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# Critical Thinking

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*'Human beings reason  
well when they take  
the time to do so'*

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Timothy A. Crews-Anderson

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Tim Crews-Anderson took his BA at the Florida State University and his MA at Georgia State University, where he has also taught as a Visiting Instructor. He is currently pursuing his PhD at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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## Introduction: Thinking Skilfully

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Try for a moment to imagine a field of human endeavour that does not require reasoning. This is likely to be impossible as there is little that human beings do that does not involve our ability to think. Many philosophers over the years have postulated that if there is anything essential to the human being, it is the capacity for reason. Indeed, thought is so fundamental to the human experience that it is only rarely that one is without it. The operations of the mind come so naturally and so easily that one scarcely realizes that they are going on. It is perhaps for this reason that the notion of thinking *skilfully* may seem strange.

The goal of this book is to consider thought as an activity, as an act or series of acts that a person deliberately, intentionally and wilfully undertakes. In simpler terms, the present purpose is to think about thinking. Close attention will be paid to the process of thought with the aim of evaluating reasoning and cultivating good thinking skills. This project falls within the confines of **logic**, which is *the branch of philosophy that studies the reasoning process and seeks to understand the differences between good and bad reasoning*.

Human beings naturally reason well when they take the time to do so, and if their attention is properly directed, they are, in the vast majority of cases, capable of great insight. If there is one fundamental difference between a person who is an incisive critical thinker and one who is not, it is that the critical thinker takes the process of thinking seriously, consciously attends to that process and asks the right questions. The focus, therefore, will be on the concerns that one should keep in the forefront of the mind and on which questions should be asked. It is also worth noting that this book does not introduce much that the average person does not already do. Everyone has carried out all of the described reasoning activities countless times. What the book offers is a careful cataloguing of the various types of reasoning with a discussion of which of them are reliable and which are not. It is, in a sense, a guided tour of the human capacity for reasoning along with instructions for its use.

With most human activities the development of skills does not come without practice, and it is no different with thinking. It is probably unreasonable to expect them to come easily, but it is almost certain that time and effort will pay a hefty dividend.

Considering the length of this book, its scope is perhaps somewhat larger than it should be. The idea is to present the basics of critical thinking and informal logic and to point the way towards further study, so it is perhaps best to consider the book as a primer. It will provide a solid introduction to the fundamental concepts and considerations as well as links to other resources on the web and in print.