

Responsible Action's Dependence on Sound, Critical Thinking

“Doing the right things starts with knowing the right things.” People essentially strive to do the right thing, yet human weaknesses often set them on a different, destructive course. The reason for our failings is irrationality brought on by personal conviction, ignorance, and emotional recklessness. Making the right decision is a complex process that involves a drive to ignore personal bias. Searching for truth is to uncover layers of deceit. Despite our intuition and instinct we can only be psychologically certain of our beliefs. Raw facts are solid, irrefutable evidence that a person can wholeheartedly rely on. **One acts responsibly through critical reasoning and the pursuit of truth and fact.**

It is undeniable fact, not personal conviction, which enables you to make the right choices. In Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment, the protagonist Raskolnikov is psychologically certain of the *Superman Theory* which drives him to make the horrible choice to murder. He idolizes the idea of “extraordinary people” who ought to be exempt from moral rules that govern the whole of society. With strong conviction, he believes that he murdered a principle as opposed to a human being. This is false because the truth of the matter is that he murdered a thinking, feeling human of three dimensions despite his strong, personal belief. Raskolnikov was more concerned with psychological certainty, which led to grave results, rather than epistemic certainty. This shows the importance in acknowledging content over personal conviction in order to do the right thing. A second example of strong personal conviction commonly originates from religious undertakings. Religions can arguably have positive moral teachings that instruct you to make responsible decisions as the bible's ten commandments do. They include “thou shall not kill” and “thou shall not steal,” which in fact mirror society's governing laws. However, religion can work negatively as Satanism suggests. Satanism encourages vengeance and hedonistic gratification as part of their *Nine Satanic Statements*. This is why religion's psychological certainty cannot be the basis of making responsible choices. In contrast, epistemic certainty guides you without the falsehood of religion's indoctrination. A Satanist is taught to indulge in irresponsible gratification like heroin use. However, epistemic certainty shows that heroin is addictive and damaging where there is no argument against these proven facts. Knowing such can steer you away from taking drugs,

because their ill effects will without a doubt surface. Responsible action depends on acknowledging scientific and medical truths of epistemic certainty.

Skepticism allows you to question circumstances in order to discover the truth.

“Doing the right thing” in terms of law means upholding justice which is achieved by skepticism. In law courts, both arguments of the dispute are challenged to uncover the truth. The jury and judge question everything in a legal case to differentiate fact from fiction. This is a prime example of using skepticism by weighing all of the facts, making connections, and logically assembling evidence. A lawyer’s cross-examination is also based on skepticism. When the witness or defendant answers the lawyer’s questions, the lawyer doesn’t simply accept the reply. He or She will relentlessly challenge the answer and attempt to discern falsehood in their testimony. This skepticism is due to knowledge by description in which a person or group of persons relates their experiences to a second party. The second party relies on or trusts the said person instead of personally knowing themselves. Knowledge by description is therefore questionable, because it involves the giving of knowledge from a point of view that may be skewed or biased. Such bias can result from a situation misinterpreted by several bystanders depending on how, when, or where they viewed it. In the case of abortion, many people would immediately condemn a woman who made the decision to have one. They would label her dozens of degrading terms such as an irresponsible, careless sinner. Skepticism and closer examination may show that she had had an unwanted pregnancy due to rape. Once this truth is revealed, the people who had initially persecuted the woman would reject their false impression of her. They would no longer accuse her of inflicting the situation on herself and “getting what she deserved.” They could finally treat her appropriately and act responsibly. The positive aspect of questioning everything may be countered by the negativity of reaching the point of knowing too much. One might say that someone who was emotionally unprepared to learn something would be shocked and scarred by a certain idea. However, finding things out for yourself encourages you to mature and to make better choices. Whether or not you choose to dig deeper, life’s ways will eventually catch up to you. Skepticism offers awareness and the precautions to be taken before it’s too late.

Logic and reason must accompany the unreliability of personal feeling to act responsibly. Making responsible decisions means knowing that every action has a reaction. Once one can identify the consequences of their actions, they can make an appropriate plan

of action. In Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, Anna's intuition and passion-fueled emotions cloud her ability to rationalize. She is overcome by passion for Vronsky despite being married with a child. When she engages in an affair, the repercussions of her infidelity gradually consume her to the point of suicide. Anna fails to recognize the gravity of her mistake, because she refuses to reason. If she had relied on logic rather than personal feeling, she would have behaved responsibly. Emotions are unreliable because they are fickle and easily manipulated. Letting them dictate your decisions essentially means to act on impulse. An impulsive attitude leads to regrets that can permanently scar your life and your future. In my high school experience, I've witnessed my peers make poor decisions involving violence because they were driven by rage. If they used logic and reason, they would realize that it is not worth it to inflict pain on others. The conflict just builds on hostile feelings until it finally blows out of proportions and someone is seriously injured. This impacts communities and families and the healing process is lengthy and strenuous if ever even completed. These consequences could have been prevented had the offenders unclenched their fists and critically thought through their actions. In making the right decisions, one must think rationally without the bias of feeling. This neutral mind frame enables you to ask yourself what it is you intend on accomplishing. You can ask yourself if it is worth it to sacrifice your future for the temporary satisfaction that your emotions demand. In order to do the right thing, you have to put aside your emotions despite how strong they may be. On the other hand, a void of emotion expels compassion and mercy as illustrated in Bret Easton Ellis' American Psycho. The main character, Patrick Bateman, describes himself as

...an idea of a Patrick Bateman; some kind of abstraction. But there is no real me: only an entity, something illusory. And though I can hide my cold gaze, and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours... I simply am not there. (Ellis, 1991, p. 23)

Bateman descends into madness due to this lack of a meaningful existence or substantial feeling. This shows that logic should balance feeling just as feeling should balance logic. It is through logic, reasoning, and moderated emotion that you can react accordingly.

To do the right thing, you must have the right mind frame. Doing the right thing is difficult, because it means stepping outside of your skin and seeing the situation for what it is. It is tough to bar heightened emotions, but they will inevitably fail you in the end if you don't. Pre-meditating consequences through logic can ensure your success in avoiding

them. You find truth by relentlessly pursuing it so as to make better-informed decisions. By constantly questioning what you know or what you're told, one may distinguish fact from fiction. Fact can't be contradicted which is why epistemic certainty is more reliable than psychological certainty. Scientific and medical truths are far more valid than biased personal conviction. Once you utilize reason, epistemic certainty, and analysis, you will be equipped with the ideal mind frame to act responsibly.