



# Opinion

## The Daily Campus

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# People don't get 'Opinions'

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From the political stage to Tiktok comments, I've seen an onslaught of misunderstanding as to how opinions work and what they are. Oxford Languages defines an opinion as "a view or judgment formed about something, not necessarily based on fact or knowledge," while Merriam Webster takes the more abstract denotation of a "belief stronger than impression and less strong than positive knowledge." The issue in practical colloquial usage is that what constitutes an opinion and its implications are continually renegotiated or argued. Opinions can be purely subjective preferences, while others are value-based judgments that can be argued with reasons. The following are various scenarios that showcase different presumptions about opinions and their potential weaknesses.

Case I (They didn't assert it as fact): "The customer is always right." This is a business philosophy or a common adage, not an objective fact. When people state their preferences or individual opinions on a matter, many often assume them to assert this to be the factual, impartial truth. No... a customer coming to a cashier for a mani-pedi at a Chick Fil A is not objectively right.

Case II (Opinions can be argued): "'To Zion' by Lauryn Hill is the greatest song of all time because of its impact!" "No, that's mid. 'Spooky' by Dusty Springfield is more impactful because it's older and has had more time to create influence." Even though opinions are not wholly facts, they can still be argued — logically, this is not the case when it comes to sensory impressions or personal likings themselves, but when an opinion is situated on a logical pretense. If you both qualify the greatness of a song on its impact, you can argue why each song has more cultural impact and offer comparative criticism.

Case III (Opinions aren't absent from judgment): Out of a similar line of reasoning as Case II, people will often defend and isolate themselves from any form of opinionated criticism. This remains heavily ironic as in dismissing the criticism, you've already made an evaluative judgment — simultaneously arguing opinions to be valid in their own right while disregarding the critical opinion. I'll see this from political commentators who attempt to shield their fallacious pretense. Establishing such a precedent of incontrovertible belief distorts the very fact-oriented pretenses the belief relies on; insulating beliefs from scrutiny petrifies opinion and petrified beliefs have historically been the substrate of dogma and bigotry. If destructive societal ideas become unquestionable, we will fail to progress from those ideas. How can you argue murder to be wrong if the opinion that murder is right is incorrigible? Certain conflicts and arguments are necessary for societal growth.

Case IV (Opinions don't always need to be argued): Let people live. For opinions of little import and influence like what your favorite album or color is, there is no moral imperative to argue against such; the pleasure derived from liking something can easily be corroded by the impetus of argument and it shouldn't be pursued when the argumentative consequence has a relatively lesser societal benefit. Though, considering Case III, what's considered important enough to be argued can itself be argued.

Case V (Opinions differ in axiology): Axiology refers to the branch of philosophy which deals with how we place value on things and how we differentiate between different modes of value. We can decide eating a hamburger has both ethical and pleasurable value for it sustains us and tastes good; individually, people dictate which form of value is of greater import. In an axiological



A pop art style cartoon of a businessman stating "in my humble opinion". Currently, many seem to have lost the meaning of what an "opinion" actually is. PHOTO COURTESY OF DREAMSTIME.COM.

line of reasoning, some may argue "the Wuthering Heights adaptation was better than the original" because they evaluate the quality of a movie based off a specific form of aesthetic appeal — the attractiveness of the cast or cinematography. Others may criticize the adaptation out of a perceived lack of textual and moral fidelity which they value — opinions even when based in fact may

depend upon varying individual values. Some may advocate against free speech restrictions as they value hedonism or individual liberties, while others argue in favor in cases of hate speech due to a priority of social welfare. Both individuals may be working from the same underlying facts about the film or speech yet arrive at different conclusions because they differ in axiology and how

they weigh the facts.

Case VI (Argumentum ad Populum): This is likely the simplest and, perhaps, most common fallacy mentioned. An opinion is not of greater logical validity than another just because it's more popular. Assuming harm to be immoral, the most common counterexample is slavery. If society vastly agreed and legislated slavery, it would not be logically valid under this form of ethics. While many more opinion-based logical fallacies exist, I've been seeing popularity conflated with validity more often recently — these cases contest presumptions prior to argument.

Why do these presumptions occur? Maybe they're cognitive biases rendered to support individual preferences or retroactive delineations that form bigotry. Regardless, it is important, in my opinion, for societal growth to garner a proper understanding of opinion within and outside of the scope of argument. Without such an awareness, opinion collapses into different forms of failure: false objectivity, where opinions are veiled as facts; empty relativism, where all positions are established as equally valid; or wanton conflict, where arguable differences are either over- or under-contested.



Cartoon figures all try to speak over each other's speech bubble. Everyone has a different meaning of what they believe an opinion should be, this has led to recent discourse across the media. PHOTO COURTESY OF @EVERYBACK ON PINTEREST.