

## The School of Nihilism

### Module 4 – *Developing Clarity of Thought / Using a Methodology for Coherent Thinking*

Easily one of the biggest (understated) problems facing individuals, and society at large, is the inability to think clearly, or even to think at all. As a consequence many can't distinguish between garbage and gold, they latch on to the most asinine trends and see salvation in superficially-appealing rhetoric without any underlying functional utility. They get bounced back and forth from one absurdity to another – religious trash, secular nonsense, academic bullshit, and on and on. There's no way we can realistically stop the mental trash from coming at us day and night, but we can all make an effort to develop the clarity of thought necessary to reject the garbage and stop poisonous memes from spreading any further like a nasty virus.



Remember that, even more than everyday life in our physical existence, the Internet is a vast minefield of unintentional misinformation, calculated disinformation, fraud, deceit and total bullshit. If you don't have your mind in shape, if you can't think coherently (or at all) you're nothing but easy meat for every con-artist and cheat that can reach you.

Don't be a dummy.

Don't be a victim.

Think carefully

Think coherently

Think analytically

### ***Start by reevaluating your state of mind***

A major part of establishing clarity of thought is simply the *attitude* and state of mind that you possess while learning and absorbing information. It's all too easy to find the message you're looking for and not the one that's really there.

- We get duped because we *want* to believe in what we're hearing or seeing.
- We get fooled because we consider ourselves to be smarter and more perceptive than 'other people', and therefore less likely to fall for the same tricks, when in

fact this belief in personal superiority is precisely why it's so easy to fall for the same mental traps!

Avoid unnecessarily complex or convoluted explanations for forces and events. Conspiracy stories, for instance, rely on overly-complicated explanations for things that seem mysterious from the distance of time and space, but that usually have relatively simple and even mundane explanations. The simplest answer is most often the actual one.

Next, any time you read, view or intake something start by asking yourself some basic questions:

***What is the author's premise?***

What is the main idea, theme, or purpose behind the presentation you're receiving?

This should be apparent in the title, introduction, or in the first few paragraphs. If no point is apparent after a reasonable attempt at discernment on your part, *move on and don't waste your time with muddled-thinking and opaque presentations.*

***Is any of this verifiable?***

Just as Gorgias 'the nihilist' of ancient Greece demonstrated with his use of speeches and rhetoric to sway audiences, words can be made to mean almost anything. So ask yourself, is the presented material connected to real events, or tied to people and forces that have actually occurred? Ask, is this purely talk and rhetoric or has it been measured against real forces and events, or at least is there a reasonable attempt on the part of the author or producer to do that? If not, if the material you're receiving is in the realm of fiction then clearly mark it as such in your mind and don't try to make it into anything but fantasy or entertainment for yourself or for anyone else. If it does have bearing to what it claims, play out a scenario in your mind and ask yourself how this idea or concept would work in practice, could it be improved or is it wholly unworkable and why? Look up the history; has this been done before and if so what did the research and results indicate?

Question #1: Why is it important to test and verify claims and ideas in a genuine setting?

***Who is the author and what is their motivation?***

The character of the author or producer doesn't necessarily determine whether the material they make is factual or inaccurate, just as it's easy to falsely tarnish a valid message by assaulting the integrity of the author. Rather, determining the author's intentions and character is useful for establishing a context, a mental framework necessary for properly digesting the material you're receiving. Look at the other books, films, websites, and so on, that the author has produced or been involved in, the length of time and locations; build a pattern or trend – what do you find?

***Look for key words and phrases, loaded terms and biased mental imagery.***

Most disinformation and deception is revealed with keywords and phrases. Loaded terms and images with exceptional emotional impact are frequently used to sway the viewer and to deactivate their critical faculties in favor of reactionary emotion. Beware of the classic tactics of propaganda. Much like the character of the author, even propaganda is not necessarily wrong or inaccurate, so just detecting it doesn't mean you should immediately discount it. Again, consider the author and their motivation and pay close attention to the substance of the material you're receiving, being very careful to cleave the rhetoric and the potentially-loaded imagery from the substance. *Measure the objective substance, not the colors and the flashy accoutrements.*

***Don't get overloaded by the noise***

Videos are perfect example of why it's so important to pay attention to the message in a critical and analytical way. Many people love to watch videos, and YouTube is a testament to the appeal of Internet entertainment. Videos are a great way to spread disinformation, and a poor way to spread facts or accurate messages precisely because the senses are easily overloaded and distracted by the multiple streams of data coming at the viewer in sight and sound, and everything else multi-media presentations can throw at the audience.

Question #2: A great way to break down the effect of sensual-overload is to watch TV with the sound muted. What do you notice about how the experienced has changed?

Question #3: Next, close your eyes or look away from the screen and just listen to the sound for awhile. Focus on the audio and write down what you experience, note the subtleties and differences.

***Life and thought are a synthesis – don't get too attached to any one position or value.***

Some important ideas are wrecked by a sloppy or incompetent presentation. And some really terrible notions are pushed much farther than they should be allowed to go because of a slick presentation. Any time you encounter unusual or unorthodox views and ideas don't feel you need to accept or reject them immediately. Leave room for consideration without immediate adoption. Digest a new or unconventional view for awhile, see if it works or not and continue on your journey constructing a synthesis of experiences and ideas that best helps you in life.

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