

Ch. 1: Critical Thinking: It Matters

I. Critical thinking is the process of assessing opinions.

- A. We all might be entitled to our opinions, but some opinions are more reasonable than others.
- B. Critical thinking consists in examining the views that you and others hold and the reasons for them.

II. Critical thinking is clear thinking about issues

- A. Three step process
 - a. Identifying the issue
 - b. Recognizing what positions people are taking on that issue
 - c. Understanding the arguments for and against those positions.
- B. The ultimate **goal**
 - a. What are the best reasons to accept a claim, reject it, or suspend judgment?
- C. An **issue** is any point being discussed or thought about.
 - a. An issue may also be thought of as a question: Some assertion has to be decided on.
- D. An **argument** is an attempt to support a claim by giving reasons for believing it.
 - a. The claim being argued for is the argument's **conclusion**, while the claim or claims given as reasons for accepting the conclusion are **premises**.
 - b. Argument vs. Persuasion
 - i. It is true that good arguments can persuade people. But not all arguments are made for the purpose of persuading, and without a doubt not all attempts to persuade are arguments.

- c. Argument vs. Explanation
 - i. Briefly, an argument tries to show that some sentence is true; an explanation tries to say why something happens or how it happens.
- d. Conclusion and Premise Indicators
 - i. **Conclusion indicators:** "therefore," "hence," "we may conclude," and so on.
 - ii. **Premise indicators:** "since," "because," "given that," etc.

III. First Step: Identifying the Issue

IV. Second Step: Identifying Factual Issues and Nonfactual Issues

A. **Factual issues** are about **factual claims**. A factual claim does not have to be true. But if it is true it states a fact.

- a. "Beyond Pluto there is another planet" is a factual claim even if we never find out the truth of it.
- b. "'Eggplant' is a funnier word than 'broccoli'" is a nonfactual claim.

B. Is the issue a factual one?

- a. One method: if two people disagree and at least one of them has to be mistaken, the issue is factual.
- b. Another method: If established methods exist for settling a question, it is a factual question.
 - 1. Astronomers have definitions of planets and know how to look for them; hence the question of a tenth planet is a factual one.

C. Opinions about nonfactual issues are not all equally good.

- a. Questions of moral decisions and aesthetic judgments raise very important types of nonfactual issues. In discussions of those issues it is especially important to insist on good arguments.

V. Watch out for the factors that might influence your decision about a claim but are in fact irrelevant to that decision.

A. Human beings are commonly influenced by considerations that strictly speaking do not have to do with the truth of a claim.

a. Friends and Relatives

1. We take friends' and relatives' opinions more seriously than those of strangers; we feel more like agreeing with people who present themselves attractively or speak well.

b. Clumsy and shy delivery

1. Likewise, a clumsy and shy delivery can make us reject what a speaker is saying.