

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*

Information Discrimination Challenge

In today's world, navigating sources of information can be challenging. Often claims are stated without supporting evidence and a lot of information comes from secondhand sources. An important skill to develop involves learning to think critically, in other words developing the ability to sort through unsupported, misleading, or fraudulent claims.

Claims pertaining to science, those which attempt to reveal the workings of the physical universe, continue to challenge our imaginations, logic, and discrimination skills. In this assignment, you are asked to critically evaluate claims of a science (physical) nature. Remember to restrict your efforts to claims that deal with our understanding of the workings of our physical world. We are not interested in determining the accuracy of news reports such as: "A plane crash occurred yesterday in California," or "A person recovered from a serious and lengthy illness." Those statements merely present us with news items, they do not claim to describe how our world works. However, if the plane story claimed that the aircraft stopped in mid-air, made a 90-degree turn, then plummeted to earth, that challenges our understanding of the world and would be worthy of assessment. Likewise, if the health story claimed that mega-doses of vitamin C cured the sick individual, it would be worth assessing. Keep in mind also that we are not interested in evaluating claims that are not meant to factual or representative of reality, such as science fiction shows, fantasy works, or speculative works.

Directions

1. Select 3 secondhand sources of information (claims). These may be in the form of a passage from a book, an essay, an advertisement, a magazine, or newspaper article, a commercial, a TV show, a movie, or a lecture. Select the sources so that you can assign one to each of following categories:

GOOD	BAD	UGLY
you strongly believe the claim and would wager a large sum on its accuracy	you doubt the claim, though you are not certain and would not wager much either way	you completely discount the claim and would wager a large sum that it is false
Reason:	Reason:	Reason:

2. For each source and category assignment, CLEARLY state the reasons for your decision.
3. Considering the thoughts you used to lead to your judgment, *compile a list of five questions that you applied (or can apply) to ANY claim.*
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
4. For each source, attach the article (or a brief description of the source) on the front side of lined paper. On the back side, write a paragraph describing the source and explaining how you chose its classification.
5. Staple this sheet to your three articles.

References:

<https://michaelshermer.com/sciam-columns/baloney-detection/>
<https://michaelshermer.com/sciam-columns/more-baloney-detection/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNSHZG9bIQQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn7jVTGjb-I>
<https://www.skeptic.com/skepticism-101/baloney-detection-kit-sandwich-infographic/>

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