

Week 4

The First Four Stages of Development

Stage 1: the unreflective thinker (We are unaware of significant problems in our thinking.)

At this stage, we don't know how to analyze and access our thinking. We don't know how to determine whether our purposes are clearly formulated, our assumptions justified, our conclusions logically.

Practice:

Describe the role that thinking is playing in your life

What was a recent assumption you made that you should not have made

Explain the role of egocentric thinking in your life.

Stage 2: the challenged thinker (we become aware of problems in our thinking.)

We cannot solve a problem we do not own or deal with a condition we deny.

Without knowledge of our ignorance, we cannot seek the knowledge we lack.

We often

- Make questionable assumptions;
- Use false, incomplete, or misleading information;
- Make inferences that do not follow from the evidence we have;
- Fail to recognize important implications in our thought;
- Fail to recognize problems we have;
- Form faulty concepts;
- Reason within prejudiced points of view; and
- Think egocentrically and irrationally.

Practice:

What's wrong?

The teenager who thinks that smoking is sexy.

The motorcyclist who reasons that helmets obstruct vision and, therefore, riding with one is safer.

The person who thinks he can drive safely while drunk.

The person who decides to marry a self-centered person with the thought that he or she will "change" after marriage

(one of the signs of emerging reflectiveness: You find yourself becoming interested in the role of self-deception in thinking.)

Practice:

See whether you can identify any problems in your thinking. For example, a behavior of yours that somehow is creating problems, either for you or for others.

Stage 3: the beginning thinker (we try to improve but without regular practice)

Some of the major influences that have shaped your thinking (and ours):

1. You were born into a culture.
2. You were born at some point in time.
3. You were born in some place.
4. You were raised by parents with particular beliefs.
5. You formed various associations (largely based on who was around you)
- Our minds have no mechanism for screening out false beliefs.

Practice:

Imagine yourself in another place in time.

1. The time within which I am imagining that I live is. . .
2. The details of the situation are. . .
3. If I had lived in this place in time, I most likely would hold the following beliefs (about religion, my country, sexual conventions and taboos, gender issues, relationships, people of differences, etc.)

We think within a variety of domains: sociological, philosophical, ethical, intellectual, anthropological, ideological and political, economic, historical, biological, theological, psychological.

Explain how

- our minds are influenced by the social groups to which we belong
- our minds are influenced by our personal philosophy
- our minds are influenced by the extent to which we behave in accordance with our obligations and the way we define our obligations
- our minds are influenced by the ideas we hold, by the manner in which we reason and deal with abstractions and abstract systems.
- Our minds are influenced by cultural practices, mores, and taboos
- Our minds are influenced by the structure of power and its use by interest groups around us
- Our minds are influenced by the economic conditions under which we live
- Our minds are influenced by our history and by the way we tell our history

- Our minds are influenced by our biology and neurology
- Our minds are influenced by our religious beliefs and attitudes
- Our minds are influenced by our personality and personal psychology.

Trap 1: dogmatic absolutism (believing that truth is acquired not through reasoning and inquiry but, rather, through some predetermined, nonintellectual faith)

Trap 2: subjective relativism (believing that there are no intellectual standards by which to judge anything as true or false)

Practice:

- Explain the difference between absolutism and subjective relativism
- Make a list of some things you can do to begin your development as a disciplined thinker

Stage 4: the practicing thinker (we recognize the necessity of regular practice.)

1. Used “wasted” time

- When did I do my worst thinking today?
- When did I do my best thinking?
- What did I actually think about today?
- Did I figure out anything?
- Did I allow any negative thinking to frustrate me unnecessarily?
- If I had to repeat today, what would I do differently? Why?
- Did I do anything today to further my long-term goals?
- Did I act in accordance with my own expressed values?
- If I were to spend every day this way for 10 years, would I, at the end, have accomplished something worthy of that time?

2. Handle a problem a day

- What exactly is the problem?
- How can I put it into the form of a question?

3. Internalize intellectual standards (clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, fairness) Focus one week on clarity, the next on accuracy, and so on. For example,

- When are you being unclear in communicating with others?
- When are others unclear in what they are saying?
- When you are writing a paragraph, ask yourself whether you are clear about what you are trying to say.

4. Keep an intellectual journal

- Describe only situations that are emotionally significant to you
 - Describe only one situation at a time
 - Describe how you behaved in the situation, being specific and exact (what did you say? What did you do? How did you react?)
 - Analyze, in the light of what you have written, what precisely was going on in the situation; dig beneath the surface
 - Assess the implications of your analysis (what did you learn about yourself? What would you do differently if you could relive the situation?)
5. Practice intellectual strategies (will deal with the strategies in Week 16)
 6. Reshape your character (see teaching materials for “Become a fair-minded thinker”) For example, if concentrating on intellectual humility, begin to notice when you admit you are wrong. Notice when you refuse to admit you are wrong, even in the face of glaring evidence that you are truly wrong. Notice when your arrogance keeps you from learning, when you say to yourself, for example, “I already know everything I need to know about this subject,” or, “I know as much as he does. Who does he think he is, forcing his opinions onto me?”
 7. Deal with your ego
 - Did I become irritable over small things?
 - Did I do or say anything irrational to get my way?
 - Did I fail to speak my mind when I felt strongly something and then later feel resentment?
 8. Redefine the way you see things (We live in a world, both personal and social, in which every situation is defined. How a situation is defined determines how we feel about it, how we act in it, and what implications it has for us. Many of the negative definitions we apply to situations in our lives could be transformed into positive definitions.) For example, redefine your initial approach to a member of the other sex not in terms of the definition, “His/her response will determine whether I am an attractive person,” but in terms of the definition, “Let me test to see if this person is initially drawn to me, given the way he or she perceives me.”
 9. Get in touch with your emotions
 - whenever you feel some negative emotion, systematically ask yourself,
 - “What, exactly, is the thinking that leads to this emotion?”
 - How might this thinking be flawed?
 - What am I assuming?
 - Should I be making these assumptions?
 - What information is my thinking based on? Is that information reliable?
 10. Analyze group influences on your life
- For a given group,

- What are you required or expected to believe?
- What are you “forbidden” to do?
- If you conclude that your group does not require you to believe anything or has no taboos, you can conclude that you have not deeply analyzed that group.

Practice:

Write out a basic plan for beginning your development as a thinker. List the first three strategies you will incorporate into your thinking and how you plan to do this. Be specific and detailed. Then at the end of each day, revisit your list and see how you are progressing. Add to your list as you internalize previously learned ideas.

Stage 5 The Advanced Thinker (we advance in accordance with our practice)

Stage 6 The Accomplished Thinker (skilled and insightful thinking become second nature to us.)