Some Challenges to Thinking Critically

Chris Heavey

Critical thinking is difficult to teach, probably because we all think we’re already pretty good at it.

Two Different Situations

1. We don’t believe we know the answer and we don’t have a preference.

   - Daniel Kahneman: *Thinking, Fast and Slow (2011)*
   - Bat and ball
   - The brain has two systems for thinking and solving problems: System 1 and System 2
   - “System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control.” (p. 20).
   - System 1 involves intuition, heuristics, snap judgments, and automatic preferences.
   - “System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration.” (p. 21)
   - System 2 is what we associate with conscious reasoning.
   - While we think we are mostly System 2, in fact we are mostly System 1.
   - Automatic processes rule; we have little if any access to them.

2. We believe we know the answer or we have a preference among possible answers

   - Righteous: Arising from an outraged sense of justice, morality, and fair play. Self-Righteous: Convinced of one’s own righteousness, especially in contrast with the actions and beliefs of others.
   - “An obsession with righteousness (leading inevitably to self-righteousness) is the normal human condition” (p. xiii)
   - Make large, complex societies possible but also provide the foundation for moral strife
   - The rider and the elephant: The mind is divided, like a rider and an elephant, and the rider’s job is to serve the elephant. (p. xiv) Hume: Reason is the servant of passion.
   - The rider is more the press secretary, whose job is to justify the actions of the elephant, than the wise driver. (Split brain evidence.)
   - Standards of evidence differs based on how we feel about an idea, person, argument, etc.:
     o Ideas to which we are inclined: Can I believe it (i.e., is there any evidence that I can use to justify believing this)?
     o Ideas to which we are disinclined: Do I have to believe it (i.e., is there any evidence that I can use to reject this belief)?
   - Reasons for preferences: Team (tribe); Self-Presentation/Reputation; Morality