### PHIL 100 Chapter 2 "The Environment of Critical Thinking"

**Critical thinking**

- the systematic evaluation or formulation of beliefs, or statements, by rational standards

**Barriers to critical thinking**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to critical thinking</th>
<th>I. due to <em>how</em> we think</th>
<th>II. due to <em>what</em> we believe (about beliefs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Basic outline:

**I. Aspects of the way we think that can get in the way of critical thinking**

- psychological factors
  - 2 main kinds of barriers
    1. "the almighty self" – self interest, emotion, more
    2. "the power of the group" – external pressures
  - overcoming these barriers: understand & look out for them

**II. Beliefs about knowledge and belief that are barriers to critical thinking**

- 3 beliefs that get in the way
  1. subjective relativism
  2. social relativism
  3. philosophical skepticism
- overcoming these barriers: recognizing problems with these beliefs

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**I. Aspects of the way we think that can get in the way of critical thinking**

### - psychological factors

- 2 main kinds of barriers
  1. "the almighty self"
    - *self interest*
      1. to gain benefits, save face, avoid admitting mistakes
      2. manifestations
        - A. tend to accept (and try to convince others) of beliefs that would be to our advantage
        - B. selective attention:
          - tend to overlook, ignore, not look for evidence that conflicts with beliefs or would be disadvantageous
    - *emotions*: fears, hopes, motivations, attitudes
    - *tendency to fill things in to fit expectations, make patterns*
      - proof reading, overlook errors
      - stereotypes
    - *how memory works*
      1. source amnesia
      2. repetition
      3. filling in gaps
2. "the power of the group"
   family, friends, coworkers, political or religious group, audience
   a. *peer pressure*
      apt to act or believe in a way that conforms to with the group
      (may or may not be an effort to help us fit in, gain acceptance)
   b. *tend to think one’s own group, its beliefs & practices are best*
   c. *appeal to popularity (appeal to the masses)* -
      fallacy of saying one should believe something because lots of
      people do
   d. *appeal to common practice*
      fallacy of saying one should do something (or do things a
      certain way) because lots of people do

B. overcoming these barriers
   1. look for evidence opposing the view you want to support; make
      sure you don’t leave out relevant evidence or considerations
   2. watch out for reasons to suspect that the person trying to convince
      you might be overlooking or hiding relevant evidence
   3. watch out for overly emotional appeals
   4. focus on reasons, rather than person who holds views, or what
      people around you are saying and doing

II. Beliefs about knowledge and belief that are barriers to critical thinking
   A. 3 beliefs that get in the way
      1. *subjective relativism:*
         a. whatever one believes is true (true for that person)
         b. there is no objective truth
      2. *social relativism:*
         whatever is accepted by one’s group is true
      3. *philosophical skepticism:*
         nobody knows anything
   B. overcoming these barriers: recognizing problems with these beliefs
      1. subjective relativism
         a. rules out the possibility of false beliefs
         b. we can never disagree with each other
         c. self-defeating: If true, the belief that there are objective
            truths is also T, but that entails that subjective relativism is F
      2. *social relativism*
         a. self-defeating
         b. we can never disagree with members of other groups
      3. *philosophical skepticism*
         a. arises out of false belief that knowledge requires absolute
            certainty – no possible doubt about the claim
         b. too high a standard – knowledge requires only that there is
            no *reasonable* doubt