

The politician's fallacy and the politician's apology

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Raymond Chen

I learned this from *Yes, Minister*. They call it the politician's fallacy:

1. Something must be done.
2. This is something.
3. Therefore, we must do it.

As befits its name, you see it most often in politics, where poorly-thought-out solutions are proposed for urgent problems. But be on the lookout for it in other places, too. You might see somebody falling victim to the politician's fallacy at a business meeting, say. Something else I picked up is what I'm going to call the politician's apology. This is where you apologize for a misdeed not by apologizing for what you did, but rather apologizing that other people were offended. One blogger coined the word "fauxpology" to describe this sort of non-apology. In other words, you're not apologizing at all! It's like the childhood non-apology. "Apologize to your sister for calling her ugly." "I'm sorry you're ugly." In the politician's apology, you apologize not for the offense itself, but for the fact that what you did offended someone. "I'm sorry you're a hypersensitive crybaby."

| The president regretted any hurt feelings his statements may have caused.

Another form of non-apology is to state that bad things happened without taking responsibility for causing them:

| There should not have been any physical contact in this incident. I am sorry that this misunderstanding happened at all, and I regret its escalation and I apologize.

This particular non-apology even begins with the accusation that the other party was at fault for starting the incident!

What bothers me is that these types of non-apologies are so common that nobody is even offended by their inadequacy. They are accepted as just "the way people apologize in public". (It's become so standard that Slate's William Saletan has broken it down into steps for us.)

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