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How To Think About Weird Things: Critical Thinking For A New Age



Synopsis

This concise and engaging text teaches the basic principles of good reasoning through an examination of widely held beliefs about the paranormal, the supernatural, and the mysterious. By explaining what distinguishes knowledge from opinion, science from pseudoscience, and evidence from hearsay, *How to Think about Weird Things* helps the reader develop the skills needed to tell the true from the false and the reasonable from the unreasonable. Instructors and students can now access their course content through the Connect digital learning platform by purchasing either standalone Connect access or a bundle of print and Connect access. McGraw-Hill Connect[®] is a subscription-based learning service accessible online through your personal computer or tablet. Choose this option if your instructor will require Connect to be used in the course. Your subscription to Connect includes the following:

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Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: McGraw-Hill Education; 7 edition (January 28, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0078038367

ISBN-13: 978-0078038365

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.6 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (67 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #57,482 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Criticism](#) #339 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy](#) #17815 in [Books > Reference](#)

Customer Reviews

This is an EXCELLENT book on critical thinking; I think that a critical thinking class (perhaps with

this book or something like it as text) should be mandatory from grade-school on up. I find it interesting that one reader chastised this book for its "pro-science" viewpoint, without ever bothering to explain WHY "pro-science" is BAD? I'm also curious as to whether that reader actually READ the book; if so he'd note that Schick and Vaughn are very careful to give balanced treatment to all paranormal claims. They make certain to point out, for instance, that "this doesn't mean ESP doesn't exist, of course..." merely that a particular claim doesn't validate our belief in it. Throughout the book, Schick and Vaughn are very gentle in their handling of paranormal claims. And yet the reviewer claims that Schick and Vaughn "don't take [them] seriously" or ridicule claims they don't like. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In addition, the poster tried to draw a distinction between ontological and epistemic relativism, without noting that when considering a philosophy like realism (the view that there is a real, measurable, consensual reality -- a prerequisite for being a skeptic) the ontological relativism IS the epistemic relativism. Being IS the basis of our belief system -- if there's no "out there" out there, realism is a baseless philosophy. Schick and Vaughn do a VERY good job of dissecting and laying to rest the relativistic and solipsistic claims that are so popular today (IE, "there's no such thing as reality" or "whatever's true for you..."). And again, they are relatively gentle (for a less gentle treatment of the fad of social constructivism, see some of Sokal's books, for example). All in all this is an EXCELLENT, clear, well-rounded, and balanced look at critical thinking in an age of bizarre claims.

I first read the previous edition of this book when I was in high school. A friend of mine had gotten a job working for James "the Amazing" Randi, and somehow the professional complimentary copy got passed on from Randi to him to another friend to me. I read it over and over until it was practically falling apart, and I have recommended it to many people over the years, because it had such a major and positive influence on my own thinking. I am currently about halfway done with my Ph.D. in chemistry. I credit this book for giving me an appreciation for the beauty of the scientific process, as well as helping to convince me that I wanted to be a part of it myself. It is true that the book necessarily simplifies the scientific process for the sake of not overburdening the reader with technical jargon and information overload. It should definitely be considered as an INTRODUCTION to critical thinking, as opposed to an all-inclusive and exhaustive text. However, I can't recommend this book highly enough to anyone who wants to understand the beauty and ideal of how science works at its glorious best.

I first read this at 18 and wrote the following review about this book I'm still rather fond of: This is a

fine piece of writing, and a very complete introduction to critical thinking -- a skill which is more desperately needed (yet also more desperately lacking) now than in any other time. I wish that every college-student, professor, and, in fact, all thinking individuals would read this book. Critical thinking is one of the most crucial skills for any thinking person, yet is most often ignored or left out of the educational system. The ideas presented in this book are clear, concise, well thought-out, and well-researched. In addition, the writing style keeps the reader interested, with relevant quotes, articles, and true stories, to provide examples of the concepts covered in the book. If you are a lover of wisdom, learning, and/or knowledge; are open to the idea of questioning, or are looking for a clear and logical foundation upon which to base your life's philosophy, this book is an excellent tool in your pursuits. Critical thinking is not a prepackaged belief system; it is a system for analyzing claims and making rational, reasonable, and logic decisions about your philosophy, your ethical code, and your belief-system. In that capacity, this book serves as a wonderful introduction and resource. Do not miss reading this book!

If you are a layman like myself with an interest in reading about science, this is a basic book in the philosophy of science that will aid in the rational analysis of scientific claims. Naturally the book wouldn't sell too many copies if the word "Philosophy" ended up in the title so we have this cutesy title that unfortunately may not give sufficient clues as to what is inside. My wife is a believer in all things paranormal, and I am a true skeptic with an education in experimental psychology. We have a shaky truce in our house about these issues, and I have developed an intense interest in the claims made in astrology, channeling, ESP, NDE and the like. This book lays out the logic for analyzing claims made in the name of science or the paranormal. We are told first of all that knowledge without evidence is not knowledge; it may constitute a belief, but it is not knowledge. What is reliable evidence? What is objective truth? What is the value of anecdotal evidence? What are the criteria of adequacy for a hypothesis? How is a scientific study properly set up? What sort of studies can establish the effectiveness of a medical treatment beyond a reasonable doubt? The author discusses all of this and more as he applies the logic learned to medicine, dowsing, astrology, ESP, Channeling, and even UFO abductions. It's an informative, entertaining book that will educate without boring you or even making your poor brain work overtime. If nothing else you can read the book, and impress (or bore) your friends by telling them you just read a book on applied epistemology.

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