

Week Three

Becoming a Fair-minded Thinker

Weak-sense critical thinkers (sophist)

Believers see mistakes in the thinking of nonbelievers; nonbelievers see mistakes in the thinking of believers. Those who oppose abortion readily see mistakes in the arguments for abortion; those who favor abortion readily mistakes in the arguments against abortion.

Most significantly, this kind of thinking fails to consider viewpoints that contradict its own viewpoint.

Practice:

Read articles to look for situations in which someone deliberately hides or distorts information in pursuing a goal.

Strong-sense critical thinker

What does fair-mindedness require?

Intellectual humility (being aware of one's biases and prejudices as well as the limitations of one's viewpoint) and **intellectual arrogance** (a natural tendency to think one knows more than one does know)

Practice:

What is (name of subject)? What is the main goal of studying this subject? What are people in this field trying to accomplish? What kinds of questions do they ask? What kinds of problems do they solve? What sorts of information or data do they gather? How do they go about gathering information in ways that are distinctive to this field? What is the most basic idea, concept, or theory in this field? How did studying this field change your view of the world?

Intellectual courage (facing and fairly addressing ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints even when this is painful) and **intellectual cowardice** (fear of ideas that do not conform to one's own + fear of rejection)

Practice:

Try to think of a circumstance in which either you or someone you know defended a view that was unpopular in a group to which you belonged. Describe the circumstances and, especially, how the group responded. If you cannot think of an

example, what is the significance of that realization?

Intellectual empathy (to put oneself imaginatively in the place of others on a routine basis, so as to genuinely understand them) and **intellectual self-centeredness**

Practice:

During a disagreement with someone, switch roles.

Intellectual integrity (hold yourself to the same standards to which you hold others) and **intellectual hypocrisy** (the mind is naturally egocentric, and it is naturally hypocritical, yet at the same time skillfully able to rationalize whatever it thinks and however it leads us to act)

Practice:

The context within which I fail to have intellectual integrity is. . .

Intellectual perseverance and **intellectual laziness**

Intellectual perseverance is rarely fostered in school. Instead, students are often encouraged to complete tasks quickly.

Practice:

Most people have much more physical perseverance than intellectual perseverance. On the one hand, most are ready to admit “No pain, no gain!” when talking about the body. On the other hand, most give up quickly when faced with a frustrating intellectual problem. Thinking of your own responses, especially in classes, how would you evaluate your own intellectual perseverance?

Confidence in reason (based on the belief that one’s own higher interests and those of humankind at large are best served by giving the freest play to reason, by encouraging people to come to their own conclusions through the use of their own rational faculties) and **distrust of reason** (By nature, people are not adept at analyzing their views. Yet we tend to have complete confidence in our own views. The more we analyze our views, the more we see problems in our views and the less we want to hold on to views we have not analyzed)

Practice:

Think of a recent situation in which you felt yourself being defensive, and you now realize that you were not able to listen to an argument you disagreed with, although

the argument had merit. In this situation, you apparently could not be moved by good reason.

Intellectual autonomy (thinking for oneself while adhering to standards of rationality) and **intellectual conformity** (What makes this activity difficult is that we often perceive ourselves as thinking for ourselves when we are actually conforming to others.)

Practice:

One belief I have learned from my peer group is. . . In analyzing this belief, I do/do not think it is rational because. . .

The interdependence of intellectual virtues

The intellectual traits are interdependent.

To the extent that we are motivated unconsciously to believe what we want to believe, what is most comfortable to believe, what puts us in a good light, what serves our selfish interest, we are unable to function as rational persons.

To what extent would you like to become a person whose characteristics are defined by the intellectual traits explained here? How important is that goal to you?