

The impact of logical fallacies in critical thinking essay sample



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According to (Bassham 1), critical thinking is disciplined thinking governed by clear intellectual standards. The standards, as defined by (Bassham 1-2), are clarity, precision, accuracy, relevance, consistency, logical correctness, completeness, and fairness. In order to achieve a conclusion that encompasses all of the intellectual standards, the critical thinker must have the ability to identify and evaluate logical fallacies in arguments. This paper focuses on defining the concept of logical fallacies, and identifying three logical fallacies and analyzing their impact on the critical thinking process.

If we are to understand the concept of logical fallacies, we must first define what an argument is and the components that make up an argument.

According to (Humanist Learning Center), an argument is a logically grounded statement of a proposition with one or more premises. The construction of an argument can be summarized in the following diagram, premises inferences conclusion. Premises can be thought of as acceptable reasoning or presuppositions that make up the foundation of the argument.

Logical fallacies -or fallacy for short (Bassham 2), can be defined as an argument or arguments that offer reasoning that does not support its conclusion. The reasoning can either be mistaken or reasoning that does not sufficiently support the conclusion. Logical fallacies can generally be classified into two general groups, 1) fallacies of relevance also known as formal fallacies, and 2) fallacies of insufficient evidence also known as informal fallacies.

Fallacies of relevance can be described as arguments that contain premises that are logically irrelevant to the conclusion. Fallacies of this type are

typically not noticed because the premises made in this type of fallacy are based on emotions.

Fallacies of Insufficient Evidence can be described as arguments in which the premises, though they may be relevant to the conclusion, do not provide sufficient evidence to support the conclusion.

This paper will examine two fallacies of relevance and one fallacy of insufficient evidence. We will first examine two fallacies of relevance, the fallacy of attacking the motive, and the red herring fallacy and then move on to the fallacy of insufficient evidence, the fallacy of hasty generalization.

The fallacy of attacking the motive occurs when the arguer rejects the argument or claim of a person by criticizing the person's motive rather than attacking the argument itself. The fallacy can be generalized as, " Person X is biased or has objectionable motives, and therefore the argument or claim of person X should be rejected. An illustration of this fallacy can be found in the opening statement of an online editorial about Michael Moore's controversial new film, Fahrenheit 911, " Michael Moore's publicity machine is at it again." (Straka). In this example, the author is clearly attempting to discredit Michael Moore by attacking Michael Moore's motive as opposed to the film itself.

The red herring fallacy when an arguer tries to sidetrack his or her audience by raising an irrelevant issue and then claims that the original issue has effectively been settled by the irrelevant diversion. We can see an example of this fallacy in the same article on the movie Fahrenheit 911, " I even respect his audacity. I mean, come on? Who else has the guts to make up
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such garbage about any sitting president (unless you believe that former President Bill Clinton is innocent of sexual harassment — in which case Paula Jones, Gennifer Flowers (search), Monica Lewinsky and Juanita Broaddrick are all just as audacious).” (Straka).

The fallacy of hasty generalization occurs when an arguer draws a general conclusion from a sample that is either biased or too small. A biased sample can be generalized as one that is too small or not representative of the target group. Hasty generalizations can often lead to false stereotypes.

In conclusion, identifying logical fallacies is an important skill for everyone to gain knowledge of in critical thinking. It not only helps one to avoid accepting false conclusions, but it also helps one to learn better reasoning and debating skills which can be applied in every day decision making. The process of looking for logical fallacies can help one to better understand the subject one is reading about or discussing.

Works Cited

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