

Dialectical Reasoning

We use dialectical reasoning all the time when we make decisions and solve problems. This type of reasoning is used for scientific research because it is intended to help us understand ourselves and the world around us.

Dialectical reasoning refers to critical thinking skills in evaluating the various sides to any given issue.

The process of discovering the truth requires a person possess the three following qualities, e.g. objectivity, openness to new ideas, and the ability to apply ethical thinking to a problem. Of these three qualities objectivity is perhaps the most difficult to practice. Most people understand and use the word objective to mean “being impartial”; while this understanding of the word isn’t completely wrong it isn’t completely right either. Specifically, to be objective means to “go where the evidence takes you” despite your beliefs or assumptions.

Being truly objective is difficult for some people. This is because practicing true objectivity forces people to let go and/or re-evaluate cherished beliefs. The discomfort a person feels when evidence disproves a belief or requires a person to re-evaluate that belief is called **cognitive dissonance** by social psychologists.

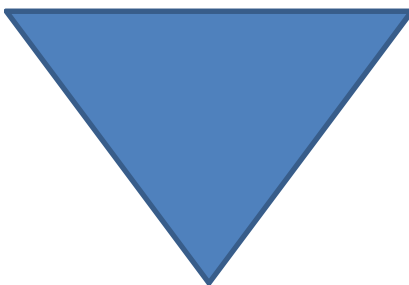


In modern psychology, **cognitive dissonance** is the feeling of discomfort an individual feels while simultaneously believing two or more ideas that conflict with one another are both correct and true.

In a state of dissonance, people sometimes feel a combination of frustration, dread, guilt, anger, embarrassment or anxiety. The phrase was coined by Leon Festinger in his 1956 book *When Prophecy Fails* which chronicled followers of a UFO cult as reality clashed with their fervent belief in an impending alien apocalypse. Festinger subsequently (1957) published a book called *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* in which he outlines the theory. Cognitive dissonance is one of the most influential and extensively studied theories in social psychology.

There are three basic steps to follow in dialectical reasoning, e.g. state a thesis, develop an antithesis, and then integrate the two opposing views in to a synthesis that reconciles the two views into one comprehensive viewpoint.

THESIS



ANTITHESIS

SYNTHESIS

Synthesizing ideas show that there is a grain of truth to both sides of an issue. When combined there is a unity in the diverse aspects of an issue. If we wanted to further refine our thinking about the issue, we could take the synthesis as a thesis and use the dialectic over and over. Using dialectical reasoning is helpful when forming ideas, values, opinions, and solving problems.

Let's work through an example together. Let's look at the issue of mothers giving birth in their own home environment.

Thesis: Women should give birth in their own homes.

- Home birth may be more comfortable for the mother and less stressful for the baby.
- A home environment celebrates birth rather than defining it as a surgical procedure.
- The birth is more personal with family members participating in it.

Antithesis: Women should not give birth in their own homes.

- The baby and mother can more easily be monitored with equipment if the need should arise.
- The hospital environment is more sanitary and protective of the mother and child.
- A safe birth is the focus rather than family involvement.

Synthesis

A caring delivery can occur in both the hospital delivery room and in a safe home environment. Some women may choose to deliver their babies in a hospital delivery room for safety and health reasons. Other women may choose to give birth in their home environment under the care of their doctor or trained medical people as well as their family members.

Now it's your turn. Read the information on the next page and be prepared to use dialectical reasoning to decide this issue.

In order to help you the problem, you might find asking one or more of the following questions useful.

What else could we assume?	Why is ... happening?
You seem to be assuming ... ?	What evidence is there to support what you are saying?
How can you verify or disprove that assumption?	What alternative ways of looking at this are there?
What would happen if ... ?	Who benefits from this?
Why is that happening?	Why is it better than ...?
How do you know this?	What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?
Can you give me an example of that?	What are similarities between ... and ... ?
Are these reasons good enough?	What are differences between ... and ... ?

“Sonograms”

Many expectant mothers are not willing to wait for the birth of their child to find out the sex. Some will pay additional money or attend hospital clinics to obtain a sonographic picture or an ultrasound image of their unborn child. It's not hard to see the appeal. The latest advances in ultrasound technology—from sketchy 2-D to detailed 4-D with accompanying DVD—produce images that are impressive, showing facial features, hair, fingers, toes and even the sex of the fetus. Some companies may even submit a soundtrack to accompany the images.

There may be risks, however. Even at low levels the ultrasound waves may cause damage to developing tissues. Limited exposure is recommended if the ultrasound is necessary for medical reasons. The procedure must be performed by a medically trained sonographer. Parents must weigh the advantages and the disadvantages of this procedure.

1). Write a thesis that supports the use of sonographic snapshots in the space provided below.

2). List two pieces of evidence—facts rather than opinions—that support the thesis.

3). State the opposing point of view in the antithesis.

4). List two pieces of evidence—facts rather than opinions—that support the antithesis.

5). Now combine each viewpoint to create one statement that synthesizes (“brings together”) the central idea. Write your synthesis below.