
My Critical Thinking And Development Stage

“People never change” is a statement I fundamentally disagree with. While people do tend to hold tightly to their beliefs and perceptions, we are capable of growing and developing greatly throughout our lives. Personally, I have changed a great deal over time. The naïve and shallow beliefs that I began with have been overturned and replaced with more informed, realistic, and mature ones. I recognized that Egocentrism and sociocentrism were players in my line of thinking, and worked to overcome their influence. Many factors have influenced my growth, such as new experiences and people, but the most important thing that led me to where I am today was the development of stronger critical thinking skills. I went through every stage of critical thinking development in order to reach the state of being an accomplished thinker. As a result, my views on religion, food, politics, and many other things have matured.

Religion is something that many people fail to think critically about. It is a series of belief systems that are not based on direct experience. It's almost impossible to truly evaluate the reliability or the information and source of the information that these beliefs stem from because they are so ancient and undocumented. I was born into a family that had been Catholic for generations. It was a rare occasion when my parents went to church, but we celebrated all the holidays and I was expected to get my first communion. I blindly accepted the ideas of god, heaven, and sin as truths of life, just as it is true that the sun is bright and the sky is blue. But as I grew older and began developing an ability to think for myself, I started to question the legitimacy of my religion. I wanted factual evidence to back up the claims that it was founded on, but it was scarce. The information that was being presented lacked evidence and didn't make sense from a logical point of view. The Bible is essentially the only source to turn to when looking for information on this subject, which presents some issues. This material is overwhelmingly biased and there is no way to determine neither the reliability nor the accuracy of it, which makes it very difficult to evaluate. The faith I had in Christianity was egocentric in that I had assumed that my beliefs were true without every really questioning the basis of them- it was sociocentric in that I internalized what was presented to me and didn't have an understanding of the alternatives. I got my first communion out of respect for my family, but it didn't mean anything to me. I wanted to believe in religion like I wanted to believe in Santa Claus, but I dropped my belief in both around the same time- once I was able to assess them on my own.

Young children simply eat what they are given- food is a primal instinct, and it's necessary to stay alive. Sometimes this “as long as it's food” mentality continues well into adulthood, but this is not the case for me. I went through Perry's Stages of Knowing in this aspect of my life. In my early childhood, I ate what I was given because my adults told me to. They knew better than I did about what I should eat and avoid. This was my “Garden of Eden” stage. As I grew to discern between foods I liked and disliked, I transitioned into the “Anything Goes” stage. I decided that if my parents didn't know what food was best for me, I could eat anything I wanted. Through my late elementary and early junior high years, I consumed Poptarts and Sprite regularly, never once stopping to think of the implications the food I ate may have on my well-being and health. My shift into the “Thinking Critically” stage was less gradual. I decided that I would “phase meat out my diet,” and haven't eaten it since. The idea of becoming vegetarian required a lot of thought. Is it moral to kill animals? Is it simply survival of the fittest?

Can humans even survive off only plant-based foods? I gave each question the attention it was due. I had to deeply consider the viewpoints of both sides of the argument for meat being in our diet, and choose the one I felt was right for me. I've since become lactose intolerant as well, so I have to eat much healthier to compensate for the lack of animal products in my diet. This has led me to think critically about food in general how the standard diet should be healthier.

My transition to thinking critically about politics and the government has taken me on a well-worn path from the Left to the Right. My interest in politics was in its infancy when Obama was running for the first time. I was young enough that I didn't have the capacity to understand his policies, but I knew that he was the charismatic one. My blind, uninformed support for Obama continued in the next election when he was still the likeable one. To me, republicans represented all that was intolerant and negative in the world- opposition to same sex marriage and abortion, overly conservative values, military spending, etc. I loved being liberal because everyone else my age is. My support for the democratic side only began to wean when I became thoroughly educated on the topics up for debate. My dad, who leans to the right, was my biggest influence. He'd always tried to get me to listen to his point of view, and I finally decided to break out of my egocentric mindset and consider his opinions. After all, he was a more experienced and knowledgeable source than anything I could get from my peers. His information had been nothing but reliable in other facets of life, so there was no reason to assume he'd be wrong in this one. Some of his views I disagreed with -he didn't understand gay marriage and didn't support the legalization of marijuana, although I've since swayed him on both- many of the things he said made a great deal of sense to me. As I started giving both sides of each argument equal consideration, I noticed the great deal of reason that supported the Republican side of many arguments and the evidence that backed them up. This isn't to say that I magically became infatuated with Donald Trump. Now that I'm educated enough, I try to give both parties an equal chance and pick out what I like best from either. Balance is important, and I now realize that many people lack it when it comes to politics.

Through employing critical thinking, every one of my beliefs has evolved to become more advanced and intellectual. For the most part, I started with egocentrism and sociocentrism clouding my ability to properly use and interpret information, but once I recognized that, I began to grow as a person. Being able to evaluate the reliability of the source and information and evaluate different perspectives led me to become the person I am today, who is always willing to listen to another's point of view but has many strong opinions of her own. I've changed a lot, but this is just the beginning.