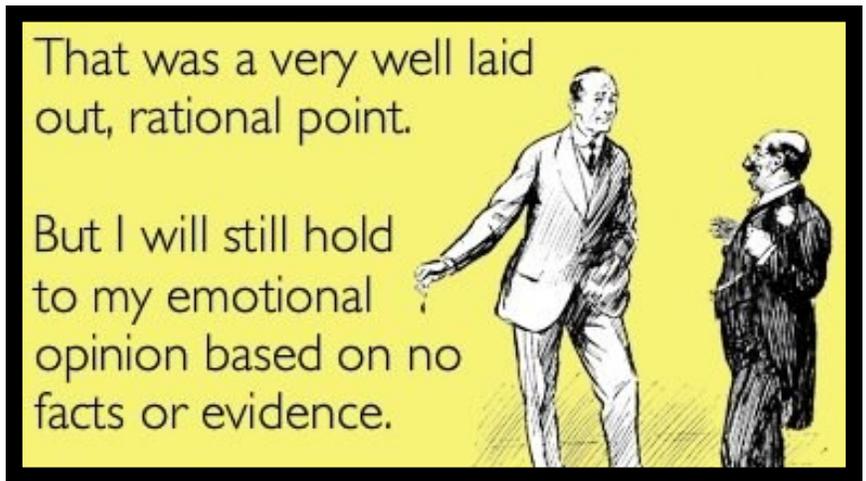


CONTROVERSIAL DEBATE STRATEGIES

—PART ONE—

MR. ZOUBEK
DEBATE (ARGUMENTATION)
SPRING 2020

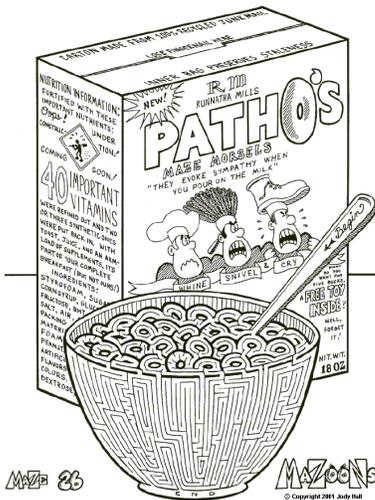


This lesson will focus on the specific types of fallacies you might see in **emotional arguments**. Emotional arguments can be powerful, truthful, and appropriate in many circumstances. However, some rhetors try to “tug at our heartstrings” (or raise our blood pressure) to make (or fake) their point. In doing so, those rhetors violate the good faith on which a legitimate argument depends. It’s hard to trust someone who cannot make a point without frightening someone, provoking tears, or stirring up trouble.

THE FALLACY OF SCARE TACTICS

Scare tactics are remarkably common, ranging from ads for life insurance to threats of audits by the IRS. Politicians, advertisers, and public figures often peddle their ideas by scaring people, exaggerating possible dangers beyond their logical, statistical likelihood. Such ploys work; it’s easier to imagine something terrible happening than to appreciate its statistical rarity.

Consider this example: Why are so many people afraid of flying as opposed to driving? Auto accidents occur much more frequently, but they do not impact our imaginations like air disasters do. Scare tactics can also be used to stampede legitimate fears into panic or prejudice. For example: People who genuinely fear losing their jobs can be persuaded easily enough to mistrust all immigrants as people who might work for less money. People living on a fixed income can be convinced that even minor modifications of entitlement programs, such as Social Security, represent dire threats to their standard of living. Even well-intended fear campaigns—like those directed against the use of illegal drugs—can misfire if their warnings prove to shrill.





IF YOU DON'T FORWARD
THIS TO TEN FRIENDS,
SOMETHING TRAGIC
WILL HAPPEN TO YOU
IN THE NEXT 24 HOURS!

THE TEXAS CHAIN LETTER MASSACRE

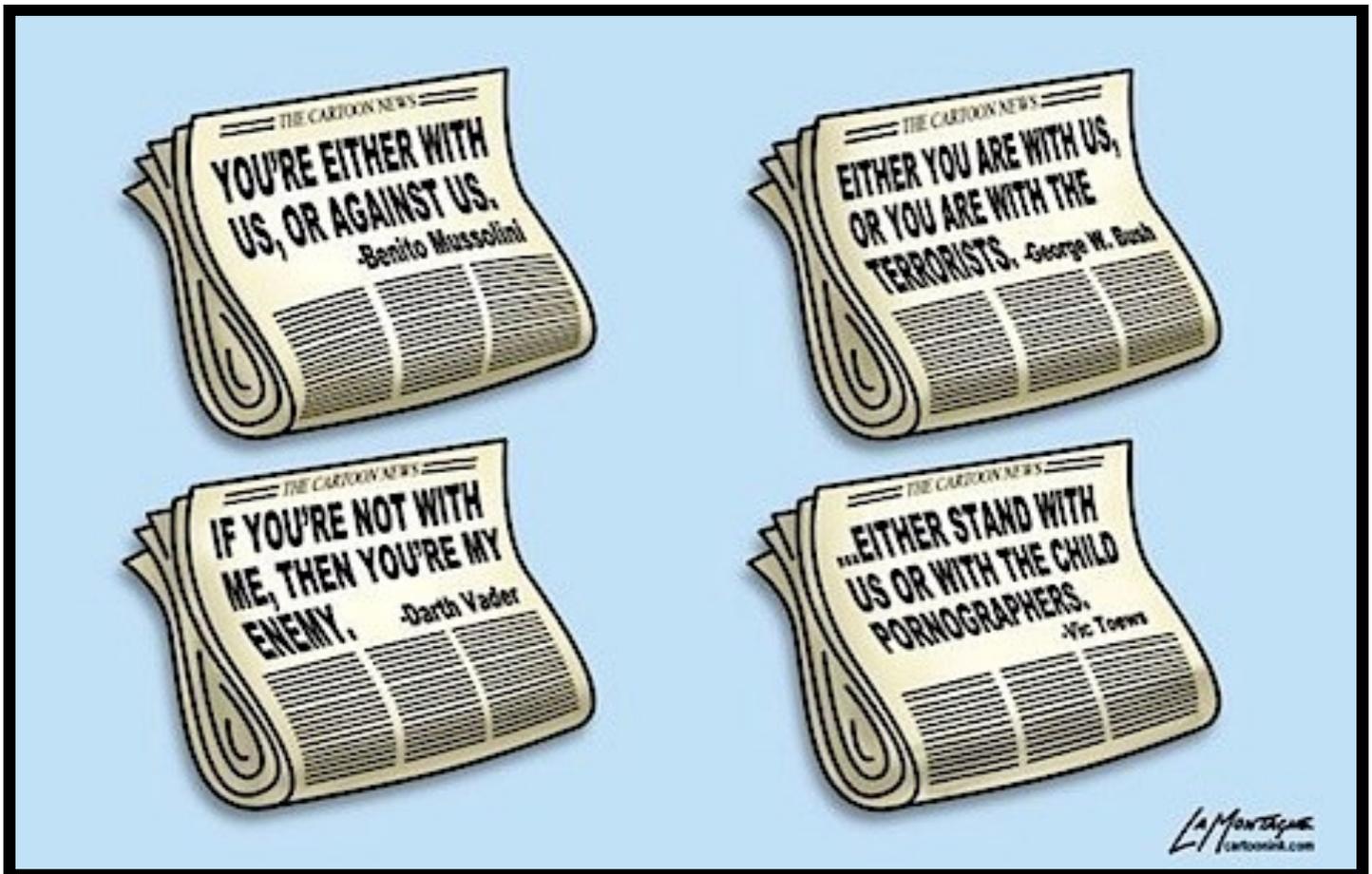
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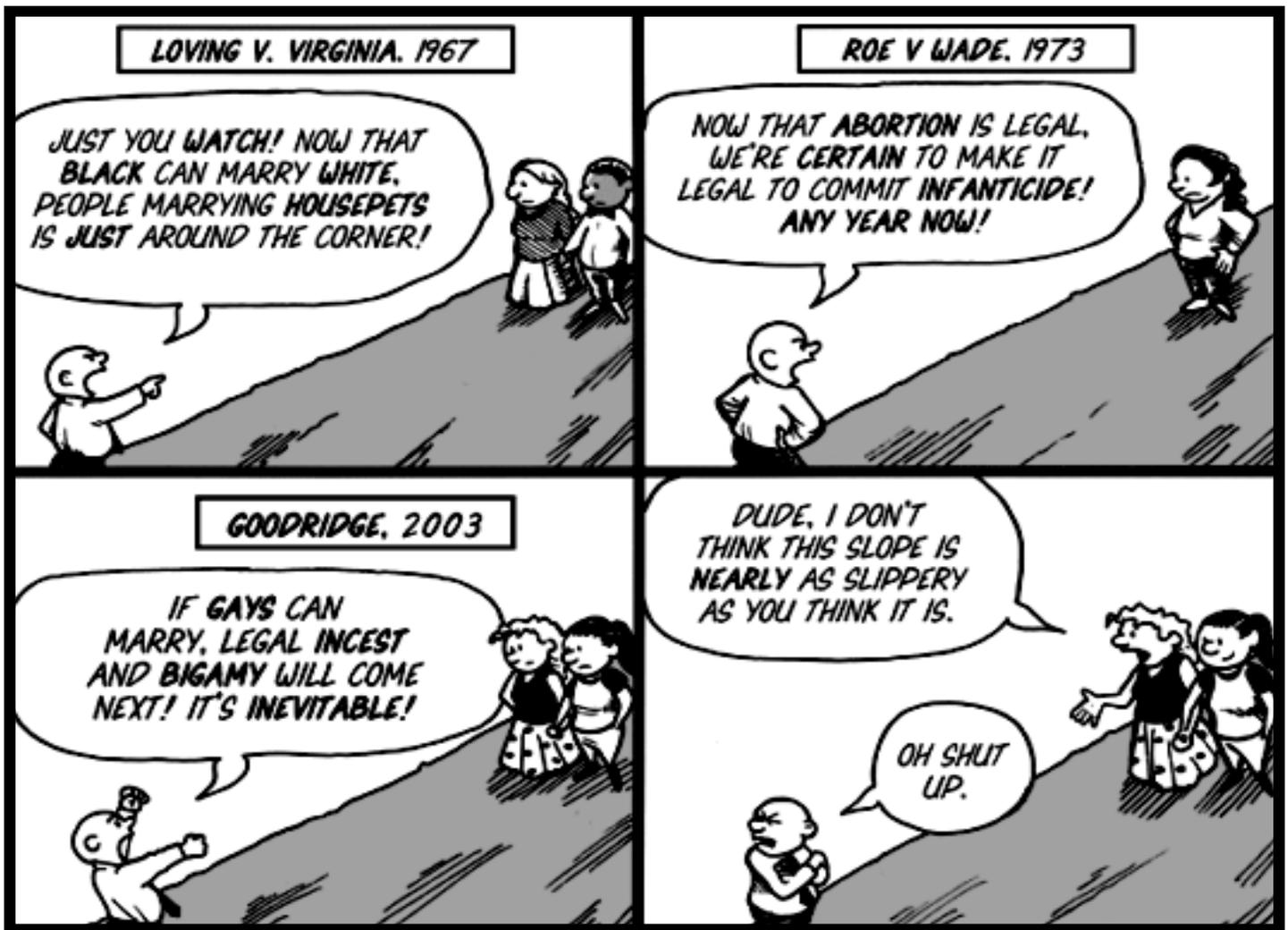
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“EITHER-OR” CHOICES

Also known as **ultimatums**, “**either-or**” arguments can be well-intentioned strategies to get something accomplished. Parents use them all the time, telling children that either they’ll eat their broccoli or they won’t get dessert. But such arguments become fallacies when they reduce complicated issues to excessively simple terms. Such arguments also become fallacious when they’re designed to obscure legitimate alternative choices. “Either-or” arguments,” like most scare tactics, are often purposefully designed to seduce those who don’t know much about a subject.

That’s another reason “either-or” arguments can violate the principle of civil debate; arguments should *enlighten* people, making them more knowledgeable and more capable of acting intelligently and independently. Very often, *we don’t have to* choose one side over another side.



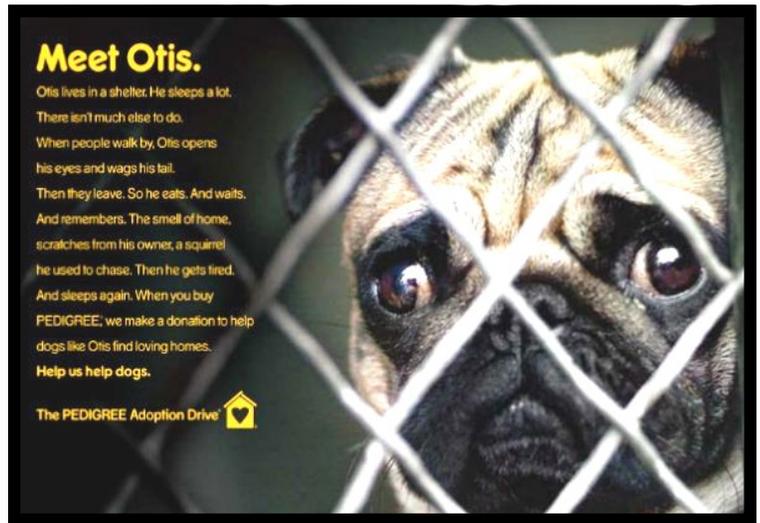


SLIPPERY SLOPE

The **slippery slope fallacy** is well-named, describing an argument that casts today's *tiny* missteps as tomorrow's disaster. A slippery slope argument becomes a fallacy when a person exaggerates the likely consequences of an action—sometimes to frighten someone. As such, slippery slope arguments are also scare tactics. For example: Defenders of free speech often regard even mild attempts to regulate behavior as leading relentlessly to the complete downfall of the First Amendment. (“*Sorry, Dean of Students! If school officials can require me to cut my ponytail, they’ll eventually be allowed to impose uniforms and crew cuts!*”) Similarly, opponents of gun control warn that any legislation regulating firearms is just the first step toward the government knocking down citizen’s doors and seizing weapons. (Of course, ideas and actions do have consequences. But they aren’t always as dire as some rhetors would have you believe.)

SENTIMENTAL APPEALS

Sentimental appeals are arguments that use tender emotions to distract us from facts. Quite often, such appeals are highly personal and individual, focusing attention on heartwarming or heart-wrenching situations that make us feel guilty if we challenge an idea, policy, or proposal. Emotions become an impediment an argument when they keep people from thinking clearly.



BANDWAGON APPEALS

Bandwagon appeals are arguments that urge people to follow the same path everyone else is taking. Many American parents are quite refined at refuting bandwagon appeals, especially when their children whine...

"But everyone else is doing it!"

"Yeah? And if everyone else went and jumped off a cliff, would you too?"

Children in this situation stomp and groan—and then try a different line of argument. Unfortunately, not all bandwagon approaches are so transparent. We are easily seduced by ideas endorsed by mass media and popular culture. In an atmosphere of obsession, there's a feeling that everyone must be concerned by "the issue of the day" and "something—ANYTHING—must be done!" More often than not, enough people jump on the bandwagon to achieve a measure of change. And when changes occur because people have become sufficiently informed to exercise good judgment, then one can speak of "achieving consensus"—a rational goal for civil arguments.

But sometimes, bandwagons run out of control—as they did in the 1950s, when careers were destroyed by "witch-hunts" for suspected communists during the McCarthy era, and again in the late 1980s, when concerns over child abuse sometimes mushroomed into indiscriminate prosecutions of parents and child care workers. In a democratic society, the bandwagon appeal is among the most potentially serious and permanently damaging fallacies of argument.

