Critical Thinking

Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life

Richard W. Paul • Linda Elder

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Chapter 3

Becoming a Fair-Minded Thinker

Weak versus Strong Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves basic intellectual skills, but these skills can be used to serve two incompatible ends: self-centeredness or fair-mindedness. As we develop the basic intellectual skills that critical thinking entails, we can begin to use those skills in a selfish or in a fair-minded way. In other words, we can develop in such a way that we learn to see mistakes in our own thinking, as well as the thinking of others. Or we can merely develop some proficiency in making our opponent's thinking look bad.

Typically, people see mistakes in other's thinking without being able to credit the strengths in those opposing views. Liberals see mistakes in the arguments of conservatives; conservatives see mistakes in the arguments of liberals. 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 see mistakes in the arguments against it.

We call these thinkers weak-sense critical thinkers. We call the thinking "weak" because, though it is working well for the thinker in some respects, it is missing certain important higher-level skills and values of critical thinking. Most significantly, it fails to consider, in good faith, viewpoints that contradict its own viewpoint. It lacks fair-mindedness.

Another traditional name for the weak-sense thinker is found in the word sophist. Sophistry is the art of winning arguments regardless of whether there are obvious problems in the thinking being used. There is a set of lower-level skills of rhetoric,

or argumentation, by which one can make bad thinking look good and good thinking look bad. We see this often in unethical lawyers and politicians who are merely concerned with winning. They use emotionalism and trickery in an intellectually skilled way.

Sophistic thinkers succeed only if they do not come up against what we call strong-sense critical thinkers. Strong-sense critical thinkers are not easily tricked by slick argumentation. As William Graham Sumner (1906) said almost a century ago, they

> *cannot be stampeded . . . are slow to believe . . . can hold things as possible or probable in all degrees, without certainty and without pain . . . can wait for evidence and weigh evidence . . . can resist appeals to their dearest prejudices. . . .*

Perhaps even more important, strong-sense critical thinkers strive to be fair-minded. They use thinking in an ethically responsible manner. They work to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others. They are willing to listen to arguments they do not necessarily hold. They change their views when faced with better reasoning. Rather than using their thinking to manipulate others and to hide from the truth (in a weak-sense way), they use thinking in an ethical, reasonable manner.

We believe that the world already has too many skilled selfish thinkers, too many sophists and intellectual con artists, too many unscrupulous lawyers and politicians who specialize in twisting information and evidence to support their selfish interests and the vested interests of those who pay them. We hope that you, the reader, will develop as a highly skilled, fair-minded thinker, one capable of exposing those who are masters at playing intellectual games at the expense of the well-being of innocent people. We hope as well that you develop the intellectual courage to argue publicly against what is unethical in human thinking. We write this book with the assumption that you will take seriously the fair-mindedness implied by strong-sense critical thinking.

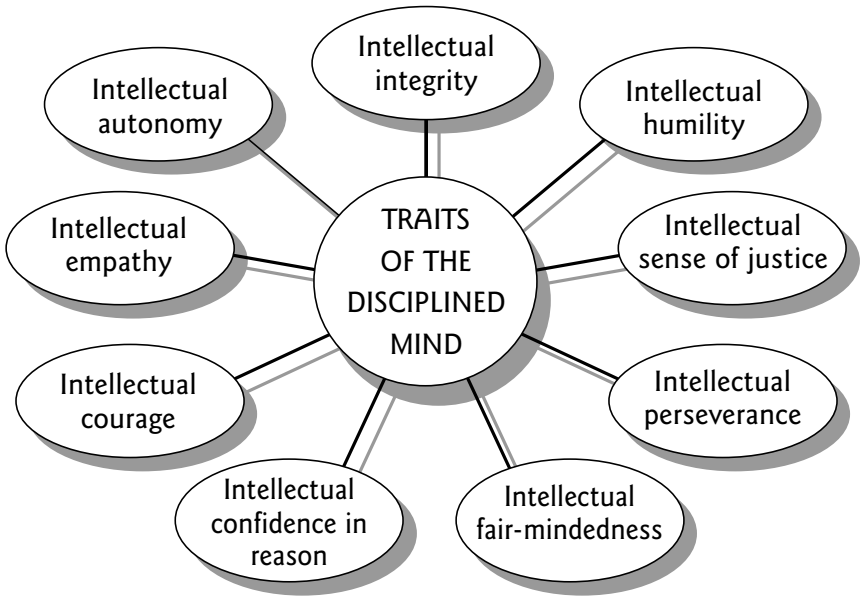
To think critically in the strong sense requires that we develop fair-mindedness at the same time that we learn basic critical thinking skills, and thus begin to "practice" fair-mindedness in our thinking. If we do, we avoid using our skills to gain unfair advantage over others. We avoid using our thinking to get what we want at the expense of the rights and needs of others. We treat all thinking by the same high standards. We expect good reasoning from those who support us as well as those who oppose us. We subject our own reasoning to the same criteria we apply to reasoning to which we are unsympathetic. We question our own purposes, evidence, conclusions, implications, and points of view with the same vigor that we question those of others.

Developing fair-minded thinkers try to see the actual strengths and weaknesses of any reasoning they assess. This is the kind of thinker we hope this book will help you become. So, right from the beginning, we are going to explore the characteristics that are required for the strongest, most fair-minded thinking. As you read through the rest of the book, we hope you will notice how we are attempting to foster "strong-

sense" critical thinking. Indeed, unless we indicate otherwise, every time we now use the words "critical thinking," from this point onward, we will mean critical thinking in the strong sense.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will explore the various intellectual "virtues" that fair-minded thinking requires (Figure 3.1). There is much more to fair-mindedness than most people realize. Fair-mindedness requires a family of interrelated and interdependent states of mind.

Figure 3.1 Critical thinkers strive to develop essential traits or characteristics of mind. These are interrelated intellectual habits that lead to disciplined self-command.



In addition to fair-mindedness, strong-sense critical thinking implies higher-order thinking. As you develop as a thinker and internalize the traits of mind that we shall soon discuss, you will develop a variety of skills and insights that are absent in the weak-sense critical thinker.

As we examine how the various traits of mind are conducive to fair-mindedness, we will also look at the manner in which the traits contribute to quality of thought (in general). In addition to the fairness that strong-sense critical thinking implies, depth of thinking and high quality of thinking are also implied. Weak-sense critical thinkers develop a range of intellectual skills (for example, skills of argumentation) and

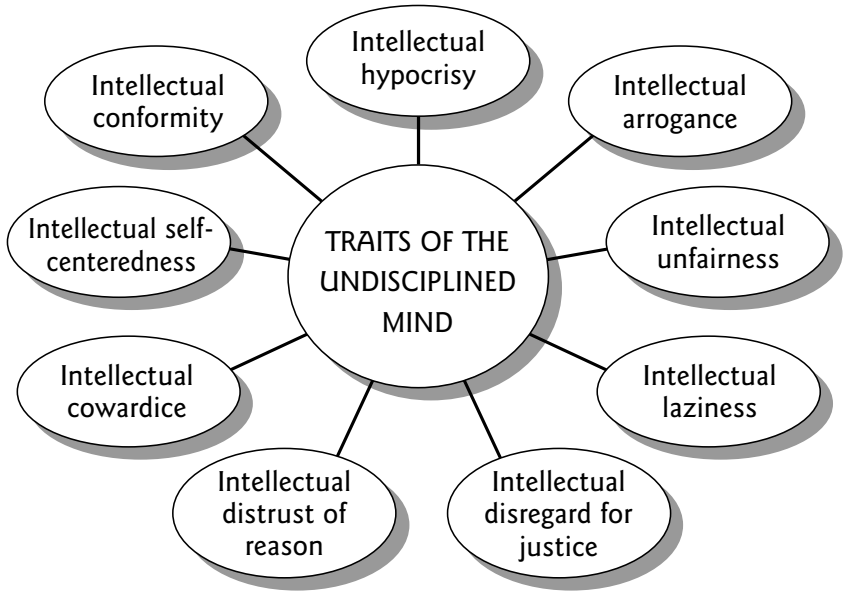
may achieve some success in getting what they want, but they do not develop any of the traits highlighted in this chapter.

It is important to note that many people considered successful in business or in their profession are, in fact, selfish thinkers. In self-indulgent and materialistic cultures, the idea "if it is good for me it is good for everyone" is tacitly assumed when not overtly stated. The pursuit of money, often at the expense of the rights and needs of others, is considered not only acceptable, but also commendable. Nevertheless when the pursuit of wealth and power is unbridled, injustice often results. The human mind is readily able to justify its own selfishness and lack of consideration for others. The powerful find many reasons to ignore the interests of the weak (Figure 3.2).

True critical thinkers, in the strong sense, realize the ease with which the mind can ignore the rights and needs of others. They recognize that to be reasonable and just is not to comply with nature but to defy it. They recognize the difficulty of entering into points of view different from our own. They are willing to do the work that is required to go beyond selfish thinking.

Let us turn to the component traits of the strong-sense critical thinker. After we take up each individual trait as it stands in relation to fair-mindedness, we will highlight its significance as a contributor to the general development of high levels of thinking.

Figure 3.2 These are the opposites of the intellectual virtues. They occur naturally in the mind and can only be countered through culturalization of intellectual virtues.



What Does Fair-Mindedness Require?

First, the basic concept:

> *Fair-mindedness entails a consciousness of the need to treat all viewpoints alike, without reference to one's own feelings or selfish interests, or the feelings or selfish interests of one's friends, company, community, or nation. It implies adherence to intellectual standards (such as accuracy and sound logic), uninfluenced by one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.*

To be fair-minded is to strive to treat every viewpoint relevant to a situation in an unbiased, unprejudiced way. It entails a consciousness of the fact that we, by nature, tend to prejudge the views of others, placing them into "favorable" (agrees with us) and "unfavorable" (disagrees with us) categories. We tend to give less weight to contrary views than to our own. This is especially true when we have selfish reasons for opposing views**.** For example, the manufacturers of asbestos advocated its use in homes and schools, and made large profits on its use, even though they knew for many years that the product was carcinogenic. They ignored the viewpoint and welfare of the innocent users of their product. If we can ignore the potentially harmful effects of a product we manufacture, we can reap the benefits that come with large profits without experiencing pangs of conscience. Thus, fair-mindedness is especially important when the situation calls on us to consider the point of view of those who welfare is in conflict with our short-term vested interest.

The opposite of fair-mindedness is intellectual self-centeredness. It is demonstrated by the failure of thinkers to treat points of view that differ significantly from their own by the same standards that they treat their own.

Achieving a truly fair-minded state of mind is challenging. It requires us to simultaneously become intellectually humble, intellectually courageous, intellectually empathetic, intellectually honest, intellectually perseverant, confident in reason (as a tool of discovery and learning), and intellectually autonomous.

Without this family of traits in an integrated constellation, there is no true fair-mindedness. But these traits, singly and in combination, are not commonly discussed in everyday life, and are rarely taught. They are not discussed on television. Your friends and colleagues will not ask you questions about them.

In truth, because they are largely unrecognized, these traits are not commonly valued. Yet each of them is essential to fair-mindedness and the development of critical thinking. Let us see how and why this is so.

Intellectual Humility: Having Knowledge of Ignorance

We will begin with the fair-minded trait of intellectual humility:

> *Intellectual humility may be defined as having a consciousness of the limits of one's knowledge, including a sensitivity to circumstances in which one's native egocentrism is likely to function self-deceptively. This entails being aware of one's biases, one's prejudices, the limitations of one's viewpoint, and the extent of one's ignorance. Intellectual humility depends on recognizing that one should not claim more than one actually knows. It does not imply spinelessness or submissiveness. It implies the lack of intellectual pretentiousness, boastfulness, or conceit, combined with insight into the logical foundations, or lack of such foundations, of one's beliefs.*

The opposite of intellectual humility is intellectual arrogance, a lack of consciousness of the limits of one's knowledge, with little or no insight into self-deception or the limitations of one's point of view. Intellectually arrogant people often fall prey to their own bias and prejudice, and frequently claim to know more than they actually know.

When we think of intellectual arrogance, we are not necessarily implying a person who is outwardly smug, haughty, insolent, or pompous. Outwardly, the person may appear humble. For example, a person who uncritically believes in a cult leader may be outwardly self-effacing ("I am nothing. You are everything"), but intellectually he or she is making a sweeping generalization that is not well founded, and has complete faith in that generalization.

Unfortunately, in human life people of the full range of personality types are capable of believing they know what they don't know. Our own false beliefs, misconceptions, prejudices, illusions, myths, propaganda, and ignorance appear to us as the plain, unvarnished truth. What is more, when challenged, we often resist admitting that our thinking is "defective." We then are intellectually arrogant, even though we might feel humble. Rather than recognizing the limits of our knowledge, we ignore and obscure those limits. From such arrogance, much suffering and waste result.

It is not uncommon for the police, for example, to assume a man is guilty of a crime because of his appearance, because he is black for example, or because he wears an earring, or because he has a disheveled and unkempt look about him. Owing to the prejudices driving their thinking, the police are often incapable of intellectual humility. In a similar way, prosecutors have been known to withhold exculpatory evidence against a defendant in order to "prove" their case. Intellectually righteous in their views, they feel confident that the defendant is guilty. Why, therefore, shouldn't they suppress evidence that will help this "guilty" person go free?

Intellectual arrogance is incompatible with fair-mindedness because we cannot judge fairly when we are in a state of ignorance about the object of our judgment. If we are ignorant about a religion (say, Buddhism), we cannot be fair in judging it. And if we have misconceptions, prejudices, or illusions about it, we will distort it (unfairly) in

our judgment. We will misrepresent it and make it appear to be other than it is. Our false knowledge, misconceptions, prejudices, and illusions stand in the way of the possibility of our being fair. Or if we are intellectually arrogant, we will be inclined to judge too quickly and be overly confident in our judgment. Clearly, these tendencies are incompatible with being fair (to that which we are judging).

Why is intellectual humility essential to higher-level thinking? In addition to helping us become fair-minded thinkers, knowledge of our ignorance can improve our thinking in a variety of ways. It can enable us to recognize the prejudices, false beliefs, and habits of mind that lead to flawed learning. Consider, for example, our tendency to accept superficial learning. Much human learning is superficial. We learn a little and think we know a lot. We get limited information and generalize hastily from it. We confuse cutesy phrases with deep insights. We uncritically accept much that we hear and read—especially when what we hear or read agrees with our intensely held beliefs or the beliefs of groups to which we belong.

The discussion in the chapters that follow encourages intellectual humility and will help to raise your awareness of intellectual arrogance. See if you, from this moment, can begin to develop in yourself a growing awareness of the limitations of your knowledge and an increasing sensitivity to instances of your inadvertent intellectual arrogance. When you do, celebrate that sensitivity. Reward yourself for finding weaknesses in your thinking. Consider recognition of weakness an important strength, not a weakness. As a starter, answer the following questions:

- Can you construct a list of your most significant prejudices? (Think of what you believe about your country, your religion, your company, your friends, your family, simply because others—colleagues, parents, friends, peer group, media—conveyed these to you.)
- Do you ever argue for or against views when you have little evidence upon which to base your judgment?
- Do you ever assume that your group (your company, your family, your religion, your nation, your friends) is correct (when it is in conflict with others) even though you have not looked at the situation from the point of view of the others with which you disagree?

Test the Idea: Intellectual Humility

Name a person you think you know fairly well. Make two lists. In the first list include everything you know for sure about the person. In the second list include everything you know you don't know about him/her. For example: "I know for sure that my spouse likes to garden, but I'm also sure that I have never really understood what her fears and personal desires were. I know many superficial things about her, but about her inner self I know little." Support what you claim by writing out an explanation of your thinking.

Intellectual Courage: Being Willing to Challenge Beliefs

Now let's consider intellectual courage:

> *Intellectual courage may be defined as having a consciousness of the need to face and fairly address ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints toward which one has strong negative emotions and to which one has not given a serious hearing. Intellectual courage is connected to the recognition that ideas that society considers dangerous or absurd are sometimes rationally justified (in whole or in part). Conclusions and beliefs inculcated in people are sometimes false or misleading. To determine for oneself what makes sense, one must not passively and uncritically accept what one has learned. Intellectual courage comes into play here because there is some truth in some ideas considered dangerous and absurd, and distortion or falsity in some ideas strongly held by social groups to which we belong. People need courage to be fair-minded thinkers in these circumstances. The penalties for nonconformity can be severe.*

The opposite of intellectual courage, *intellectual cowardice*, is the fear of ideas that do not conform to one's own. If we lack intellectual courage, we are afraid of giving serious consideration to ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints that we perceive as dangerous. We feel personally threatened by some ideas when they conflict significantly with our personal identity—when we feel that an attack on the ideas is an attack on us as a person.

All of the following ideas are "sacred" in the minds of some people: being a conservative, being a liberal; believing in God, disbelieving in God; believing in capitalism, believing in socialism; believing in abortion, disbelieving in abortion; believing in capital punishment, disbelieving in capital punishment. No matter what side we are on, we often say of ourselves: "I am a (an) [insert sacred belief here; for example, I am a Christian. I am a conservative. I am a socialist. I am an atheist]."

Once we define who we are in relation to an emotional commitment to a belief, we are likely to experience inner fear when that idea or belief is questioned. Questioning the belief seems to be questioning us. The intensely personal fear that we feel operates as a barrier in our minds to being fair (to the opposing belief). When we do seem to consider the opposing idea, we subconsciously undermine it, presenting it in its weakest form, in order to reject it. This is one form of intellectual cowardice. Sometimes, then, we need intellectual courage to overcome our self-created inner fear—the fear we ourselves have created by linking our identity to a specific set of beliefs.

Intellectual courage is just as important in our professional as in our personal lives. If, for example, we are unable to analyze the work-related beliefs we hold, then we are essentially trapped by those beliefs. We do not have the courage to question what we have always taken for granted. We are unable to question the beliefs collectively held by our co-workers. We are unable to question, for example, the ethics of our decisions and our behavior at work. But fair-minded managers, employers, and employ-

ees do not hesitate to question what has always been considered "sacred" or what is taken for granted by others in their group. It is not uncommon, for example, for employees to think within a sort of "mob mentality" against management, which often includes routinely gossiping to one another about management practices, especially those practices that impact them. Those with intellectual courage, rather than participating in such gossip in a mindless way, will begin to question the source of the gossip. They will question whether there is good reason for the group to be disgruntled, or whether the group is irrational in its expectations of management.

Another important reason to acquire intellectual courage is to overcome the fear of rejection by others because they hold certain beliefs and are likely to reject us if we challenge those beliefs. This is where we invest the group with the power to intimidate us, and such power is destructive. Many people live their lives in the eyes of others and cannot approve of themselves unless others approve of them. Fear of rejection is often lurking in the back of their minds. Few people challenge the ideologies or belief systems of the groups to which they belong. This is the second form of intellectual cowardice. Both make it impossible to be fair to the ideas that are contrary to our, or our group's, identity.

You might note in passing an alternative way to form your personal identity. This is not in terms of the content of any given idea (what you actually believe) but, instead, in terms of the process by which you came to it. This is what it means to take on the identity of a critical thinker. Consider the following resolution:

> *I will not identify with the content of any belief. I will identify only with the way I come to my beliefs. I am a critical thinker and, as such, am ready to abandon any belief that cannot be supported by evidence and rational considerations. I am ready to follow evidence and reason wherever they lead. My true identity is that of being a critical thinker, a lifelong learner, and a person always looking to improve my thinking by becoming more reasonable in my beliefs.*

With such an identity, intellectual courage becomes more meaningful to us, and fair-mindedness more essential. We are no longer afraid to consider beliefs that are contrary to our present beliefs. We are not afraid of being proven wrong. We freely admit to having made mistakes in the past. We are happy to correct any mistakes we are still making: Tell me what you believe and why you believe it, and maybe I can learn from your thinking. I have cast off many early beliefs. I am ready to abandon as many of the present beliefs as are not consistent with the way things are.

Test the Idea*:*
Intellectual Courage I

Select one group to which you belong. Complete the following statements:

1. One main belief common to members of this group that might be questioned is … (here you want to identify at least one belief that may lead group members to behave irrationally).
2. This belief might be questioned because…
3. I would or would not be able to stand up to my group, pointing out the problems with this belief, because…

Intellectual Courage II

Try to think of a circumstance in which either you or someone you knew defended a view that was unpopular in a group to which you belonged. Describe the circumstances, and especially how the group responded. If you can't think of an example, what is the significance of that realization?

Intellectual Empathy: Entertaining Opposing Views

Next let's consider intellectual empathy, another trait of mind necessary to fair-mindedness:

> *Intellectual empathy is an awareness of the need to imaginatively put oneself in the place of others so as to genuinely understand them. To have intellectual empathy is to be able to accurately reconstruct the viewpoints and reasoning of others and to reason from premises, assumptions, and ideas other than one's own. This trait also correlates with the willingness to remember occasions when one was wrong in the past despite an intense conviction of being right, and with the ability to imagine being similarly deceived in a case at hand.*

The opposite of intellectual empathy is *intellectual self-centeredness*. It is thinking centered on self. When we think from a self-centered perspective, we are unable to understand others' thoughts, feelings, and emotions. From this natural perspective, we are the recipients of most of our attention. Our pain, our desires, and our hopes are most pressing. The needs of others pale into insignificance before the domination of our own needs and desires. We are unable to consider issues, problems, and questions from a viewpoint that differs from our own and that, when considered, would force us to change our perspective.

How can we be fair to the thinking of others if we have not learned to put ourselves in their intellectual shoes? Fair-minded judgment requires a good-faith effort to acquire accurate knowledge. Human thinking emerges from the conditions of

human life, from very different contexts and situations. If we do not learn how to take on the perspectives of others and to accurately think as they think, we will not be able to fairly judge their ideas and beliefs. Actually trying to think within the viewpoint of others is not easy, though. It is one of the most difficult skills to acquire.The extent to which you have intellectual empathy has direct implications for the quality of your life. If you cannot think within the viewpoint of your supervisor, for example, you will have difficulty functioning successfully in your job and you may often feel frustrated. If you cannot think within the viewpoints of your subordinates, you will have difficulty understanding why they behave as they do. If you cannot think within the viewpoint of your spouse, the quality of your marriage will be adversely affected. If you cannot think within the viewpoints of your children, they will feel misunderstood and alienated from you.

Test the Idea:
Intellectual Empathy I

Try to reconstruct the last argument you had with someone (a supervisor, colleague, friend, or intimate other). Reconstruct the argument from your perspective and that of the other person. Complete the statements below. As you do, watch that you do not distort the other's viewpoint. Try to enter it in good faith, even if it means you have to admit you were wrong. (Remember that critical thinkers want to see the truth in the situation.) After you have completed this activity, show it to the person you argued with to see if you have accurately represented that person's view.

1. My perspective was as follows (state and elaborate your view):
2. The other person's view was as follows (state and elaborate the other person's view):

Intellectual Integrity: Holding Ourselves to the Same Standards to Which We Hold Others

Let us now consider intellectual integrity:

> *Intellectual integrity is defined as recognition of the need to be true to one's own thinking and to hold oneself to the same standards one expects others to meet. It means to hold oneself to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which one holds one's antagonists—to practice what one advocates for others. It also means to honestly admit discrepancies and inconsistencies in one's own thought and action, and to be able to identify inconsistencies in one's own thinking.*

The opposite of intellectual integrity is intellectual hypocrisy, a state of mind unconcerned with genuine integrity. It is often marked by deep-seated contradictions and

inconsistencies. The appearance of integrity means a lot because it affects our image with others. Therefore, hypocrisy is often implicit in the thinking and action behind human behavior as a function of natural egocentric thinking. Our hypocrisy is hidden from us. Though we expect others to adhere to standards to which we refuse to adhere, we see ourselves as fair. Though we profess certain beliefs, we often fail to behave in accordance with those beliefs.

To the extent that we have intellectual integrity, our beliefs and actions are consistent. We practice what we preach, so to speak. We don't say one thing and do another.

Suppose I were to say to you that our relationship is really important to me, but you find out that I have lied to you about something important to you. My behavior lacks integrity. I have acted hypocritically.

Clearly, we cannot be fair to others if we are justified in thinking and acting in contradictory ways. Hypocrisy by its very nature is a form of injustice. In addition, if we are not sensitive to contradictions and inconsistencies in our own thinking and behavior, we cannot think well about ethical questions involving ourselves.

Consider this political example. From time to time the U.S. media discloses highly questionable practices by the CIA. These practices run anywhere from documentation of attempted assassinations of foreign political leaders (say, attempts to assassinate President Castro of Cuba) to the practice of teaching police or military representatives in other countries (say, Central America or South America) how to torture prisoners to get them to disclose information about their associates. To appreciate how such disclosures reveal a lack of intellectual integrity, we only have to imagine how the U.S. government and citizenry would respond if another nation were to attempt to assassinate the president of the U.S or trained U.S. police or military in methods of torture. Once we imagine this, we recognize a basic inconsistency common in human behavior and a lack of intellectual integrity on the part of those who plan, engage in, or approve of, such activities.

All humans sometimes fail to act with intellectual integrity. When we do, we reveal a lack of fair-mindedness on our part, and a failure to think well enough as to grasp the internal contradictions in our thought or life.

Test the Idea:
Intellectual Integrity

Write about a dimension of your life that you suspect holds some inconsistencies or contradictions (where you probably are not holding yourself to the same standard to which you hold those whom you dislike or disagree with). Think of a situation where your behavior contradicts what you say you believe. This might be in your relationship with an employee, or a spouse, for example. Explain what inconsistencies may be present in your behavior.

Intellectual Perseverance: Working Through Complexity and Frustration

Let us now consider intellectual perseverance:

> *Intellectual perseverance can be defined as the disposition to work one's way through intellectual complexities despite the frustration inherent in the task. Some intellectual problems are complex and cannot be easily solved. One has intellectual perseverance when one does not give up in the face of intellectual complexity or frustration. The intellectually perseverant person displays firm adherence to rational principles despite the irrational opposition of others, and has a realistic sense of the need to struggle with confusion and unsettled questions over an extended time to achieve understanding or insight.*

The opposite of intellectual perseverance is *intellectual laziness*, demonstrated in the tendency to give up quickly when faced with an intellectually challenging task. The intellectually indolent, or lazy, person has a low tolerance for intellectual pain or frustration.

How does a lack of intellectual perseverance impede fair-mindedness? Understanding the views of others requires that we do the intellectual work to achieve that understanding. That takes intellectual perseverance-insofar as those views are very different from ours or are complex in nature. For example, suppose you are a Christian wanting to be fair to the views of an atheist. Unless you read and understand the reasoning of intelligent and insightful atheists, you are not being fair to those views. Some intelligent and insightful atheists have written books to explain how and why they think as they do. Some of their reasoning is complicated or deals with issues of some complexity. It follows that only those Christians who have the intellectual perseverance to read and/or understand atheists can be fair to atheist views. Of course, a parallel case could be developed with respect to atheists' understanding the views of intelligent and insightful Christians.

Finally, it should be clear how intellectual perseverance is essential to all areas of higher-level thinking. Virtually all higher-level thinking requires some intellectual perseverance to overcome. It takes intellectual perseverance to reason well through complex questions on the job, to work through complex problems in intimate relationships, to solve problems in parenting. Many give up during early stages of working through a problem. Lacking intellectual perseverance, they cut themselves off from all the insights that thinking through an issue at a deep level provides. They avoid intellectual frustration, no doubt, but they end up with the everyday frustrations of not being able to solve complex problems.

Test the Idea:
Intellectual Perseverance

Most people have more physical perseverance than intellectual perseverance. Most are ready to admit, "No pain, no gain!" when talking about the body. Most give up quickly, on the other hand, when faced with a frustrating intellectual problem. Thinking of your own responses, in your work or your personal life, how would you evaluate your own intellectual perseverance (on a scale of 0–10)? Write out what you are basing your score on.

Confidence in Reason: Recognizing that Good Reasoning Has Proven Its Worth

Let us now consider the trait of confidence in reason:

> *Confidence in reason is based on the belief that one's own higher interests and those of humankind will be best served by giving the freest play to reason. Reason encourages people to come to their own conclusions by developing their own rational faculties. It is the faith that, with proper encouragement and cultivation, people can learn to think for themselves. As such, they can form insightful viewpoints, draw reasonable conclusions, and develop clear, accurate, relevant, and logical thought processes., In turn, they can persuade each other by appealing to good reason and sound evidence, and become reasonable persons, despite the deep-seated obstacles in human nature and social life. When one has confidence in reason, one is "moved" by reason in appropriate ways. The very idea of reasonability becomes one of the most important values and a focal point in one's life. In short, to have confidence in reason is to use good reasoning as the fundamental criterion by which to judge whether to accept or reject any belief or position.*

The opposite of confidence in reason is *intellectual distrust of reason*, given by the threat that reasoning and rational analysis pose to the undisciplined thinker. Being prone toward emotional reactions that validate present thinking, egocentric thinkers often express little confidence in reason. They do not understand what it means to have faith in reason. Instead, they have confidence in the truth of their own belief systems, however flawed their beliefs might be.

In many ways we live in an irrational world surrounded by many forms of irrational beliefs and behaviors. For example, despite the success of science in providing plausible explanations based on careful study of evidence gathered through disciplined observations, many people still believe in unsubstantiated systems such as astrology. Many people, when faced with a problem, follow their "gut" impulses. Many follow leaders whose only claim to credibility is that they are skilled in manipulating a

crowd and whipping up enthusiasm. Few people seem to recognize the power of sound thinking in helping us to solves our problems and live a fulfilling life. Few people, in short, have genuine confidence in reason. In the place of faith in reason, people tend to have uncritical or "blind" faith in one or more of the following (often as a result of irrational drives and emotions):

1. Faith in charismatic national leaders (think of leaders such as Hitler, able to excite millions of people and manipulate them into supporting genocide of an entire religious group).
2. Faith in charismatic cult leaders.
3. Faith in the father as the traditional head of the family (as defined by religious or social tradition).
4. Faith in institutional authorities (employers, "the company," police, social workers, judges, priests, evangelical preachers, and so forth).
5. Faith in spiritual powers (such as a "holy spirit," as defined by various religious belief systems).
6. Faith in some social group, official or unofficial (faith in a gang, in the business community, in a church, in a political party, and so on).
7. Faith in a political ideology (such as communism, capitalism, Fascism).
8. Faith in intuition.
9. Faith in one's unanalyzed emotions.
10. Faith in one's gut impulses.
11. Faith in fate (some unnamed force that supposedly guides the destiny of us all).
12. Faith in social institutions (the courts, schools, charities, business communities, governments).
13. Faith in the folkways or mores of a social group or culture.
14. Faith in one's own unanalyzed experience.
15. Faith in people who have social status or position (the rich, the famous, the powerful).

Some of the above are compatible, under some conditions, with faith in reason. The key factor is the extent to which some form of faith is based on sound reasoning and evidence. The acid test, then, is: Are there good grounds for having that faith? For example, it makes sense to have faith in a friend if that friend has consistently acted as a friend over an extended time. On the other hand, it does not make sense to have faith in a new acquaintance, even if one finds oneself emotionally attracted to that individual and that person professes his or her friendship.

As you examine and evaluate your own thinking on the nature of different kinds of faith, and the extent to which you have appropriate confidence in reason and evidence, ask yourself to what extent you can be moved by well-reasoned appeals. Suppose you meet someone who shows so much of an interest in your significant other

that you feel intensely jealous and negative toward that person. Would you shift your view if you receive evidence by a dependable friend that the person you are negative about is actually exceptionally kind, thoughtful, and generous? Do you think you could shift your view, even when, deep down, you want your significant other to reject this person in favor of you? Have you ever given up a belief you held dear because, through your reading, experience, and reflection, you became persuaded that it was not reasonable to believe as you did? Are you ready and willing to admit that some of your most passionate beliefs (for example, your religious or political beliefs) may in fact be "wrong?"

Test the Idea: Faith in Reason

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 that you did not agree with, though the argument had merit. In this situation, you apparently could not be moved by good reasons. Briefly write what happened in the situation. Then write the reasonable arguments against your position that you were not willing to listen to. Why weren't you able to give credit to the other person's argument? In answering this question, see if you can use the list of sources of faith that people usually rely on.

Intellectual Autonomy: Being an Independent Thinker

The final intellectual trait we will consider here is intellectual autonomy:

> *Intellectual autonomy may be defined as internal motivation based on the ideal of thinking for oneself; having rational self-authorship of one's beliefs, values, and way of thinking; not being dependent on others for the direction and control of one's thinking.*

Autonomous persons are persons in charge of their lives. They are not irrationally dependent on others and not controlled by infantile emotions. They have self-control. They are competent. They complete what they begin. In forming beliefs, critical thinkers do not passively accept the beliefs of others. Rather, they think through situations and issues for themselves and reject unjustified authorities while recognizing the contributions of reasonable authority. They mindfully form principles of thought and action and do not mindlessly accept those presented to them. They are not limited by the accepted way of doing things. They evaluate the traditions and practices that others often accept unquestioningly. Independent thinkers strive to incorporate knowledge and insight into their thinking, independent of the social status of the source. They are not willful, stubborn, or unresponsive to the reasonable suggestions of others. They are self-monitoring thinkers who strive to amend their own mistakes. They function from values they themselves have freely chosen.

Of course, intellectual autonomy must be understood not as a thing-in-itself. Instead, we must recognize it as a dimension of our minds working in conjunction with, and tempered by, the other intellectual virtues.

The opposite of intellectual autonomy is *intellectual conformity*, or intellectual or emotional dependence. Intellectual autonomy is difficult to develop because social institutions, as they now stand, depend heavily on passive acceptance of the status quo, whether intellectual, political, or economic. Thinking for oneself almost certainly leads to unpopular conclusions not sanctioned by dominant groups. There are always many rewards for those who simply conform in thought and action to social pressure.

Consequently, the large masses of people are unknowing conformists in thought and deed. They are like mirrors reflecting the belief systems and values of those who surround them. They lack the intellectual skills and the incentive to think for themselves. They are intellectually conforming thinkers (Figure 3.3).

Even those who spend years getting a Ph.D. may be intellectually dependent, both academically and personally. They may uncritically accept faulty practices in the discipline as it stands, uncritically defending the discipline against legitimate critics. The result often is unwarranted human harm and suffering.

One cannot be fair-minded and lack intellectual autonomy, for independent thinking is a prerequisite to thinking within multiple perspectives. When we intellectually conform, we are only able to think within "accepted" viewpoints. But to be fair-minded is to refuse to uncritically accept beliefs without thinking through the merits (and demerits) of those beliefs for oneself.

Test the Idea: Intellectual Autonomy

Briefly review some of the variety of influences to which you have been exposed in your life (influence of culture, company, family, religion, peer groups, media, personal relationships). See if you can discriminate between those dimensions of your thought and behavior in which you have done the least thinking for yourself and those in which you have done the most. What makes this activity difficult is that we often perceive ourselves as thinking for ourselves when we are actually conforming to others. What you should look for, therefore, are instances of your actively questioning beliefs, values, or practices to which others in your "group" were, or are, conforming.

Recognizing the Interdependence of Intellectual Virtues

The traits of mind essential for critical thinking are interdependent. Consider intellectual humility. To become aware of the limits of our knowledge, we need the intellectual courage to face our own prejudices and ignorance. To discover our own prejudices, in

turn, we often must intellectually empathize with and reason within points of view with which we fundamentally disagree. To achieve this end, we typically must engage in intellectual perseverance, as learning to empathically enter a point of view against which we are biased takes time and significant effort. That effort will not seem justified unless we have the necessary confidence in reason to believe we will not be tainted or "taken in" by whatever is false or misleading in the opposing viewpoint.

Furthermore, merely believing we won't be harmed considering "alien" viewpoints is not enough to motivate most of us to consider them seriously. We also must be motivated by an intellectual sense of justice. We must recognize an intellectual responsibility to be fair to views we oppose. We must feel obliged to hear them in their strongest form to ensure that we are not condemning them out of ignorance or bias on our part. At this point, we come full circle to where we began: the need for intellectual humility.

To begin at another point, consider intellectual integrity or good faith. Intellectual integrity is clearly a difficult trait to develop. We are often motivated—generally without admitting to or being aware of this motivation—to set up inconsistent standards in thinking. Our egocentric or sociocentric tendencies, for example, make us ready to believe positive information about those that we like and negative information about those that we dislike. We likewise are strongly inclined to believe what serves to justify our selfish interests or validate our strongest desires. Hence, all humans have some innate mental tendencies to operate with double standards, which is typical of intellectual bad faith. These modes of thinking sometimes correlate well with getting ahead in the world, maximizing our power or advantage, and getting more of what we selfishly want.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to operate explicitly or overtly with a double standard. We therefore need to avoid looking at the evidence too closely. We need to avoid scrutinizing our own inferences and interpretations too carefully. At this point, a certain amount of intellectual arrogance is quite useful. I may assume, for example, that I know just what you're going to say (before you say it), precisely what you are really after (before the evidence demonstrates it), and what actually is going on (before I have studied the situation carefully). My intellectual arrogance makes it easier for me to avoid noticing the unjustifiable discrepancy between the standards I apply to you and the standards I apply to myself. Not having to empathize with you makes it easier to avoid seeing my self-deception. I also am better positioned if I lack a need to be fair to your point of view. A little background fear of what I might discover if I seriously consider the inconsistency of my own judgments can be quite useful as well. In this case, my lack of intellectual integrity is supported by my lack of intellectual humility, empathy, and fair-mindedness.

Going in the other direction, it will be difficult to use a double standard if I feel a responsibility to be fair to your point of view. This responsibility requires me to empathetically view things from your perspective, and to do so with some humility, recognizing that I could be wrong, and that you could be right. The more I dislike

you personally, or feel wronged in the past by you or by others who share your way of thinking, the more pronounced in my character the trait of intellectual integrity and good faith must be to compel me to be fair.

We can begin to analyze the extent to which we have developed these interdependent traits of mind by focusing on our reactions to situations in the workplace. Imagine, for example, that your company decides to reorganize your division and some people lose their jobs. To what extent are you able to *intellectually empathize*, not only with your colleagues who lost their jobs, but also with the managers who made the decision? To what extent do you see *intellectual humility* operating in your thinking, so that you recognize what you do know and what you do not know about the situation? To what extent are you able to *think autonomously* so that you are not trapped in the group's reaction to the situation? To what extent is your thinking driven by an *intellectual sense of justice* to all parties involved? To what extent are you able to *think with integrity* so that you apply the same standards to all parties involved in the situation?

Conclusion

True excellence in thinking is not simply the result of isolated intellectual skills. There are inevitable problems in the thinking of persons who, without knowing it, lack intellectual virtues. Instead, they frequently display the traits of the undisciplined mind. To the extent one is unconsciously motivated to believe what one wants to believe, what is most comfortable to believe, what puts one in a good light, what serves one's selfish interest, one is unable to function as a rational person. As you work through this book, we hope you find yourself internalizing the essential traits. We hope you will resist the influence of both the conformist thinkers around you and the egocentric thinker within you. We hope you will recognize that skilled thinking can be used for good or for ill. We hope you will see that it is the intellectual virtues that guide thinking toward fair-mindedness. Such virtues enable us to enter, in good faith, all viewpoints relevant to a complex issue before coming to final conclusions, to seek out weaknesses in our thinking, to be moved by reasoning that is superior to our own. When possible we have the advantage in seeing all sides and are able to work with them, supporting in each what we see as sound and respectfully disagreeing with that which we see as flawed.

Natural versus Critical Thinking

- As humans we think; as critical thinkers we analyze our thinking.
- As humans we think egocentrically; as critical thinkers we expose the egocentric roots of our thinking to close scrutiny.
- As humans we are drawn to standards of thinking unworthy of belief; as critical thinkers we expose inappropriate standards and replace them with sound ones.

- As humans we live in systems of meanings that typically entrap us; as critical thinkers we learn how to raise our thinking to conscious examination, enabling us to free ourselves from many of the traps of undisciplined, instinctive thought.
- As humans we use logical systems whose root structures are not apparent to us; as critical thinkers we develop tools for explicating and assessing our participation in the logical systems in which we live.
- As humans we live with the illusion of intellectual and emotion freedom; as critical thinkers we take explicit intellectual and emotional command of who we are, what we are, and the ends to which our lives are tending.
- As human thinkers we are governed by our thoughts; as critical thinkers we learn how to govern the thoughts that govern us.