

What is critical thinking in the social sciences?

Academic Skills (GLCb1004)

Week 02

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What is critical thinking?

- *Critical* can mean different things
 - Being critical of something or someone
 - “The director is always critical of the department and the job we are doing”.
 - Critical school of thought
 - “I enjoy reading the texts written by critical sociology scholars!”

What is critical thinking?

- Critical thinking :
 - Method of evaluating arguments (a set of tools)
 - Involves interpretation of statements
 - Is based on weighting the evidence
 - Can be learnt & requires practice

Critical thinking in the social sciences

- Doing research = identifying, collecting, and assessing evidence from social world to better understand social life
- Critical thinking is a basis of the social sciences

Elements of arguments

- Grounds
 - provide basic information
 - claims about how things are
- Warrants
 - justifications that involve values
 - allow drawing conclusions
 - can be implicit
- Conclusions
 - logical results of grounds and warrants
- Assumptions
 - parts of grounds or warrants that are taken for granted

Elements of arguments

- Ground:
 - *Women make 83 % of what men earn.*
- Warrant:
 - *We don't want to live in a society where discrimination persist.*
- Conclusion:
 - *Gender pay gap is a global challenge that we need to overcome.*
- Assumption:
 - *People of all genders have equal rights and responsibilities.*

In-class activity

- Present your argument to your partner and identify key elements (assumptions, grounds, warrants, conclusion) of your argument together with your partner
- Time frame: 20 minutes
 - 5 + 5 minutes to present the arguments to each other
 - 5 + 5 minutes to discuss the elements
- Questions about arguments you might consider:
 - What is taken for granted in the argument?
 - On what information (about the world) is the argument based?
 - Is warrant made explicit or implicit?
 - What is the result of grounds and warrants? What is the message of the argument?

In-class activity

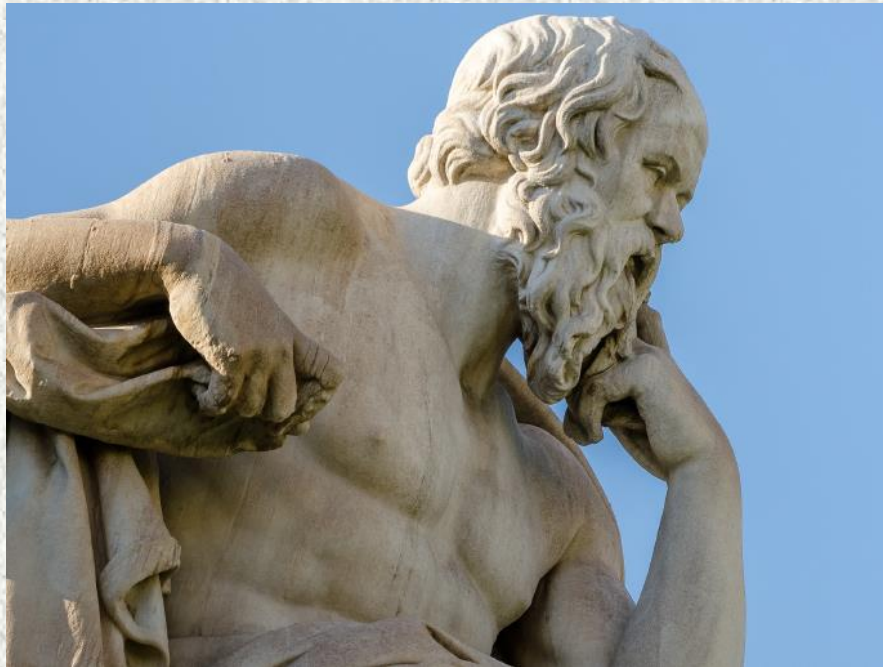
- What assumptions, grounds, warrants and conclusions have you identified?
- What was the most difficult to identify?
- Would you modify or change your argument after this activity? If yes, why?

Critical thinking in the social sciences

- What does it mean to understand social world better?
 - Making strange familiar
or
 - Making familiar strange?

The Socratic Method

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNDYUIxNIAA>



Critical thinking

- Thinking in questions about the world
- Being attentive towards taken for granted claims
- Staying modest and ready to reconsider own arguments

... are important features of becoming a good critical thinker (and social scientist!)

Next Week:

Week #3: Reading social science

- **Reading:** B. Greetham (2001) How to Write Better Essays, Chapters 11 and 12
- **Homework:** Prepare two questions related to your reading for the Global Displacement and Migration session:
 - 1) A question answered in the reading
 - 2) A question about something that caught your attention and you would like to know more aboutBring an electronic or hard copy to class.