

The Appeal to Emotion

Instead of giving reasons, the speaker just uses expressive language for provoking attraction or aversion toward a claim.

You should not oppose the President. It is Unpatriotic.

This is just a tactic to pressure you. If we were to try to construct a deductive argument out of this, it would be patently absurd. The argument would assume that you cannot be loyal to your country if you do not agree with everything the current president says.

Some appeals to emotion have their own label to indicate the emotion they provoke. (*Ad in terrorem* abets fear; *ad misericordiam* rouses pity; *ad odium* causes spite...)

Warning! A discussion of an emotional topic does not always commit an “appeal to emotion.” It is not as if every argument on abortion is fallacious! Rather, the problem is when the emotions are provoked in a *manipulative* way, or in a way that inhibits rather than promotes good thinking.

Appeals to emotion are usually classified as argument fallacies. However, a speaker can attempt to persuade an audience using emotional language even when there is patently no argument. Consider the following promotion by a global conglomerate:

Let your dreams be the path to your destiny. Aditya Bira Group.

There is zero attempt to give reasons for why the conglomerate is a good one. There is simply an inspirational slogan to make you feel good and associate that good feeling with the company.

Note: An appeal to emotion is not always *intentionally* manipulative. The speaker may be caught up in genuine emotions that they feel; even so, emotions *per se* are not reasons.

This indicates something important. Sometimes, we can be taken in by *our own* emotions and treat them as legitimate reasons. Psychologists call this sort of thing “emotional thinking.” For example, you might say to yourself:

My sister hasn't responded to my email. She's intentionally ignoring me.

It of course does not follow from the premise that your sister is intentionally ignoring you. Anxiety or the like may be driving that conclusion, and it may be more rational to allow that your sister has just temporarily forgotten to reply or is temporarily busy with other things.

Other kinds of emotional thinking are “catastrophizing” (when an emotion causes you to overestimate a negative event) or “minimizing” (when you underestimate a problem to make it seem less disturbing).

Unfortunately, life is not simple. Sometimes, an appeal to our emotional sense is not only permissible but *necessary* in order to understand an issue correctly. We will discuss this in a separate handout.