

# Fair-Mindedness

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It's You and Me Kid, and I'm Not So Sure About You

Chapter 9

Introduction to Critical Reasoning

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# Overview

- 291 This chapter will cover:
  - Defense mechanisms that cloud our thinking
  - The effect of conformity on critical thought
  - Ideas that trigger emotional responses
  - Active listening techniques that foster open-mindedness and empathy

# Ourselves in the Center

- 291 There is a tendency in human nature arising from a childhood predisposition to consider ourselves as the center of the universe.
- This self-centered way of treating the issues has historically clouded our science, our interpretation of events in the world, our view of other cultures and our belief systems.

# Ethnocentrism or Sociocentrism

- 291 Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view one's own race or culture as central, based on the deep-seated belief that one's own group is superior to all others.
- We can only hold onto ethnocentrism when we can consider other cultures as less important or deserving than our own.
- A critical thinker can counter ethnocentrism by developing the trait of fair-mindedness.

# Fair-mindedness

1. 291 A respect for people whose ethnicities and traditions are different from our own,
2. A willingness to hear and understand other viewpoints,
3. An openness to change when new information or insight warrants that change.

# Egocentrism

- 291, 292 The individual version of ethnocentrism has been defined as a tendency to view everything else in relationship to oneself.
- One's desires, values and beliefs are often uncritically used as the norm of all judgment and experience.
- Egocentrism is one of the fundamental impediments to critical thinking.

# Egocentrism

- 292 To be logical, fair and less egocentric:
  1. To recognize the basic defense mechanisms we use to distort reality and to deceive ourselves and others
  2. To recognize areas where we, for whatever reasons, have trouble being rational
  3. To understand and have empathy (the ability to share another's feelings and perspective) for someone else's viewpoint

# Fixing Belief, Charles Peirce

- Four Methods of Fixing Belief:
  - Method of Tenacity — Holding to what you believe just because **you** believe it
  - Method of Authority — Someone higher than yourself setting your beliefs for you
  - A-priori Method — Presuppositional thinking
  - Method of Science — Method of science

# Strong Beliefs

- 292 There is nothing wrong with taking strong, even immovable, stands on issues.
- We don't want to be so open-minded that we have no core beliefs or opinions at all.
- What is unfair is taking a strong stand without having thought carefully and honestly about all the relevant factors involved in an issue.
- The most fair, ethical and persuasive attitude is one of respect and politeness to those with whom we disagree.

# Defending our Egos

- 293 Are you thinking or just rearranging your prejudices?  
Walter Martin

# Defending our Egos

- Defense mechanisms are strategies we use to avoid uncomfortable realities.
- Two defense mechanisms that interfere with clear thinking:
  - Rationalization
  - Denial

# Rationalization

- 294 Rationalization is a defense mechanism that underlies many other defense mechanisms.
- It is our way of justifying or making sense out of things that don't make sense.
- It's a way of explaining things away that should be brought under examination.
- See examples. Do exercises on 294, 295

# Cognitive Dissonance

- 295 A state of mind that occurs whenever two ideas (cognitions) are out of sync and create discomfort (dissonance) in our thinking. Leon Festinger
- We attempt to make conflicting ideas harmonious by rationalizing.
- We explain away inconsistencies between our principles and our actions rather than face them and deal with them.
- Festinger considers this need a basic drive like the need for food.

# Rationalization

- 295 The more we give up our critical thinking abilities, the harder it becomes to face our errors in judgment, and personal and social tragedies can be the result.

# Denial

- 296 Denial is also a state of mind that blocks critical thinking, because it involves the repression of or refusal to recognize any negative or threatening information.
- 297 Denial and rationalization are often found together as defense mechanisms , when truth is denied and behavior is rationalized.

# Resolution

- 298 Critical thinkers take the time and energy required to recognize the weak points of their own side of an issue and the good points of their opponents.
- They search for truth rather than victory and are willing to change when presented with new information instead of insisting on maintaining a position that can no longer be supported.

# Resolution

- 298 We may still find that there are times when our emotional reactions cause us to lose rational perspectives.
- We need to be aware of and adjust for our strong feelings, rather than denying that they have an impact on us.

# Conformity and Ways to Overcome it

- 298, 299 The principle of *social proof*... states that “The greater the number of people who find any idea correct, the more the idea will be correct.” Robert Cialdini
- In general, when we are unsure of ourselves, when the situation is unclear and ambiguous, when uncertainty reigns, we are most likely to look to and accept the actions of others as correct.
- Bystanders watch a murder and do nothing about it.
- [T]he cause of the inaction was not apathy, but conformity to the inaction of others.

# Conformity and Ways to Overcome it

- 299 “it is clear that widely publicized aggression has the nasty tendency to spread to similar victims, no matter whether the aggression is inflicted on the self or on another.” Robert Cialdini
- This is true whether the aggression is suicide or murder. It seems as if there is an increase in suicides or murders, “copycats.”

# Conformity and Ways to Overcome it

- 300 Conformity occurs when we follow what others in a public crowd are doing; we also find that conformity is often a necessary condition for being accepted in a group.
- The pressure may come in the form of reasoning, teasing, bribery, shaming, pleading, complimenting, or, usually as a last resort, shunning.
- 301 The tendency to go along with a group's decision has been labeled by Yale psychologist Irving L. Janis as "groupthink."

# Conformity and Ways to Overcome it

- How can we overcome the effects of conformity and groupthink on our actions?
- Read list on 301.

# Areas Where We Have Trouble Being Rational

- 301 Trouble spots in our thinking are called “points of logical vulnerability.”
- 302 There are topics about which a person, we say, “just cannot be rational.” That person has difficulty being objective about that issue.
- What are your points of logical vulnerability?

# Areas Where We Have Trouble Being Rational

- 303 There is a difference between having a strong, well-considered conviction, a value about which you are not flexible and those areas where you are just not rational.

# Areas Where We Have Trouble Being Rational

- Antidotes for Points of Logical Vulnerability
  - Albert Korzypski and other general semanticists, have come up with several cures to for irrational statements.
  - With respect to Harold's remark, "All women are cruel and selfish," they give several recommendations:

# Areas Where We Have Trouble Being Rational

1. Eliminate the word *all* since no one can know every single woman.... Delete the word *all* from your vocabulary when it precedes a general category.
2. Change labels of *cruel* and *selfish* to specific behaviors.
3. Put a date on the statement. In other words limit the offensive behavior to a particular time, so like eliminating the word *all* for all women, eliminate the word *all* for all times.
4. Add the *etc.* to the statements. What are the possible extenuating circumstances surrounding the problem.

# Areas Where We Have Trouble Being Rational

- Read Harold's last statement: page 304, 305

# Areas Where We Have Trouble Being Rational

- Do exercise number 1 on page 305.

# Actively and Accurately Listening: Developing Empathy

- 306 Some psychologists believe that the ability to listen to another person, to empathize with, and to understand their point of view is one of the highest forms of intelligent behavior. Edward DeBono
- Read the lists starting on the bottom of 306.

# The Art of Listening Well

## Precautions About Active Listening

- 307 The listening exercise:
- 312 The person who stays cool and calm in a discussion seems secure in his or her position. The person who blows it by becoming overexcited and unfair to the opposition seems threatened—that is, logically vulnerable. Jumping up and down, name calling, interrupting and other forms of bullying serve only to make the person who uses these tactics seem foolish and unstable.
- Your cool, clear mind—don't leave home without it!