Lecture 5: Expectations/ Schemata, Assumptions & Emotions in Critical Thinking

<u>**Our objectives today:**</u> After our discussion of the topics in italics, you should be able to:

Assumptions: Critical Thinking and the Unknown
1. Recognize assumptions in various situations
2. Compare and contrast necessary and unwarranted assumptions
3. Develop methods of checking assumptions and creating alternatives

Logic versus Emotion
1. Define the role of emotion in reasoning and argument.
2. Identify the impact of emotional influence on personal and professional effectiveness.
3. Explain the impact of feelings on the critical thinking process.

Assumptions: Critical Thinking and the Unknown
Assumptions are the seemingly self-evident rules about reality that we use to seek explanations, make judgments, or decide on various actions. In other words, they are the <u>unquestioned givens</u> which we take for granted. People reach adulthood with already formed frameworks of understanding, attitudes, and sets of assumptions that underlie their decisions, judgments, and actions. These assumptions influence how we understand cause-and-effect relationships (for example, seeing crime as the result of laziness as opposed to as the result of poverty, or viewing armed resistance as terrorism, rather than a response to oppression / perceived injustice, etc.).

Assumptions form the basis of our criteria regarding what is good (or bad) behavior in others (for example, kindness, courage, honesty, or selfishness, greed, treachery, etc.). The most important decisions we make in our lives (who we marry, where we work, how we raise our children, what we expect from others, how we treat our parents, what we consider the limits of wantok obligations, etc.) are usually made on the basis of our assumptions.

Before we can understand how assumptions influence our actions, we need to know how we come to assume things. Assumptions we make about human nature and society comprise our frameworks of understanding (world view). They fall into *psychological* **assumptions** and *cultural* **assumptions:**
- <u>Psychological assumptions</u> are subconscious inhibitions that cause anxiety and guilt when we violate them. For example, many people are 'programmed' to "Never confront people", "Never perform less than perfectly", "Never express your feelings," etc. We develop these inhibitions through the influences on our psyche during the early sensory-motor and pre-operational stages of our cognitive development.
- <u>Cultural assumptions</u> are embedded in the dominant cultural values of a society and are transmitted by social institutions. They influence our conduct in political, economic, occupational, and religious spheres. We learn to overcome these distorting

cultural and psychological assumptions (enculturation) by consciously analyzing them.

How Can We Identify Our Assumptions?
In order to learn to think critically, we must be able to identify and challenge the assumptions, which mold our attitudes and reasoning. It is not easy: admitting that our assumptions may be wrong often feels threatening, so our ego defenses kick in. Becoming aware of assumptions that are so internalized that they are perceived as second nature or common sense is difficult, because these ideas are so much part of us, of who we are. Assumptions on, for example, what work we are naturally suited for, how the political world works, or why people behave the way they do in relationships are set in our minds and structures of understanding. If becoming aware of these assumptions is difficult, challenging their validity is even more so, for in doing this we call into question beliefs and rules that have governed much of our lives. There are a number of techniques we can use to help us identify and challenge the assumptions by which we live. These **techniques** include:

- *Critical questioning,* designed to identify the motives and assumptions underlying our thoughts and actions.
- *Critical incident technique* – you should identify an incident or event which for some reason was of particular significance to you, and then try to identify what it was that made it so important for you.
- *A crisis-decision simulation* – it is a technique in which people are asked to imagine themselves in a situation where they are forced to make a decision from among a number of uncomfortable choices. After making this decision, they are then required to justify and elaborate on the reasons for choosing this course of action above others. When people make difficult choices from among a number of bad and worse options, their assumptions (in particular, their basic moral values) usually surface. For example, imagine you managed to scramble aboard a small boat after a shipwreck. There is space only for two more in the boat. You see three people thrashing about in the water, begging for help. These are a doctor, a pregnant mother, and a teacher. Which of these three do you choose to help?

Techniques for Developing Alternatives
The success of techniques for creating alternatives is assessed by the extent to which they help us break with existing patterns of thought and action. Some of these techniques include *brainstorming* and *envisioning alternative futures*.

Brainstorming: In a 'sticky' situation, try to think of as many different, even outrageous, solutions as you can. The purpose of brainstorming is to think deliberately in divergent ways, to promote originality of thought as opposed to habitual judgments and assumptions.

Envisioning alternative futures is part of problem solving. It involves a detailed analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of alternative courses

of action (or inaction), and is actually hypothesizing based on maximally accurate information.

Both *brainstorming* and *envisioning alternative futures* are part of problem analysis and problem solving.

Feelings & Thinking
When we form our opinions (come to a ***conclusion*** about something), we do so 'with history' (based on our previous experiences and formed assumptions and beliefs). We have all learned to care about certain things, to support particular interests, and to discount claims of a particular type. So we always start to think critically in the midst of existing opinions and attitudes (*schemata*, or mental structures formed during the ***enculturation*** process, remember?). We have emotional commitments to these existing opinions. They are ***our*** opinions, and we quite understandably feel protective of them. Our emotions are an important part of human experience. They are, in part, what separates humans from machines and the lower life forms, for machines can compute/ process data, but they cannot feel joy, despair, anger, love. jealousy or frustration.

But what has *feeling* to do with *thinking*? In some ways, they are opposites, aren't they? In fact, our society and culture often set them apart and suppress any show of feelings (particularly in business, religion, and family):

Business – Business etiquette requires cool rational politeness. Can you think of any business that allows their employees to vent their emotions? How long would their jobs last? Conversely, can you think of many businesses whose culture encourages screams of joy, whoops of laughter, or hugs and kisses? Rather, the expected norm is that of the cool, objective decision processor, the executive who knows the facts, reasons to a profitable conclusion, and then issues the orders. We hear references to "the tough-minded business exec" and the "lean and mean" company. Such phrases imply some limited feelings, but again, mainly along strict control.

Church - The dominant message from Christian religions has been that feelings can lead us into trouble, called "sin". Sin is often nothing other than feelings out of control. Consider some of the sins of lust, avarice, gluttony, envy, and vengeance. In all those sins, feelings have gone to excess. So, according to Christianity, it is often feelings that tempt the mind and lead people astray, and in the worst of scenarios, to hell. Christianity teaches its followers to control and suppress those feelings.

Family - Although most families allow children occasionally to scream and yell, and perhaps even physically fight with siblings, it also carries a clear message to boys - don't be a wimp, control your emotions - and to girls, who have traditionally been allowed more leeway - don't get hysterical or throw tantrums.

In short, feelings are frequently looked upon as childish, and a sign of weakness. Nevertheless, these feelings are there and they charge our words with a ***tone*** so strong that it cannot be ignored.

The Force behind Our Thoughts

Emotions can both inhibit and inspire thought. As we try to think critically, we cannot help but become aware of how emotions are intertwined with our reasoning. People became aware of the 'connection' between our perceptions and thoughts thousands of years ago: **Protagoras** (c.490-420 BC), one of the first great Ancient Greek philosophers, believed all sensory perceptions to be true for the person who feels them. He reportedly said, **"Man Is the Measure of All Things,"** thus contradicting most earlier and even contemporary Greek philosophers, who made a clear distinction between **sense** and **thought**, between **perception** and **reason**, and had believed that the truth is to be found, not by the senses, but by **reason**. The whole teaching of Protagoras rests on **denying** this distinction.

Think about it:

Herder, a German philosopher, wrote over 200 years ago in his *"Essay on the Origin of Language"* that the origin of language is in human nature. He believed that knowledge is possible only through the medium of language. Although humans and other creatures of the physical world share feelings, human *consciousness* (thought) separates us from all other creation, in order to link us again in deliberate use of words to *refer* to reality. Thus, what we may vaguely sense but not recognize in feeling, finds expression and understanding through language. **Feeling and thought thus interpenetrate each other; and the word, being at once sound and significance, is the cause of this union.** Every signification of something, therefore, includes an emotional attitude toward it that reflects the particularity and the outlook of its users. Thus, the structure of language is a true image of human nature.

Are you in agreement with Herder?

Pascal* (1623-1662), on the other hand, thought the relationship between reason and feeling was that of "an eternal battle."

* A French mathematician, physicist, religious philosopher, and master of prose. He laid the foundation for the modern theory of probabilities, formulated what came to be known as Pascal's law of pressure, and propagated a religious doctrine that taught the experience of God through the heart rather than through reason.

If we view our feelings as Pascal describes them, as *battling* with our mind, then we have a dangerous enemy; on the other hand, if try to understand our feelings, we can *use* them to our advantage.

Let us dig deeper now – what lies beneath the surface of rationality/ rational thought?

1. **Our needs and wants** – they often drive our thoughts and actions. Most of the time people "know" what they want (often this *knowing* is a *feeling*!), and then they develop reasons to convince themselves or others that their wants are good. Relatively few people approach issues with an objective, questioning and data-gathering mind that considers most angles and makes decisions with long-range vision. Paradoxically, many people who claim to be most objective, and to base all

their decisions on facts, often don't know themselves. They suppress their feelings and, in fact, are often unaware of them. These hidden feelings function then at the subconscious level and often prove to be dangerous.

2. **Our values, beliefs, and attitudes** (prejudices, morals, etc.) – they are closely related to our needs and wants. These *root elements (assumptions)* are usually formed early in life, taught by parents, modeled by peers, and become firmly fixed. Although reasons to justify our root elements are readily available to the mind, the ***reasons*** are not usually ***why*** we hold onto our values, beliefs, prejudices, and morals; the ***feelings are***. Thinking and feeling flows both ways – Herder was right there! Thoughts can influence our feelings so strongly that cognitive therapy, which changes the way we think about things, is a good way to shape our feelings. Fortunately, we are often aware of our thoughts, and thus we have the ability to adjust them and their impact on our emotions; however, we are often less aware of our feelings and therefore we need to identify and deal with them. I like the *simile* in Kirby and Goodpaster's book, Chapter 6: "Our feelings are like the magma beneath the surface which fuels the erupting volcano."

Asking critical questions about our values, ideas, and behaviors may be quite disturbing, and we often feel resentment, or anxiety, when pressed to face these 'uncomfortable' issues. Yet, as critical thinkers, we must try to understand ourselves, before we can understand others (remember the Sophists' motto, ***Know Thyself***?)

So: *thinking* and *feeling* are fundamentally interrelated. Thoughts can influence our feelings so strongly, they can radically change what we feel – this is where *persuasion* comes in: have you ever 'talked' yourself, or a friend, into feeling happy? Or started feeling sad, because of sad thoughts that crossed your mind? Fortunately, we are (by definition) aware of our conscious thoughts, and so can adjust them and their impact on our feelings. However, our feelings and attitudes can be ***subconscious***, and that is why we need to identify them, become *aware* of them, in order to be able to deal with them.

The Importance of Tone
So strong is the force of our feelings that it can override the content of our message. If someone does not like us, we *feel* it, despite the outward friendliness. If someone doesn't love us and says they do, we can hear it in their tone. The tone does not lie – it usually carries the true meaning, overriding the words.

Tone reflects the *attitude* we have toward a subject or whoever we are dealing with. **Attitudes *drive* our behaviour**. If we dislike what we are talking about, or who we are talking to, *it will show through*, ***it will be felt*** by the people we are communicating with.

Therefore, it becomes important to "tune in" to others in order to accurately interpret their thoughts; we must also "tune in" to *our own* tone, and **match** it to our own ***thoughts,*** as we speak and write. If our feeling and thinking are in harmony, then our message will carry the force of our Personal Truth.

Thinking Activity*: Feelings beneath Our Thoughts

What are the feelings behind your thinking and actions? What feelings underlie the choices you make? What, deep down, really drives you as you select, choose and decide? Consider your relationships, behavior patterns, your beliefs and values, and try to identify the feelings that influence your actions and decisions:

_____

_____

_____

Have you discovered any feelings *behind* your thoughts? If someone you hate approached you, would you start thinking? Would your thoughts be driven by your feelings towards that person?
* This activity is based on Activity 6.1 on p. 100 of the Kirby & Goodpaster *Thinking* text.

Cognitive Consistency: Importance of Inner Harmony

Cognitive consistency is *harmony* between our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. We strive for cognitive consistency, because conflict between them creates a very unpleasant psychological state called ***cognitive dissonance***, or discord. To escape from this unsettling inner conflict and regain our psychological balance, we employ all those *ego defenses* (denial, projection and rationalization and *self-serving biases*) we discussed last week.

The use of Emotions in Reasoning and Argument
There is much truth to the old saying that life is just one problem after another. That's why problem solving is one of life's major preoccupations. Reasoning is the essential ingredient in problem solving. When confronted with a problem, those of us who are rational, reason out solutions based on what we already know, or have good reason to believe to be true. The trick, of course, is to reason well. Reasoning goes stepwise, and can be expressed in the form of logical arguments.

Logical arguments consist of one or more premises offered to support a conclusion. Here is a simple example of reasoning about the nature / nurture issue:

Identical twins sometimes have different IQ test scores. Yet these twins inherit exactly the same genes. So environment must play some part in determining a person's IQ.

This kind of reasoning is called an **argument.** In this case, the argument consists of three statements:
>   1. Identical twins often have different IQ test scores.
>   2. Identical twins inherit the same genes.
>   3. So environment must play some part in determining IQ.

The first two statements in this argument give reasons for accepting the third. In logic talk, they are said to be **premises** of the argument; and the third statement, which asserts the **claim** made by the argument, is called the argument's **conclusion.**

In trying to influence others, people often employ (deliberately or not) illogical (false) arguments. False arguments twist or ignore logic. If you can identify false or weak reasoning, you will effectively defend your argument and influence (persuade) your receivers. Common diversionary tactics include:

- The personal argument (attacking the person, instead of the issue)
- The emotive argument (appealing to emotions, manipulating reasoning)
- The illogical argument (deficient in logical reasoning)
- The dishonest argument (deliberately misleading).

As critical thinkers, we must learn to recognize false arguments and neutralize them with logic. We'll spend most of the remainder of this course learning how to distinguish good arguments from fallacies; here is a very brief description of just one of the fallacies: the emotive argument.

The Emotive Argument: 'Emotional' or 'emotive' arguments can take many forms. It is possible to influence persuasive outcomes by deliberately using prejudiced terms which elicit a more favorable or hostile response than the bare facts would indicate. Advertisers, lawyers, politicians, journalists and speakers at mass meetings are generally good at this: "Whom are we to admire? A lone, conscientious man who speaks out the truth, or a group of power-hungry and blinkered tyrants?" [Not much choice, huh?] Partiality, self-interest, bias and prejudice should not influence our judgment in matters of fact. Language can be calculated to appeal to the emotional leanings or needs of the audience, distracting attention from the evidence and logic of the argument.

False arguments may have a short-term persuasive effect. People, however, come to realize eventually that they have been tricked or pressured, and their good will, trust, and cooperation will turn into distrust and hostility (so much for your attempt to influence them!)

All of us use emotional appeals in our arguments. Logic can convince thoughtful people, but we know that logic is often blocked by emotions. Much of the persuasive pressure that drives and influences people lies deep within our root elements/ assumptions (our values, needs, biases, and beliefs). These forces are established early in life, and they drive the emotional tone beneath our convictions. Because we want to appear rational, we often camouflage our emotions with reasons.

Do you agree with this opinion?
> It is essential to have an open mind in order to think critically. Open-mindedness is not easy to achieve: prejudices and biases tend to stick, penetrating into the subconscious mind. Negative thoughts can be consciously neutralized, but negative feelings are more difficult to eliminate. These feelings may continue to feed our negative behaviours and attitudes towards a group.

Understanding Our Feelings
Now that we understand the dynamism / interrelationship between feelings and thoughts, we can tap this power. We must become aware of how we feel about a topic that we are thinking about: this awareness will lead us to the 'root causes' of our feelings, the

unwarranted assumptions and fossilized beliefs and attitudes we didn't know we had. It is this awareness that will help us understand and re-evaluate our thinking.

Thinking and Feeling Challenges

1. What did Protagoras mean, when he said, "Man Is the Measure of All Things"? Please give 3 examples to illustrate your ideas.
2. What do you think about Pascal's statement, "Those who are accustomed to judge by feeling do not understand the process of reasoning"?
3. How does your language reflect what our society thinks about feelings? For instance, some of the words to describe an emotional male are *sensitive* and *kind*; can you think of any other words (positive or negative) to describe an emotional male? Think of other examples that reflect our cultural attitude toward feelings.
4. How extensive is your vocabulary for describing feelings? To answer this question, begin by listing all the words you can think of, that describe love, hate, anger, or fear.
5. To begin to grow more aware of your feelings toward certain topics, rate your feelings toward the items on the list below:
   (0=neutral; 10=the best; -10=the worst)

___ snakes	___ gay people	___ politicians	___ foreigners
___ raskols	___ Islam	___ lawyers	___ children
___ teachers	___ ice cream	___ LPD course	___ old people
___ exams	___ roast chickens	___ smoking	___ sick people

5. When you hear the next person talk, listen to the tone, the feelings underneath the expressed thoughts, and describe them. Are they in line with the words (verbal content)?
6. Rousseau said, "I felt before I thought." What might he mean?
7. Describe what your culture thinks about emotions. Give examples to support your description.