

What are four barriers to critical thinking?

The late 19th century American philosopher Charles Peirce developed a sophisticated model for critical thinking. Peirce was the founder of the tradition of American philosophy called Pragmatism. According to Pragmatism, all thought is contextual. People's thoughts and beliefs help them to make sense of the world. When the context changes or your beliefs become problematic, you are compelled to "fix your beliefs." This is done through opening the road to inquiry. The barriers to critical thinking, in Peirce's terms, are anything that blocks the road to inquiry.

1. Stubbornness

- One of the barriers to critical thinking is stubbornness. Peirce referred to this as "the method of tenacity." Having a clear set of beliefs and opinions helps to make sense of things, provides comfort and doesn't leave you in a state of indecisiveness. A person is "tenacious" or stubborn, in Peirce's sense, when he clings stubbornly to his beliefs even when evidence and new facts emerge that place his views in question.

2. Prejudice

- Another barrier that hinders critical thinking is prejudice or bias. On a practical level, people know that it is wrong to be prejudiced or biased against others. However, Peirce's view of prejudice and bias is more subtle, and simply refers to the fact that thought doesn't occur in a vacuum. The 20th century philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer argued that prejudice is a condition of thought. Everyone comes from particular traditions and cultures that shape the ways in which they view the world. Your family and the social environment you grow up in affect the way you think about and evaluate things and events. One of the goals of the scientific method is to root out subjective biases and influences. Peirce argued that science should be based on a community of inquirers rather than the individual scientist, as individual thought is one-sided and incomplete.

3. Fear

- Because a person's beliefs and worldviews provide comfort and guidance, anything that places those beliefs in question is threatening. Fear may prevent you from pursuing a line of questioning or from confronting evidence and facts that may force you to reevaluate your position. Fear interferes with critical

thinking on an individual level or at an institutional level. Galileo's conflict with the Catholic Church is an example of institutional fear. The Church felt threatened by Galileo's heliocentric view of the universe and stubbornly clung to the geocentric view that places the earth at the center of the universe.

4. Laziness

- Another barrier to critical thinking is laziness. Critical thinking takes effort, patience and a willingness to explore, analyze and consider different points of view. The original model of critical thinking is the Socratic method. The Socratic method is a primary teaching tool in most law schools. The Greek philosopher Socrates (469 to 399 BC) pursued truth by engaging in a dialogue about a particular topic. A genuine dialogue requires that the parties involved are willing to be swayed by the force of the better argument.