

Ankara Üniversitesi Açık Ders Notları

PHI 106 CRITICAL THINKING

TOPIC 2:

“Critical thinking is also not passive, not a matter of simply sitting and passing judgment (a process that’s far from passive, by the way, since your neurons are a-buzzing).

Why identify errors if not to correct them?

Why identify weaknesses if not to strengthen them?

Certainly, there may be fatal flaws, in which case you’re best to reject the argument.

But more often, there will be areas that “simply need a little work” before you can decide whether or not to accept the argument and its conclusion.

Furthermore, you will not always be the passive recipient of an argument, defending yourself from others, defending yourself against manipulation by shoddy argument.

You will also be active agents of argument, defending yourself to others, defending your own claims and arguments.

Critical thinking is not solely destructive.

Perhaps it often becomes destructive, and only destructive, because that’s the easy part—it’s easy to tear something down, to break it, to destroy it (be it something physical like a chair or something abstract like an argument).

It’s far more difficult to build something, to create it (be it a chair or an argument).

And if you're truly after the best claim, you won't want to limit yourself to what simply happens to cross your path— you may often need to construct the argument you haven't yet come across, and it may well turn out to be the best one.

Nor is critical thinking necessarily adversarial.

An antagonistic approach is for those who just want to win.

For those who want more than that, for those who truly want to know what to believe and what to do, it's far more productive to take a co-operative approach: listen to every claim, every argument, and explore every claim and every argument, drawing on as many resources as you can—in order to arrive at the best claim, the best argument.

Critical discussion seldom involves solely contradictory arguments, so “I'm right and you're wrong” will seldom apply.

More often, “What I've said strengthens or weakens what you've said” describes the discussion.

Critical thinking is not necessarily cold, calculating, and unfeeling.

Being rational does not preclude being passionate.

On the contrary, I hope you get excited, I hope you care very deeply about your beliefs, your opinions, your ideas—especially when you have good grounds for them.

And I hope you are, and remain, concerned, sympathetic, delighted, angry, and so on.

But I hope your passion will be supported by, not a replacement for, reason.

Critical thinking is not intuitive.

After all, what is intuition but a feeling, a hunch, some barely conscious disposition, quite likely the result of some early childhood conditioning (which, when moral issues are involved, we call “conscience”)?

We’re hard-pressed to articulate why we feel the way we do when we attribute a feeling to “intuition”—and if we can’t articulate the why, the reason, we certainly can’t evaluate it.

Lastly, critical thinking is not just using our “common sense.”

After all, “common sense” tells us the earth is flat. But even when “common sense” is correct—it may tell us, for example, that a thing can’t be green and not-green at the same time—critical thinking goes well beyond just using such basic principles.”

(Compiled from Peg Tittle’s Critical Thinking Textbook)