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Critical Condition

Replacing Critical Thinking with Creativity

Patrick Finn

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Should we stop teaching critical thinking? Meant as a prompt to further discussion, *Critical Condition* questions the assumption that every student should be turned into a “critical thinker.”

The book starts with the pre-Socratics and the impact that Socrates’ death had on his student Plato and traces the increasingly violent use of critical “attack” on a perceived opponent. From the Roman militarization of debate to the medieval Church’s use of defence as a means of forcing confession and submission, the early phases of critical thinking were bound up in a type of attack that Finn suggests does not best serve intellectual inquiry. Recent developments have seen critical thinking become an ideology rather than a critical practice, with levels of debate reduced to ad hominem attack. Far from arguing that we abandon critical inquiry, the author suggests that we emphasize a more open, loving system of engagement—one that is not only less inherently violent but also more robust when dealing with vastly more complex networks of information.

This book challenges long-held beliefs about the benefits of critical thinking, which is shown to be far too linear to deal with the twenty-first century world. *Critical Condition* is a call to action unlike any other.

Patrick Finn is an associate professor in The School for Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Calgary. His research and teaching focus on performance and technology, where technology can be anything from vocal technique and alphabets to complex computer algorithms. He is an active artist and founding artistic director of The Theatre Lab Performance Institute in Calgary, Alberta.

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PATRICK FINN

Patrick Finn has written a book for the academy, but its implications are much wider. The critical thinking that drove the academics who wanted to “teach him a lesson” by beating him in debate is well represented outside the Ivory Tower as well (think Question Period). But there is a growing awareness—and this book is part of it—that progress, collaboration, and creativity move hand in hand; that the emphasis belongs on “and,” not “but.” Finn is careful to differentiate critical thinking of the constructive kind from the rest; it is puzzling why it gets academics in such a huff. But surely that is a reason for reading it!

– **Jay Ingram**, science writer and broadcaster, author of *The End of Memory: A Natural History of Aging and Alzheimer’s* (2015)

In this engaging and important book, Patrick Finn attacks traditional critical thinking for promoting hurt, anger, suspicion, and violence. He argues persuasively that critical thinking encourages the use of speech as a tool for dominance, control, and repression. He makes an eloquent and revolutionary plea for replacing critical thinking with “creative, loving, open-source thought.” *Critical Condition* should be read by everyone who cares about the harmonious advance of the human project, particularly in the universities, but also in the world beyond.

– **Philip Slayton**, president, PEN Canada, author of *Mayors Gone Bad* (2015)



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