



A Critical Pragmatic Study of Fallacy in Religious Debates

Zina Esam Awad¹ , Wafaa Sahib Mehdi² 

Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq¹

Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq²

zina.isam2303@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq¹

Dr.wafaa@colang.uobaghdad.edu.iq²

<https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v36i3.1860>

Received: 1 June 2025; **Accepted:** 20 August 2025; **Published:** September 30, 2025

Abstract

A fallacy is a kind of faulty reasoning that undermines the credibility of an argument on a logical level and paves the way for the argument to be exposed as being invalid. It is a flaw in reasoning that contravenes one or more of the five main criteria of a good argument. These criteria encompass the argument's structure, relevance, acceptance, sufficiency, and rebuttal. It is argued that fallacies abound in debates, especially in religious ones. This paper examines this negative issue in terms of the critical pragmatic approach. It addresses the following questions: What are the types of fallacies that are made in religious debates? What are the pragmatic strategies used to convey fallacies in the data under study? This research analyzes two religious debates to answer these questions. The first is between a Muslim and an atheist figure, while the second is between a Christian and an atheist. This study utilizes Damer's (2013) classification of fallacies as well as Searle's theory (1976) and Grice's Maxims (1975). A variety of conclusions have been reached. Firstly, the fallacy makers employ different types of fallacies to win the argument; they employ the fallacies of elusive normative premise, wrong reasoning, and ignoring the counter-evidence. Secondly, similar pragmatic strategies are utilized to convey fallacies in the two debates. Various speech acts appear in the data, like stating, commanding, and criticizing. In terms of rhetorical devices, the fallacy makers employ hyperbole and rhetorical questions.

Keywords: Arguments, critical pragmatics, fallacy, pragmatic strategies, religious debates



دراسة تداولية نقدية للمغالطة في المناظرات الدينية

زينة عصام عواد^١ ، وفاء صاحب مهدي^٢

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية للبنات، جامعة بغداد، العراق^١

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية للبنات، جامعة بغداد، العراق^٢

zina.isam2303@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq¹

Dr.wafaa@colang.uobaghdad.edu.iq²

<https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v36i3.1860>

تاريخ الإستلام: ٢٠٢٥/٦/١١، تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٥/٨/٢٠، تاريخ النشر الإلكتروني: ٢٠٢٥/٩/٣٠

المستخلص:

المغالطة هي نوع من الاستدلال الخاطئ الذي يُقوّض مصداقية الحجة على المستوى المنطقي، ويمهد الطريق لكشف الحجة على أنها غير صحيحة. وهي خلل في الاستدلال يُخالف واحداً أو أكثر من المعايير الرئيسية الخمسة للحجة الصحيحة. وتشمل هذه المعايير: بنية الحجة، والملاءمة، والقبول، والكفاية، والرد على الاعتراضات. ويُعتقد إن المغالطات شائعة في المناظرات، لا سيما في الموضوعات الدينية. تتناول الدراسة الحالية هذه المشكلة السلبية من خلال المنهج التداولي النقدي. حيث تطرح الأسئلة التالية: ما أنواع المغالطات التي تُرتكب في المناظرات الدينية؟ وما الاستراتيجيات التداولية المستخدمة لإيصال هذه المغالطات في البيانات قيد الدراسة؟ يحل هذا البحث مناهرتين دينيتين للإجابة عن هذه الأسئلة؛ الأولى بين شخصية مسلمة وأخرى ملحدة، أما الثانية فهي بين شخصية مسيحية وملحدة. وتستند هذه الدراسة إلى تصنيف دامر (٢٠١٣) للمغالطات، بالإضافة إلى نظرية سيرل (١٩٧٦) ومبادئ غرايس (١٩٧٥). وقد تمّ التوصل إلى مجموعة من النتائج؛ أولاً، يستخدم صانعو المغالطات أنواعاً مختلفة من المغالطات للفوز بالحجة؛ حيث يوظفون مغالطة المقدمة المعيارية، والاستدلال الخاطئ، وتجاهل الأدلة المخالفة. ثانياً، تُستخدم استراتيجيات تداولية متشابهة لإيصال المغالطات في كلا المناظرتين حيث تظهر أفعال كلام متنوعة ضمن البيانات قيد التحليل مثل التصريحية، والامرية، والنقدية. أما من حيث الوسائل البلاغية، فيوظف صانعو المغالطات المبالغة والأسئلة البلاغية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجدل، التداولية النقدية، المغالطة، الاستراتيجيات التداولية، المناظرات الدينية

1. Introduction

Constructing a sound argument is vital in religious debates as debaters seek to convince the audience of the truth or prevalence of a specific belief system. Religious debates offer a unique chance to examine the impact of language on arguments and beliefs. In this context, language serves as a powerful means to persuade, form opinions, and shape beliefs about the nature of existence. However, fallacies may characterize the argumentation in such kinds of debates. Fallacies have captured immense interest since they are deeply rooted in social, cultural, political, and religious contexts.

The widespread presence of erroneous reasoning in religious discussions diminishes the credibility and validity of arguments. It is essential to recognize how fallacies are effectively communicated, especially in debates that engage with public belief systems. Many individuals are not aware of how persuasive techniques and rhetorical strategies can obscure flawed reasoning in debates pertaining to religious ideologies.

This study critically examines fallacies in religious debates through a critical pragmatic lens. It aims to investigate the types of fallacies and their pragmatic manifestations in the data under investigation. Critical analysis aims to highlight any negative social issue to raise public awareness.

This study is likely to be useful for researchers who specialize in pragmatics and critical studies, as well as those interested in argumentation in religious discourse. It investigates fallacies from a critical pragmatic perspective in a new kind of genre that has not been examined before (i.e., religious debates), to the best of the researchers' knowledge.

2. Fallacies Conceptualized

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1983, p.1) state that argumentation is defined as "a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint". Argumentations are mostly characterized by fallacies. "A fallacy is a mistake in an argument that violates one or more of the five criteria of a good argument, but it may violate a criterion in several different ways, all of which share some standard features with other violations of that same criterion" (Damer, 2013, p. 52). Fallacies are seen as an essential aspect of daily life since individuals use them in their daily interactions (Abdulmajeed

& Yunis, 2019). Abbas et al. (2024) claim that fallacy is a strategy that characterizes political debates. The use of fallacies in religion is crucial due to the sensitivity of this aspect in our lives. Beliefs are sacred to all people. In religious debates, convincing the audience often has a greater significance than persuading the opponent.

2.1 Criteria for Identifying Fallacies

Many scholars have investigated fallacies after Aristotle (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1983), Toulmin et al. (1984), Walton (1994), Johnson (2000), Tindale (2007), Freeley and Steinberg (2008) and Damer who examined fallacies in his book entitled “*Attacking Faulty Reasoning: A Practical Guide to Fallacy-Free Arguments*,” with its editions of (2009) and (2013). This study makes use of Damer’s (2013) model for recognizing erroneous arguments. Damer (2013) identifies five criteria of a good argument. It must have a well-formed structure, premises relevant to the truth of the conclusion, premises acceptable to a rational individual, premises that offer sufficient justification for the truth of the conclusion, and premises that provide an effective rebuttal to all expected criticisms of the argument. He states that a fallacy usually contravenes one or more of these five criteria for strong reasoning. He identifies five essential criteria of fallacies as follows:

1. Fallacies that attack the Structure Criterion
2. Fallacies that attack the Relevance Criterion
3. Fallacies that attack the Acceptability Criterion
4. Fallacies that attack the Sufficiency Criterion
5. Fallacies that attack the Rebuttal Criterion

These main types are further realized by subtypes. They are outlined below by the prevalent ones in the data of this study.

2.1.1 Fallacies that Violate the Structural Criterion

Damer (2013, p.32) explains that any argument should avoid including a premise that assumes the truth, makes the same claim, or makes a claim that resembles the conclusion’s claim. This type of fallacy consists of two main types: fallacies of improper structure (such as begging the question and the elusive normative premise fallacy) and fallacies of deductive inference (such as denying the antecedent and false conversion).

2.1.2 Fallacies that Violate the Relevance Criterion

Damer (2013, p.33) argues that “a premise is considered irrelevant if its acceptance provides no evidence for, has no bearing on, or has no connection to the merit of the conclusion”. This type of fallacy contains different subtypes: those of irrelevant premises (such as drawing the wrong conclusion and using the wrong reasons) and those of irrelevant appeals (such as appealing to irrelevant authority and manipulating emotions).

2.1.3 Fallacies that Violate the Acceptability Criterion

According to Damer (2013, p.35), any argument is considered fallacious in terms of acceptability if it depends on premises that fail to meet the criteria for being acceptable. There are different types here: fallacies of linguistic confusion (such as equivocation and ambiguity) and unwarranted assumption fallacies (such as faulty analogy and fallacy of composition).

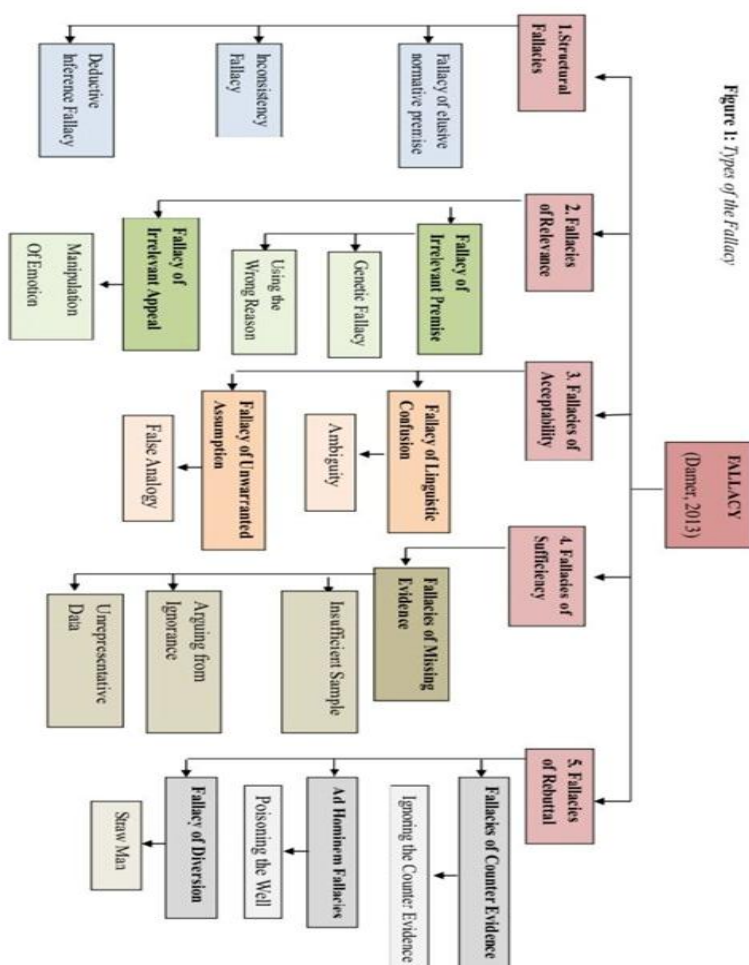
2.1.4 Fallacies that Violate the Sufficiency Criterion

Damer (2013, p.39) explains that if an argument depends on little, biased, and crucial evidence, it may result in an insufficient, fallacious conclusion. This type of fallacy can be divided into two groups: fallacies of missing evidence (such as an insufficient sample and arguing from ignorance) and causal fallacies (such as causal oversimplification).

2.1.5 Fallacies that Violate the Rebuttal Criterion

According to Damer (2013, p.40), an argument is considered a fallacious rebuttal criterion if it fails to offer a convincing counter to all anticipated criticisms brought against it or against the views it supports. There are several different types of this fallacy, like the fallacy of counter-evidence (such as denying counter-evidence and ignoring counter-evidence), the ad hominem fallacy (such as abusive ad hominem and poisoning the well), and the fallacy of diversion (such as straw man and red herring). Out of all these various types of fallacies, the following are of relevance to this study. They are illustrated in Figure 1 as follows:

Figure (1)
Types of the Fallacy



3. Critical Pragmatics (CPs)

The critical pragmatic approach examines the social functioning of language to understand it and to pay attention to its various uses and manifestations (Verschuere, 1999, p. 320). Mey (2001, p.316), who originally introduced the term, claims that “critical” denotes a “reflective, examining stance towards the phenomena of life”. It is a critical reflection that depends on dissatisfaction with a specific state of affairs. Critical pragmatics is “an analytical methodology that examines critical issues to see how the pragmatic theories are utilized to reflect ideologies” (Mehdi, 2020, p. 123). In this paper, a fallacy is viewed as an ideology that is activated in argumentation to reflect language abuse rather than language use. Fallacy

makers try to manipulate their arguers due to the ideology they adopt. CPs is akin to critical discourse analysis and critical stylistics in adhering to a specific stance that opposes the negative issue under scrutiny, i.e., fallacies in this research work (Nashim & Mehdi, 2022). Critical pragmatists think that the use of fallacies represents a critical issue that needs to be securitized to understand how people often use and manipulate language to achieve their persuasive aims. There are basic concepts in doing a critical pragmatic analysis of any kind of discourse, which are stance and reproduction. Stance is defined as the “public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, concerning any salient dimension of the sociocultural field” (DuBois, 2007, p. 163). The stance that this paper adopts is the anti-fallacious stance, where using fallacies in argumentation is viewed as negative. It needs to shed light on and be exposed for others to be aware of. Reproduction is a mechanism or procedure that can offer alternatives to expressions or statements that are viewed negatively (Muhammed, 2018, p. 89). There are a variety of alternatives that can be used to reduce or avoid negative expressions. These may involve the use of hedging, adding words or phrases, modifying words or phrases, deleting words or phrases, asking a question, or completely avoiding the negative expression.

4. The Pragmatic Representation of Fallacies

Pragmatics is defined as the examination of how individuals utilize language in communication (Mey, 2001, p.6). It is the study of meaning not as generated by the linguistic system but as conveyed and manipulated by participants in a communicative situation. Two theories have been chosen to determine how fallacy is conveyed in the religious debates under investigation. These are the speech act theory of Searle (1976) and Grice's Maxims (1975).

4.1 Speech Acts Theory

Austin's (1962, p. 101) essential idea about the theory of speech acts is that saying is equivalent to performing an action. Searle (1976) develops his classification of speech acts as illocutionary acts. He outlines five macro-categories of such acts: representatives or assertives where the speaker shares information about the truth (such as affirming), expressives where the speaker conveys feelings or attitudes (such as criticizing), commissives where the speaker commits doing an action, (such as promising), directives in which the speaker encourages others to take action (such as requesting), and declarations where the speaker's utterance bring about an external

change (such as declaring war) (pp. 17-22). Usually, the first four are more likely to be activated in analyzing religious or political discourse (Mehdi and Al-Hindawi, 2018, p.6).

4.2 Grice's Maxims

Grice (1975, pp.45-47) argues that individuals cooperate when they take part in conversation. He introduces the cooperative principle, which is the direction of the talk exchange in which the speaker must provide an appropriate conversational contribution at the right time. Cruse (2000) clarifies that since conversations are guided by cooperative principles, they are not just a collection of disconnected words generated randomly. Four fundamental maxims are proposed to reflect cooperation in interactions: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. Any violation of these four maxims may result in figurative use of language like metaphor, hyperbole, or rhetorical questions (Hadi & Mehdi, 2023, p. 25). It is worth mentioning that a fallacy maker is never cooperative and he never adheres to Grice's principles because in presenting his fallacious argument, he is violating the maxim of manner as he is not truthful.

5. Analytical Framework

This research synthesizes an eclectic model for critically examining fallacies in religious debates. This model serves as the basic apparatus for qualitatively analyzing the collected data. It is explained as follows: fallacies are manifested via language. Due to its criticality, it is investigated in terms of CPs. First, types of fallacies are identified by representing standard forms of the argument. The data are extracts taken from religious debates that have been examined to explore the manifestation of fallacy. Then, the pragmatic theories that are used to issue the fallacious argument are explained. Fallacies are manifested via some pragmatic theories. These are speech acts of Searle (1976) and Grice's Maxims (1975). The fallacious utterances need to be reproduced by offering various alternatives. This can be achieved via employing the mechanism of CPs, which involves reproduction. It uses hedges, adding, modifying, or deleting a word/phrase, as well as using a question form, and total avoidance. It aims to minimize or avoid the fallacy. The aforementioned components of the model are schematized in Figure 2 below:

The diagram illustrates the identification of fallacious arguments and the types of fallacy, categorized into structural and representativeness fallacies, and pragmatic strategies.

The identification of fallacious arguments (Garnham, 2013)

- Violation of Relevance
- Violation of Reference
- Violation of Acceptability
- Violation of Sufficiency
- Violation of Inclusion
- Violation of Exclusion

Types of Fallacy

- Fallacious argument**
 - Structural Fallacies**
 - Incommensurable Fallacy
 - Exhaustive premises
 - Fallacies of Relevance
 - Genetic fallacy
 - Manipulation of conditions
 - Multiple wrong premises
 - Fallacies of Sufficiency
 - Appealing from ignorance
 - Insufficient sample
 - Unrepresentative data
 - Stereotype
 - Representativeness**
 - Speech acts (Sperber 1970)
 - Violation the Maxims (Grice, 1975)
 - Expressive
 - Evaluating
 - Asserting
 - Directives
 - Questioning
 - Conceding
- Pragmatic strategies**
 - Violating the Maxims (Grice, 1975)

CP Mechanisms

- Total evidence**
 - Adding a worldframe**
 - Using heuristics
 - Adding a worldframe
 - Deleting a worldframe**
 - Using heuristics
 - Deleting a worldframe
 - Modifying a worldframe**
 - Using heuristics
 - Modifying a worldframe

Two religious debates are chosen for the analysis. The first is entitled “Islam or Atheism: Which Makes More Sense?” and the second is “Does God Exist.” They are chosen as being characterized by fallacy. Moreover, they have high rates of views on the Internet due to the sensitivity of the topics. They employ fallacies to persuade others, defend their beliefs, and divert attention

from flaws in their argument, especially when these arguments are difficult to defend rationally. They are put under investigation in terms of the critical pragmatic paradigm.

6.2 Data Description

A summary of two religious debates is presented below.

1. The Debate between Tzortzis and Krauss

The debate is entitled “Islam or Atheism: Which Makes More Sense?”. It took place in a London auditorium in 2013. It includes two main debaters: Hamza Tzortzis, who is a British Muslim debater, philosopher, and activist known for his Islamic education, and Lawrence Krauss, who is an American theoretical physicist and cosmologist. Tzortzis focuses on two main aspects in his argument: the origins of the universe and the nature of the Qur’an discourse. In contrast, Krauss concentrates on the scientific explanation of the universe, the critique of religious beliefs, and the concept of nothingness.

2. The Debate between William Lane Craig and Christopher Hitchens

The debate is entitled “Does God Exist?”. It occurred in 2009 at Biola University. It includes two main debaters: William Craig, who is an American philosopher, theologian, and Christian apologist, and Christopher Hitchens, who is a British-American author, journalist, and public intellectual. Craig focuses on the cosmological argument; the universe began to exist; therefore, it has a cause (God), and the resurrection of Jesus. On the other hand, Hitchens focuses on the problem of evil, the critique of religious claims, and science and naturalism. Craig is more persuasive and presents a philosophical approach, while Hitchens employs rhetorical power and his argument lacks a direct engagement with Craig’s claims.

6.3 Data Analysis

The fallacy is identified in four extracts from the two debates. Under the critical pragmatic paradigm, utterances are examined as units of analysis. The data are analyzed qualitatively in terms of the analytical framework developed by the research. Fallacies are underlined in the extracts under examination.

Extract (1)

Krauss: “Is homosexuality wrong?”

Tzortzis: “In the Islamic tradition, it is a sin.”

Krauss: “Homosexuality is perfectly natural in all animal species. It occurs with a 10% frequency. There are good evolutionary reasons for

homosexuality. So why would God, who thought it was a sin, make it natural among all species? 10% of sheep are in long-term homosexual relationships. Why would a God create sheep, who do not have a soul and cannot even think about it, to be homosexual?”

Analysis of Extract (1)

To prove that homosexuality is not a sin, Krauss uses many premises. If we convert his argument to a standard format, it would look like this. Homosexual behavior is natural (premise). It is natural in all animal species (premise). Good evolutionary reasons for homosexuality are there (premise). God makes it natural among all species (premise). Then, Homosexuality is not a sin (conclusion).

The faulty reasoning in this argument can be attacked via the counterevidence method of attacking faulty arguments, which attacks its acceptability. Homosexuality is not a natural behavior because the natural thing is that species are created as male and female. Moreover, Islamic traditions consider it a sin for human beings, not animals. The phrase “all animal species” said by the fallacy maker alludes to human beings as part of being animals, where there is a manipulation of the intended meaning. The claim that God makes it natural among all species is invalid since homosexuality has only been observed in some species, not all. Moreover, the 10% ratio is related to sheep, and it does not apply to all creators, if we assume that it is correct and real, as Krauss claims to support his argument.

The framework of his argument is that naturalness implies moral approval, which is precisely the issue being contested. He commits the fallacy of an elusive normative premise. The normative conclusion—that God should not condemn homosexuality or that it is irrational for God to create something “natural” and then deem it sinful—rests on an implicit normative premise, such as: whatever is natural must be morally acceptable. A morally perfect God would not design natural inclinations that He subsequently condemns. These moral assumptions remain unstated and undefended, yet the entire conclusion relies upon them. Regarding the criterion of relevance, Krauss’s core argument depends on the premise that the natural occurrence of homosexuality in animals means it must be morally acceptable. He commits the fallacy of wrong reason, which depends on irrelevant premises; just because something occurs in nature does not imply its moral right (e.g., aggressiveness and infanticide also occur in nature). As a result, he violates the relevance criterion. Furthermore, he commits the fallacy of false analogy by invoking sheep. Krauss introduces an irrelevant comparison to the moral responsibilities of humans under Islamic law. The premise that sheep’s behavior can exemplify human ethics is neither logically nor theologically

valid within the context of Tzortzis's argument, which is grounded in the divine commands of ethics in Islam. As a result, he violates the acceptability criterion. The sufficiency criterion is violated since Krauss employs the assertion that "10% of sheep engage in long-term homosexual relationships" as adequate justification to challenge a complete religious moral framework. This evidence is insufficient to support the claim that homosexuality is ethically acceptable or that God should not forbid it. He neglects to address theological answers (e.g., the distinction between existence and command). He commits the fallacy of unrepresentative data. He presents a percentage that is not necessarily consistent across species. He generalizes this percentage across the animal kingdom, which is unscientific. He neglects to consider whether natural behavior in animals ought to have normative moral implications for humans, resulting in an inadequately substantiated conclusion. The rebuttal criterion is also violated as Krauss does not explicitly address Tzortzis's theological assertion that, in Islam, moral rightness is dictated by divine commands rather than by natural occurrence. He commits the fallacy of the straw man. He diverts the debate from the fundamental assertion to biology and animal behavior, distorting the theological rationale. Through the employment of rhetorical questions and a tone of incredulity ("Why would God make sheep gay?"), He circumvents the religious rationale and fails to provide a substantive counterargument to the religious framework.

According to Speech Acts Theory, Krauss employs a representative SA of stating when he says that "Homosexuality is perfectly natural in all animal species. It occurs with a 10% frequency." He argues that homosexuality occurs naturally in all animal species. He presents claims grounded in empirical observation.

Regarding Grice's Maxims, Krauss employs a rhetorical question, "Why would a God who thought it was a sin make it natural among all species?", to present a naturalistic critique in a religious debate. He violates the maxim of relevance, shifting the debate from religious doctrine(sin) to biological occurrence (animal behavior). CPs claims that to reproduce Krauss's utterances without fallacies, deletion can be used with hedging. The utterance "Homosexuality is perfectly natural in all animal species" can be reproduced as follows: "Homosexuality can be natural in some animal species". Moreover, hedges can be used: "Could it be worth reflecting on why a God would create sheep, who do not have a soul and cannot even think about it, to be homosexual?"

Extract (2)

Tzortzis: “The Quran challenges its readers to bring one chapter like it, highlighting its unique literary form.”

Krauss: “But literary uniqueness can be subjective. Many texts throughout history have been deemed unique, yet they still reflect the cultural context of their time.”

Tzortzis: “The Quran contains verses that align with modern scientific understanding, such as embryology.”

Krauss: “But those interpretations are often vague. Just because a text can be interpreted in a way that seems to fit science does not mean it was intended as a scientific document.”

Analysis of Extract (2)

The fallacy maker argues that the Quran is not unique by saying that literary uniqueness is subjective (premise). Many texts have been regarded as unique, but they still reflect their cultural context (premise). Then, the Quran is not unique (conclusion). To support his point of view regarding the uniqueness of the Quran, Tzortzis presents the scientific perspective of the Quranic texts. This idea has been confronted by another fallacious argument by Krauss. He claims that Quranic texts that align with science are often vague (premise). Interpreting religious texts to fit science does not imply that they were meant as scientific publications (premise). Therefore, the scientific alignment of the Quran does not necessarily set it as unique (conclusion).

Regarding the relevance and acceptability criteria, Krauss presents the notion of subjectivity and cultural context, which does not immediately counter the particular challenge presented by the Quran’s unique literary structure. He diverts attention to widespread doubt without addressing the fundamental claim. It interrogates an alternative category (the subjectivity of uniqueness) rather than examining if or how the Quranic challenge may be addressed. As a result, he violates the relevance criterion. Krauss violates the acceptability criterion. He suggests that due to the ambiguity of interpretations, they are either invalid or misleading. This generalization lacks definite evidence. He does not explicitly tackle how and why the embryological references in the Quran are incorrect; instead, he depends on the assumption that the interpretations are ambiguous. He commits the fallacy of ambiguity. He employs the term “vague” without illustrating which interpretations are vague and why. Regarding the criterion of sufficiency, Krauss assumes that “Just because a text can be interpreted in a way that seems to fit science does not mean it was intended as a scientific

document.” He commits the fallacy of arguing from ignorance. He suggests that the Quran is being misinterpreted to align with scientific principles without making this claim covertly. This suggests manipulation without providing definitive evidence. As a result, he violates the sufficiency criterion. Regarding the rebuttal criterion, Krauss disregards Tzortzis’s arguments on the Quran’s literary distinctiveness and scientific alignment (e.g., embryology), instead repeating criticisms without directly addressing such claims. As a result, he violates the rebuttal criterion.

Here, Krauss performs a representative speech act of stating. He believes that literary uniqueness is subjective and not a definitive criterion for divinity. He also believes that ancient texts are unsuitable for answering evolving scientific questions. In terms of Grice’s Maxims, Krauss breaches the quantity maxim by employing “many texts”. It is an overstatement trope (hyperbole) to reinforce interaction and persuade the audience that the texts are not a rare exception but a common pattern. CPs claims that to reproduce utterances without a fallacy, hedges and modification can be utilised: “It could be argued that literary uniqueness is to some extent subjective. Possibly, many texts that have been considered unique throughout history still appear to reflect the cultural influences of their respective periods.”

Extract (3)

Craig: “If God does not exist, then objective moral values do not exist. But objective moral values do exist. Therefore, God exists.”

Hitchens: “I say that what is moral is what you decide you think is moral. We are evolved primates; we are half a chromosome away from a chimpanzee, and it shows. But we can, by conscious reasoning, discussion, moral suasion, and without any supernatural authority, work out what is right and what is wrong. We have to, because if we do not, we are lost.”

Analysis of the Extract (3)

Hitchens uses many premises to prove that God does not exist, and humans establish morality without supernatural authority. Humans are evolved primates, biologically close to chimpanzees (premise). Morality is not based on supernatural authority (premise). Humans possess the ability to employ conscious reasoning, dialogue, and moral persuasion to determine right and wrong (premise). We must undertake this moral thinking independently (premise). Then, morality may and should be established by humans without dependence on any supernatural authority (conclusion).

According to Damer’s (2009) criteria, Hitchens violates the structural criterion. He asserts that morality is established by rational thought rather than divine authority. He commits the fallacy of inconsistency. He posits

that we are evolved beings while simultaneously asserting that we must depend exclusively on rational speech for morality. It may be self-contradictory by neglecting the impact of evolutionary instincts on moral judgments. Regarding the relevance and acceptability criteria, Hitchens violates the relevance criterion. He invokes our biological beginnings to form a perspective on morality. The evolutionary derivation of humans from monkeys does not logically determine the existence or non-existence of objective morality independent of God. It shifts the debate from moral philosophy to evolutionary biology, which is not immediately relevant to the normative question of what should be considered moral. He commits the fallacy of genetic determinism. He attempts to explain or rationalize moral standards based only on evolutionary proximity to animals. Although evolution may explain our inherent tendencies, it does not justify normative standards. This may confuse descriptive biology with prescriptive ethics. Thus, relevance is violated. The acceptability criterion is violated. He commits the fallacy of ambiguity. He employs terms such as “moral” and “right” that require precise definitions, as ambiguity may result in varied interpretations. Regarding the sufficiency criterion, his assertion that “But we can, by conscious reasoning, discussion, moral suasion, and without any supernatural authority....” Lacks sufficient evidence. He tries to prove that reasoning alone is sufficient for establishing moral truth. He commits the fallacy of insufficient evidence. He does not present a philosophical grounding or explanation of how reasoning replaces divine command theory. He derives a conclusion regarding moral thinking from a restricted number of cases or personal experiences, which may result in premature generalizations of human moral capacities. The rebuttal criterion is also violated. Hitchens fails to acknowledge the influence of religious or cultural moral frameworks, which may present substantial difficulties to the assertion that morality is exclusively a secondary product of human reasoning. He commits the fallacy of ignoring the counter-evidence. He does not tackle the role of religious or cultural moral framework. He also commits the fallacy of ad hominem. He attacks the character of those who hold them instead of tackling the substance of the claims.

According to the Speech Acts Theory, Hitchens performs a representative SA of stating “I say that what is moral is what you decide you think is moral. We are evolved primates; we are half a chromosome away from a chimpanzee.” He believes that the nature of morality is subjective and determined by individual judgment. He also conveys his belief or scientific claim about human evolution. He conveys factual information to support a naturalistic view of human nature. He issues a SA of the commanding. He implies that we should engage in reason and moral suasion instead of depending on supernatural authority: “But we can, by conscious reasoning,

... work out what's right and what's wrong". He also uses a directive SA of command in this utterance: "In fact, we have to, because if we don't, we are lost." He commands the audience to adopt a rational approach to morality. In terms of Grice's Maxims, Hitchens employs rhetorical tropes in this utterance, "We are evolved primates; we are half a chromosome away from a chimpanzee". He uses a metaphor to compare humans to chimpanzees. He violates the quality maxim to emphasize our biological closeness. He implies that our morality is not divinely instilled but evolved. In this utterance, "Half a chromosome away from a chimpanzee," He violates the quantity maxim. It is achieved by using (half) to exaggerate the situation to influence the audience. He exaggerates the smallness of the difference for rhetorical effect, even though humans and chimpanzees are genetically similar. CPs claim that to reproduce utterances without a fallacy, hedge can be used: "We might be considered evolved primates, possibly sharing close genetic links with chimpanzees", and addition can be used: "We are evolved primates, sharing many biological traits with chimpanzees, yet we also possess unique cognitive and moral capacities."

Extract (4)

Hitchens: "The idea of hell is sadistic and morally repugnant. I could never worship a god who sends people to eternal torment."

Craig: "Disliking a doctrine doesn't make it false. The existence of God isn't dependent on whether we find His actions emotionally satisfying."

Analysis of the Extract (4)

The fallacy maker argues that he could never worship a god who sends people to eternal suffering by stating that the idea of hell entails eternal suffering (premise). Eternal pain is horrible and morally repugnant (premise). A morally repugnant doctrine is undeserving of worship (premise). Therefore, he concludes that he could never worship such a God (conclusion). This argument appeals to emotion and subjective moral standards, which may not serve as a rational basis to assess the theological coherence or truth of a doctrine.

According to Damer's (2013) criteria, Hitchens violates the structural criterion. He presents a personal belief without offering a premise that logically supports his conclusion. His reasoning posits that the moral repugnance of hell undermines the existence of a God who would create it. The conclusion depends on an absent normative premise, such as: "Any god who allows eternal suffering is unworthy of worship," or "Eternal punishment is always unjust and morally unacceptable." However, Hitchens fails to state or defend this normative assumption, even though his

conclusion depends entirely on it. This is the fallacy of the elusive normative premise since the move from “eternal suffering exists” to “God is not worthy of worship” is not logically valid unless one accepts the unstated moral assumption, which should be stated and defended. Hitchens’ emotional and moral assessment of hell is not rationally relevant to the truth of God’s existence. He commits the fallacy of appeal to emotion. As a result, he violates the relevance criterion. Regarding the acceptability criterion, his premises depend on subjective moral evaluations (“sadistic,” “morally repugnant”) that lack broad acceptance in logical or empirical contexts. The sufficiency criterion is violated. Hitchens fails to present sufficient evidence or arguments refuting the presence of God, relying instead on his emotional response to the notion of hell. His assertion is predicated exclusively on his ethical evaluation, which may not be universally acknowledged. He commits the fallacy of insufficient evidence. He does not support his conclusion with sufficient theological and philosophical arguments. The rebuttal criterion is also violated. Hitchens commits the fallacy of ignoring the counter-evidence. He fails to engage with counterarguments, including theological explanations of hell, the idea of justice, or divine mercy.

According to Speech Acts Theory, Hitchens performs a representative SA of stating. He asserts a belief about the nature of hell and reflects his moral stance, committing to its description as cruel. He utilises a directive SA of criticizing in this utterance, “sadistic and morally repugnant.” He criticizes the idea of hell and reveals his moral disgust by expressing his attitude toward the doctrine of hell. He also employs commissive SA. He commits himself to a future action (not worshipping such a god). In terms of Grice’s Maxims, Hitchens utilises a metaphor to compare the idea of hell with sadism. He violates the quality maxim, suggesting cruelty and enjoyment of others ‘suffering. In this utterance, “Eternal torment,” Hitchens violates the quantity maxim. It is achieved by using it (eternal torment) to exaggerate the situation to influence the audience by expressing it as unending suffering, making it intensely dramatic. In terms of CP mechanisms, reproduction suggests using hedge and modification to reduce the fallacy in the above extract. The reproduced one is “The idea of hell could be viewed by some as morally troubling”, “I might personally find it difficult to worship a god whose doctrine involves eternal punishment.” The reproduction mechanism also suggests the total avoidance of the entire extract due to its context.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the fallacies underlying two religious debates. It has reached the following conclusions: Firstly, pragmatic strategies are utilized to convey the fallacy in the two religious debates. Representative speech acts of stating, commanding, and criticizing are used. Stating presents religious

claims as logical issues rather than beliefs, while the commanding speech act encourages the audience to dismiss religious faith, and the criticizing seeks to challenge the authority of religious texts. Secondly, the fallacy makers often employ various fallacies to highlight negative aspects of their beliefs. The fallacy of elusive normative premise allows them to make judgments without clearly stating the underlying beliefs, assuming the audience shares them. The genetic fallacy undermines opposing views by focusing on their origins rather than content, appealing to audiences concerned with supernatural origins. The fallacy of using the wrong reasons involves supporting conclusions with irrelevant arguments. The argument from ignorance fallacy is employed to address deficiencies in metaphysical understanding. Debaters employ it to reinforce faith-based beliefs by suggesting that the lack of disproof equates to proof. Lastly, ignoring counter-evidence fallacy includes ignoring or omitting relevant evidence that contradicts one's perspective, which can create the appearance that there is no significant evidence against it. Acknowledging counterarguments may weaken their rhetorical position or unsettle believers. Thirdly, in terms of rhetorical devices, the fallacy makers employ hyperbole and rhetorical questions to boost the shortcomings of their competitiveness. These three stages are encapsulated inside the mechanisms of CPs, which involve stance and reproduction. The last one is accomplished by providing alternatives for the utterances that represent the fallacy. Thus, the research questions have been answered.

References

- Abbas, N. F., Muslah, A. F., & Najem, A. S. (2024). Fallacy as a Strategy of Argumentation in Political Debates. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 14(8), 2399-2407. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1408.12>
- Abdulmajeed, R. K., & Yunis, L. L. (2019). *Islamophobia Fallacies in the UK Press Headlines*. *Opcion*, 35(19), 2568-2586. ISSN 1012-1587 / ISSN: 2477-9385.
- Al-Hindawi, F. H., & Mohammed, W. S. M. (2018). *Towards an Analytical Model in Critical Pragmatics*. *Arab World English Journal*, 9(4), 162–176. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no4.11>
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford University Press.
- Cruse, D. (2000). *"Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics."* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Damer, T. (2009). *Attacking Faulty Reasoning: A Practical Guide to Fallacy-Free Arguments*. Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

- Damer, T. E. (2013). *Attacking Faulty Reasoning: A Practical Guide to Fallacy-Free Arguments*. (7th ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no4.11>.
- DuBois, J. (2007). The Stance Triangle. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), *Stance-taking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (pp.139-182). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Freeley, A. and Steinberg, D. (2008). *Argumentation and Debate: Critical Thinking for Reasoned Decision Making*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- Grice, P. (1975). Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, (pp.41-58). New York: Academic Press.
<https://www.sfu.ca/~jeffpell/Cogs300/GriceLogicConvers75.pdf>
- Hadi, M. M., & Mehdi, W. S. (2023). A Pragmatic Study of Narcissism in the American Movie Big Eyes (2014). *Journal of the College of Education for Women*, 34(3), 1-37. Retrieved January 9, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374342090_A_Pragmatic_Study_of_Narcissism_in_the_American_Movie_Big_Eyes_2014
- IERA. (2012, March 14). Lawrence Krauss vs Hamza Tzortzis | Islam vs Atheism Debate [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/uSwJuOPG4FI>
- Johnson, R. H. (2000). *Manifest rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.
- Mehdi, W. S. (2020). American Sexism: A Critical Pragmatic Perspective. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies* 4(3),120-139. <https://oapub.org/lit/index.php/EJLLL/article/view/225>
- Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics: An Introduction*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Muhammed, W. S. (2018). *A Critical Pragmatic Approach to Racial Discourse in American Contexts* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Babylon, College of Education for Human Sciences.
- Nashmi, B., & Mehdi, W. S. (2022). A Pragmatic Study of Identity Representation in American Political Speeches. *Journal of the College of Education for Women*, 33(1), 16–32. <https://doi.org/10.36231/coedw.v33i1.1560Pragmatics>. *Arab World English Journal*, 9 (4), 162 -176.
- Reasonable Faith Org. (2012, April 4). *Does God Exist? William Lane Craig vs. Christopher Hitchens - Full Debate [HD]* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/0tYm41hb48o>
- Searle, J. R. (1976). *A Classification of Illocutionary Acts*. *Language in Society*, 5(1), 1–23.
- Tindale, C. (2007). *Fallacies and Argument Appraisal: Critical Reasoning and Argumentation*: Cambridge University Press.
- Toulmin, S. & Reike, R., Janik, A. (1984). *An Introduction to Reasoning*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.
- Van E. H., & Grootendorst, R., 2003. *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation: The Pragma-Dialectical Approach*. Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/245101639_A_Systematic_Theory_of_Argumentation_The_Pragma-Dialectical_Approach

- Van Eemeren, F., & Grootendorst, R. (1983). *Speech Acts in Argumentation*. Foris Publications.
- Verschueren, J. (1999). Whose Discipline? Some Critical Reflections on Linguistic Pragmatics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 31, 869–879.
- Walton, D. (1994). *Begging the Question as a Pragmatic Fallacy*. DOI: 10.1007/BF01063922