

How to Bless those Who Persecute You:

Practical Advice for Dealing  
with Pushback

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# How to Talk Across the Divide with Christian Nationalists

**"True Believer"**  
hardcore CN, actively  
promotes and recruits

## Red Light

STOP!

- If it's unsafe
- If you're not the right person
- If it's not the right time

**"Soft Christian Nationalist"**  
leans toward CN but doesn't  
actively promote or recruit

## Yellow Light

Tread Lightly

- Listen, show respect
- Empathy, genuine curiosity
- May move to red or green light

**"Open to Conversation"**  
attracted to CN, but not fully  
drawn in

## Green Light

Go Deeper,  
Gently, Wisely

- Build & maintain relationship
- Find common ground
- Avoid making assumptions, admit your own failings

**Mary Midgley**  
**British**  
**Philosopher**  
**(1919 – 2018)**

Midgley explained the tactics often used by those wishing to dismiss the concerns of those addressing justice issues, such as advocating for animal and environmental rights.



***Tactics for  
Derailing  
Advocacy  
Efforts***

- 1) accusations of being “too emotional”***
- 2) accusations of being ignorant***
- 3) accusations of being hypocritical***
- 4) accusations of being inappropriate***

**BEWARE THE  
RED HERRING!**



1. Calm down,  
you're being too  
emotional!

**\* Aside from the fact that this is a thinly veiled sexist remark implying that our work is akin to women's hysteria, the accusation is based on an incorrect premise.**

**\* Calling advocates "emotional" assumes that emotion is the opposite of rationality, logic and level-headedness. It is not.**

**\* "All argument involves trying to change feelings, because all belief involves feeling," (113).**

This *is* an  
emotional topic.

**First, we must note that, as Midgley points out, those who react against our work are also “emotional,” otherwise they wouldn’t be reacting at all.**

**Second, we must always inquire as to the motive behind the urging to “stop overreacting” and being overly emotional.**



Emotion IS the  
appropriate  
reaction.

“Anyone accused of being emotional about injustice or oppression or war or bad science or anything else, can quite properly reply:

‘Of course I feel strongly about this, and with good reason. It is a serious matter. Anyone who has no feeling about it, who does not mind about it, has got something wrong with him.’ **Strong feeling is fully appropriate to well-grounded belief on important subjects.** Its absence would be a fault.” (Midgley, 112).



2. You don't know  
what you're  
talking about!

**Accusations of ignorance, stupidity and being uninformed – when in fact reasonable steps have been taken to observe, study data, employ reason, and make conclusions based on evidence – are another kind of red-herring tactic.**



**Red  
Herring**

Let's find a  
better way!

When you're told, "It may be bad, but you have no idea how much worse it could be, and what you're proposing is going to send us down the wrong track," the appropriate response is: **there is no justification for causing or allowing suffering.**

**Let's find a way to do things better!**

3. You're a hypocrite

**hyp·o·crite**  
(hip'ə krit)

Function: *noun*

Meaning:

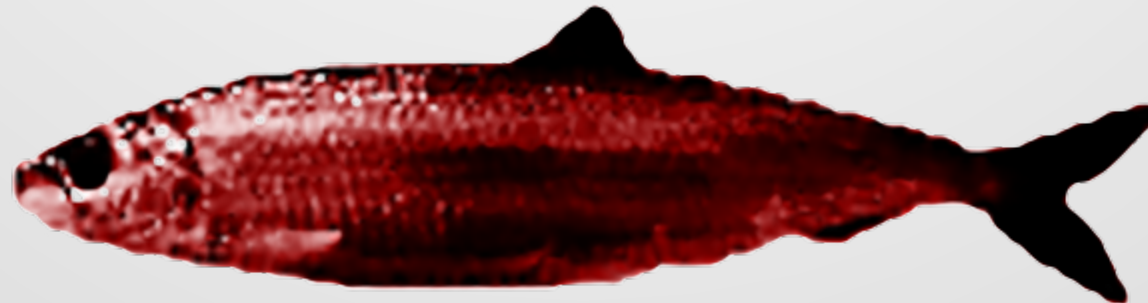
1. a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion
2. a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings

**WARNING:**

**WILL RESORT TO  
AD HOMINEM ATTACKS  
WHEN CORNERED**

**This kind of accusation is made about the disputer, not the dispute (thus it is an *ad hominem* attack, meaning that it's a subtle type of character assassination).**

**This is yet another red herring, because it distracts from the issue at hand.**





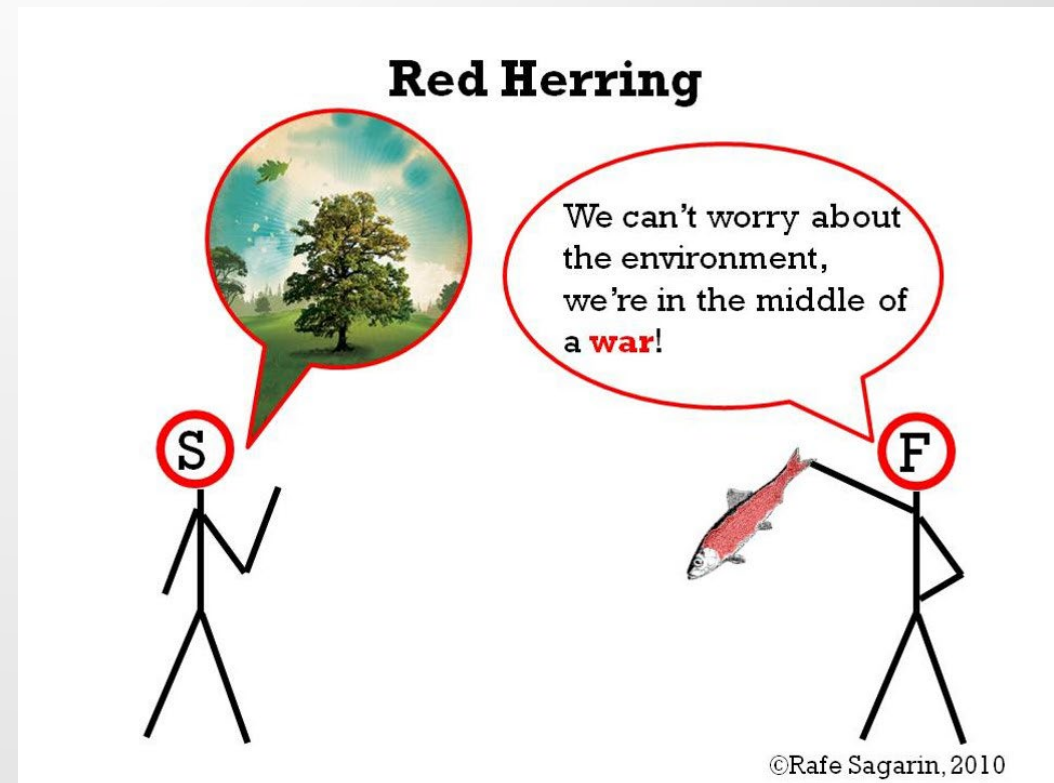
Advocacy is our  
moral obligation  
as consumers and  
citizens.

**Midgley points out why it's perfectly acceptable in our activism to be critical of existing practices and products:**

**“People who want to change are not disqualified from asking for it by their involvement in existing institutions. If they were, no change could ever be brought about.”**

## 4. Be “realistic”

**“You environmentalists are stuck in a fantasy world and need to touch down to reality. Let’s be objective and realistic. We don’t have the luxury to do what you’re asking. It’s too expensive. There’s a war going on. We don’t have the resources. There are too many other pressing problems.” Etc., Etc.**



Deflect and  
dismiss

**The accusation is that we are being inappropriate in our critique and distracting from the “real” issues that usually involve money, protection of systemic power, and maintenance of institutional status quo.**



Weighing  
competing  
concerns

**This is not to say that there aren't real questions about how we weigh competing concerns, assign priorities, and triage emergency situations.**



**BEWARE OF THE  
FALSE  
DICHOTOMY!**

**The problem is when the person who receives our criticism responds by**

- a) subtly using emotion to manipulate us away from the question we raise, or**
- b) framing the issue as a zero-sum game (also called creating a “false dichotomy” or “false dilemma”).**
  - Either we have energy or we live in caves.**
  - Either we frack or we cannot have energy independence.**
  - Either we have jobs or we protect sea turtles.**

**Beware ignored  
alternatives.**

**Either we have gas or we freeze to death!**

**This argument ignores alternatives and other information (solar has now become competitive with fossil fuels).**

**It's another red herring tactic.**

**This Stinks**





RHETORIC OF  
ACTION

When you encounter these kinds  
of rhetoric of inaction, counter  
with the **rhetoric of action:**

***Urgency***

***Agency***

***Possibility***

Gamson, William A., and David S. Meyer, "Framing political opportunity," *Social Movements and Culture*, Vol. 4 (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001); drawing on the work of Albert O. Hirschman, 1991.

# Urgency

**Urgency** points out that if we do not act now, the situation will not remain the same but will, in fact, become more and more difficult to change or manage. Action may be risky but inaction is riskier still.

Examples?



## Agency

**Agency** encourages us to embrace the "openness of the moment" by pointing out that windows that are currently open will not stay open for long.

Admittedly, there is no guarantee of success, but the present offers opportunity enough to keep hope alive.

Also, taking action now will open the window wider and keep it open longer, allowing more room for future success.

Examples?



# Possibility

**Possibility** shows us the promise of new alternatives which helps to counter the threats of perverse effects.

Create a vision of better policies, greater justice, and more humane social life as alternatives which our actions can help bring about.

**Examples?**

Finally, take  
heart!

It's actually a sign that your activism and advocacy is having an effect on the world when certain people respond with sniping, negative comments, name-calling and attempts to dismiss. Because it means that you have been heard.

You have brought attention to an issue that, indeed, makes people uncomfortable, but nevertheless needs to have our attention.

Finally, take  
heart!

It is precisely the reason behind or beneath their discomfort, anger, or otherwise negative response that is the more interesting question. Because if there really was no reason to be concerned, you would have been ignored.

The fact that you have touched a sore spot and gotten a reaction means that we have found an area that requires our attention.