I. Ad Hominem Arguments

A. Different kinds of Ad Hominem Arguments

1. Silencers: these seek to deny a person’s right to make an argument or a claim.
   a. These arguments include a conclusion that focuses on the speaker’s right or standing to contribute.
   b. Tu quoque arguments (“You are another”) if used to undermine a person’s right to speak.
   c. For example, if someone were speaking as if they were an authority on a topic but were not in fact an authority, one might issue this type of ad hominem.

2. Dismissers: these seek to deny a person’s ability to provide good reason to believe an argument or a claim
   a. These arguments include a conclusion that focuses on some aspect of the speaker.
   b. They typically concern deep strains of personal character that are indicative of a person’s ability to be a good source of information; as such, they would not involve what someone is wearing or whether they shaved (unless that was taken to be a sign of some deep strain of personal character).
   c. They seek to establish that the fact that this person supports a claim is not a good reason to believe it by calling into question their credibility, reliability, trustworthiness, consistency, etc.
   d. The genetic fallacy can be seen as one of these, given that one’s origin is part of one’s identity.

3. Deniers: these seek to deny the strength of an argument or the truth of a claim on the basis of some characteristic(s) of its source
a. These arguments include a conclusion that focuses on a claim or an argument. “You say that you would never support Pakistan but that shirt you’re wearing there is made in Pakistan.”

b. They base criticism of this claim/argument on some characteristic of the speaker; these can be superficial or deep, depending on the argument.

c. *Tu Quoque* arguments if used to deny a particular argument or claim.

B. Relating these kinds: Our authors note that these can be justified or unjustified and they give us a table that represents this, but they do not help us by relating these kinds to one another. This can be done in several ways:

1. **Grouping #1: Precondition vs. Condition.** {Silencers} vs. {Dismissers, Deniers}. Silencers are different than the other two in that silencers address whether or not the speaker even has the right to open his mouth; the considerations raised by dismissers and deniers only become relevant if the speaker does have the right to speak and so cannot be silenced.

2. **Grouping #2: Focus of Conclusion.** {Deniers} vs. {Silencers, Dismissers}. Deniers have conclusions that concern the argument or claim put forward by a speaker, whereas silencers and dismissers focus on the speaker. (Sometimes, these are distinguished into *ad hominem* “arguments” (i.e., the deniers) and *ad hominem* “attacks” (i.e., the silencers and dismissers).) Thus, the conclusions of deniers are directly about the argument/claim and indirectly about the speaker, while the other two are directly about the speaker and indirectly about the argument/claim.

3. **Grouping #3: Order of Criticism.** {Silencers} → {Dismissers} → {Deniers}. If you want to use an *ad hominem* to critique a position, these three types correspond to three different stages. First, you could deny a speaker the right to speak (i.e., issue a silencer), rendering the other two considerations irrelevant. Second, if they do have the right to speak, you could call attention to some aspect of their character that should make us suspicious of anything that comes out of their mouths (i.e., issue a dismisser). Third, if they cannot be dismissed, you might try to find a way to reject their argument/claim on the basis of some aspect of their character that is questionable even if it isn’t enough to dismiss them (i.e., issue a denier). (In general, though, it is probably better to directly reject their claim or argument, if you can do that.)

C. **Assessing the quality of these arguments**
1. As with many of the arguments we’ve seen in chapters 13-15, these arguments are not necessarily bad, i.e., they are not necessarily fallacious.

2. We can follow the author’s lead in the appeals section and introduce a few questions to guide us in assessing the quality of these arguments, and in particular, determine if they are being employed fallaciously. (In what follows, let A be the person who makes the *ad hominem* argument and B be the person who A’s argument concerns.)

   a. What sort of *ad hominem* argument is it?
      
      i. Does the conclusion of A’s argument focus us on B {silencer, dismisser} or on B’s argument/claim {denier}?
      
      ii. If the former, does it focus on B’s right to speak {silencer} or on B’s ability to provide good evidence {dismisser}?

   b. Are the facts of the *ad hominem* argument in order?

   c. Do the facts of the argument give you a relevant reason to reject B’s argument/claim? (E.g., does B not have a right to speak? Is B a pathological liar? Is there something about the content of the argument/claim made that renders it weak or falsifies it on the basis of some fact about or characteristic of B?)

   d. Why is A making an *ad hominem* argument? (Often these will be assuring moves meant to dismiss a criticism or opposing view on the basis of the person defending it, in this case B.)

D. Concerns about this classification: There are problems with this section that make the distinctions in it unclear.

   1. All types of *ad hominem* argument are ultimately aimed at rejecting an argument or claim made by another. This is true with *silencers* as much as it is true with the others. Silencers are intended to render an argument/claim *inadmissible*, while the others are intended to render it *not worth believing*. In both cases, the goal is to get rid of the argument/claim (or perhaps several of them, or all of the arguments/claims to be made by the person, etc.).

   2. While the distinction between silencers, on the one hand, and dismissers and deniers, on the other, is pretty clear, the distinction between deniers and dismissers is murky at best. There appear to be two considerations proffered that separate them:
a. The conclusions of dismissers focus on the speaker, while the conclusions of deniers focus on the argument/claim.

b. Dismissers aim to establish that the fact that the speaker supports a claim is not a good reason for believing it (or denying it), while deniers argue that an argument/claim made by the speaker should be rejected.

c. In practice, it will often be difficult to determine which of these we’re working with, as conclusions don’t always neatly divide in the way specified in (a) and it isn’t always clear what characteristic of the speaker is being called on to support rejection of their argument/claim.

i. For example, the Louie/Lucy case considered at the top of p. 355 concludes that we should take what Louie said as false because “we can’t take Louie’s word for it”. The reason to reject the claim is that Louie is not a good source, that is, the fact that he made it is not a good reason to believe it; further, the background suggests that this is a deep character fact about Louie. Thus, the case itself would appear to be more in line with the category of dismissers than deniers.

ii. In arguments of both types, a claim/argument will be rejected on the basis of characteristics or facts about the speaker. The categories appear to grade into one another, so it may often be quite difficult to sort arguments into them.

3. The chapter doesn’t analyze the relationships among these types, which are important to understand if you are going to evaluate ad hominem arguments you find in the wild. (See section B above for help with this.)

II. Appeals Arguments

A. An appeals argument is made when one introduces a consideration that is not directly relevant to the conclusion of the argument being advanced. In these arguments, the appeal is introduced as a reason for the conclusion.

B. There are many different types of appeals arguments. These include:

1. Truth-relevant appeals. These are made to considerations that purport to bear on the truth of the claims that constitute an argument.

   a. Appeal to authority: that the authority believes P is a good reason to believe that P is true.
b. **Appeal to ignorance:** that you are unable to reject P is a good reason to believe that P is true.

c. **Appeal to popular opinion (or tradition):** that lots of people believe P (or have believed it for a long time) is a good reason to believe that P is true. (These could also be used in truth-irrelevant ways.)

2. **Truth-irrelevant appeals.** These are made to considerations that have nothing to do with the truth of the constituent claims. Often, these address the emotions of the audience in an attempt to win them over to the conclusion via non-rational means.

   a. **Appeal to emotion:** these include appeals to pity, fear, anger, joy. They tend to get us to believe or act in a certain way for reasons that are not relevant to the truth of the supported claim.

   b. **Appeal to threat:** if you don’t believe P, I will [BAD ACTION HERE] you!

   c. **Guilt by association:** [Republicans/Democrats] support P, and you don’t want to be like [Republicans/Democrats], so reject P.

C. As with many of the other arguments we’ve considered, these can be good arguments. The questions we’ve put forward to help guide evaluation of them are as follows:

   1. Are the presuppositions of the appeal satisfied in this case? (E.g., is the person cited an authority on the topic? Is this the kind of question that can be settled by such an appeal?)

   2. Are the facts of the appeal in order?

   3. Why is an appeal of this sort being made at all?