

## **Chapter 1: The Nature of Critical Thinking**

- “Critical thinking is reasonable and reflective thinking aimed at deciding what to believe and what to do.” – Robert Ennis

### **Reasonable**

- It demands that we have reasons for our beliefs and decisions.
- It involves distinctive methods and procedures.

### **Reflective**

- It requires thinking what the appropriate methods are to use in certain situations.
- Requires regular judgement

Critical thinking (CT) helps us attain knowledge (which is Justified, true, belief)

**Justification**: means that the belief is based on enough of the right kind of evidence

**Belief**: An attitude about how things are what the facts are.

(These three elements of knowledge are independent of one another.)

### **Examples:**

“People can believe the world is a certain way, and have evidence for it however they could be wrong.” (Someone believes that the earth is flat, and justifies it by saying he can see across the park with no noticeable curvature however he is wrong.) LUCKY

“People can have a belief of the way the world is and be correct however they don’t have enough evidence or justification.” (Someone chooses a random number for a lottery, the number is the number picked however he had no evidence that it would be.) UNLUCKY

“People can have evidence which is true however they themselves can’t believe it” (Girl has evidence that her boyfriend is cheating and it’s true however she can’t believe it) DENIAL

To achieve true knowledge you need all three elements.

With CT our beliefs are justified and since justified beliefs are more likely to be true, it can help us gain knowledge.

### **What is Truth?**

Three attitudes one might have to claims in some subject matter:

**Realism**: There are truths in that subject and are independent of anyone’s personal beliefs. (Math, Chemistry)

**Relativism:** There are truths in that subject but what they are depends on what we believe them to be. (We manipulate our beliefs a certain way so they're true.) (Ex. Which movie is best, what sport is best)

**Nihilism:** There are no truths in that subject. (Ex. Mythical creatures)

### **Relativism and the Argument from Disagreement**

It is thought that relativism is the proper attitude to take towards a subject that carries a lot of disagreement. (Very bad way of thinking during this situation)

This is because there is also lots of agreement about morality

Realism can be the right attitude even when there is lots of disagreement (Ex, Physics, Evolutionary theory)

Critical Thinking presupposes Realism

A belief is justified if it is based or grounded in good reasons.

### **Different kinds of reasons**

**Pragmatic:** Believing something because it is useful or because questioning it would be too difficult.

**Emotional:** Believing something because it makes us feel good or comfortable, or helps us to fit in with others.

**Epistemic:** Believing something because we have evidence that is true.

Critical Thinking requires that we have good epistemic reasons for our beliefs.

What are good Epistemic Reasons?

Good Epistemic Reasons are sufficient and acceptable

**Sufficient:** To be justified, beliefs have to be based on enough of the right kind of evidence. We'll have lots to say in this course about what 'enough' means.

**Acceptable:** Reasons to believe something when the source of knowledge is reliable or a good source.

Our epistemic reasons (evidence) can conflict in two ways.

Evidence that P is true is overridden when we have better evidence that P is not true.

Evidence that P is undermined when we have good reason to think that its source is unreliable

When our evidence conflicts, we need to be cautious before deciding what to believe. A critical thinker is prepared to withhold judgement!

Some mistakes to Avoid

Appeal to origins: It is a mistake to assume that a belief's originating reasons are epistemic reasons too.

Personalizing Reasons: It is a mistake to personalize reasons by treating them as if they belonged to someone. Epistemic reasons are

Universal: If they are reasons for one person to believe something, then they are reasons for everyone to believe it.

Objective: Whether certain reasons are good is independent of whether we think they are good.