• OK, maybe that’s true, but you don’t therefore *deserve* an A, which is of course all that counts!
Appeal to Disrespect

• Very much like the appeal to indignation, but the disrespect need not come in the form of anger.
Appeal to Reverence

• “Our founding fathers …”
Appeal to Reciprocation

• Hey, I helped you. You should help me!
Appeal to Revenge

• He hurt me, so I can hurt him.
• aka: Two Wrongs (don’t!!) make a Right fallacy
Other Appeals

• Appeal to Tradition
• Appeal to Novelty
• Appeal to Popularity
• Appeal to Exclusiveness
• Social Pressure
  – Peer pressure
  – Herd Instinct
  – Common Practice
  – Bandwagon
  – Provincialism
  – Nationalism
But remember, sometimes appeals to emotions can be quite relevant!

- “You should bring me to the hospital, because I just broke my leg”
- This is *not* an inappropriate appeal to pity!