

## Projecting and Protecting

### *Tu Quoque Fallacy as a Mindset in Modern Society*



^^ *In response to Tony Romo calling the Bills 2023 playoff loss 'devastating'*

*Hitler says the sky is blue. Is the sky still blue?*

## Intro

You are an innately flawed creature. Well, not *just* you. Every human has flaws, both innate and acquired. This has been true throughout history, and will never change. What has changed, and will continue to change, is our awareness of these flaws and the coping methods we employ as a result. Within recent times, this awareness has transformed; Americans have become immensely more self-obsessive. We spend on average 3 hours a day using the ultimate tool of self-assessment: social media. Coupled with the already existing culture of individualism, the growth of social media has led to Americans becoming significantly more self-conscious, insecure, and deathly afraid of critique. Criticism in any capacity is now often perceived as a threat to our entire state of being, and we respond to this threat the same way we respond to any threat: by fighting back. Our weapon of choice?

## The 'Tu Quoque' Fallacy

Tu quoque, or the appeal to hypocrisy, is a type of fallacy in which the user attempts to discredit an opponent's argument by pointing out their hypocrisy as being inconsistent with their argument. This is done with the intention of deeming the argument invalid. For example, if my coworker James told me I should drive safer, and I responded by pointing out James' history of unsafe driving, I would be using the tu quoque fallacy. In my mind, since James is not a safe driver, he cannot make the claim that driving safely is 'good', as his own behavior is inconsistent with his claim. The reason why this argument is fallacious is because hypocrisy does not alter the truth value of a claim. James being an unsafe driver doesn't disprove the notion that driving safely is good; it just means that James is a bad driver, and that I'm insecure and don't

understand logic. For me to successfully deem James' accusation invalid, I have to make an actual counterargument. You know, one that has things like actual evidence, or logical reasoning.

Now this response being a 'fallacy' doesn't necessarily completely diminish hypocrisy of having any importance within argumentative settings. Generally speaking, hypocrisy is valid to address in an argument if consequences are associated with the argument. Let's say James defined me as a bad driver and said that he was going to try to get me fired due to my unsafe driving. If James drove in a similar manner to me, and didn't plan on getting himself fired, it would be valid to point out James' hypocrisy. We both drive unsafely, yet he is arguing only I should get consequences for this behavior. Sometimes humans display an understanding of this logic, such as within discussions related to policy or a new set of standards. We label hypocritical arguments as unfair, and critique the hypocrites for not abiding by their own standards. We argue that the speaker's argued standards aren't realistic or pragmatic, pointing to the speaker's own lack of abidance as evidence. This in itself is fine, and valid. Standards typically imply consequences, so hypocritical standards must be critiqued. However, this fallacy has skyrocketed in usage in the social media era, even within arguments not associated with any apparent or directly-enforced consequences. Why has this happened?

### **Other-Directed Response to Criticism**

In the other-directed world, we have become deeply insecure, self-conscious individuals. The other-directed relates everything to themselves, and their level of social approval. *How will this jacket affect the likeliness of me garnering approval? Will my friends still like me if I listen to Coldplay?* Approval becomes a part of survival, and thus losing approval elicits emotional responses. To be approved is to be **good**, and to not be approved is to be **BAD**. Thus, we simply perceive more things as a personal attack. When you're absurdly insecure and self-conscious, an act signifying disapproval of you or your actions is your absolute nightmare. As discussed in a previous essay, we absolutely *despise* receiving criticism now. We constantly crave social approval, and anything threatening our approval is something we must destroy, or avoid.

So when our coworker James implies we're a bad driver and kindly advises us to drive safer, we feel personally threatened. James has essentially signaled to himself, others, and to myself that I deserve less social approval. We also don't really internally understand the idea that hard work can improve your ability or performance in some aspect, such as driving. Thus, we believe that in his assessment James has deemed us permanently and ontologically bad. As a defense mechanism, we fight fire with fire. The emotional response combined with our hypersensitivity causes us to become illogical, and interpret James' critique as personal.

*You think I'm a bad driver James? That's why you crashed your car.*

*Coming from the guy who has five speeding tickets... give me a break.*

*Oh is that what you believe James? Is that why you cheated on your girlfriend?*

If we were to attempt to explain the logical reasoning to this behavior, we could point to the presence of consequences. In an argument, hypocrisy is only valid to call out if unfair consequences are enforced as a result of the argument, correct? What unfair consequences did we perceive as associated with James' argument? All he said was we need to drive safer. I mean, I guess you could interpret the implied label of 'bad driver' could result in social consequences, however, we *are* a bad driver. Is it truly unfair if the critique is correct, and valid? Why do I perceive it as such?

### **Admitting Weakness**

Let's say James is actually right. Let's say I'm the worst driver in the world, and that I actually need to improve my driving abilities for the sake of myself and others. Why don't we just actually take his advice as valid? Put simply, admitting James' argument is valid in any capacity is admitting weakness in the other-directed mind. If I signal in a room full of my coworkers that James is right and that I am a bad driver who needs to improve, I essentially tell my coworkers that I am a worse person. As stated in previous essays, I do not care to truly be a good person deserving of approval, I just have to act like one. All I have to do is convince others that I am good. Admitting defeat for even one second and reliving the awful feeling of losing approval simply cannot happen. And once again, I'm also lazy, and don't really care for hard work. So when I'm faced with James' critique, and I'm in a room full of my coworkers, and I'm an other-directed, lazy individual who's probably feeling attacked, tell me which option you think I'm more likely to pick.

A. acknowledge my weaknesses in driving, and begin trying to improve my driving skills in my everyday life

OR

B. point out that James is a bad driver as well, signaling that James' evaluations are not to be trusted and that I'm actually a good driver.

You've made this choice before. You know the answer.

### **Tu Quoque, as a Mindset**

Using this fallacy once or twice doesn't necessarily prove you are an other-directed, lazy, narcissistic individual. Humans have used the tu quoque fallacy since the beginning of time, and a majority of its misuse *stemmed* (not stems) from a simple misunderstanding of the nature of

hypocrisy. A one-time user of this fallacy may come to this conclusion through a logic train that looks something like this:

1. I want to improve at basketball.
2. One of the ways my coach helps me improve at basketball is critiquing my behavior on the court.
3. When I called my coach a fatass moron who didn't know basketball after he said I take too many threes, he felt hurt, causing him to not want to critique me as much.
4. This caused me to not improve as much.
5. I should not call my coach a fatass moron when he helps me improve something I want to improve.

The one-time user identified that the tu quoque fallacy did an overall disservice to his improvement, because he *cares* about improvement. This is where those who employ the tu quoque as a **mindset** differ; they do not care about improvement. They care about being seen as good at something, not being truly good at something. Being seen as good at something gets you the same social approval as being truly good at something, yet avoids all the hard work. And because they do not truly care about being good at something, or at least care for their image more, they do not care for genuine critique. Criticism in any form feels like a pull at the mask, and the mask must stay on.

This is how the tu quoque mindset becomes self-protecting in nature. The other-directed, narcissistic individual only cares to uphold their image and identity, causing a natural pull towards the tu quoque fallacy. It's the perfect weapon, no matter how you look at it. It rejects the truth of the critique towards you and maintains social approval, whilst simultaneously making the critic and other witnesses less likely to critique you in the future, keeping your image safe. Our image is everything, so everything is protected. We do not solely use the tu quoque when protecting our direct selves as well.

## **Hypocrisy through Association**

Another effect of the self-obsessed and anti-nuance society we've created is the product of hypocrisy through association. The tu-quoque mindset is very simplistic in its assessment of others, and typically engages in behavior that is known as 'splitting'. Splitting is a defense mechanism in which one views the world in extremes black-and-white, classifying everything as either 'entirely good' or 'entirely bad'. Splitting is especially common in deeply insecure individuals, such as those with narcissistic personality disorder (*ring a bell?*). Other-directed individuals commonly use splitting in modern argumentative discussions, where users will evaluate one's entire character to determine the validity of their argument. Let's look back to a possible (*and weirdly common*) response I listed earlier as a reply to James assessing my driving skills.

*Oh is that what you believe James? Is that why you cheated on your girlfriend?*

Why did I say this? James was not critiquing my faithfulness within my relationship, nor was he enforcing consequences as a result of my moral character. Why did I feel the need to bring up his past moral faults?

Let's break down my other-directed deductive reasoning, prior to saying this statement.

1. James told me I should improve my driving skills, essentially saying that I am a bad person.
2. James' critique is enforcing social consequences on me, since other people heard his critique and may think I am a bad person now.
3. James cheated on his girlfriend, signaling that James is a bad person.
4. Since James' argument was that I am a bad person, and James was attempting to enforce consequences for being a bad person, and James is a bad person, I should call out James' hypocrisy.

As a result of James' past moral failures, I have essentially deemed him as permanently wrong about everything. James made bad judgement in the past, so he's probably wrong about most things. And because I am super hypersensitive and interpret every critique as an attempt to paint me as an entirely bad person, I simplified James' argument. It was no longer about if my driving skills needed improvement. It was now 'Who's the bad guy, and who's the good guy in this argument?'. James, being a bad guy in the past, is now a hypocrite through association. He can't make any assessments towards what's good or bad, or what food is tasty or disgusting, because he is ontologically a bad person.

This phenomenon of splitting individuals and their arguments into 'entirely good and correct' and 'entirely bad and wrong' extends past moral failures. James got denied from a college? James can never make an argument about education again. James got fired from his job? James can never assess someone's success in any field, ever. James has a weird haircut? James can never be right again. James has an annoying laugh? James is an entirely wrong person. The splitting extends beyond subjective discussion as well. James claims humans are mammals, yet he shit his pants in 2014. Therefore, humans are not mammals.

The most interesting, or extreme instances of this 'hypocrisy by association' mindset can be commonly found on social media. To connect this to recent events, the identity of the assassin who killed the United Healthcare CEO was recently revealed. Prior to the revealing of the identity, online left-wing spaces in particular paraded the assassin. However, the assassin's Twitter was revealed, and it had some pretty **damning** stuff.



That's right guys, he's an alt-right adjacent incel, and this leftist guy no longer supports him. Why? He retweeted a video of Peter Thiel, read an Ayn Rand book, and posted about possible solutions to the falling birth rates in Japan. Sorry guys; leftists can't support him anymore.

This is perhaps one of the most extreme cases of hypocrisy by association and splitting that I have seen. Mike's logic:

- Peter Thiel voted for Trump, so none of his takes or analysis can possibly be correct, and he is ontologically wrong.
- Mr. Mangione gave Thiel the greatest endorsement one could possibly receive; a retweet of a 1 minute clip of him speaking, which Mike from PA did not watch a second of.
- Since this basically means the shooter is wholeheartedly endorsing someone who is wholeheartedly wrong, the shooter is now wholeheartedly wrong.

The DSA member Mike can't support one of the most significant leftist attempts at revolution in modern American history; the assassin was a hypocrite! (*Not saying I 'support' the assassin's actions. Just highlighting leftists' parading of the assassin prior to figuring out he retweeted one (1) Peter Thiel clip, then deeming him a hypocritical incel and rejecting him as a left-wing symbol*).

If you still aren't convinced on the invalidity of calling out splitting, or hypocrisy by association, please refer to this series of questions below.

*Hitler claims the sky is blue. Is the sky now green?*

*Epstein claims pedophilia is immoral. Is pedophilia now moral?*

*Bin Laden claims political violence is bad. Is political violence now good?*

## **Social Consequences**

Ok, let's get a recap on hypocrisy.

1. Hypocrisy is valid to call out within an argument if consequences are enforced as a result of said hypocrisy.
2. We perceive criticism as something that will deplete our social approval, regardless of the critique's truth.
3. Losing social approval is perceived as a serious consequence.
4. We think hypocrisy is valid to call out when faced with criticism, since consequences are enforced as a result of said hypocrisy.

Calling this line of reasoning to be invalid, or flawed, seems to be logical. But what are social consequences? Do they have to be explicitly stated by the critic in order for it to be valid to call out the critic's hypocrisy? What if there are *real*, non-explicit consequences that will be enforced as a result of the hypocritical critic's claims?

The *boring* answer? It's subjective. The *real* answer? It's subjective.

Social consequences are effects of an action that affect your treatment and perception within society. These can be positive or negative, and can affect your relationships with others within a scale of any kind within a social setting. A man accusing you of being a liar and a narcissist produces negative, indirect social consequences. Anyone who believes this claim would be less likely to befriend you or treat you nicely, thus affecting your personal relationships. A direct social consequence would be if the man accused you of being a narcissistic liar, and claimed he would stop being friends with anyone who remains friendly with you. If faced with critique of any kind, you should ask yourself the three trusty questions.

1. What is this critique based upon?
2. Is this critique, or the reasoning behind it valid?
3. What should I do in regards to this criticism?

If the critique isn't based upon any truth, or is invalid, then argue that. If the critique is based upon true events, however the events aren't valid or related to the claim, then argue that. If the critique is truthful, but the critic is hypocritically enforcing unfair or unrealistic consequences, then argue that. However, still consider the truth of the critic's assessment. Perhaps you are both liars, but does this mean you should be? Are you justified in being a liar? Probably not. And if the critique is valid, and truthful, then you deserve the social consequences. Your response should be focused on improving in this area in the future, not avoiding consequences. I'm not arguing social consequences don't exist, or should never be perceived; I'm just saying we perceive way too much critique as socially consequential. The most general advice I can give: perceive less critique as consequential than you do now.

## **Conclusion**

If you find yourself doing any of the following:

- dismissing an argument or claim due to the person behind the claim
- responding to accusatory claims with counter-accusations
- personally attacking those who critique you, or something you associate yourself with
- interpreting critique as inherently negative

- struggling to create a valid counterargument, yet finding ease in creating counter-attacks

Do some self-reflecting. Identify what you can or can't change, what you want to change, and what you would like to be critiqued on. When you interact with critique, attempt to view the argument from the most objective standpoint possible. Forego your biases, or personal emotional responses, and assess the critique for what it is. Identify if you find yourself using the tu quoque fallacy, and do everything you can to cease your usage. Do not evaluate the critic first; evaluate the critique. If we cannot address this growth in tu quoque as both a fallacy and a mindset soon enough, we may end up killing critique, and thus growth, entirely. We must stop assessing critique based upon the critic's past actions or behavior, and start assessing critique based upon its trueness and validity.

### **TL;DR**

Americans have become self-obsessive and defensive, as defined within the other-directed mindset. As a result, we've developed an extreme fear of criticism and use fallacious responses to dismiss critique entirely. The most prominent response we employ is the tu quoque fallacy, which essentially is a fallacy in which the user attempts to discredit an critic's argument by pointing out the critic's hypocritical behavior. This is a fallacy because hypocrisy does not often affect the truth value of arguments. Hypocrisy is valid to call out if the critic is enforcing consequences as a result of their argument, and we know this. However, we now overinterpret any sort of critique or argument as an enforcement of consequences due to our hypersensitivity and desire to protect ourselves from accepting criticism and feeling 'worse'. Thus, we overuse this fallacy so much to the point that it's dominated our entire psyche. We split everyone into classes of either 'entirely good and correct' or 'entirely bad and wrong', completely rejecting arguments from those who we believe to be bad because we interpret their arguments as hypocritically labelling us as bad. This results in Americans becoming even more insecure, and blocks us from receiving actual good, constructive criticism. To overcome this, we must assess criticism based upon its trueness and validity, not based upon the critic's character or behavior. Stop focusing on hypocrisy so much, and start focusing on the critique itself.

### **Side Notes**

- This is very, very surface-level analysis.
- To accept your participation in phenomena is not to accept a fundamental character flaw, but more to accept a flawed habit that is a product of your environment and also shared

by the majority. I am not void of participating in this phenomena and in fact see this behavior as something I need to improve on.

- I am not claiming hypocrisy is never important to call out.
- I am not arguing for total forgiveness of all moral failures in the name of improving critique. I am simply pointing out and emphasizing that we often over-dismiss arguments based upon the arguer's character, thus harming critique and discussion as a whole.
- If you would like to discuss, critique, or expand upon anything covered in this topic or any of my essays, please DM me or contact me in any way. It's one of my favorite things to do, and this topic in particular is a big interest of mine.
- I am (still) working on an expanded, research-backed project related to criticism's nature. I am currently debating the format of this essay (convert to a video, keep as essay, simplified article), so if you have any suggestions let me know!

Thank you for reading!