

Full-Day Interdisciplinary Symposium

Critical Thinking: Beyond Incantatory Rhetoric

Friday, June 7, 2024 – Room CV1, Ground floor, 66, Boulevard Carl-Vogt

8:45 – 9:00	Welcome
9:00 – 9:15	Introduction Céline Schöpfer — University of Geneva
9:15 – 10:15	Critical thinking in the information age: Know your mind! Mirelle Betrancourt and Emmanuel Sander – University of Geneva <i>Critical thinking is currently acknowledged as an essential objective of educational systems internationally, being often cited as one of the core skills that citizens of the 21st century should master. Its presumed benefits range from strengthening students' capacity – as future citizens and workers – to apply their knowledge in new and changing circumstances, to the ability to select, interpret, evaluate, and apply relevant and reliable information. Among the circumstances that make critical thinking so relevant today, the use of media and social media plays a significant role: in the era of 'information obesity,' the dangers of fake news and post-truth attitudes, a deficit in skills for accurately evaluating information is a major risk at both the individual and collective levels. Developing information literacy is necessary, but is it sufficient? Our claim is that critical thinking is primarily the ability to question our own beliefs and opinions. This conference focuses on identifying the processes involved in various activities such as perception, memory, understanding, reasoning, emotions, and social interactions that either support or hinder the exercise of critical thinking. It provides insights into developing critical thinking by encouraging self-questioning, actively seeking information, and critically analyzing the argumentation. Finally, we highlight the importance of cognitive flexibility, emphasizing the leverages initiated by the ability to change perspectives and grasp the viewpoints of others.</i>
10:15 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 11:30	A Battle Lost in Advance? Critical Thinking in the Minefield of Language Thierry Herman – University of Neuchâtel and Lausanne <i>Critical thinking is based on philosophical virtues such as fact-checking and writing cogent arguments. It aims to develop skills to resist attempts at manipulation. However, studies in linguistics have shown that there are many subtle ways of influencing others that are not immediately apparent. These means are not always addressed in critical thinking. The aim of this presentation is to bring together linguistic studies that challenge critical thinking tools and to explore how critical thinking may address the issue of loaded language.</i>
11:30 – 12:30	Critical thinking and Computer-Aided Argument Mapping Martin Davies – University of Melbourne <i>An important educational question that needs addressing is this: how can we teach students to think critically? Critical thinking is a 'wicked' problem and while universities laud the importance of critical thinking, seldom do they explicitly teach it. For some decades a quiet revolution has been underway in the form of computer-aided argument mapping (CAAM). This promises a way of explicitly teaching critical thinking by means of argument maps. To my knowledge, CAAM is not being used in any widespread way in the tertiary sector and my view is that it should be. Indeed, it appears to have some empirical support. A number of studies on CAAM appear show promise, and a meta-analysis of all extant CAAM studies indicates measurable critical thinking gains (van Gelder, 2015). This presentation outlines why critical thinking is a wicked problem, reviews the innovation of CAAM, compares it to other ways of teaching critical thinking, and outlines some of its methodological peculiarities.</i>

12:30 – 13:45	Lunch
13:45 – 14:45	<p>Educating Critical Thinking from Its Natural Cognitive Groundings</p> <p>Elena Paquinelli – Fondation La Main à la Pâte, membre associé Institut Jean Nicod</p> <p><i>How do we educate critical thinking? To answer this frequently asked question, it is first necessary to clarify the concept of ‘critical thinking’ and thereby search for its natural cognitive foundations. I will present the work conducted by a group of researchers in philosophy and cognitive sciences as well as teachers seeking a solid basis for proposing pedagogical interventions aimed at equipping students with critical thinking skills. I will conclude my presentation with some pedagogical guidelines that take into account conceptual work and the analysis of literature in cognitive sciences and education, along with practical examples of classroom activities that adhere to these principles.’</i></p>
14:45 – 15:45	<p>The Place of the Intellectual Virtues within Critical Thinking</p> <p>Harvey Siegel – University of Miami</p> <p><i>Much has been written about the educational ideal of critical thinking and the place of the intellectual virtues within it. In this talk I will try to identify that place. I will first briefly rehearse my account of the ideal, according to which critical thinking is comprised of two components, the reason assessment and the critical spirit components, which are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for critical thinking. I will then address recent scholarship on the intellectual virtues, which is sometimes offered as an alternative ideal. After noting the close connections between the critical spirit and the intellectual virtues – they are nearly but not quite identical – I will identify their differences, and urge that critical thinking is the fundamental ideal.</i></p>
15:45 – 16:00	Break
16:00 – 16:45	<p>Critical Thinking Beyond Acclaim: Addressing Inherent Conceptual Challenges</p> <p>Céline Schöpfer — University of Geneva</p> <p><i>Critical thinking is universally acknowledged as a vital educational objective due to its considerable personal and social benefits. Yet, it is fraught with conceptual challenges, exemplified by the plethora of definitions that clutter the academic discourse. In their 2015 work, Johnson and Hamby delineated several critical issues such as the Failure to Capture the Force of ‘Critical’, Conflation, Subliming, etc. Building on their insights, I employed experimental philosophy methods – including online surveys and semi-structured interviews – to elucidate these persistent problems and to analyze them through an examination of lay perspectives on critical thinking. This presentation argues that overcoming the mere rhetoric around critical thinking necessitates a deep engagement with its conceptual difficulties. We must articulate these challenges to educators to enhance their awareness and teaching practices. The analysis of experimental data reveals not only the fragmented perceptions of critical thinking but also the potential pitfalls of its reification and the problematic impacts of its pedagogical implementation.</i></p>
16:45 – 17:00	Closing remarks

Localization:



Nearby bus or tram stop:

- ‘Uni-mail’ – tram line numbers 15 and 17
- ‘Ecole-de-médecine’ – bus line 1
- ‘Musée d’ethnographie’ – bus line numbers 2 and 19