

Critical Thought

MRes Philosophy of Knowledge:

(slides available at <http://cfpm.org/mres>)

Why is a critical approach so important?

The absence of definitive truth?

Popper – falsificationism in science (theories approximate truth because of their ability to resist refutation)

Quine – pragmatism in science (theories approximate truth because of their elegance)

Kuhn – paradigms on science (theories approximate truth because of their orthodoxy)

*Is this the same as nihilism?
(questioning is its own foundation)*

The spirit of approach: 3 Aspects

- **Independent thinking** – self-imposed immaturity
- **Challenging** the group and the species –
- **Don't judge by the surface** – considering the hidden and non-obvious causes

Critical approaches

- Using existing knowledge in new contexts – experiment with novel applications – e.g. Post-It Notes
- Follow lines of flight, tangents
- Recognize distinctions between solutions; resolutions and dissolution
- Importance of rhetorical skill – e.g.: Ratner

Critical approaches (cont..)

- Recognise the distinctions between things - Know your limits
- Identify the bedrock (beliefs; assumptions; habits)
- Look for relevant evidence
- Look for contradictions – are they bad?
- Look for consequences
- Being aware of authority (power over and power to)
- Put yourself in the place of others
- Reflect on the importance of emotions, feelings and intuition (as distinct from prejudice)
- Court the strange – insight is never orthodox
- Integrity of approach (consistency; persistence; ethics)

3 elements of a critical argument

What so?

- the description of states of affairs (events, beliefs, relations) remaining fully aware of the possibility of these being different from different perspectives

How so?

- the investigation of how states of affairs came to be, the traditions, habits and histories that are brought into the frame in establishing something as 'being the case'

So what?

- the explanation of implications arising from the presented states of affairs, including an awareness of the prevailing interests being served

Some Characteristics of critical thought in research



- Interpretation – the ability to comprehend experience meaningfully
- Analysis – identifying intended and actual inferences in representations of experience
- Evaluation – assessing the credibility of representations of experience
- Inference – drawing conclusions
- Explanation – awareness of the logical scaffold of your argument
- Self-regulation - cognitively self-aware and self critical
- Categorization; significance testing; clarifying meaning
- ideas; arguments; assumptions/bedrock
- relevance of facts; consistency; integrity
- creating meaning
- justify methods; justify assumptions; present argument
- think about thinking

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IQ and genetics – an exercise (I)



- Form two teams – I will arbitrarily designate each team to one of two positions on this
- You need to think up some arguments to support your position
- But also try and anticipate the other side's arguments
- Think up some arguments against what you anticipate theirs will be

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IQ and genetics – an exercise (II)



- Now simply list your arguments and those you anticipated from the other side
- How might thinking critically about the subject change how you argue?
- Is it possible to be detached from the arguments? In what way and how much?
- How might you prepare better for a debate?
- Were you surprised at any of the arguments?
- How might you creatively change the debate onto different grounds/basis?

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