

LOGICAL FALLACIES AND ABORTION ADVOCACY



Ad hominem:

Ad hominem attacks are when someone attacks you rather than your argument. For example, as a young activist someone may, in a debate or forum, say that you are “too young” to know about these things and you should let adults decide. This is not an argument against your points, and should be called out and rejected as not relevant to the points being made.

Strawman Argument:

This is when someone attacks a position that you don't actually hold. In the context of abortion advocacy, this is very clear in the US at the moment where you will hear anti-choice people pushing through anti-abortion legislation or attack pro-choice people saying that they want “late term abortion” or even statements such as “abortion up to and even after birth”.

Slippery Slope Fallacy:

The slippery slope fallacy is when someone makes outrageous and long winded claims that one thing will lead to another. For example, “if abortion is legalised, it means everyone will be getting abortions, and people will stop using contraception as if they get pregnant they can simply get an abortion”. Again, this is clearly false and will not happen, however it is seen among anti-choice arguments.

Red Herring Fallacy:

The red herring fallacy is a distraction from the points raised, normally with a point that seems related to the topic but actually is not relevant. This is used by anti-choice people in particular when it comes to the issue of abortion and disabilities. While it may seem relevant, in actuality it is not, and many activists say that disabilities are not a reason to restrict someone's right to choose whether or not to continue with a pregnancy; in actuality that is a whole other discussion about an oppressive patriarchal and ableist society that values people without disabilities over those with disabilities and puts pregnant people in a position where they are making that consideration in the first place.

Hasty Generalisation:

This is a statement without any evidence to support it, leading to stereotyping and exaggeration. For example, “young people want abortion legalised because they are irresponsible, don’t use contraception, and want a way out of the consequences of their actions”. In reality, there may be many nuance and personal reasons that people are pro-choice, on top of the basic human rights-based view.

Appeal to Authority:

This is when someone misuses authority for their own gain in an argument - in this case against abortion. For example, they may cite a “doctor” who is anti-choice, who in actuality is a dermatologist and has no expertise in abortion care. This can also come from people who are anti-choice on religious grounds. This should not be confused with providing evidence - if you provide evidence then it isn’t an appeal to authority. An appeal to authority is based on the position of authority *only*.

Appeal to Pity:

This is another point that anti-choice people can bring up that is not relevant to any disagreement on abortion rights. Often time you will hear them use the term “baby” instead of foetus and talk about “saving the unborn child” - this are all to appeal to people’s feelings of pity for small children and ban abortion. Obviously this is not relevant to any arguments as the science is clear on the differences between an embryo, foetus, and a child.

Bandwagon Fallacy:

This fallacy assumes that something is true because others or a group of people agree with it. In the case of abortion, this most often can come from religious circles; people of certian religions may feel they have to be anti-choice because that’s what everyone else is and what they are told to be.

It is almost never a good use of time to engage these fallacies and is much better to call them out for the falsehoods they are and perpetuate. This can take time and practice, so don’t worry if you fall for some of them now and again. **It is most important to be able to spot these when you are doing advocacy with those who are “on the fence”.** They may be easily swayed by slippery slope arguments and arguments that appeal to their sense of pity. **If you can demonstrate that these are nonsense in their construction it means often you will not need to deal with the argument itself.**