

Argumentative Fallacies: Slanting

While it seems that some in our time have no knowledge of the standard argumentative fallacies at all, many do seem familiar with some of the better known, such as ad hominem attacks or straw men. Rarely, however, does one see anyone call out slanting, despite the frequency with which one sees cases of slanting not only in op-ed pieces but in what purports to be news reporting.

What is slanting? It's the deliberate use of loaded language in such a way as to suggest or imply something without directly asserting it. Why is this a fallacy? It could be seen as a form of question begging (*petitio principii*): assuming something that cannot be taken for granted and requires argumentation to support—or at the very least, explicit recognition that one is departing from a contestable point. It might be best, though, to regard it as something distinct: the attempt to avoid making any kind of argument at all.

Slanting is insidious. While it might seem one of the least important of fallacies, it can be harder to spot. Let's take an example. Suppose someone wants to describe a woman who is not overweight. In English, you could describe her as slim, slender, willowy, skinny, thin, scrawny, underfed, emaciated, malnourished or anorectic. These have very different connotations, from the clearly positive to the worryingly negative. When you see them listed together, this range of implication is obvious.

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The insidious element of slanting is not only that isn't always so obvious but also that its effect is often cumulative. The accumulation can occur through the sheer repetition of a term within a text, but also, more insidiously, through repetition in a given sphere of discourse. Let's take the example of *care*, which has crept into discussions of both abortion and medical sex change.

It had become common in reporting on the abortion debate to refer to abortion as 'abortion care'. Let's note to begin with that *care* in this instance is redundant. Consider these sentences: 'Abortions are available through Planned Parenthood' and 'Abortion care is available through Planned Parenthood'. How does *care* add to the meaning of the second sentence? If the author wishes to inform her readers that they can get abortions through a particular organisation, the first sentence does that. Is the addition of *care* meant to imply that more than abortion is offered? That, say, some form of post-abortion medical supervision is offered, supervision which could not be routinely expected? Unlikely, or if so, then the writer should make this more explicit.

No, *care* is being added, it seems, to give the impression that abortion is, in itself, caring. If this is in fact the case, then care is truly redundant. One sign of its redundancy is that *abortion* and *care* are both nouns, the connection between which is in no way signalled by syntax. Contrast the phrase *nursing care*. While nursing could be here taken as a noun (as in 'Nursing was his chosen profession'), it would more logically be taken as an adjective (analogously to palliative, in palliative care). There is no such possible gloss of *abortion care*; both elements of the phrase are nouns. Now of course some noun phrases consist of two nouns, *fire engine* for example. In that case, though, *fire* specifies the purpose for which a particular engine is used, as opposed to, say, automotive engine. *Care* in the phrase *abortion care* adds nothing to *abortion*: the care in question is the abortion and it goes without saying that there is usually follow-up of major medical procedures. No one talks about 'appendectomy care': the medical care provided was the appendectomy and it's assumed some medical professional will be available for further care in case of complications. Granted, it seems that many abortion providers offer little in the way of post-op supervision, but that's an indictment of the very use of the word *care* in this context.

So *care* in this phrase is either redundant, because abortion is inherently caring, or its addition is intended to lull the reader into accepting a position that is widely contested, with sound reason, given that the sole end of abortion is to end a human life. No doubt some advocates of abortion would say there is no life—this is effectively also the purpose of rejecting standard medical terminology for the entity in the womb, such as embryo or foetus, in favour of piece of tissue and so on. Whatever you call it, it is undeniably human (not bovine or avian or reptilian, for example) and undoubtedly living, or there would be no need for an abortion. It is an individual entity, which acquires capacities such as locomotion which are independent of its mother (such as kicking in the womb), hence the article (a human life). The purpose of abortion is not to remove dead tissue—which both in virtue of being dead and in virtue of being merely superfluous tissue has no capacity to grow into a human being—but to prevent a living entity from continuing to live and grow. That is its sole purpose and it is Orwellian to characterise the deliberate ending of a healthy human life as *care*.

One senses a certain desperation in the increased frequency with which one sees the phrase *abortion care*, rather than simply abortion. It is as if the pro-abortion lobby needs to manufacture wordy euphemisms because it knows that what it advocates is grisly and inhumane—not to mention almost always unnecessary, given the close to infallible efficacy rates of modern contraceptive methods. The phrase is an attempt to cover over the gruesome purpose of abortion by shoving the word into a shotgun marriage with *care* and the idea seems to be that if you do this often enough, people will simply stop noticing the oddity of the compound. The most cynical reading is that the addition of *care* is intended to snatch a fig leaf of moral standing for a position whose advocates know full well is grotesque.

Much the same can be said of the increasing insertion of *care* into phrases such as gender-affirming care. Here the slanting is two-fold: not only the addition of *care* but *affirming*.

(The use of *gender* is a different issue: the question-begging of assuming there is some legitimate meaning of *gender* outside the context of grammar.)

Let's start with *affirming*. The intent of the phrase *gender-affirming* is twofold: first to lull the reader into accepting the premise that there is, outside of a grammatical context, something called *gender* which is different from biological sex. I doubt you could dub this slanting, properly speaking—though slanting is a subtle fallacy, not as sharply defined as, say, the post hoc or ad hominem fallacies. I would say *gender-affirming* is more a form of gaslighting: presenting a counterfactual idea as factual and then expressing astonishment when someone suggests it isn't. Gaslighting has never to my knowledge been classified as an argumentative fallacy, but it is clearly a rhetorical device used to ambush rationality, so at least a kissing cousin of the classical fallacies. Talk about *gender* enough without justifying the existence of such a phenomenon and people will start to believe that there is such a thing—a strategy which has, as of this writing, had some success, though how lasting remains to be seen.

That's just *gender*. Now what about *affirming*? The shotgun marriage of the two terms is a tacit, and probably unintended, admission of the problems with *gender*. If *gender* is real, why would it need affirmation? Someone who is black and lives in a society where racism is real might benefit from support in seeing their race as not inferior the way the surrounding society implies it is—but such a person would not need affirmation of the fact that their skin is darker than some other people's. Everyone can see this is the case. So someone would only need their *gender* affirmed because people can't see 'gender' in the way they almost always see sex.

There are any number of YouTube videos that show this: the 'transgender' person (almost always a man attempting to pass as a woman) exploding with rage because some shop assistant or waitperson uses 'sir' instead of 'ma'am' or some such. The fact that, despite the best that can be done with clothing, hair and makeup, a quick glance at someone is enough to determine their biological sex says it all: drag is drag. Maybe it's amusing (although why less demeaning to women than blackface is to Blacks is a mystery) but that's as much as it could be. It's no foundation for a contented life.

Sticking *affirming* onto the end of *gender* does, in a way, do what it says (or hints at) on the packet, by slyly affirming the idea that biological sex is merely a construct and that maleness and femaleness consist in how we feel about ourselves. However *care* adds more, adds what it does to abortion, by suggesting that an ugly reality is actually motivated by compassion.

In the case of 'gender-affirming care' the ugly reality is physical mutilation and lifetime dependence on drugs that ultimately ravage the body, the surgical manoeuvres transforming healthy bodies into a maze of scars and pestilent cavities which fund the fat-cat salaries of second- or third-rate surgeons, and the drugs creating lifetime dependency, to the tune of over a million dollars per patient, while debilitating the physiological

systems of those whose bodies are not biologically suited to being blasted with exogenous hormones—all to the enrichment of the rapacious pharmaceutical industry.

These medical interventions in healthy bodies leave young girls scarred and debilitated for life by double mastectomies and young men lumbered with the daily attending to constructed internal cavities that require painful dilation and standing invitation to serious infection. The words that are used to denote these surgical procedures and hormonal infusions are *affirming* and *care*.

This 'care' in the context of abortion, designates the ending of a human life, the sole end of the procedure. 'Care', in the context of gender affirmation designates the surgical mutilation of healthy bodies and hormonal bombardment of the whole physiological system, both of which are at best, corrosive of health and at worst, life-threatening or death-dealing, yet *care* continues to be used for both procedures.

Why? Because slanting works. It works just as other argumentative fallacies work, by lulling the ignorant and unwary into accepting the irrational. Slanting, one of the least familiar of the fallacies, is perhaps the most effective of all, precisely because it is so subtle.

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