

Essential Intellectual Traits

from *Foundation for Critical Thinking*

Intellectual Humility

vs.

Intellectual Arrogance

...being conscious of

the limits of our knowledge

the circumstances in which our native egocentrism is likely to function self-deceptively

the bias, prejudice and limitations of our view point

Intellectual humility depends on recognizing that we should not claim more than we actually know. It does not imply spinelessness or submissiveness. It implies the lack of intellectual pretentiousness, boastfulness or conceit, combined with insight into the logical foundations, or lack of such foundations, of our beliefs.

Intellectual Courage

vs.

Intellectual Cowardice

...being conscious of the need to face and fairly address ideas, beliefs or viewpoints toward which we have strong negative emotions and to which we have not given a serious hearing

This courage connects to the recognition that ideas considered dangerous or absurd are sometimes rationally justified (in whole or in part) and that conclusions and beliefs inculcated in us are sometimes false or misleading. To determine for ourselves which is which, we must not passively and uncritically "accept" what we have "learned." Intellectual courage comes into play here because inevitably we will come to see some truth in some ideas considered dangerous and absurd, and distortion or falsity in some ideas strongly held in our social group. We need the courage to be true to our own thinking in such circumstances. The penalties for non-conformity can be severe.

Intellectual Empathy

vs.

Intellectual Callousness

...being conscious of the need to

imaginatively put ourselves in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them

egocentrically identify truth with our immediate perceptions of long-standing thought or belief

This trait correlates with the ability to reconstruct accurately the viewpoints and reasoning of others and to reason from premises, assumptions and ideas other than our own. This trait also correlates with the willingness to remember occasions when we were wrong in the past despite an intense conviction that we were right and with the ability to imagine our being similarly deceived in the case at hand.

Intellectual Autonomy

vs.

Intellectual Conformity

...having a rational control of our beliefs, values and inferences

The ideal of critical thinking is to learn to think for ourselves, to gain command over our thought processes. It entails a commitment to analyzing and evaluating beliefs on the basis of reason and evidence, to question when it is rational to question, to believe when it is rational to believe and to conform when it is rational to conform.

Intellectual Integrity vs. **Intellectual Hypocrisy**

...recognition of the need to

be true to our own thinking

be consistent in the intellectual standards we apply

hold ourselves to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which we hold our antagonists

practice what we advocate for others

honestly admit discrepancies and inconsistencies in our own thoughts and actions

Intellectual Perseverance vs. **Intellectual Laziness**

...having a firm commitment to

the need to use intellectual insights and truths in spite of difficulties, obstacles and frustrations

rational principles despite the irrational opposition of others

struggling with confusion and unsettled questions over an extended period of time to achieve deeper understanding or insight

Intellectual Confidence vs. **Intellectual Cynicism**

...having confidence that

in the long run, our own higher interests and those of humankind at large will be best served by giving the freest play to reason and by encouraging people to come to their own conclusions by developing their own rational faculties

with encouragement and cultivation, people can learn to think for themselves, form rational viewpoints, draw reasonable conclusions, think coherently and logically, persuade each other by reason and become reasonable persons - despite the deep-seated obstacles in the human mind and in society as we know it

Intellectual Objectivity vs. **Intellectual Bias**

...being conscious of the need to

treat all viewpoints alike, without reference to our own feelings or vested interests, or the feelings or vested interests of our friends, community or nation

adhere to intellectual standards without reference to our own advantage or the advantage of our group