Fallacy and Argumentational Vice

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Outline

A virtue theory of argumentation

Virtue theory of argumentation as ad hominem

Legitimate ad hominem undercutting

The ad hominem fallacy according to virtue theory

A virtue theoretic approach to fallacy

Conclusions
Daniel Cohen’s argumentational vices and virtues

Deaf dogmatist  
↑  
Willingness to Listen/Modify  
↓  
Concessionaire

Eager Believer  
↑  
Willingness to Question  
↓  
Unassuring Assurer

Quietism  
↑  
Willingness to Engage  
↓  
Argument Provocateur
A tentative typology of argumentational virtue

1. willingness to engage in argumentation
   1.1 being communicative
   1.2 faith in reason
   1.3 intellectual courage
      1.3.1 sense of duty

2. willingness to listen to others
   2.1 intellectual empathy
      2.1.1 insight into persons
      2.1.2 insight into problems
      2.1.3 insight into theories
   2.2 fairmindedness
      2.2.1 justice
      2.2.2 fairness in evaluating the arguments of others
      2.2.3 open-mindedness in collecting and appraising evidence
   2.3 recognition of reliable authority
   2.4 recognition of salient facts
      2.4.1 sensitivity to detail

3. willingness to modify one’s own position
   3.1 common sense
   3.2 intellectual candour
   3.3 intellectual humility
   3.4 intellectual integrity
      3.4.1 honour
      3.4.2 responsibility
      3.4.3 sincerity

4. willingness to question the obvious
   4.1 appropriate respect for public opinion
   4.2 autonomy
   4.3 intellectual perseverance
      4.3.1 diligence
      4.3.2 care
      4.3.3 thoroughness
Tracy Bowell and Justine Kingsbury’s challenge

‘Any shift in the direction of an agent-based approach may itself appear to commit some kind of illegitimate ad hominem move’


The challenge

1. All virtue based argument appraisal is agent oriented.
2. All agent oriented argument appraisal is ad hominem.
3. All ad hominem reasoning is fallacious.

∴ All virtue based argument appraisal is fallacious.
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Five types of ad hominem argument

ad hominem$_0$: Arguing from the respondent’s commitments. (Lockean ad hominem.)

ad hominem$_1$: Arguing that the respondent is disqualified from speaking. (Poisoning the well.)

ad hominem$_2$: Arguing that the respondent’s commitments are inconsistent. (Tu quoque.)

ad hominem$_3$: Arguing that the respondent’s character rebuts his argument.

ad hominem$_4$: Arguing that the respondent’s character undercuts his argument.
Tracy Bowell and Justine Kingsbury’s challenge refined

The challenge refined

1. All virtue based argument appraisal is agent oriented.
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3. All ad hominem reasoning is fallacious.
   \[ \therefore \] All virtue based argument appraisal is fallacious.

‘Legitimate ad hominem arguments provide reasons to doubt the truth of a *claim* on the basis of facts about the person making it. It is commonly supposed that it is never reasonable to reject an argument on the basis of such facts, however’

The challenge refined

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John Woods’s account of ad hominem

1. Sarah makes her *ad hominem* retort.
2. She *concludes* from this that the adequacy of her opponent’s case is called into doubt.
3. She *concludes* from *this* that there is reason to think that her interlocutor’s position is false.

The @BolsoverBeast argument

Two thirds of the Cabinet — 18 out of 29 ministers — are millionaires. Tomorrow, unlike you, they'll get a £42,000 tax cut. #Allinittgether

9:06 AM - 31 Mar 13

2,172 RETWEETS 142 FAVORITES

The @BolsoverBeast argument analysed

[All millionaires will get a £42,000 tax cut tomorrow.]

18 Cabinet ministers are millionaires.
So, 18 Cabinet ministers will get a £42,000 tax cut tomorrow.
The @BolsoverBeast argument

The @BolsoverBeast argument analysed

[All millionaires will get a £42,000 tax cut tomorrow.] 18 Cabinet ministers are millionaires. So, 18 Cabinet ministers will get a £42,000 tax cut tomorrow.
Effect of named authority on persuasiveness

Ten Signs a Claimed Mathematical Breakthrough is Wrong

1. The authors don’t use TeX.
2. The authors don’t understand the question.
3. The approach seems to yield something much stronger and maybe even false (but the authors never discuss that).
4. The approach conflicts with a known impossibility result (which the authors never mention).
5. The authors themselves switch to weasel words by the end.
6. The paper jumps into technicalities without presenting a new idea.
7. The paper doesn’t build on (or in some cases even refer to) any previous work.
8. The paper wastes lots of space on standard material.
9. The paper waxes poetic about “practical consequences,” “deep philosophical implications,” etc.
10. The techniques just seem too wimpy for the problem at hand.

The ad hominem fallacy according to virtue theory

‘Consequently, three sorts of ad hominem arguments that attack the speaker’s intellectual character are legitimate. These arguments attack a speaker’s: (1) possession of reliabilist vices (e.g., unreliable vision); or (2) possession of full-blown responsibilist vices (e.g., dogmatism); or (3) failure to perform intellectually virtuous acts (e.g., failure to do what an open-minded person would do). [Footnote:] Ad hominems that attack a speaker’s intellectual motives will not be legitimate unless those motives prevent the speaker from performing intellectually virtuous acts’

A virtue theoretic approach to fallacy
The ‘Gang of Eighteen’ and some distinctive corresponding defective virtues in proponent and respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fallacy</th>
<th>Proponent</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ad baculum</td>
<td>(2)(b)(i); (3)(d)(i)</td>
<td>(1)(c)</td>
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<td>ad hominem</td>
<td>(2)(b)(ii)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ad misericordiam</td>
<td>(2)(a)(i); (3)(d)(iii)</td>
<td>(4)(c)(i)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ad populum</td>
<td>(4)(a)</td>
<td>(4)(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ad verecundiam</td>
<td>(2)(c); (4)(c)(iii)</td>
<td>(2)(c); (4)(c)(iii)</td>
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<tr>
<td>affirming the consequent</td>
<td>(3)(a)</td>
<td>(3)(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amphiboly</td>
<td>(2)(d)(i); (3)(d)(iii)</td>
<td>(2)(d)(i)</td>
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<tr>
<td>begging the question</td>
<td>(3)(a)</td>
<td>(3)(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>biased statistics</td>
<td>(3)(b)</td>
<td>(2)(b)(iii)</td>
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<tr>
<td>complex question</td>
<td>(3)(b)</td>
<td>(2)(d)(i)</td>
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<tr>
<td>composition and division</td>
<td>(2)(d)(i); (3)(d)(iii)</td>
<td>(2)(d)(i)</td>
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<td>(3)(a)</td>
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<td>gambler’s</td>
<td>(4)</td>
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<td>hasty generalization</td>
<td>(2)(b)(iii)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ignoratio elenchi</td>
<td>(3)(b)</td>
<td>(1)(b); (2)(b)(ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secundum quid</td>
<td>(2)(d)(i); (3)(a)</td>
<td>(2)(d)(i); (3)(a)</td>
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▶ once the ambiguity in ‘ad hominem’ is resolved, the virtue theory of argument withstands the argument that it is inherently fallacious

▶ the virtue theory of argument clarifies the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate ad hominem

▶ attention to fallacies sharpens understanding of the virtues of argumentation
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