

And there's a good way:

- A. 'I don't dispute the injustice that women have suffered, and still do suffer, from discrimination. It is real and it is wrong and it should be tackled. However, introducing a different kind of injustice through the use of quotas is not the way to deal with this problem.'

Here, like a footballer stepping out of the way of the flying boot and regaining possession of the ball, A moves away from the personal attack and gets straight back on to the main point of the argument.

The 'they don't get it' argument

- A. 'Parliament should vote for the UK to rejoin the EU because Brexit is a disaster for the British economy.'
- B. 'Point of information. MPs are overwhelmingly white, male and privately educated. How can they possibly know what is best for ordinary people?'

This looks less like the *ad hominem* because B is not attacking the speaker. She is, however, attacking people associated with the argument, not the argument itself.

Bad rebuttal:

- A. 'It's a good job they're privately educated. It means they've got more sense than all those idiots who voted for Brexit.'

Kicking back, attacking a different group of people.

Good rebuttal:

- A. 'That is a very fair point about the unrepresentative nature of Parliament. However, this debate is not about how MPs are selected. It is about Britain rejoining the EU. And the reason Parliament should vote for the UK to rejoin the EU is ...'

Gently but firmly moving the debate back on to the argument.

The 'you can't tell me that' argument

- A. 'Making the use of homophobic language illegal would be counter-productive because it would turn bigots into martyrs.'
- B. 'Point of information. As a gay person, I have suffered homophobic bullying. You have no right to tell me that the law should not protect me from this.'

**Move the
debate
back on
to the
argument**

This is a harder one to deal with, partly because it often comes with a very emotional personal story. It can feel like any form of rebuttal is a personal attack. That shouldn't blind you to the fact that it is itself a personal attack. It is saying to the first speaker, because you haven't experienced what I've experienced, you are worth less than me.

Here's how to rebut it without letting things get personal:

- A. 'I'm very sorry to hear that you've suffered that kind of bullying. It is totally wrong and indefensible. I want to see an end to that kind of bullying. That's why I'm against the proposed measure, which will only make homophobic bullying worse because ...'

Again, gently but firmly leading us back to the argument.

To sum up:

- Don't attack the person making the argument.
- Don't attack people associated with the argument.
- Always attack the argument.
- If the other side do 1 or 2, don't attack back, but instead lead the debate gently but firmly back to the argument.

In other words ... **keep your eye on the ball.**

3 Argument by anecdote

'One death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic.' So said Joseph Stalin. Stalin is perhaps not the ideal role model for a debater, given that, during his brutal reign as leader of the Soviet Union, he had millions of people murdered for daring to question a single word he said. However, he did have a point.

Individual stories - also known as **anecdotes** - are always more emotionally powerful than generalised statistics. As such, they can be very persuasive. If a charity wants to raise money to help girls in less economically developed countries attend school, a story about little Aisha who wants to be a doctor when she grows up because she saw her mother die of malaria and ever since she's wanted to make other women better is always going to have people reaching for their credit cards faster than graphs and charts extrapolating levels of female education as correlated to mortality rates. So it's not surprising that debaters often reach for these stories in the hope of persuading audiences and judges.

**Individual
stories are
always
more
powerful
than
statistics**