13.5: Conclusion, Glossary, References

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined what critical thinking is and how it involves more than simply being critical. Understanding critical thinking helps in formulating and studying arguments. We see arguments every day in advertising, use arguments to persuade others, and we use them to benefit us. The overview of fallacies showed not all arguments are valid or even logical. Always critically think and examine any argument you confront, and remember that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is a fallacious argument. We practice critical thinking on a daily basis, often without any extra effort. Now that you know a bit more about how to do these things better, you should find that you can put together more persuasive arguments that avoid the pitfalls of fallacious thinking. More importantly, when you hear a statement such as, “You should drink at least four glasses of wine per day,” you’ll know that something isn’t right. And if you do hear a statement like this, you will be prepared to think critically about the statement, and will be in a position to make a more educated decision about the information.

Review Questions and Activities

Review Questions

1. Explain the difference between critical thinking and being critical. Why should we care?
2. List and discuss at least three ways that we use logic and argumentation in our daily lives.
3. If I say, “There is plenty of pasta, so you should have some more,” am I implying or inferring that you have not eaten enough?
4. What are fallacies and why is it important that we study them?
5. Name, define, and give examples of three different fallacies you have heard recently.

Activities

1. Throughout this chapter, we have turned to the abortion debates for examples. In order to practice critical thinking in action, spend some time researching the major arguments each side uses. Because the debates in this area are so complex, you might want to narrow your focus just a bit. For example, you could focus on the issue of minors consenting to abortion or abortion in the case of rape or other sexual assault. Compile a list of the most common arguments used by each side. Your list should include: any evidence used to support claims, a list of the major claims, any conclusions. Return to the core critical thinking skills and critically evaluate how each side forms arguments and uses evidence. How do your own biases and thoughts on the issue of abortion influence your evaluation? If you were an advisor, what advice would you give to each side to make their arguments stronger and more logically sound?

2. Your local newspaper’s Letters to the Editor section is a prime spot to find logical fallacies in action. For several days, read the Letters to the Editor and identify all of the fallacies you find. Keep a log of the specific fallacies you find, dividing them by type. Once you have compiled a variety of example, take a step back and evaluate them. Questions that you might want to ask include: what fallacy or fallacies seem to be most popular? Why do you think this is? Pick a few of the most egregious fallacies and rewrite them correcting for the flaw in reasoning.

3. Throughout this chapter, we have studied arguments by looking at their various parts. In practice, arguments occur as part of larger statements or speeches making their analysis a bit more complicated. To understand the ways arguments occur in daily life, visit the American Rhetoric page (www.americanrhetoric.com). On this page you will find a number of political, activist, movie, and other speeches. Pick one and try to identify the major arguments that are set forth. What are the main claims? What are the sub-claims? What sorts of evidence or support are provided? Are there any fallacies present in the argument? If you were a speech writer, what advice would you give to improve the argument?

Glossary

Ad Hominem Fallacy
A fallacy focus from the premises and conclusions of the argument and focus instead on the individual making the argument; a personal attack.

Analysis
The process of asking what is happening in a message through breaking it into its individual components and asking questions of each section.

Appeal to Authority
A fallacy that occurs when the truth of a proposition is thought to rest in the opinion of a famous other or authority.

Argument
Statements that combine reasoning with evidence to support an assertion.

Bad Reasons Fallacy
A fallacy that occurs when then we assume the conclusion of an argument to be bad because a part of the argument is bad.

Bandwagon Fallacy
Believing in something, or taking action simply because everyone else did.
**Begging the Question**
A fallacy that occurs when the conclusion of the argument is also used as one of the premises.

**Critical Thinking**
Active thinking in which we evaluate and analyze information in order to determine the best course of action.

**Deduction**
An argument in which the truth of the premises of the argument guarantee the truth of its conclusion.

**Either-Or Fallacy**
A fallacy that occurs when the audience is only given two choices.

**Evaluation**
The process of assessing the various claims and premises of an argument to determine their validity.

**Evidence**
Research, claims, or anything else that is used to support the validity of an assertion.

**Fallacy**
A flaw or error in reasoning.

**Fallacy of Quantitative Logic**
A fallacy that occurs when we misuse quantifying words such as “all” or “some.”

**False Analogy**
A fallacy that occurs when there exists a poor connection between two examples used in an argument.

**False Cause**
A fallacy that occurs when there exists a flawed connection between two events.

**Hasty Generalization**
A fallacy that occurs when reaching a conclusion without any, or little, evidence to back up the argument.

**Imply**
To suggest or convey an idea.

**Induction**
An argument in which the truth of its propositions lend support to the conclusion.

**Infer**
To draw a conclusion that rests outside the message.

**Interpretation**
Explaining and extrapolating the conclusions that we draw from a statement.

**Non sequitur**
An argument where the conclusion may be true or false, but in which there exists a disconnect within the argument itself.

**Premise**
A proposition (statement) supporting or helping to support a conclusion; an assumption that something is true.

**Red Herring Fallacy**
A fallacy that occurs when an irrelevant issue is introduced into the argument.
Self-regulation
The process of reflecting on our pre-existing thoughts and biases and how they may influence what we think about an assertion.

Slippery Slope Fallacy
A fallacy that occurs when we assume one action will initiate a chain of events that culminate in an undesirable event.

Strawman Fallacy
A fallacy that occurs when the actual argument appears to be refuted, but in reality a related point is addressed.

Syllogism
A form of deductive argument in which the conclusion is inferred from the premises. Most syllogisms contain a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion.

References

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