

Week 5 Self-understanding

Goal: to lay a foundation for better understanding the nature of the human mind. Only through this insight can we hope to understand and transform ourselves. One of the fundamental challenges most humans face in learning is that our life is dominated by a tendency to think and feel egocentrically.

Monitor the egocentrism in your thought and life

The tendency for humans to think in an egocentric fashion means that , typically, we have little or no real insight into the nature of our own thinking and emotions.

We can restrain our egocentrism only by developing explicit habits that enable us to do so. By owning these responses when they occur and restructuring the thinking that is feeding those emotions.

What should you do if you are gripped by the egocentric fear of appearing ridiculous or dumb when you want to ask a question in the classroom? What kind of thinking should you replace it with?

Practice:

Think of the most self-centered person you know. This can be someone who is fundamentally selfish or arrogant. Describe the person's behavior in detail. Based on the person's behavior, how would you describe his or her thinking? What types of feelings does he or she display? What is the person motivated to do? To what extent does the person use other people to get what he or she wants? To what extent does the person exhibit sincere concern for the thoughts and feelings of others?

Make a commitment to fair-mindedness

No one defines himself or herself as an egocentric person. One of the ways to confront our own egocentrism is by exploring the extent to which we have allowed our identity to be egocentrically shaped.

How do our parents, acquaintances or friends, lovers, teachers, religion, schooling, politicians influence us?

It's true because I believe it. ⇐ What's the assumption here?

It's true because we believe it. ⇐ What's the assumption here?

It's true because I want to believe it.

It's true because I have always believed it. ← What's the assumption here?

It's true because it is in my selfish interest to believe it.

If we consciously recognize these tendencies in ourselves and deliberately and systematically seek to overcome them by thinking fairmindedly, our definition of ourselves can aid our development as thinkers. We can begin to divide our thoughts into two categories: (1) thoughts that advance the agenda of our egocentric nature, and (2) thoughts that develop our rational fairmindedness.

Recognizing the mind's three distinctive functions

The mind has basically three basic functions: thinking, feeling, and wanting.

The function of thinking is

The function of feeling is

The function of wanting is

They are inter-related. When we think we are being threatened, we feel. . . and we want. . . .

When we think a subject we are required to study has no relationship to our lives and values, we feel. . . and we want. . . .

Understand that you have a special relationship to your mind

The trick is to make that unconscious relationship conscious and deliberate. For every positive thought the mind "believes," it naturally tends to generate a positive emotion to fit it.

The meaning we create can be grounded in insight, objective reality, a fantasy, or even a dysfunctional interpretation of reality. Explain.

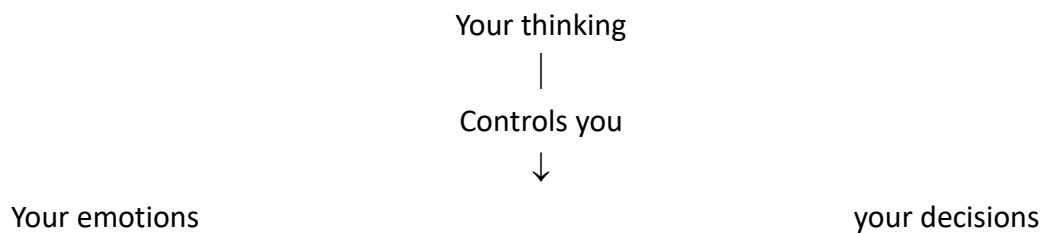
Considering two students faced with the task of improving their writing ability. The first holds a negative attitude, while the second positive.

What may happen if we are force-fed math in a way that ignores our emotional response?

How can we be self-motivated no matter how boring the class itself might seem?

What questions can I ask myself if I am bored in class? (What is the thinking that influences me not to want to learn this? What exactly is the value of learning this? Is this something I need to learn? Will this be useful to me? If so, what do I need to do

to learn it?)



Do you control your thinking?

Practice:

Think of a situation you were in recently in which you experienced a negative emotion such as anger, frustration, depression, insecurity, or fear.

1. Write out in detail what was going on in the situation and how you felt in the situation.
2. Now try to figure out the thinking you were doing in the circumstance that led to the negative feeling. Write out the thinking in detail.
3. Then write how your thinking and feelings affected your behavior. (Given these thoughts and emotions, what were you motivated to do?)

Connect academic subjects to your life and problems

We need to experience non-egocentric thinking.

What can historical thoughts help us? Sociological thoughts? Philosophical thoughts? Economic thoughts?

Learn both intellectually and emotionally

We spend most of our time thinking about what we personally want or value. The subjects we take in college contribute to our educational growth only insofar as we are able to relate what we are studying to our personal lives.

What is the relevance of literature to our life?

If learning becomes sheer drudgery and you don't see value in it, what might you think? How should you think if you want to change the situation? (Here we find a vicious circle.)

Why do uneducated people tend not to value education?

The more emotionally powerful connections you can make between what you study and what you value in life, the easier you will find learning to be.

Practice:

Select one of your courses and try to write out the most fundamental, the most significant concept in the course and then make a list of ways in which you can use this idea in your life.

Or make a list of important questions that thinkers within the field of study might ask. Write out your answer or explain orally.

The three functions of the mind

Thinking

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**Makes sense of
the world**

judging

perceiving

analyzing

clarifying

determining

comparing

synthesizing

feeling

|

**Tell us how we
are doing**

happy

sad

depressed

anxious

stressed

calm

worried

excited

wanting

|

**Drives us to act
as we do**

goals

desires

purposes

agendas

values

motives