

DAY ONE

Discover Your Ignorance

Most of us assume whatever we believe to be “right.” Though we were taught much of what we believe before we could critically analyze our beliefs, we nevertheless defend our beliefs as *the truth*. Good thinkers know this is absurd.

When you actively focus on uncovering your ignorance, you realize you are often wrong. You look for opportunities to test your ideas for soundness. You recognize that much of what people believe is based on prejudice, bias, half-truths, and sometimes superstition. You routinely question your beliefs. Your beliefs do not control you; you control your beliefs. You develop intellectual humility—awareness of the extent of your ignorance.

“Willingness to be taught what we do not know is the sure pledge of growth both in knowledge and wisdom.” —Blair

Intellectual humility is the disposition to distinguish, at any given moment and in any given situation, between what you know and what you don’t know. People disposed toward intellectual humility recognize the natural tendency of the mind to think it knows more than it does, to see itself as right when the evidence proves otherwise. They routinely think within alternative viewpoints, making sure they are accurately representing those viewpoints. They consider other viewpoints to understand them in good faith—not to dismiss them.

Socrates, an early Greek philosopher and teacher (c. 470–399 B.C.E.), was a living model of intellectual humility. Consider:

“Socrates philosophized by joining in a discussion with another person who thought he knew what justice, courage, or the like was. Under Socrates’ questioning, it became clear that neither [of the two] knew, and they cooperated in a new effort, Socrates making interrogatory suggestions that were accepted or rejected by his friend. They failed to solve the problem, but, now conscious of their lack of knowledge, agreed to continue the search whenever possible (p. 483).”⁴

“Profoundly sensible of the inconsistencies of his own thoughts and words and actions, and shrewdly suspecting that the like inconsistencies were to be found in other men, he was careful always to place himself upon the standpoint of ignorance and to invite others to join him there, in order that, proving all things, he and they might hold fast to that which is good (p. 332).”⁵

People with a high degree of intellectual humility (and they are rare) understand that there is far more that they will *never* know than they will *ever* know. They continually seek to learn more, to develop their intellectual abilities, and to expand their knowledge base, always with a healthy awareness of the limits of their knowledge.

Be on the lookout for...

...intellectual arrogance today, the tendency to confidently assert as true what you do not in fact know to be true. Try to discover the limitations and biases of your sources of information. Question those who speak with authority. Question the information they use in their arguments, the information they ignore, the information they distort. Question what you read and see in the media. Notice the confidence with which “the news” is asserted. Question the sources that “produce”

4. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1972.

5. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, 1911, Cambridge, England: the University Press.

the news. Whenever you feel inclined to make a bold statement, stop and ask how much you really know about what you're asserting.

Strategies for developing intellectual humility:

1. When you cannot find sufficient evidence that *proves* your belief to be true, begin by saying: "I may be wrong, but what I think is..." or "Up to this point, I have believed..." or "Based on my limited knowledge in this area, I would say...".
2. Notice when you argue for beliefs without evidence to justify them. Recognize why you are doing this.
3. Actively question beliefs that seem obviously true to you, especially deeply held beliefs such as religious, cultural, or political beliefs.
4. Find alternative sources of information that represent viewpoints you have never considered.
5. Don't be afraid to "explore" new beliefs, and hence, be open to new insights.
6. Make a list of everything you absolutely know about someone you think you know well. Then make a list of things you think are true about that person, but that you cannot be absolutely sure about. Then make a list of things you do not know about that person. Then, if you can trust the person, show him or her the list to see how accurate you are. What insights emerge for you after you get feedback on such lists?

Questions you might ask to identify weaknesses in your thinking:

- What do I truly know (about myself, about this or that situation, about another person, about my nation, about what is going on in the world)?
- To what extent do my prejudices or biases influence my thinking?

- To what extent have I been indoctrinated into beliefs that might be false?
- How do the beliefs I have accepted uncritically keep me from seeing things as they are?
- Do I ever think outside the box (of my culture, nation, religion, and so on)?
- How knowledgeable am I about alternative belief systems?
- How have my beliefs been shaped by the time period in which I was born, by the place in which I was raised, by my parents' beliefs, by my spouse's beliefs, and by my religion, culture, politics, and so on?

DAY TWO

Strive to Be a Person of Integrity: Beware of Your Own Hypocrisy

People are hypocritical in at least three ways. First, they tend to have higher standards for those with whom they disagree than they have for themselves or their friends. Second, they often fail to live in accordance with their professed beliefs. Third, they often fail to see contradictions in the behavior of people with whom they identify (such as people of high status).

Hypocrisy, then, is a state of mind unconcerned with honesty. It is often marked by unconscious contradictions and inconsistencies. Because the mind is naturally egocentric, it is naturally hypocritical. Yet at the same time, it can skillfully rationalize whatever it thinks and does. In other words, the human mind naturally wants to see itself in a positive light. The *appearance* of integrity is important to the egocentric mind. This is why, as humans, we actively hide our hypocrisy from ourselves and from others (through self-deception and rationalization). For example, though we are often selfish, we almost never see ourselves in this light. But we readily see selfishness in others. In other words, it is okay for me to be selfish, but not for you to be selfish. Although we expect others to adhere to much more rigid standards than the standards we impose on ourselves, we see ourselves as fair. For instance, the bookkeeper who steals money from her company may deceive herself into believing the company “owes” her that money, because the company has never paid her what she is worth, or, she might reason that the business is highly lucrative so should pay

her more, and so on. All are rationalizations that enable her to hide from the truth. Though we profess certain beliefs, we often fail to behave in accordance with those beliefs.

Only to the extent that our beliefs and actions are consistent, only when we say what we mean and mean what we say, do we have intellectual integrity.

“We are companions in hypocrisy.”
—William Dean Howells

When you resolve to live a life of integrity, you routinely examine your own inconsistencies and face them truthfully, without excuses. You want to know the truth about yourself. You want to know the truth in others. By facing your own hypocrisy, you begin to grow beyond it (while recognizing that you can never get full command of your hypocrisy because you can never get full command of your egocentricity). When you recognize it in others (especially those of status), they are less able to manipulate you.

See page 23 for an explanation of intellectual integrity, which is the opposite of hypocrisy.

Be on the lookout for...

...contradictions or hypocrisy in your behavior and the behavior of others today. Catch yourself using double standards. Notice when others do. Because hypocrisy is a natural human tendency, theoretically this should be easy. Look closely at what people say they believe. Compare this with what their behavior implies. Dig out inconsistencies in your thinking and behavior. Notice when you profess a belief, and then act in contradiction to that belief. Notice how you justify or rationalize inconsistencies in your behavior. Figure out the consequences of your hypocrisy. Does it enable you to get what you want without having to face the truth about yourself? Figure out the consequences of others' hypocrisies. However, if you don't see hypocrisy in yourself, look again and again and again.

Strategies for reducing hypocrisy in yourself:

- Begin to notice situations in which you expect more from others than you do from yourself. Target the areas of your greatest hypocrisy (these are usually areas in which you are emotionally involved). Do you expect more from your spouse than you do from yourself? From your coworkers? From your subordinates? From your children?
- Write a list of beliefs that seem most important to you. Then identify situations in which your behavior is inconsistent with those beliefs (where you say one thing and do another). Realize that what you believe is embedded in your actions, not your words. What does your behavior tell you about yourself? For example, you might say that you love someone while often failing to behave in accordance with his or her interests. Or, you might say your intellectual development is important to you while in fact spending little time on it.
- Think about the way you are living your life. Are you living a life of integrity where your motives are transparent? Or, are you hiding something significant? If so, what are you hiding, and more importantly, why are you doing this? How can you face your hypocrisy? What do you need to change about yourself or your situation?

Strategies for noticing hypocrisy in others:

1. Observe the people around you. Begin to analyze the extent to which they say one thing and do another. Compare their words to their deeds. For example, notice how often people claim to love someone they criticize behind the person's back. This is a common form of bad faith.
2. Think about the people you are closest to—your partner, spouse, children, or friends. To what extent can you identify hypocrisy or integrity in these relationships? To what extent do they say what they mean and mean what they say? What problems are caused by their hypocrisy?

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DAY THREE

Empathize with Others

Intellectual empathy requires us to think within the viewpoints of others, especially those we think are wrong. This is difficult until we recognize how often we have been wrong in the past and others have been right. Those who think differently from us sometimes possess truths we have not yet discovered. Practice in thinking within others' viewpoints is crucial to your development as a thinker. Good thinkers value thinking within from opposing viewpoints. They recognize that many truths can be acquired only when they "try on" other ways of thinking. They value gaining new insights and expanding their views. They appreciate new ways of seeing the world. They don't assume their perspective to be the most reasonable one. They are willing to engage in dialogue to understand other perspectives. They don't fear ideas and beliefs they don't understand or have never considered. They are ready to abandon beliefs they have passionately held when those beliefs are shown to be false or misleading.

See page 22 for a further explanation of intellectual empathy.

Be on the lookout for...

...opportunities to empathize today. Look for examples of empathetic *behavior* in others. Practice being empathetic. For example, whenever someone takes a position with which you disagree, state in your own words what you think the person is saying. Then ask the person whether you have accurately stated her or his position. Notice the extent to which others empathize

with you. See whether there is a difference between what they say (“I understand”) and what their behavior possibly implies (that they aren’t actually listening to you). Ask someone who disagrees with you to state what he or she understands you to be saying. Notice when people distort what is being said to keep from changing their views or giving up something in their interest. Notice when you do the same. By exercising intellectual empathy, you understand others more fully, expand your knowledge of your own ignorance, and gain deeper insight into your own mind.

“He who lives in
ignorance of others lives
in ignorance of himself.”
—Anonymous

Strategies for empathizing with others:

1. During a disagreement with someone, switch roles. Tell the person, “I will speak from your viewpoint for ten minutes if you will speak from mine. This will perhaps help us understand one another better.” Afterward, each of you should correct the other’s representation of your position: “The part of my position you don’t understand is....”
2. During a discussion, summarize what another person is saying using this structure: “What I understand you to be saying is.... Is this correct?”
3. When reading, say to yourself what you think the author is saying. Explain it to someone else. Recheck the text for accuracy. This enables you to assess your understanding of an author’s viewpoint. Only when you are sure you understand a viewpoint are you in a position to disagree (or agree) with it.

Clarify Your Thinking

Our own thinking usually seems clear to us, even when it is not. Vague, ambiguous, muddled, deceptive, or misleading thinking are significant problems in human life. If you are to develop as a thinker, you must learn the art of clarifying your thinking—of pinning it down, spelling it out, and giving it a specific meaning. Here's what you can do to begin. When people explain things to you, summarize in your own words what you think they said. When you cannot do this to their satisfaction, you don't truly understand what they said. When they cannot summarize to your satisfaction what you have said, they don't truly understand what you said. Try it. See what happens.

“Muddled thinking is the key to a muddled life.”

—Anonymous

Be on the lookout for...

...vague, fuzzy, blurred thinking—thinking that may sound good but doesn't actually say anything. Try to figure out the real meaning of what people are saying. Compare what people say with what they might really mean. Try to figure out the real meaning of important news stories. Explain your understanding of an issue to someone else to help clarify it in your own mind. Practice summarizing in your own words what others say. Then ask them if you understood them correctly. Be careful to neither agree nor disagree with what anyone says until you (clearly) understand what he or she is saying.

Strategies for clarifying your thinking:

To improve your ability to clarify your thinking (in your own mind, when speaking to others, or when writing, for example), use this basic strategy:

- State one point at a time.
- Elaborate on what you mean.
- Give examples that connect your thoughts to life experiences.
- Use analogies and metaphors to help people connect your ideas to a variety of things they already understand. (Consider this analogy: Critical thinking is like an onion. It has many layers. Just when you think you have it basically figured out, you realize there is another layer, and then another, and another, and another, and on and on.)

Here is a format you can use to make sure you are clear when speaking or writing your thoughts:

- I think (state your main point)
- In other words (elaborate on your main point)
- For example (give an example of your main point)
- To give you an analogy (give an illustration of your main point)

To clarify other people's thinking, you might ask any of the following questions:

- Can you restate your point in other words? I didn't understand you.
- Can you give an example?
- Let me tell you what I understand you to be saying. Do I understand you correctly?

As you begin to use these strategies, as basic as they seem, note how seldom others use them. Begin to notice how often people assume that others understand them when what they have said is, in

fact, unintelligible, muddy, or confusing. Note how, very often, the *simple* intellectual moves are the most powerful. (For example, saying to someone: “I don’t understand what you are saying. Can you say that in other words?”) Focus on using these basic, foundational moves whenever it seems at all relevant to do so. As you do, you will find that your thinking becomes clearer and clearer, and you get better and better at clarifying others’ thinking.

The idea of clarifying thinking is almost *so easy it is hard*. It is like watching the ball while playing tennis. It is easy to deceive ourselves into thinking we are doing it when we are not. The difference is that in tennis we get immediate feedback that tells us when we were not watching the ball (when, for instance, the ball doesn’t go over the net). In thinking, we do not have this same luxury of instant feedback. So, we can remain self-deceived much of the time.

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DAY SEVEN

Be Relevant: Stick to the Point

When thinking is relevant, it is focused on the main task at hand. It selects what is germane, pertinent, and related. It is on the alert for everything that connects to the issue. It sets aside what is immaterial, inappropriate, extraneous, or beside the point. That which directly bears upon (helps solve) the problem you are trying to solve is *relevant* to the problem. When thinking drifts away from what is relevant, it needs to be brought back to what truly makes a difference. Undisciplined thinking is often guided by associations (“this reminds me of that, that reminds me of this other thing”) rather than what is logically connected (“if a and b are true, c must also be true”). Disciplined thinking intervenes when thoughts wander and it concentrates the mind on the things that help it figure out what it needs to figure out.

If you find your thinking digresses, try to figure out why. Is your mind simply wandering? If so, you probably need to intervene to get it back on track. Or, perhaps you realize that you need to deal with a different issue before addressing the one you were originally focused on. If so, by all means address the issue your mind has surfaced. But most importantly, *know precisely, at any given moment, the issue you are addressing*, and then stick to that issue until you have either reached resolution or made an active decision to revisit the issue later, or deal with the alternative issue that has emerged and stick to that issue. But do not allow your mind to wander aimlessly from idea to idea, issue to issue, without direction or discipline.

Be on the lookout for...

...fragmented thinking—thinking that leaps about with no logical connections. Start noticing when you or others fail to stay focused on what is relevant. Focus on finding what will help you solve a problem. When someone brings up a point that doesn't seem pertinent to the issue at hand, ask, "How is what you're saying relevant to the issue?" When working through a problem, make sure you stay focused on what sheds light on, and thus helps address, the problem. Don't allow your mind to wander to unrelated matters. Don't allow others to stray from the main issue or divert you. Frequently ask, "What is the central question? Is this or that relevant to it? How?"

"If we are to solve a problem, we must pursue it with all our intellectual prowess, identifying exactly that which helps us solve it, and weeding out that which gets in the way." —Anonymous

Questions you can ask to make sure your thinking is focused on what is relevant:

- Am I focused on the main problem or task?
- How are these two issues connected, or are they?
- How is the problem raised intertwined with the issue at hand?
- Does the information I am considering directly relate to the problem or task?
- Where do I need to focus my attention?
- Am I being diverted to unrelated matters?
- Am I failing to consider relevant viewpoints?
- How is my point relevant to the issue I am addressing?
- What facts will actually help me answer the question? What considerations should be set aside?
- Does this truly bear on the question? How does it connect?

DAY EIGHT

Be Reasonable

A hallmark of the critical thinker is the disposition to change her or his mind when given a good reason to change. Good thinkers want to change their thinking when they discover better thinking. In other words, they can and want to be *moved* by reason.

Yet, comparatively few people are reasonable in the full sense of the word. Few are willing to change their minds once set. Few are willing to suspend their beliefs to hear the views of those with whom they disagree. This is true because the human mind is not *naturally* reasonable. Reasonability, if it is to develop in the mind to any significant degree, must be actively fostered in the mind by the mind. Although we routinely make inferences or come to conclusions, we don't necessarily do so *reasonably*. Yet we typically see our conclusions as reasonable. We then want to *stick to our conclusions* without regard for their justification or plausibility. The mind typically decides whether to accept or reject a viewpoint or argument based on *whether it already believes it*.

“We think so because other people think so; or because—*or because—* after all, we do think so; or because we were told so, and think we must think so; or because we once thought so and think we still think so; or because, having thought so, we think we will think so.” —Henry Sidgwick

To put it another way, the mind is not naturally malleable. Rather, it is, by nature, *rigid*. People often shut out good reasons readily available to them. We often refuse to hear arguments that are perfectly reasonable (when those reasons contradict what we already believe).

To become more reasonable, open your mind to the possibility, at any given moment, that you might be wrong and another person might be right. Be willing to change your mind when the situation or evidence requires it. Recognize that you don't lose anything by admitting you are wrong; rather, you gain in intellectual development.

See page 23 to read about confidence in reason, an important intellectual trait.

Be on the lookout for...

...reasonable and unreasonable behaviors—yours and others'. Notice when you are unwilling to listen to the reasoned views of others, when you are unwilling to modify your views even when others present evidence or good reasoning that supports a better view. Carefully observe yourself. Can you be moved by reason? Are you open to the voice of reason in others? When you catch yourself being defensive, see whether you can break through your defensiveness to hear good reasons being presented. Identify times when you use language that makes you appear reasonable, even though your behavior proves otherwise. Try to figure out why you or others are being unreasonable. Do you have a selfish interest in not being open-minded? Do others have a selfish interest in not being open-minded?

Strategies for becoming more reasonable:

- Notice how seldom people admit they are wrong. Notice, instead, how often they hide their mistakes. Most people would rather lie than admit to being wrong. Decide that you do not want to be such a person.
- Say aloud, "I'm not perfect. I make mistakes. I'm often wrong." See if you have the courage to admit this during a disagreement, "Of course, I may be wrong. You may be right."

- Practice saying in your own mind, “I may be wrong. I often am. I’m willing to change my mind when given good reasons.” Then look for opportunities to make changes in your thinking.
- Ask yourself, “When was the last time I changed my mind because someone gave me better reasons for his or her views than I had for mine?” To what extent are you open to new ways of looking at things? To what extent can you objectively judge information that refutes what you already think?
- Realize you are being unreasonable if:
 - a. You are unwilling to listen to someone’s reasons.
 - b. You are irritated by reasons people give you (before thinking them through).
 - c. You become defensive during a discussion.
- When you catch yourself being close-minded, analyze your thinking by completing the following statements in your journal (remember that the more details you write in your journal entries, the better able you will be to change your thinking in future similar situations):
 - a. I realize I was being close-minded in this situation because...
 - b. The thinking I was trying to hold onto is...
 - c. Thinking that is potentially better is...
 - d. This thinking is better because...

Be on the lookout for...

...opportunities to show mercy to others, to display understanding, compassion, and forgiveness. Notice the extent to which others around you favor punishment and suffering as the proper response to “deviant” behavior. Notice the extent to which you do. As you read the newspaper, notice that severe sentences often are meted out for “crimes” that injure no one except the perpetrator.

Ask yourself how often punishment is extreme (in causing human suffering). Consider “three-strikes-and-you’re-out” legislation. Consider the practice of trying children as adults. Consider “adult crime,

adult time” legislation (laws aimed at giving adult-length sentences to children convicted of serious crimes). Also familiarize yourself with the approach of other countries (for example, Finland) that successfully return criminals to socially meaningful lives as soon as possible, with a low rate of repeat offenders. Think of ways to deal with cultural deviance without extreme punishment and social vengeance.

Be Fair, Not Selfish

Human thinking is naturally self-serving or selfish. Selfishness is a *native*, not learned, human tendency (though it can be encouraged or discouraged by one's culture and the groups to which one belongs). Humans naturally tend to look out for "number one." Unfortunately, that often means we are unfair to persons "two" and "three."

"Selfishness is that detestable vice which no one will forgive in others, and no one is without in himself."

—H.W. Beecher

You don't have to be selfish. It is possible to develop as a fair person and thinker. You can learn to give significant attention to the desires, needs, and rights of others. You do not need to "cheat yourself" to be fair.

When you think fairmindedly, you consider the rights and needs of others as equivalent to your own. You forego the pursuit of your desires when fair play requires it. You learn how to overcome your selfishness. You learn how to step outside your point of view and into others' points of view. You value fairmindedness as a personal characteristic worth pursuing.

See page 23 for an explanation of fairmindedness.

Be on the lookout for...

...selfishness today—in yourself and others. Notice how often people justify their selfishness. Notice how often they object to the selfishness

of others. Look closely at the role of selfishness in your life. Note how hard it is to be fair to those you have been taught to consider “evil.” Note how difficult it is to identify your own unfair behavior (because the mind naturally hides what it doesn’t want to face).

Strategies for developing as a fairminded thinker:

- Recognize anew, every day, that you, like every other human, are *naturally* self-centered—that you, like every other human, are primarily interested in how the world and everything in it can serve you. Only by bringing this idea to the forefront of your thinking can you begin to get command of your selfishness and self-centered tendencies.
- Be on the alert to catch yourself in the mental act of self-deception—for example, ignoring others’ viewpoints. Remember that all humans engage in some self-deception. Exceptional persons recognize this tendency in themselves and consistently work to take command of it.
- Log each time you do something selfish. Reward yourself for noticing your selfishness and not letting yourself off the hook. Target the excuses you use to rationalize self-serving behavior. Write down in detail how and when you are selfish. Then write down the point of view of those who are affected by your selfishness. Consider how you can avoid such behavior in future similar situations. You might use the following format to log your selfish episodes:
 - Today I was selfish in the following way...
 - My selfish (but unspoken) thinking was as follows... Be as honest as possible. Do not allow your mind to get away with self-deception as you detail your thinking.
 - My selfishness affected the following person or people in the following way(s)...
 - In the future, I can avoid being selfish or self-centered in a similar situation by thinking and behaving in the following rational ways...

- Take every opportunity you can to think broadly about issues that involve multiple viewpoints. Assume that your mind will tend to favor whatever perspective you hold in any given situation. Force your mind, if necessary, to consider other relevant ways of looking at the issue or situation (and to represent those viewpoints accurately, rather than in a distorted way).

**Questions you can ask to foster fairness
in your thinking:**

- Am I being fair to... right now?
- Am I putting my *desires* ahead of the *rights* and *needs* of others? If so, what precisely am I after and whose rights or needs am I ignoring or violating?
- When I think about the way I live, how often do I put myself in others' shoes?
- Do I have a selfish interest in not seeing the truth in this situation? If I face the truth, will I have to change my behavior?
- Do I think broadly enough to be fair? How many alternative perspectives have I explored? What national, religious, political, ideological, and social points of view have I considered?
- In what types of situations do I tend to be selfish? With my spouse? My children? My friends? My coworkers?