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Critical Being: A Philosophical Approach to Understanding and Expanding the Scope of Critical Thinking in UK Universities with Attention to Cross-Cultural Diversity

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Abstract

This thesis develops a philosophically informed understanding of critical thinking applicable at an expansive scope in UK universities, with particular attention to cross-cultural diversity. I begin from the assumptions, substantiated by existing literature, that 1) UK universities should (and ostensibly do) aim to teach and practice critical thinking at an expansive scope 2) this aim is often not being met, in part due to assumptions underpinning dominant understandings of critical thinking 3) the increasingly international nature of UK higher education creates additional challenges in the theory and practice of critical thinking. I argue that addressing these issues requires renewed attention to critical thinking theory and that philosophy can meaningfully contribute to this effort. I begin by justifying the above assumptions and clarifying the aims of this project. I provide a terminological and conceptual model for understanding the idea of *critical scope.* This includes building on the idea of *critical being* put forward by Barnett (1997) as a manifestation of criticality at an expansive scope. I then show how dominant conceptions of critical thinking unintentionally narrow critical scope in theory by relying on context-specific educational aims and/or assumedly universal substantive values as defining features of critical thinking. I argue these efforts constitute uncritical impositions on critical thinking that are particularly problematic in cross-cultural contexts. I use exploration of criticality in Chinese philosophical traditions to show how resources which are often excluded from critical thinking theory can support a more expansive and inclusive understanding. This includes attention to how non-critical modes of thinking and being – such as those of wonder and *wu-wei* – can help expand critical thinking towards critical being without need for the imposition of predetermined aims or assumedly universal values. This leads me to argue that the context-specific and necessarily determinant aims of education cannot define the entirety of critical thinking at an expansive scope, which is a context-reflexive and indeterminant process. I contend that whatever features 'define' critical thinking must themselves remain open to critique. This leads me to suggest *pragmatic assumptions* capable of animating critical thinking at an expansive scope within and between diverse contexts while avoiding dogmatism and relativism. I conclude by considering implications for practice, including attention to how this approach to critical thinking – exemplified by critical being – can help navigate perennial tensions within the purposes, aims, curricula, pedagogies, and environments of UK universities. Ultimately, this thesis aims to support universities in cultivating criticality that draws on diversity as a resource, helping people with divergent perspectives think and speak with (instead of past) each other in constructive critical endeavours.

Declaration

This thesis contains content previously published by the author:

Chapter 4 is a modified version of:

Normile, I. H. (2022) Exploring Criticality in Chinese Philosophy: Refuting Generalisations and Supporting Critical Thinking, *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 42.

Chapter 5 is a modified version of:

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Parts of these publications also appear in other chapters, as content has been modified to integrate into a monograph style.

Signed: Ian H. Normile

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Contents

1 Introduction

Social and political discourse around the world is increasingly cluttered with disingenuous forms of critical thinking. This is the pseudo-criticality of conspiracy theories, fake news, and post-truth politics (Burbules, 2022). It proceeds from ideologically fixed perspectives with perceived certainty, culminating in unreflective righteousness to be weaponised against anything or anyone not conforming to the same unwaveringly narrow view of the world. Conversely, genuine critical thinking reflects on the fundamental assumptions from which it proceeds (Barnett, 1997). It replaces certainty with questioning, and righteousness with receptivity and reflexivity (Dewey, 2008). This is a stark and simplified generalisation, but it helps elucidate what is at stake in how critical thinking is understood. Of course, the perils (and power) of ideological and dogmatic thinking have long been recognised. Consequently, critical thinking is a common educational aim, particularly in democratic societies, and especially as part of higher education (Barnett, 2007). Yet, few agree this aim is being adequately met, while others show outright hostility towards inclusion of critical thinking as an educational aim (Burbules, 2022). This raises questions about how the teaching and practice of critical thinking can rise past disingenuous forms of pseudo-criticality to meet the critical needs of education and society. This is the central question motivating this thesis.

This thesis is an eclectic project of exploration and integration. It is guided by the overarching question of *how to understand critical thinking in a way conducive to expansive application in diverse contexts*. Put in simpler terms, I want to understand how people with (sometimes radically) different backgrounds, experiences, knowledge, values, and perspectives can think critically *together* – how people can speak with (instead of past) each other in critical dialogue. While this question has relevance to nearly all aspects of life, this thesis focuses on how UK universities, as social institutions with increasing cross-cultural diversity, can contribute to the possibility of expansive criticality. I focus on philosophically informed *theory* because (I contend) there are issues in the philosophical underpinnings of dominant understandings of critical thinking that create substantial problems in practice, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Consequently, attention to theory – and more specifically philosophy – is seen as a prerequisite to improvements in practice. I approach this project through the lens of UK higher education because it is a context I work in and care about, but also to provide focus and maintain a manageable scope for this project.

The central aim of this thesis is to contribute towards an understanding of critical thinking applicable at an expansive scope in UK universities, with particular attention to cross-cultural diversity. I contend that greater attention to cross-cultural diversity is necessary due to the increasingly international nature of UK higher education (UKAS, 2019). My concern is that dominant understandings of critical thinking are not well-equipped to work at an expansive

scope in diverse contexts because they conflate some of the substantive aims of education[1] with the defining features of critical thinking. This happens when critical thinking is defined by and animated through reliance on predetermined educational aims and/or assumedly universal values. I argue that this aspect of theory unintentionally narrows the potential scope of critical thinking in practice. Consequently, I strive to show how critical thinking can be freed from these confining assumptions without lapsing into relativism, empty instrumentalism, or losing its animating force. This involves providing a conceptual, terminological, and graphic model for understanding the idea of *scope* and identifying *pragmatic assumptions* regarding essential features of critical thinking that can animate criticality at an expansive scope within and between diverse contexts.

I contend that realising critical thinking at an expansive scope is best understood as a manifestation of what Barnett calls *critical being* (1997; 2015). Critical being recognises the potential (and need) for criticality across a range of contexts and conditions that cannot be confined by the boundaries of academic disciplines, instrumental aims, singular traditions, or fixed norms. In this thesis I stick to the spirit of Barnett's work, aiming to facilitate more expansive and active forms of criticality in education and society. However, I approach the idea of critical being with particular emphasis on the ontological nature of *being*. I am interested in what creates the conditions for the possibility of critical thinking, in understanding how the various contexts constituting our shared world shape criticality and how critical thinking can reshape itself and the world in unforeseen and indeterminant ways. Understanding *being* in this sense is not an effort to understand the particulars *of every being*, but to consider the common and essential features of critical thinking for all (human) beings.

The philosophical positioning of this approach is explained further in the methodology section of this introduction. The key point here is that, while my ultimate concern is with actual people, this thesis focuses on an understanding of critical thinking that ought to be applicable to *all* (or at least many) people across diverse contexts. An important part of this is recognising that a critical being, as a person, need not always be mired in criticality, but instead must discern the appropriate scope of critical thinking within and across contexts. Such a person should also understand how critical and non-critical modes of thinking and being articulate, recognising the potential for a constructive two-way relationship between critical and non-critical modes of thinking and being. As I see it, the aim of critical being is not constant criticality, but integration of critical thinking into a more holistic understanding of being. Critical being can only be realised *by beings* – a diverse multitude of actual people. However, understanding this possibility requires attention to underlying theory. Consequently, this thesis focuses less on individual beings and more on developing a philosophically informed understanding of the *processes* of critical *thinking* that can support critical *being* as an educational aspiration.

[1] Education is an extremely expansive term encompassing various stages of formal education and a great deal of learning and development *outside* any formal setting. For the purposes of this thesis, I am focused on UK universities. Thus, the 'aims of education' referenced throughout refer to the educational aims of UK universities.

In this introductory chapter, I briefly recount how I became interested in this area of study, explain why I focus on UK universities, and justify philosophical inquiry as an appropriate methodology. I then outline the assumptions framing this thesis and justifying my aims. To provide some conceptual and terminological clarity I briefly touch on the key concepts of critical scope and critical being. I conclude by providing an overview of the thesis structure, including the key contributions of each chapter.

1.1 What brought me here?

This thesis is informed by my experience in international education. I spent more than a decade as a teacher and school leader in East and Southeast Asia. Much of that time was dedicated to delivering various forms of 'international' curricula, preparing students to study abroad, and providing ongoing professional development for local teachers. For example, as the Deputy Head of a primary school in China I helped integrate International Baccalaureate (IB) and Chinese national curriculum. Questioning, inquiry, and critical thinking were explicit aims of both curricula. In the same school all teachers were required to sign documents promising, on threat of legal punishment, not to have any 'improper opinions' and pledging not to 'say anything critical of the Party'. Books in the library were censored and many of the most contextually relevant topics for critical consideration banned from discussion. When delivering professional development sessions, local colleagues recalled their experiences with critical thinking at Chinese universities as a process of learning and repeating the 'correct' critical perspective provided by the lecturer – and approved by the Party. Yet, in this seemingly 'uncritical' environment, students *did* learn to think critically. I watched students and teachers develop the skills and dispositions many theorists (e.g., Ennis, 2015; Facione, 1990; Halpern, 2014; Paul and Elder, 2016) see as essential to critical thinking. Students participated in Philosophy for Children courses and became members of what Lipman calls a 'community of inquiry' (2012). But the boundaries of that community were often narrowly drawn. Critical thinking in the science classroom did not always seem to translate into critical thinking in the history classroom, much less other contexts beyond any classroom. I observed students who were adept at critically analysing a piece of literature uncritically repeat false claims from social and news media. I saw students keenly aware of the role science plays in modern medicine uncritically adhere to traditional remedies with no need for evidence of effectiveness. It seemed that certain sources of information and convention remained immune to critical thinking. In these instances, critical thinking appeared to be a compartmentalised and instrumentalised individual skill for application in particular contexts aimed at approved ends. This led me to wonder about the nature of critical thinking. Is it something that can, or perhaps must, be compartmentalised? Or is it something that can, or must, be applied more broadly for someone to be considered a *critical person*?

My experience with international education has continued since returning to the UK. I teach on a postgraduate education programme at a prestigious UK university, where most students are international, and primarily from Mainland China. Both programme and course learning objectives are replete with requirements for critical evaluation, critical reflection, and various

forms of criticality that imply a need for critical thinking. This is in line with national requirements for postgraduate study (QAA, 2019). There is, however, very little explicit attention given to what exactly critical thinking *is,* how to go about it, or how cultural and experiential differences may impact teacher and student expectations and understandings of critical thinking. Exploring staff and student experiences in this regard is an area of growing research (e.g., Durkin, 2008; Fakunle *et al.*, 2016; Moosavi, 2020). However, such research rarely touches on questions or implications regarding the philosophical underpinnings of various understandings of critical thinking. This led me to join others in questioning whether critical thinking is perhaps culturally biased (e.g., Biggs, 1997; Hammersley-Fletcher and Hanley, 2016; Indelicato and Prazic, 2019; Moosavi, 2020). If so, is it then also potentially culturally relative – perhaps intractably so?

This spectre of relativism, whether the boundaries are cultural, political, epistemological, or (at an extreme) individualised perspectives, has an erosive effect on critical thinking. It prevents people from thinking critically together, leading them to speak past (instead of with) each other. This is problematic not only for critical thinking, but for the prospect of forging the kinds of shared understandings necessary for social cohesion. For example, the populist rise of Trumpism in my home country of the United States has shown substantial portions of the nation apparently losing a grip on reality. Alternative truths and fake news have become normalised parts of political discourse and popular media. There seems simultaneously to be an abundance of criticism and a lack of criticality. Conspiracy theories sometimes draw on meticulously reasoned and logical arguments derived from dubious and unquestioned assumptions. Social justice causes are increasingly ideological and decreasingly reflective on the dangerous nature of ideology (Haidt, 2016). The degree to which emotion, opinion, and identity drive belief and action became devastatingly evident amidst a politicised pandemic in which people rallied (often claiming to be thinking critically) against well-evidenced public health measures. Yet, despite so many unreasonable (and dangerous) beliefs and actions, most people *do have* reasons and justifications for what they think and how they act. Is it possible people are thinking critically in parallel? That a plurality of seemingly relative perspectives leaves people speaking *past* instead of *with* each other? Is this plurality of perspectives something critical thinking creates or something it may help to resolve?

These experiences and questions have led me to wonder about the nature of critical thinking and the aims of education. Given the vastness and diversity of education, in both theory and practice, I have narrowed my focus to a more specific (but still vast and diverse) context, that of UK universities. This provides a focal point for this thesis. It also raises questions about the relationship between critical thinking and the aims of UK higher education. Is critical thinking bound to be instrumentalised and compartmentalised? Is an engineer that thinks critically about their profession but uncritically consumes propaganda a critical thinker, or are they only a critical engineer? And what are the aims of education, to create critical engineers, or critical *people*? Similarly, is critical thinking somehow bound to other educational aims, like preparation to be a democratic citizen or the pursuit of social justice? If so, where do students and staff from non-democratic societies or with different notions of justice fit in? Given the educational trend towards 'learning objectives' being made painfully (and perhaps

problematically) explicit, it is odd that critical thinking is claimed as an aim of education without any clarification as to exactly who is responsible for it, or what it is. Furthermore, while it is common to ask what certain disciplines or practices within education need from critical thinking (e.g., problem solving, evaluation of evidence, coherent reasoning, clear argumentation), it is far less common to ask what critical thinking might require of education. It seems the relationship between critical thinking and the purposes and aims of education requires more attention. These are some of the experiences and questions that have led to this research.

1.2 Methodology and philosophical positioning

This thesis began as an empirical study, the first step of which was clarification of terminology, particularly providing a 'definition' of critical thinking. In many regards, this thesis is a result of having never gotten past this first step. As I explored different understandings of critical thinking, I consistently found fundamental philosophical assumptions were either overlooked or, when explicitly addressed, caused potential problems for critical thinking across diverse contexts. I also found confusion (or conflation) between the aims of education and the defining features of critical thinking, which seemed particularly problematic in diverse and cross-cultural contexts. Consequently, I was pulled into the gravity of trying to provide conceptual clarity as a prerequisite for empirical study. I then realised that conceptual clarity could not only contribute to future empirical inquiry, but also help meaningfully inform policy and practice.

This led me to approach this project as a form of philosophical inquiry. Following Pring's approach to philosophical inquiry as a research methodology, this thesis aims to identify underlying assumptions and unexamined values within theory that may meaningfully impact practice (2000; 2012). Critical thinking is a common educational aim at most levels of education in many parts of the world (OECD, 2019). Thus, understanding the philosophical underpinnings and implications of various conceptions of the concept is essential to understanding how best to select and meet high-priority educational aims. Philosophical inquiry is also deemed appropriate due to the normative nature of critical thinking. Critical thinking is a construct. It is not a thing that can be picked up and examined or a phenomenon that simply needs to be described; it is a practice that is created and maintained. Theories of critical thinking are not descriptions of how people *do* think, but *ideals* of how people *ought* to conduct a particular type of thinking, in particular contexts, for particular purposes. Critical thinking is aspirational. This is a large part of why modern considerations of the concept have thrived in the fields of philosophy and philosophy of education.

Of course, philosophy is not the only means of gaining insight into critical thinking. The critical thinking literature is vast and multidisciplinary. Cognitive science, neurology, sociology, psychology, and any number of other fields can make meaningful contributions to how critical thinking is understood, taught, and practised (Barnett and Davies, 2015a). I focus on the field of philosophy in part to maintain a manageable scope for this thesis. However, some education

practitioners question philosophy's ability to support the kinds of 'applied' critical thinking needed in education and society (Barnett and Davies, 2015a). Consequently, a key aim of this thesis is to contest such views by showing that philosophy still has a great deal to offer critical thinking. Indeed, I argue that overlooking the philosophical underpinnings of critical thinking can greatly limit potential scope. Furthermore, philosophical resources from traditions often excluded from critical thinking theory may shed light on the nature of the practice and help expand the scope of criticality in diverse contexts.

While this thesis remains focused on philosophy, it cannot draw on *all* of philosophy. Consequently, I have made choices regarding which traditions, thinkers, and ideas to draw on as part of this inquiry. To put a sharper point on the justification for my philosophical positioning it may help to trace out the intersecting pathways that formed my process of inquiry. In the early stages of my work, I noticed much of the literature attempting to address similar questions and concerns to my own consistently referenced Heidegger. I also noticed that many of the philosophical positions drawn on to support dominant conceptions of critical thinking (most explicitly by Siegel) aimed at resolving longstanding problems in epistemology, like the problems of infinite regress, circularity, dogmatism, and relativism in justification of knowledge. This led me to explore these challenges within philosophy more generally, with a natural starting point being the various thinkers and perspectives drawn on for support or targeted for critique within the critical thinking literature. This led me towards Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Rorty, Taylor, Sellars, and others. Simultaneously, as I was developing the idea of critical scope, I came across the work of Barnett and Davies, including both the ideas of *scope* and *critical being.* This work also contained hints of Heidegger. Consequently, after seeing how heavily these various perspectives relating to my questions of concern drew on Heidegger, it became evident I could no longer avoid reading Heidegger. Thus, I dedicated myself to that task. Being in lockdown certainly helped, as did the secondary scholarship of others (e.g., Blattner, 2013; Dreyfus, 1991; McManus, 2015a). The impact on my thinking was profound. My understanding of how people make sense of the world changed and, with more direct relevance to this thesis, I could see a project beginning to unfold – a reconsideration of critical thinking through a Heideggerian ontological lens. Indeed, this seemed like a project worthy of a monograph.

In that I was correct, as shortly after 'discovering' this potential, I came across *The Ways We Think* by Williams, a book that draws on Heidegger, Ryle, and Derrida to deliver a more poignant re-thinking of critical thinking (and thinking more generally) than I could hope to produce through this thesis. After some initial disappointment (that my thinking was in fact not so novel) I realised the positive opportunity to contribute to an ongoing conversation. That is a primary aim of this thesis. I find common ground with Barnett and Williams (among others) regarding critiques of dominant conceptions of critical thinking as overly rationalistic and excessively epistemological (Barnett, 2007; Williams, 2015). A central part of this critique is recognition of a need for greater attention to the ontological and relational conditions that shape the possibility of thinking, much less critical thinking. This leads Barnett towards greater consideration of critical thinkers as *beings* (2007; 2013; 2015) as opposed to philosophical conceptions of critical thinking as an abstract, often somewhat metaphysical process. This

focus is well warranted and much needed. However, in this thesis I remain focused on the *process* of critical thinking through a philosophical – but not necessarily a metaphysical – lens. I deem this vital to understanding critical thinking in diverse and cross-cultural contexts where the various character traits beneficial to criticality may differ, or (even more likely) manifest differently. Consequently, I see continued value in understanding how the 'structure' of critical thinking can be understood and realised at an expansive scope. This is intended to complement and add to a growing understanding of the attributes (qualities and character traits) conducive to individuals and communities cultivating expansive critical thinking. Where Williams moves into a focus on language via latter Heidegger, Ryle, and Derrida, I move into Chinese philosophy, particularly through the concept of *wu-wei*,[2] as another means of understanding the relationship between being in the world and critical thinking. I contend that all these approaches are oriented by the idea of *scope*, of wanting critical thinking to extend beyond the classroom, but also beyond *just thinking*, into action and as part of a larger understanding of being. My aim is to contribute to this shared effort.

My focus on the 'structure' and process of critical thinking is warranted because some efforts to expand criticality have unintended limitations in cross-cultural contexts. For example, some theorists and practitioners move towards critical pedagogy as a means of animating criticality towards action to meet social and educational aims (Brookfield, 2015; Davies, 2015b). I argue that context-specific aims, like those of critical pedagogy, ought to be separated from an expansive understanding of critical thinking to avoid unintentional dogmatism, which is particularly problematic in diverse and cross-cultural contexts. Similarly, in Chapter 3, I critique Siegel's effort to avoid relativism and facilitate 'trans-cultural reach' through insistence on 'universal values' as a defining feature of critical thinking (Siegel, 2017). Indeed, I contend that the notion of 'defining' critical thinking is itself problematic if any such definition is tethered to specific contexts or its features (e.g., context-specific aims or universal values) not recognised as open to critique and revision. This leads me to argue for the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility as *pragmatic assumptions* essential to animating critical thinking at an expansive scope without overly determined aims or undesired dogmatism.

The inclusion of Chinese philosophy is the final bit of positioning to explicate. This decision comes from my own experience and interest in Chinese history and philosophy more generally, but also from the fact that students from China comprise the largest demographic of international students in the UK. Consequently, it seems relevant to explore Chinese philosophical traditions for manifestations of critical thinking. It is important, however, to note that the decision to draw on Chinese philosophy is only one potential example of how a philosophical tradition which is generally excluded from consideration in dominant conceptions of critical thinking can inform an understanding of critical thinking. The larger aim of this thesis is to model how such exploration, across any number of traditions, may shed

[2] Wu-wei is a concept from Chinese philosophical traditions explored in chapters four and five. Throughout the thesis, for Chinese terms I use pinyin transliteration and italicise words (excluding proper nouns) the first time they are introduced, but not thereafter unless for emphasis.

valuable new light on how critical thinking is understood and practiced. It helps that there is substantial overlap, particularly in the ontological understanding of 'being in the world', between aspects of Chinese and Heideggerian philosophy (May, 1996; Parkes, 1990). This thesis does not explore these connections (and disconnections) in depth, nor is it a comparative endeavour. However, these intersecting paths of inquiry show the reasons for the philosophical positioning of this thesis. The idea of *being* is a central point of focus.

My intention is not to discard or entirely displace current understandings of critical thinking. Instead, I aim to expand upon existing ideas. This means I am not arguing to deprioritise or neglect fundamental skills and dispositions that are well established as essential features of teaching and practising critical thinking. For example, the skills of informal logic and dispositions to be inquisitive and openminded are generally understood as vital to critical thinking. There is a robust literature detailing desirable critical thinking skills and dispositions (Bailin and Battersby, 2015; Davies, 2015a; 1996; 2016b; Facione, 1990; Halpern, 2014). Achieving expansive critical thinking, moving beyond the epistemological dimension and individual domain, and working within and across diverse contexts requires *building on these ideas.* The understanding of critical thinking developed through this thesis may lead to re-evaluation, reprioritisation, or alteration in approaches to existing theory, but it need not lead to wholesale replacement of existing ideas and practices. I am indebted to the work of all those I have been inspired by and drawn ideas from. I also recognise that the positioning and purposes of this thesis are necessarily limited and must remain open to critique. I welcome that critique, as it can contribute to the larger (and more important) project of better understanding the theory and practice of critical thinking.

1.3 Why UK universities?

Before outlining the assumptions that frame this thesis, it is necessary to briefly justify my focus on UK universities. Attempting to understand critical thinking independent of context is like trying to think without thinking *about* anything – it is paradoxical. Simply put, thinking must have content. To think is to think *about* something (McPeck, 2016). A central point of this thesis is that critical thinking is context contingent. The aims, assumptions, and criteria of contexts shape the structure of critical thinking. This point is explored in detail in the next chapter. At this juncture, it is sufficient to point out that critical thinking always takes place in a network of overlapping and intersecting contexts (e.g., a UK university, a Chinese marketing firm, a flooding Bangladeshi village), proceeds from assumptions (e.g., about what is true, right, good, useful), and that what people are thinking *about* (a carburettor, poetry, justice) and what they are thinking *for* (to solve a practical problem, pass a test, start a revolution) do a great deal to shape the nature of critical thinking. Consequently, it is necessary to approach and analyse critical thinking through contextualised examples.

In this thesis I draw on a range of resources, perspectives, and contexts to understand how critical thinking can expand in scope to manifest as critical being. This includes exploration of Chinese philosophical traditions and focused attention on how critical and non-critical modes

of being articulate. This analysis has implications beyond universities and beyond the UK. However, when it comes to discussing implications for practice, I remain focused on UK universities. This is, in part, a means of managing the scope of the thesis. It is also a calculated decision based on the desire to understand *expansive* forms of critical thinking. I do not mean to imply that critical thinking is somehow reserved only for universities. In my own experience of doing philosophy with children, I have seen some of the most expansive critical thinking with the youngest students, and some of the narrowest, most ridged, and instrumental critical thinking with postgraduate adults. However, a primary school is very different from a university. Furthermore, as is shown in Section 1.6 below, the increasingly international nature of UK universities creates unique challenges and opportunities that both require and can facilitate expansive critical thinking.

I focus on universities, as opposed to 'higher education', because the latter is a broad and diverse sector that can be delineated and divided up in several different ways (Barnett, 2011; Barnett and Standish, 2003). Higher education encompasses a variety of formal and informal modes, methods, organisations, and institutions of learning. Post-secondary technical training, adult learning programmes of all sorts, and many other incarnations of learning with varying degrees of 'formality' can be considered parts of higher education. Critical thinking is possible and desirable in all these different educational endeavours. However, a twelve-week certificate course is certainly different from a three- or four-year degree program. Consequently, I focus primarily on universities with undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in mind. These, after all, are generally the educational contexts that claim to require and aim for the most expansive forms of critical thinking (OECD, 2019; QAA, 2019). Of course, universities are themselves diverse and varied in their demographics, educational offering, and roles within the broader higher education sector and society. However, I feel that UK universities provide (while still broad and vague in many ways) a sufficient context of focus for the purposes of this thesis.

A central theme of this thesis is the need for understanding, establishing, and navigating the appropriate *scope* for critical thinking. The idea of scope is the subject of the next chapter. The important point here is that understanding and discerning the appropriate scope of critical thinking, as part of the practice of critical thinking in any given instance, is something that must be learned. I join others in contending that universities are good places to do this learning (Barnett and Fulford, 2020; Brookfield, 2012; Ennis, 2016a; McPeck, 1990; Siegel, 2017). Universities provide a unique opportunity for the 'luxury' of expansive critical thinking. They are places that claim (among other things) to question assumptions, make new discoveries, and not just transmit but also 'create' knowledge (Barnett, 2011). Universities occupy a unique place and play a (potentially) pivotal role as reflexive and critical organs of the social organism. They offer individuals, traditions, disciplines, communities, and countries an opportunity for critical reflection and potential redirection. This is not to say universities are singularly responsible (or capable) of guarding all knowledge and steering all societies. It is simply to recognise that they have a privileged opportunity (some might say a responsibility) to contribute meaningfully towards these and other important processes. Criticality is at the centre of realising this possibility. This is perhaps part of why, as the highest level of formal education,

universities have the highest requirements for the most arduous applications of critical thinking (QAA, 2019). Consequently, universities provide a suitable context to help understand critical thinking at an expansive scope. Of course, universities are very diverse institutions within, much less between, different countries. Thus, the decision to focus on UK universities helps maintain a manageable scope for this thesis.

UK universities also provide an interesting opportunity to explore cross-cultural diversity. The internationalisation of higher education produces a pinch-point for students (both international and domestic) with differing conceptions of, and experiences with, critical thinking. These students are brought together and required to 'think critically', often without recognition of the impact and importance of their diverse understandings and backgrounds. This can lead to differences being understood as impediments to thinking critically and achieving the many other educational aims that rely on critical thinking (Bali, 2015; Chirgwin and Huijser, 2015; Grimshaw, 2007; Heng, 2018). In this thesis, I argue that this aspect of higher education, while posing challenges, also provides *opportunities* for the exploration and expansion of critical thinking. Consequently, my decision to focus on UK universities is part of an effort to seize on the unique opportunities of institutions (ostensibly) dedicated to expansive critical thinking and constituted by increasing diversity.

With my reasons for focusing on UK universities justified, I must now clarify some key assumptions regarding those universities that frame this inquiry. These assumptions should be subject to critical scrutiny. I invite critical engagement with the starting points, processes, and conclusions of this project as potentially beneficial to the overarching aim, which is exploring critical thinking and its relation to UK universities. This thesis begins from three key assumptions. First, that UK universities should (and ostensibly do) aim to teach and practice critical thinking at an expansive scope. Second, this aim is often not being met, in part due to epistemological assumptions underpinning dominant conceptions of critical thinking, which limit potential scope. Third, the increasingly international and cross-cultural nature of higher education makes the teaching and practice of critical thinking more complex. In what follows, I briefly outline each assumption to justify and frame the aims of this thesis.

1.4 The need for expansive critical thinking

This thesis proceeds from the assumption that UK universities should (and ostensibly do) aim to teach and practice critical thinking at an expansive scope. More detail is provided in the next chapter regarding exactly what is meant by 'expansive scope'. However, in the most basic terms, the idea is that critical thinking is needed in a range of diverse contexts both within and beyond universities. That means across academic disciplines and practices, but also across aspects of social and political life. Furthermore, critical thinking must be 'deep' enough to question the aims and assumptions guiding critical thinking itself (Paul, 1982). This idea of 'metacritique' (Barnett, 1997) is essential to critical thinking and discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. Here it is only necessary to point out that part of what constitutes an 'expansive scope' of critical thinking is the questioning of fundamental aims and assumptions.

Thus, proceeding critically from dogmatic and unquestioned assumptions lacks scope. Taken to an extreme, this could result in the antithesis of critical thinking, which is dogmatic and uncritical ideology.

It is easy to identify critical thinking as an aim of UK universities. It is more difficult to understand and assess the intended scope of critical thinking. To begin with the prior, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA) requires undergraduate degree holders to develop critical understandings and capacities (2019). Furthermore, dynamic labour markets, to which universities are increasingly responsive, prioritise flexibility, problem-solving, and a host of other 'critical' capacities (Baird and Parayitam, 2018; Halpern, 1998; Moon, 2008; Trede and McEwen, 2015). Universities also commonly aim to equip students as lifelong learners (OECD, 2019; QAA, 2019) an aim which some suggest requires critical thinking (Elder, 2016; Moon, 2008). These aims clearly show an intention to cultivate and practice critical thinking. However, it is less clear how *expansive* that critical thinking needs to be. For example, thinking critically about specific disciplinary content, solving problems in the workplace, and thinking critically enough to sustain ongoing learning (but not necessarily questioning fundamental aims and assumptions) does not necessarily require critical thinking at an expansive scope.

A clearer indicator of scope is apparent in the idea of UK universities as not only places where knowledge is transmitted, but also places where knowledge is forged. For example, the QAA requires university students to develop "a critical understanding of the uncertainty and limits of knowledge and how it is developed" (2019, p. 27). This implies the capacity to think critically about established ideas, aims, and assumptions. The kind of metacritique necessary to evaluate, change, discover, and potentially transform knowledge is an indicator of 'depth', which I argue is one 'measure' of critical scope. This is, however, only one aspect of critical scope. It is possible to think critically with great 'depth' while lacking attention to 'breadth', whether that be across dimensions of concern within a discipline (e.g., ethical, political, emotional) or across disciplines, or perhaps across contexts (e.g., classroom, workplace, community). The specialisation necessary for 'knowledge creation' is only one indicator of the need for critical scope in UK higher education. Furthermore, this aim may actually *compromise* the potential for other aspects of critical scope (MacIntyre, 2009). This is why the needs of specialised knowledge, skills, and other forms of expertise cannot be the sole justification for expansive critical thinking as an aim of UK universities.

Another argument for the necessity of expansive critical thinking as a core aim for UK higher education comes from the desire to respect the dignity of students. Siegel makes a compelling case for the justification of critical thinking as an essential educational aim, based on the premise that failure to do so infringes upon the possibility for students to fully realise their own rational autonomy (2017). Of course, the argument for teaching critical thinking to respect the dignity of students may lead to disagreement regarding what that respect entails. However, the idea of avoiding unjustifiable impositions of authority and cultivating rational autonomy is in line with fundamental aims of UK higher education (QAA, 2019). Other prospective educational aims also require critical thinking at an expansive scope. For example, some see universities as necessary focal points for emancipatory change and social transformation

(Apple, 2011; Giroux, 2001). Others point out that higher education should support social cohesion and stability (MacMullen, 2011; Peters, 2007). Some argue that universities must decide between the conflicting aims of dogmatic approaches to social justice or the critical pursuit of truth (Haidt, 2016). While some of these aims are contested, and potentially (though not necessarily) mutually exclusive, they all agree on the need for critical thinking *at an expansive scope* (even if not using this terminology) to facilitate critical thinking beyond not only specialised disciplinary boundaries, but also beyond universities themselves.

Indeed, it can be argued that, as social institutions in a democratic society, universities have a responsibility to prepare students as democratic citizens (Biesta, 2011; Callan, 1997; Dewey, 2018; Enslin and White, 2003; Gutmann, 2002). Along these lines, a common aim of UK universities is to both *be* democratic and *support* democracy, which requires critical thinking at an expansive scope (Barnett, 1997; 2013; Davies, 2015b). In this regard, it is telling that Dewey's origination of the modern conception of critical thinking explicitly and unequivocally links the concept to democratic education and education for democracy (2008; 2018). Importantly, as the UK is a multicultural democracy, this preparation as critical citizens should give attention to multiculturalism (Siegel, 2017). It is with this in mind that MacIntyre sees the university as a conduit for cultivation of an 'educated public' exposed to agonistic perspectives and capable of shaping just and moral communities within diverse societies (MacAllister, 2016; MacIntyre, 1988a). Navigating and negotiating diverse multicultural educational contexts requires critical thinking at an expansive scope.

UK universities are also seen as important nexuses in developing cosmopolitan forms of 'global citizenship' (Enslin and Tjiattas, 2004; Enslin and White, 2003; Nussbaum, 2002). In an interconnected world, graduates need to critically engage with a variety of diverse perspectives as 'global citizens' (Enslin and Tjiattas, 2004; Nussbaum, 2002). The information-rich nature of the modern world also demands increased critical vigilance in deciding what to believe and how to act (Rider and Peters, 2018). Consequently, universities must prepare students to navigate an 'information rich' world. Examples of this aim are readily available on many university resource and support pages.[3] Certainly, in a time of fake news and 'alternate truths' the need for deep and meaningful criticality in a variety of complex contexts has never been more apparent. If universities turn out critical engineers and critical nurses that consume fake news and fail to question prejudicial assumptions, it seems difficult to say they have produced critical thinkers, much less *critical beings*.

Contestation and negotiation of the purposes and nature of social institutions is a central aspect of democratic society. Consequently, the myriad of overlapping, and sometimes contradictory, aims of universities are, and should remain, contested. I revisit questions about the purposes and aims of UK universities in the implications for practice chapter of this thesis. At this juncture, I only want to justify one of the key assumptions framing this project, which is the idea that UK universities ought to, and ostensibly do, aim for the teaching and practice of

[3] For example, the University of Edinburgh Institute for Academic Development: https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/study-hub/learning-resources/critical

'expansive' forms of critical thinking. That is, critical thinking that works not only across disciplines but also beyond classrooms and can pursue and draw on new evidence and reasons to call fundamental aims and assumptions into question in a diverse variety of contexts.

1.5 The 'narrowness' of critical thinking in UK universities

The second key assumption framing this thesis is that the expansive scope of critical thinking UK universities ostensibly aim for is not always being achieved. Of course, it is not clear whether the teaching and practice of critical thinking becomes less expansive because of problems or limitations with implementation and practice, or because of something inherent to theories of critical thinking. How critical thinking manifests within and across universities depends on many interrelated factors. I cannot explore all these potential factors for all UK universities. Consequently, this thesis focuses on the assumptions underpinning dominant conceptions of critical thinking in theory. This is an important line of inquiry because drawing on inherently limiting conceptions of critical thinking in efforts to teach and practice expansive forms of criticality is bound to be problematic. As Ellerton notes, a lack of clarity in critical thinking theory leads to a lack of clarity in practice (2015). It is important, then, to scrutinise theories of critical thinking for factors that may contribute to limitations of scope. That is a core aim of this thesis, addressed most directly in Chapter 3. As noted in the next section, the need for conceptual clarity and identification of limitations within theory is particularly important in cross-cultural contexts where teachers and students may have divergent understandings of, and experiences with, critical thinking.

I draw on existing critiques from both theorists and practitioners to justify the assumption that UK universities are not cultivating critical thinking at an expansive scope at least in part *due to limitations in theory*. These critiques recognise that universities usually approach critical thinking through an epistemological lens as a set of skills and dispositions to be applied in assessing knowledge claims within specific contexts (usually disciplines or practices) for specific purposes. It is then argued that this individualistic, instrumentalized, highly abstracted, and overly epistemological approach to critical thinking fails to meet the broader needs of education and society (Barnett and Davies, 2015a; Brookfield, 2012; Thayer-Bacon, 1998; Walters, 1991; Williams, 2015). These are the broad contours of critiques that provide far more nuanced treatment of critical thinking in general, and in higher education, from a variety of perspectives. However, I contend it is telling that these contours are recognised by a variety of theorists and education practitioners.

Williams provides a comprehensive theoretical reconceptualization of critical thinking, arguing that dominant conceptions suffer from a fundamental misunderstanding of how people think in general, much less critically (E. Williams, 2016). She draws on Heidegger and Derrida (among others) to show that thinking is not something separate from the world, but a contextually embedded phenomenon arising from embodied cognition in, and as a part of, the world (ibid). Her efforts go a long way towards freeing critical thinking from the kind of hyper-rationalism that tends towards biased conceptions of universalism and instrumentalization. Other theorists

have drawn attention to the need for greater consideration of the emotional dimensions of critical thinking, pointing out the necessity of care, receptivity, and emotional intelligence to the process (Holma, 2015; Thayer-Bacon, 1993). Moving beyond the field of philosophy, Pettersson points out the need to reconcile ideals of critical thinking with new discoveries in cognitive science regarding *how people actually think* across a broader range of contexts (2020). A common theme in these treatments of critical thinking is recognition of a problematic 'narrowing' *at the level of theory.*

The potential for theory to limit the scope of critical thinking is a problem also identified by some education practitioners. Barnett and Davies conclude that traditional philosophical conceptions of critical thinking are 'impotent' in meeting the broader needs of higher education (2015). Like the theorists noted above, they argue that philosophical conceptions of critical thinking are too individualistic and overly epistemological, tending to define critical thinking as a set of skills and dispositions for individuals to apply in assessing knowledge claims within the context of specific disciplines or subjects, but lacking attention to broader social, ethical, and political dimensions (ibid). I cannot say I agree with, or find value in, the move to disregard philosophy as a potential resource for expanding the scope of critical thinking. Indeed, I suspect this single claim may not accurately reflect the aims of Barnett's larger body of work. Nonetheless, I feel it is important to contribute to those striving to show the relevance of philosophy to education practice. For example, Williams does well to draw on philosophy as a resource for expanding an understanding of critical thinking and critical thinkers (2016) in a manner that seems commensurate and complimentary to the educational and social needs identified by education practitioners. It seems fair to recognise that education and critical thinking both require more than *only* philosophical input into theory. However, it seems unnecessary to sideline philosophy as a resource for understanding and supporting critical thinking. Seeming to concede this point, Davies notes, "little progress on the topic of critical thinking in higher education can be made if the concept itself remains unmoored from any proper theoretical and conceptual grounding" (2015b, p. 42). Naturally, this raises questions as to what is the 'proper theoretical and conceptual grounding' for critical thinking. Davies, and others (e.g., Brookfield, 2015; Burbules and Berk, 1999), often draw on critical theory (a philosophy) and critical pedagogy (a practice steeped in philosophy) as the apparently (or potentially) 'proper grounding' to expand the teaching and practice of critical thinking.

I find this well-intentioned but deeply problematic. A central argument of this thesis is that the aims of education should not 'ground' critical thinking. Instead, an understanding of critical thinking should help to determine the aims of education. This direction of fit is important because using the aims of education to 'define' critical thinking risks dogmatically narrowing the scope of criticality. The aims of education are context specific and, out of practical necessity, deterministic to various degrees. This is appropriate and necessary for many *educational* aims intended to serve particular and determinant personal, economic, and social needs. However, the nature of critical thinking requires a high degree of *indeterminacy.* It is not only that the 'conclusions' of critical thinking in a particular instance, within a particular context, cannot be predetermined but that the aims, assumptions, and criteria guiding critical thinking itself cannot be predetermined or permanently fixed. To do so risks lapsing into

uncritical dogmatism or ideology. An essential feature of critical thinking is the possibility of questioning the aims and assumptions framing critical thinking itself (Barnett, 1997). Consequently, considering any substantive requirement for particular types of action towards fixed and predetermined aims as somehow *defining* critical thinking raises philosophically (and practically) challenging questions. Mulnix argues, "… any model of critical thinking that asserts that there are definite ends at which critical thinking aims – in terms of what we should or should not believe, or how we should or should not behave – is deeply suspicious" (2013, p. 406). The caution here is warranted. Mulnix sees critical thinking as a process focussed on *how* people ought to think, not a structure dictating *what* people ought to think or think *about*. This is an extremely important point, necessary to prevent critical thinking from becoming a form of ideology. Dewey recognises this risk when he frames critical thinking as a recursive enterprise that must remain open to revision of fundamental assumptions (2008). In such a view, the only 'definite ends' towards which critical thinking orients are the reflexive and recursive perpetuation of critical thinking. In this approach, particularly as interpreted by Rorty, there is no ultimate grounding for criticality, only pragmatic points of reference that facilitate reflexivity (1989). If these points of reference ossify into something like assumed certainty, then they risk falling outside the reflexive and recursive nature of critical thinking – they risk becoming dogmatic. Questions regarding the 'proper theoretical and conceptual grounding' for critical thinking are explored in Chapter 3, which shows why it is *not desirable* to tether critical thinking to substantive aspects of any single context, like particular educational aims or substantive values, as this may limit the scope of critical thinking in both theory and practice, particularly in cross-cultural contexts.

The need to balance degrees of determinacy and indeterminacy within both education and critical thinking is a theme that runs through this thesis and is discussed further regarding implications for practice in Chapter 7. The idea that critical thinking cannot be defined by predetermined aims or assumptions creates difficult questions about how exactly it is to be understood in theory. Furthermore, as practitioners like Barnett and Davies rightly notice, there is a risk of critical thinking 'unmoored from its proper grounding' becoming a kind of empty instrumentalism, lapsing into intractable relativism, or simply failing to achieve action – to be *animated* – at the scope necessary for education and society (Barnett and Davies, 2015a). These risks are considered in detail in Chapters 3 and 6, and the relationship between critical thinking and educational aims is a focus of Chapter 7. The key point at this juncture is that, despite disagreement on how best to expand the theory and practice of critical thinking, there is a great deal of *agreement* between theorists and educational practitioners that the forms of critical thinking taught and practiced in UK universities are not expansive enough. This thesis proceeds from this assumption and focuses on aspects of *theory* that may limit the potential scope of critical thinking.

1.6 The challenges of cross-cultural contexts

The challenges of dealing with diverse and divergent conceptions of critical thinking are compounded in cross-cultural contexts. Research from behavioural and cognitive sciences

provides evidence that cultural differences manifest in measurably different thinking patterns (de Oliveira and Nisbett, 2017; Henrich *et al.*, 2010; Nisbett, 2005). While there is debate around the degree and causality of differing patterns of thought between cultures, it is easy to observe differences in normative ideas regarding the practices and purposes of education and critical thinking across diverse cultural and political contexts. Consequently, imposing a distinctly 'Western-centric'[4] theory of critical thinking in culturally diverse contexts could be construed as a form of what Biggs calls 'intellectual colonialism' (1997). However, Western universities drawing on Western intellectual traditions does not necessarily constitute any form of colonialism. Many international students likely choose to study in the UK because they *want* exposure to these traditions. However, failing to consider the diversity of sociocultural assumptions underlying conceptions of, and experiences with, critical thinking is likely to be problematic in cross-cultural contexts. Expansive critical thinking seems implausible if it is not 'grounded' by receptivity to the circumstances of actual students.

This has profound implications for the purposes, aims, curricula, pedagogies, and environments of universities. For example, following others, I am strongly in favour of UK universities aiming to educate in ways that support and sustain democracy. However, I argue there is nothing about critical thinking that *requires* such aims. This becomes pertinent in contexts where many students are from non-democratic contexts. Democracy may be an orienting aim of UK universities, but not a defining feature of critical thinking. This separation allows the latter to be applied to consideration of the prior. It also helps prevent problematic assumptions, like the idea that students from non-democratic societies cannot think critically. This is not to deny the fact that democracy, freedom of speech, and open access to information are conducive to developing and practicing critical thinking. The point is that *universities have more determinant substantive ideals and values than what critical thinking itself requires.* This point is returned to and developed in Chapter 7. Here it is only relevant to point out that any aims and assumptions, like those of an ideal form of political organisation or preferred values, that structure critical thinking without themselves being subjected to critical scrutiny, create risks of uncritical dogmatism. This does not mean that every assumption in every dimension of critical concern must be interrogated as part of every instance of critical thinking. However, this kind of 'expansive' critical thinking must remain a possibility *when such fundamental assumptions become relevant*.

I contend that the increasingly international nature of UK higher education makes some taken for granted assumptions relevant to critical thinking. This is important because when the 'taken for granted' values, ideas, or perspectives differ between the people involved in teaching and learning; there is a risk of talking *past* instead of talking *with* each other. Or, worse, there is a

[4] The term 'Western' is problematically general and essentialist. In this thesis 'Western philosophy' refers to the various traditions sharing an origin in ancient Greece. 'Western countries' and 'Western culture' are even more complicated generalisations, as the terms are not geographically accurate (not all 'Western' countries are in the west) and overlook the diversity and impact of indigenous and non-European influences on historical and contemporary culture and society. Consequently, I minimise use of these terms. However, the term 'Western' can sometimes provide a useful shorthand for reference to European-settled countries with liberal democratic political systems. In this thesis I primarily consult 'Western' philosophy, literature, and research from North America, Europe, the UK, and Australia.

risk of silencing those with different perspectives and forcing movement towards homogenisation. Importantly, diversity of perspectives is not only a cross-cultural issue. The key point is that if a diversity of perspectives is not embraced – if difference is ignored instead of addressed – then universities will fail to cultivate anything like expansive critical thinking.

Understanding and navigating diversity raises questions about the possibility of cultural bias and/or relativism in critical thinking. If critical thinking is completely relative to sociocultural contexts it would seem difficult to mediate between diverse perspectives. People reasoning from incompatibly (or perhaps incomparable) assumptions towards conflicting aims could all be seen as thinking critically, just not commensurably. This leads many critical thinking theorists to assume there is something transcendent and objective about critical thinking that facilitates mediation between diverse and seemingly relative perspectives (Elder, 2016; Paul and Rudinow, 1988; Siegel, 2017). In this view, the 'theoretical grounding' of critical thinking needs to be a *common* ground to avoid intractable relativism. The implication is that, without this, imposition and force would have to replace reasoning and agreement to mediate between perspectives (Rorty, 1991b). Importantly, the issues of bias and relativism are not restricted to cultural boundaries. McPeck points out that different disciplines may have what amount to differing epistemologies (2016). How truth, knowledge, argumentation, justification, and many of the things fundamental to the process of critical thinking are understood varies across disciplines. For example, what counts as knowledge or a good argument in astrophysics is very different from that in the fine arts. Furthermore, diversity between disciplines and subjects is compounded by diversity between sociocultural contexts. For example, thinking critically about fine arts, literature, ethics, and many other things likely differs between people in Poland, China, and Zimbabwe (not to mention differences across time). Contexts do not simply provide the 'content' of thinking, but also shape *the way people think* (E. Williams, 2016). Consequently, the question of how to facilitate critical thinking across diverse contexts is vitally important to critical thinking, particularly in cross-cultural environments.

The problem of relativism is explored in Chapter 3. Without yet delving into details, it is relevant to point out a central argument of this thesis. This is the idea that no foundational, transcendent, or 'objective' criteria are required to navigate and mediate divergent critical frameworks. Instead, a shared commitment to reasoning (even if incommensurable) and receptivity to new ideas and evidence can facilitate discovery of new perspectives and possibilities that inform and potentially re-form the aims and assumptions structuring critical thinking. In this view, plurality and diversity provide challenges but also *opportunities* for the expansion of critical thinking. The increasingly international nature of UK universities provides a unique opportunity to draw on diversity as a resource for expanding critical thinking towards critical being. It is an opportunity to seize on the possibility for universities to provide the 'luxury' of time necessary for expansive critical thinking, combined with access to ideas and perspectives not always readily available outside higher education contexts.

I cannot develop this argument here in full. This is an idea that unfolds through the course of this thesis. However, my key point for this introduction is to justify the assumption that the increasingly international nature of higher education draws attention to the need for

reconsideration of critical thinking theory. If a theory of critical thinking relies on aims and assumptions from one context for applicability in *all* contexts, there is a risk of uncritical dogmatism. Furthermore, if the fact that students (for whatever reasons) may have different understandings of, and experiences with, critical thinking is not taken seriously in both theory and practice, then it will remain difficult to achieve criticality at an expansive scope. Cultivating an expansive form of critical thinking, along the lines of critical being, requires attention to the contextual contingency of being and receptivity to new perspectives and possibilities. This is not to say the aims of UK education should necessarily be shifted or somehow 'relativised', it is simply to recognise that meeting these aims may require new approaches to critical thinking. Some taken for granted aims and assumptions may become relevant in ways that could prove mutually beneficial – through the opportunity for expansion of critical scope – to all parties involved.

1.7 Critical being

As noted above, this thesis consistently engages with and draws on the work of Barnett. I share his goals of expanding critical thinking in both theory and practice to better meet the needs of education and society. I draw heavily on Barnett's ideas of *scope* and *critical being.* I strive to stick to the spirit of Barnett's work, while also introducing new perspectives and ideas. The results of this effort may reaffirm aspects of existing theory but are also likely to deviate from the original form and/or intent of some respects. With the 'critical spirit' in mind, I am open to, and eager for, critique of how I draw and build on existing ideas in this project.

The idea of critical being runs through this thesis and is approached most explicitly in Chapter 5. However, it is worth providing a provisional glimpse of this core concept at this juncture. Barnett contends that higher education ought to aim not just to help students think critically as part of their university studies but aim to develop as *critical beings:*

> *Critical persons are more than just critical thinkers. They are able critically to engage with the world and with themselves as well as with knowledge. It follows that we have to displace critical thinking as a core concept of higher education with a more comprehensive concept. The concept that I am proposing is that of critical being, which embraces critical thinking, critical action and critical self-reflection (Barnett, 1997, p. 1).*

Barnett partitions critical being into critical reason, critical self-reflection, and critical action. This partitioning is not intended to divide up and diminish, but instead draws attention to different facets of criticality. The better these facets are understood, the greater the opportunity for combining them to achieve greater critical scope. Ultimately, critical being expands critical thinking beyond narrowly individualistic, overly epistemological, and highly instrumental conceptions (Barnett, 2015). Barnett sees critical being as an *integration* of critical reasoning, critical self-reflection, and critical action in a *critical person* (1997, p. 175). Consequently, the idea of 'displacement' might better be understood as expansion through integration. As Barnett

notes in the passage above, critical being 'embraces', and I argue *encompasses* and *requires* critical thinking, critical acting, and many other forms of criticality. Indeed, in this thesis, I argue that *non-critical* thinking and *non-critical* action are equally important parts of being, and thus also provide valuable resources for *critical being*.

This draws attention to an important terminological issue. I sometimes use 'criticality' and 'critical thinking' as interchangeable synonyms. A case can be made for separating the two concepts, with the prior indicating a movement beyond only thinking to encompass broader aspects and manifestations of criticality (Davies, 2015b). While I am open to the possibility of such a distinction having value in many contexts, I do not make a sharp distinction in this thesis because I think this separation sells short the broader aims, and spirit, of critical thinking in higher education. My intention is not to diminish the centrality of thinking to critical thinking, but simply to recognise the types of criticality I aim to engage with are not focused only on procedures of thought or discursive processes, but on critical changes to the way people reason and judge what to believe and how to act. Ultimately, I strive to develop a philosophically informed understanding of *critical being*, which is better understood as a broader form of criticality as opposed to any strictly epistemological notion of critical thinking. A critical being is a person that consistently exercises expansive critical thinking. Consequently, understanding critical thinking at an expansive scope is an integral (but certainly not the only) part of understanding critical being. The idea of critical scope, as an essential aspect of critical being, is the central focus of this thesis.

Barnett touches on the idea of scope when he says, "If students are to prosper in the modern world, if they are to carry their world forward in a worthwhile fashion, they have to become critical persons embodying critique in the three domains of knowing, of self, and of the world at the same time" (2015, p. 69). The idea of domains as a measure of critical scope are discussed further in the next chapter. The key idea here is that *critical being has a necessarily expansive scope*. It encompasses thinking and acting in a variety of domains, dimensions, and contexts. This is part of a larger 'ontological turn' that Barnett sees as necessary in critical thinking theory and the aims of higher education (2007). Critical being is an approach to criticality that encompasses more than thinking, gives attention to more than just knowledge, and considers more than the individual. This does not diminish the importance of thinking, knowledge, or individuals. It only situates these as facets of critical thinking, which must be understood in relation to a larger understanding of criticality and being in the world. This thesis aims to contribute to an understanding of critical being as an actualisation of critical thinking at an expansive scope.

As embodied beings, the one constant for critical thinkers in *any* context *is being*. An 'ontological turn' in thinking about critical thinking helps turn away from using the aims and assumptions of one context to define critical thinking itself. It turns towards seeing critical thinking (manifesting at an expansive scope in critical beings) as a means of understanding and interrogating the contexts that shape thinking and being, revealing new possibilities and potentialities, and ultimately providing opportunity to shape and re-shape the world in previously unforeseen ways. The approach taken in this thesis is a turn into the existential

possibilities of criticality. Consequently, as noted above, despite the ultimate concern with the beings (actual people) that must carry out critical thinking, this thesis focuses on the underlying theory necessary for *any* individual to aspire towards critical being. In particular, I am concerned with providing resources that can help UK universities expand the scope of critical thinking in ways that cultivate critical being – that is, critical people – with receptivity to diversity. Ultimately, I contend that diversity (cross-cultural and otherwise) provides a vital opportunity (not an impediment) to expanding the scope of critical thinking and helping to realise critical being.

1.8 Structure of this thesis

This thesis pulls together several far-ranging strands of philosophical inquiry. This makes it a somewhat wandering affair. However, this eclectic range is in keeping with the spirit and aims of the project, demonstrating a degree of critical scope. The various strands of inquiry do move in a common direction, coming together to meet the core aim of shedding light on important questions and concepts with powerful implications for how critical thinking is understood and practiced. In this section, I outline the structure of the thesis, along with the key contributions of each chapter.

Chapter 2 carries the burden of setting up the extensive conceptual and terminological framework that structures the whole of the thesis. Chapter 3 digs deep into the philosophical underpinnings of dominant conceptions of critical thinking to justify my novel approach. I like to think subsequent chapters benefit from this somewhat dense work by being able to explore ideas with greater fluidity. Chapter 2 outlines a model for understanding the idea of *scope*. The primary aim of the chapter is to provide the conceptual and terminological resources for ongoing dialogue and analysis of critical thinking within and beyond this thesis. This includes outlining some of the commonly recognised features of critical thinking. Using this model, in Chapter 3 I show how dominant conceptions of critical thinking unintentionally narrow the scope of criticality *at the level of theory*. These limitations stem primarily from efforts to avoid longstanding epistemological challenges regarding infinite regress, circularity, dogmatism, and relativism in the justification of reasons. I argue that drawing on fixed epistemological assumptions, assumedly universal values, or overly determinant educational aims to define critical thinking is detrimental to the potential scope of criticality, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. To address this problem, I contend it is possible to engage with diverse critical frameworks without recourse to anything foundational, transcendent, or universal, while still avoiding the perils of strong relativism. Central to this argument are the ideas of contextual reflexivity and perspective. This leads me to conclude that exploring critical thinking through traditions different than those drawn on by dominant understandings could shed valuable light on the nature of critical thinking and how it can work in cross-cultural contexts.

I pursue this in Chapter 4 through an exploration of criticality in Chinese philosophical traditions. This chapter shows how critical thinking works in, and can draw on, philosophical resources typically excluded from critical thinking theory. Drawing on historical overview and

philosophical analysis, I reveal three types of criticality exemplifying metacritique of various 'depths'. These are criticality *within* tradition, *of* tradition, and critical integration *between* traditions. An important auxiliary aim in this chapter is to dispel overgeneralisations and essentialisations of Chinese philosophy as somehow lacking in criticality. I then draw on Chinese philosophy as a 'living resource' capable of informing critical thinking theory and practice. This foray into Chinese philosophy reveals the possibility of critical thinking derived from and operating within contexts that do not share the same assumedly universal values and aims as those often used to underwrite and animate dominant conceptions of critical thinking. This shows how critical thinking is possible without these problematically narrowing impositions on theory. Furthermore, some of these resources, like the concept of wu-wei, can help understand how critical and non-critical modes of thinking and being articulate.

This is the topic of Chapter 5, which outlines the 'mystical dimension' of critical thinking as a resource for expanding critical *thinking* towards critical *being.* I first explicate what I mean by the 'mystical dimension' of critical thinking, showing how it is a useful category for grouping together non-critical experiences with some important shared characteristics. I argue that these shared characteristics are conducive to better understanding how critical and non-critical modes of being articulate, and thus are well-equipped to contribute to the idea of critical being. Building on ideas from Chapter 3, I suggest that critical thinking does not require an 'objective' perspective, but it does require *new* perspectives. I then show how the non-critical experiences of wonder and wu-wei can expand criticality. I argue that wonder, curiosity, contemplation, and critical thinking are complimentary aspects of *critical being*. Furthermore, the concept of wu-wei (an uncritical form of efficacious interaction with the world) provides a two-way opportunity for both actualising and reflecting on critical being. Ultimately, I conclude that the *unlearning* common to both wonder and wu-wei provides opportunities for receptivity to new perspectives and possibilities beyond the boundaries of the familiar and is thus capable of sustaining the metacritique essential to expansive critical thinking. This, I argue, is essential to realising the possibility for diversity as a resource for mediation between diverse and divergent critical frameworks.

A key point of this thesis is that, while critical thinking is always contextual, it cannot be defined by the aims and assumptions of any single context, as this would dogmatically narrow its potential scope. Consequently, it is important to understand what is necessary to make critical thinking possible in *any* given context and, perhaps more importantly, what is necessary to *animate* critical thinking within and across contexts. With this in mind, Chapter 6 integrates the insights from Chapters 3, 4, and 5 into the model of critical scope sketched out in Chapter 2. This includes identifying *pragmatic assumptions* regarding features of critical thinking, without which expansive criticality would not be possible. These features are the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility. Each feature is explored briefly to show why it is necessary to critical thinking and how it contributes towards *animating* criticality at an expansive scope within and between diverse contexts, while navigating (not necessarily avoiding) the problems of infinite regress, circularity, dogmatism, and relativism without reliance on predetermined aims or fixed substantive values.

Chapter 7 brings theoretical discussion back towards practical application by exploring implications for practice. Given the scope of the thesis, these implications remain general. However, I aim to show how the philosophically informed understanding of critical being developed through this thesis can contribute to debates and discussions regarding the purposes, aims, curricula, pedagogies, and environments of UK universities. This is done by shifting focus from what universities require of critical thinking towards questions about what realising expansive critical thinking, manifesting as critical being, requires of universities. I point towards the potential for the understanding of critical thinking outlined in this thesis to be used as a resource for balancing the determinant and indeterminant purposes and aims of UK higher education. This includes arguing that a liberal education, reflexively focused on critical being, is a valuable resource for expanding critical thinking in diverse contexts. I also suggest that the conceptual, terminological, and graphic model of scope developed in this thesis can contribute towards curricular design, which (I contend) ought to include both explicit and integrated teaching of critical thinking at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. I also briefly touch on how this thesis can contribute to ongoing pedagogical debates regarding teaching, learning, and study. Finally, to further affirm the potential for application of theory to practice, Chapter 8 provides a brief and general example of a pedagogical resource drawing on the terminology and concepts of this thesis. This chapter aims both to help clarify concepts by showing them in use, but also to indicate potential for further development of practical resources. In Chapter 9, I conclude by retracing the key contributions this thesis makes to knowledge, discussing limitations, and considering how this project might contribute to future research.

2 Modelling the scope of critical thinking

In this chapter, I outline the idea of critical scope while also developing the terminological and conceptual resources used throughout this thesis. In large part, this involves reorganising and assimilating existing concepts and terms. This is necessary because the terminology around critical thinking is far from codified. Different approaches use similar terminology to describe different aspects of the practice. Consequently, it is helpful to clarify the terminology and concepts drawn on throughout (and hopefully beyond) this thesis. This reorganisation of terms and clarifications of concepts, oriented around the idea of scope, is one of the novel contributions this thesis aims to provide to critical thinking theory and practice.

Before sketching out a model for understanding the scope of critical thinking, it is necessary to note why the idea of scope matters. In some ways, the scope of critical thinking is easy to observe. Thinking critically to pass an exam is quite different from thinking critically about the cultural traditions that shape ethical norms (Paul, 1982; Paul and Elder, 2016). A student may think critically to pass an exam in ethics, anthropology, or another field that requires the same knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to question their own sociocultural traditions, yet fail to apply critical thinking towards that purpose in their own life. An activist may rail against what they see as an unjust ideology, yet fail to turn a critical eye towards the underlying assumptions of their own positions (Brookfield, 2012). These are examples of limitations in the scope of critical thinking. The implications of critical thinking operating at different scopes are profound. Critical thinking at a limited scope may be reduced to a form of problem solving, aimed at performativity within predetermined contexts, but lacking explicit attention to application across contexts and criticality towards the assumptions that shape contexts (Barnett, 1997; Burbules and Berk, 1999). Lack of attention to the scope of critical thinking sought in education stands to produce incongruous applications of critical thinking. This may manifest in universities turning out people capable of literary critique but ill-equipped to solve practical problems, or producing critical business managers and accountants, but not necessarily critical consumers of media or critical democratic citizens. There are serious questions about the value of what is ‘learned’ if critical thinking stops when students leave the classroom. Consequently, understanding the scope of critical thinking is essential to determining how the practice can meet broader educational and social aims.

A sense of what I mean by ‘scope’ becomes more evident in considering some common educational aims and real-world applications of critical thinking. For example, evaluating information and making judgments across a range of topics in diverse contexts is essential in an information-rich world. The ability to solve problems creatively is necessary in dynamic workplaces where innovation is valued or often essential (Baird and Parayitam, 2018; Trede and McEwen, 2015). Socialisation into the complicated tapestry of traditions within and between pluralistic societies requires critical engagement to keep induction into society from becoming indoctrination (Peters, 2007). The capacity and willingness not only to retain information but to build understanding, to inquire, and to discover new ideas – perhaps new truths – is vital to the wellbeing of individuals, societies, and an increasingly connected global

community (Enslin and Tjiattas, 2004). Critical thinking contributes to knowledge, practical utility, socialisation, discovery, and many other areas of educational and social concern. Underlying all these potential critical contributions is the possibility for change, perhaps even radical change. There are few experiences more educationally profound than realising an aim or assumption guiding belief and action is itself in need of revision. Learning in an active, engaged, and ongoing sense is sustained by the possibility (really the inevitability) of being wrong.

Critical thinking, at least of the expansive scope I aim to sketch out here, requires that these possibilities remain open, unrestricted, and extend to include the aims and assumptions structuring critical thinking itself. Barnett calls this *metacritique.* This involves "the capacity of a form of thought to interrogate and reflect on its fundamental categories, concepts, tests of truth and presuppositions. Here, the very constitution of the form of thought is the focus" (1997, p. 72). It must be possible to question the criteria guiding judgments, interrogate instrumental aims, and question the assumptions of traditions (Brookfield, 2012). Conceived as such, critical thinking is a Sisyphean endeavour that never rests; the engine of continued inquiry. It is not that every instance of critical thinking must lead to radical change. This would be wildly inefficient and completely undesirable. Instead, it is that any *expansive* understanding of critical thinking must account for the *possibility* of radical change. If this possibility is closed off or somehow restricted, the potential scope of critical thinking is limited, and risks of dogmatism and ideology begin to infringe on both the theory and practice of critical thinking. This provides a sense of what I mean when discussing the *expansive scope* of critical thinking. The aim of this chapter is to provide a conceptual and terminological model to better understand and discuss these aspects of criticality.

A reasonable starting point for this chapter, and the thesis as a whole, would be to 'define' critical thinking. This task has been undertaken often. Explicit attention to critical thinking first appears in Western philosophical traditions via ancient Greece (Siegel, 2017). However, it is also evident in other philosophical traditions, like those of China (Normile, 2022). It seems plausible that anywhere people have sought to understand and justify their beliefs and actions with reasons, and anywhere people have 'thought about thinking', there has been some form of critical thinking. Critical thinking is not something that was invented or discovered but, like language, something that has developed widely and diversely across human contexts over time. Drawing just from the past century and focusing on approaches to critical thinking with explicit consideration of modern education, there are no shortage of definitions. Ennis compiles fourteen definitions of critical thinking (by no means an exhaustive list) in his analysis of the concept, several of which are included below (sourced from Ennis, 2016b, p. 9):

> *"Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933 first edition 1910).*
>
> *"The ability to think critically …involves three things: (1) an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within*

the range of one's experiences, (2) knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning, and (3) some skill in applying those methods" (Glaser 1941).

"Critical thinking is reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis 1987a; 1987b; 1991; 2011, 2015).

"A critical thinker is one who is appropriately moved by reasons" (Siegel 1988).

"Skillful, responsible thinking that is conducive to good judgment because it is sensitive to context, relies on criteria, and is self-correcting" (Lipman 1988).

"Critical thinking is skilled, active interpretation and evaluation of observations, communications, information, and argumentation as a guide to thought and action" (Fisher and Scriven 1997).

"Thinking that attempts to arrive at a judgment only after honestly evaluating alternatives with respect to available evidence and arguments" (Hatcher and Spencer, 2006).

"The careful examination of an issue in order to reach a reasoned judgment" (Bailin and Battersby, 2010).

"The articulated judgment of an intellectual product arrived at on the basis of plus-minus considerations of the product in terms of appropriate standards (or criteria)" (Johnson, 2014).

This is only a truncated sampling of definitions, each of which is part of a larger theory or approach to critical thinking. Some argue that this plurality of definitions reveals commonalities of an underlying singular phenomenon – different conceptions of a shared concept (Ennis, 2016b). Others suggest this plurality points towards incommensurable and irreconcilably different concepts (Johnson and Hamby, 2015). It is also possible that concepts, conceptions, and definitions aside, what matters more is how critical thinking is actually put to use (Moore, 2013). What I take from this plurality of definitions is the important (perhaps obvious) point that the complexity and nuance of critical thinking cannot be understood, much less analysed, through a simplified definition. Critical thinking is an active process, not a static 'thing'. It cannot be conveyed as a simple turn of phrase. Furthermore, as noted in the introduction, critical thinking is not a description of how people *do* think but an *ideal* of how people *ought* to think. It is an *ideal of a process* that different people in different places at different times have conceived of differently. Consequently, no simple definition can meet the broader needs of critical thinking in education and society. Instead, a comprehensive theory (or perhaps more than one) is necessary. Furthermore, given the very nature of critical thinking, any such theory must remain reflexive, critical of itself, and open to change.

In this thesis, I develop a model for understanding and analysing the scope of critical thinking. This involves a great deal of terminological and conceptual organisation and clarification, which results in an unavoidable amount of jargon. I see this as necessary because the critical thinking literature is far from uniform in usage of terminology, which can impede conceptual clarity. For example, one of the most helpful resources in understanding widely agreed features of critical thinking and establishing a shared vocabulary for discussion comes from a 1990 report, in which forty scholars forged a consensus on key aspects of critical thinking (Facione, 1990). In this report, critical thinking is constituted of two dimensions (skill and disposition) and practiced in various domains, which primarily correspond to disciplines and fields of academic study. However, as theory has evolved, concepts and terms have changed both in how they are understood and used. For example, Barnett identifies the domains of knowledge, self, and world (1997, p. 65) along with various 'levels' of critical thinking (2015, p. 64). Building on this, Barnett works with Davies using the term domains to reference the axes of individual and sociocultural consideration within a model of critical thinking for higher education (2015). Barnett and Davies also identify six dimensions of critical thinking. These are, "skills, judgments, dispositions, actions, social relations and critical being" (Davies and Barnett, 2015, p. 43). Others recognise similar features of critical thinking, but label them as aspects or attributes (Moore, 2013). Paul and Elder also use the term dimensions, but in a somewhat different manner, referencing the need to teach critical thinking with ethical 'dimensions' (Elder, 2016; Paul and Elder, 2009). This implies that perhaps there are also emotional, political, or other dimensions to critical thinking. Many of the terms and concepts used between theories of critical thinking appear common (Ennis, 2016b). However, they are not used in a uniform or consistent manner. Consequently, one of my aims is to assimilate and organise existing concepts and terms into a comprehensive model with particular attention to understanding the *scope* of critical thinking.

I have tried to organise terms with attention to logical relation without compromising accuracy and appropriacy. The goal is to provide the conceptual and terminological resources to sustain not only the expansive practice of critical thinking, but ongoing discussion and future development of theory and practice. The model developed here maps critical thinking across individual, sociocultural, and existential *domains*, while also providing consideration for various *dimensions* (e.g., ontological, epistemological, ethical) of critical thinking. Furthermore, the model provides categories for organising the *attributes* of critical thinkers (character traits of people) that facilitate critical thinking. It also outlines the relationship between *contexts*, *critical frameworks,* and *metacritique* as essential to understanding the *scope* of critical thinking.

Before setting off into this sea of terminology, I provide a contextualised analogy that engages with the idea of critical scope. This analogy employs much of the terminology and many of the concepts that are developed in this chapter. Presenting the analogy before clarifying the terminology is intended to give a concrete example that can serve as a point of reference and reflection for otherwise somewhat abstract discussion.

2.1 An analogy of critical scope

A person building a house has aims and proceeds from assumptions, which give rise to the criteria and standards forming a critical framework – or more likely, multiple overlapping and intersecting critical frameworks. For example, they may seek to build the strongest and most durable house possible. They may also seek to complete the project quickly and/or at a low cost. In service of these goals a person may think critically about the best tools and materials to complete the job or the best contractors to hire. The criteria and standards by which these critical considerations are judged will be evident in the final product. Is the house durable enough? Was it affordable enough? However, there are many other interconnected aims a person may or may not consider. For example, they may question *why* they need to build a house? Do they require this structure for survival, or could they live with extended family in an existing structure? Is it better to *build* a house, or to buy a house someone else has built? Such contemplations would touch on the relational aspects of the sociocultural domain (especially if considering living with extended family) and extend into the existential domain by questioning fundamental assumptions of meaning and purpose. Such expansion is likely to also draw on the ontological, ethical, and political dimensions through critical consideration of expectations, norms, and laws while determining how, or whether, to conform to the various criteria of these dimensions and to what standard.

Once the person considers and settles on certain assumptions in the various domains and dimensions relevant to determining what a house *really is,* determining whether to build a house, and deciding what kind of house to build, their opportunities for critical thinking do not cease. For example, in selecting the best materials to meet the aims of durability, they could also think critically about the environmental impact those resources require. In selecting contractors to complete work quickly and affordably, they could consider the ethics of their labour practices. In designing the appearance of their house, they may need to think critically about the social norms of aesthetics in the surrounding houses. Of course, they also need to be familiar with the building codes and laws, aspects of the political dimension and sociocultural domain, which govern housebuilding in their location. They may also encounter existential questions about what makes a house into a *home.* Each of these potential critical considerations connects to other potential aims and assumptions regarding protecting the environment, supporting just labour practices, harmony within a community, obedience to law, and understanding of meaning. The scope of critical thinking is defined by which of these interconnected aims is considered, and which assumptions are drawn on as part of that consideration. Someone may think with great criticality, in a very narrow manner, about the best way to build the most durable and affordable house while overlooking the broader social and ethical implications of their narrow aims. Conversely, any attempt to think critically about *every* interconnected facet of the project is likely to leave the person paralysed by inaction. A great deal of critical thinking is thinking about what needs to be thought about. This is where the idea of scope contributes, by helping to identify potential *areas of focus* between interconnected domains and dimensions across a multitude of diverse contexts.

The importance of scope becomes even more apparent if there are multiple people building houses in the same area. If these housebuilders enter into discussion, and one is fixated on changing building codes, another on environmental impact, another on affordability, yet another on questioning prevailing aesthetics, and a final housebuilder wondering whether it might be better to abandon houses altogether in favour of an apartment complex, then it will be difficult for discussion to be genuinely (or productively) critical until each housebuilder understands the critical scope of the others. Were they all to reflect on and 'map out' the aims, assumptions, and standards defining the scope of their endeavours, they would begin to see points of divergence and convergence. They would reduce the risk of speaking 'past' each other, and be better equipped to speak with each other, in critical dialogue.

This analogy is not perfect, nor does it draw on every facet of scope or critical thinking. However, it is hopefully sufficient to draw attention to the importance of critical scope. The remainder of this chapter sketches out a terminological and conceptual model for understanding critical thinking and critical scope.

2.2 Features: intentionality, coherence, consistency, communicability, metacritique

Thankfully, despite the diversity and plurality of definitions and theories of critical thinking there are some features common to most understandings. These are features without which it seems critical thinking simply could not function. Some of these are logically necessary. For example, it seems nonsensical to conceive of critical thinking without some form of logical coherence that is consistently applied as part of reasoning and justification (McPeck, 2016; Siegel, 2003). If the reasons supporting belief, thought, and action are not coherent or consistent it is difficult to see how critical thinking could be communicable and mutually comprehensible between people. To put this another way, if what constitutes a good reason for belief or action changes *arbitrarily* and without possible explanation, one is not thinking critically. Similarly, if a person does not understand (even if incompletely or inaccurately) the reasons for their belief and action, they cannot think critically. This does not mean people must understand *every* aspect of their thinking to engage in critical thinking. Instead, they must have enough *perceived* understanding (even if actually incorrect) to operate as grounds for providing *reasons* for belief and action (Ennis, 2015; Siegel, 2017).

Critical thinking requires intentions and reasons (Siegel, 1988). To think or do something critical *by accident* or through intuition is not (in that moment) an instance of critical thinking (McPeck, 2016). Though, very importantly, such actions may constitute forms of critique and can meaningfully inform critical thinking by bringing previously unknown considerations, perspectives, and possibilities to light (Normile, forthcomming). For example, a piece of art or an unthinking action that draws attention to flawed assumptions or undesirable aims underpinning social norms may constitute a powerful, but unintentional, form of critique. Upon critical reflection, such forms of unintended critique may become integral parts of intentional critical thinking. This is a major subject of Chapter 5, where I expand critical thinking towards

critical being through attention to how critical and *non-critical* modes of being articulate. The relevant point here is that while intuition and other non-critical experiences can contribute to critical thinking, they cannot constitute its entirety. Furthermore, if reasons cannot be communicated to others, the scope for engagement in critical thinking remains problematically constrained to the individual (Barnett, 2007; Davies, 2015a). An individual may be a brilliant critical thinker, but if they cannot communicate, in some way, at least some of their intentional and coherent process of reasoning, then they are bound to the individual domain and incapable of contributing to critical thinking at an expansive scope. Taken together, this amounts to recognition that critical thinking requires intentionality, coherence, consistency, and communicability *within a given context*. This contextual qualifier is important, as coherence, consistency, and communicability might manifest differently in different contexts. They may also be contradictory, incongruous, or incommensurable between contexts.

A final feature common to most conceptions of critical thinking is metacritique (Barnett, 1997; Lipman, 2012). This is the ability to question the fundamental aims and assumptions that structure and guide criticality itself. This aspect of critical thinking also follows from a certain logic. It seems logically incoherent for *critical* thinking to depend on any assumptions that cannot themselves be thought about critically. Dogma and ideology are the antithesis of criticality. However, there are also logical and practical limits to the capacity for metacritique. Logically there is a risk of falling into an infinite regress of critique with no grounds for support. Practically, it is not necessary or desirable to critique every aim and assumption in every situation. These are important points of discussion in the next chapter. Here, it is sufficient simply to add the caveat that it is incoherent for critical thinking to depend on any dogmatic assumptions that cannot themselves be thought about critically *when the resources to question those assumptions are available and relevant.* Put another way, critical thinking does not permit for wilful ignorance but demands attention and receptivity to all the evidence, reasons, and possibilities available.

I contend that intentionality, coherence, consistency, communicability, and metacritique are vital for critical thinking to operate *within* any context. As stated above, the importance (perhaps necessity) of these features is recognised by many. However, simply recognising these features of critical thinking is insufficient to meet my aim of forging an understanding of critical thinking applicable at an expansive scope within and between diverse contexts. There is, for example, nothing about these features of critical thinking that animates or motivates criticality to expand in scope, particularly across diverse contexts. I return to this issue in Chapter 6, where I outline additional features (framed as pragmatic assumptions) that help animate critical thinking at an expansive scope in diverse contexts. However, a first step towards meeting this aim is clarifying the idea of *scope.* That is, to better articulate what I mean by 'expansive scope'. In what follows, I outline the terminological and conceptual resources necessary to understand the idea of critical scope.

2.3 Domains: individual, sociocultural, existential

These domains could also be called those of self, others, and world. Each is nested within, related to, and dependent on the other. Consequently, it is probably most constructive to see these domains as a gradient of concentric spheres or circles (Davies and Barnett, 2015). The individual and existential respectively mark the smallest and largest limits of interconnected domains. It may seem unnecessary, or even problematic, to delineate interconnected domains. However, this vocabulary helps identify meaningful differences in the theory and practice of critical thinking. For example, it is possible for a person to think critically in a narrowly individualistic manner without consideration for the sociocultural factors that shape their thinking. It is also important to recognise gradations of expansion from the individual domain. A person may expand critical thinking beyond themselves to include relational aspects of a particular context, like the university or a place of work, yet fail to consider the effect of, or implications for, larger sociocultural traditions that impact those contexts. A person could also be deeply critical of an institution or cultural tradition without thinking critically about their own connections to those institutions and traditions. This shows the expansiveness of the sociocultural domain, which encompasses a vast network of relations, from personal, to institutional, and cultural. Consequently, this could simply be called the 'relational' domain. However, *all domains* draw attention to and are defined by relation, even the individual. Individuality itself relies on relation (e.g., to the world, others, ideas) for meaning and the differentiation that gives it logical (and psychological) coherence. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the social and cultural as common forms of relations defined by 'boundaries' of norms, aims, and assumptions that greatly influence critical thinking. Consequently, I use the term sociocultural to draw attention to definitive features of this vast but vital domain of potential criticality.

The use of existential here simply intends to follow Barnett's inclusion of 'world' as an important critical domain (1997). This world includes (and makes possible) the individual and sociocultural domains but also recognises existence beyond individual subjectivity and sociocultural constructs. It is existential via attendance to questions regarding the nature of existence and meaning. This domain may seem abstract or even metaphysical, regarding concern for meaning and purpose *beyond* the world of matter and energy. Indeed, it is a domain in which such questions, aims, and assumptions become relevant. However, it is also (very importantly) the domain *of the world* and thus not necessarily metaphysical, but distinctly physical. It is a domain that decentres thinking not just from individuals but potentially from humanity. This is not to claim 'a view from nowhere' but to point towards the importance of attention to assumptions and reasoning based on receptivity to the world itself. Consequently, the existential domain is where many sciences, including the physical sciences, might be most at home. Through receptivity to the world, the existential domain stands to inform and potentially re-form important aspects of the individual and sociocultural domains. For example, paradigm shifting discoveries in science, like moving from a geocentric to a heliocentric understanding of the solar system, or from classical physics to quantum mechanics, provide examples of shifts in assumptions within the existential domain that create changes in the sociocultural and individual domains. Similarly, changes in understanding of meaning, such as

breaking with a theological worldview, a radical realignment of the perceived purposes of life, or substantial changes to how some aspect of existence is understood can have profound impacts on critical thinking in all domains and dimensions. Of course, a person could also think critically in the existential domain without consideration of the individual or sociocultural domains. This could be productive for criticality. It could also result in a lot of thinking and very little action, or perhaps significant conflicts between existential critiques and social realities, both of which can be problematic. The important point is that the existential domain relates to 'the world' in both these metaphysical and very concrete senses.

I am not claiming that all critical thinking must be existential. As noted above, these domains are not completely separable, but instead interdependent. However, it is possible for thinking to focus more on the aims and assumptions of one domain than another, and this has an impact on the potential scope of critical thinking. For example, returning to the analogy of building a house, a person could focus on the sociocultural norms (perhaps manifesting as laws) of their project to varying degrees. Similarly, they could be concerned with the existential domain regarding both the materials and mechanics of building their house, but also regarding questions of meaning about why they are undertaking such a project. A person could also lose focus on the individual domain, perhaps failing to critically consider their own insights into the possible form of their house, thus finding themselves building a house in conformity with sociocultural norms that fails to satisfy individual understanding regarding the form of not just a house, but a home. The key point is that it is possible for limitations of domain to occur in a complex variety of ways, thus the need for terms of delineation to map these potential limitations and better understand critical thinking.

2.4 Dimensions: ontological, epistemological, ethical, emotional, political, mystical

As noted in the introduction, many critics argue that critical thinking is too frequently conceptualised and practiced with an overly epistemological emphasis, lacking in adequate consideration of the ethical, emotional, and political dimensions (Bailin and Siegel, 2003; Brookfield, 2012; Lipman, 2012; Paul, 1982; Thayer-Bacon, 1998; Walters, 1991; E. Williams, 2016). However, these dimensions are not explicitly included in most models of critical thinking. Furthermore, there seems to be an assumption that the skills and dispositions acquired in the epistemological dimension will naturally extend into reasoning and judgment across the vast and diverse terrain of critical thinking. This, however, is not necessarily the case (Bailin and Battersby, 2015). Furthermore, critical thinking confined to the epistemological dimension can be highly problematic. As Brookfield notes, "if critical thinking is understood only as a process of analyzing information so we can take actions that produce desired results, then some of the most vicious human behavior could be defined as critical thinking" (2012, p. 16). I argue that the salience of this point is that vicious human behaviour *can indeed be defined as critical thinking.* Nazi engineers, the slave-owning political founders of the United States, and the uncatchable serial killer could all think critically – *at a certain scope.* To make things even more difficult, it is an oversimplification to suggest these people are simply failing to think

critically in the ethical dimension. Indeed, they almost certainly *have reasons* to justify their beliefs and actions as moral. These reasons may also be coherent and consistent, even if proceeding from questionable assumptions towards dubious aims. What is lacking is a degree of 'depth' and rigour. If the fundamental aims and assumptions of these reasons are scrutinised, they are unlikely to remain coherent and consistent, particularly if extended into the sociocultural and existential domains, and especially if extended to engage with divergent perspectives. Once ideas and perspectives are encountered that provide compelling evidence and arguments against Nazism, slavery, and murder it is difficult to *reasonably* maintain those practices. In other words, once the evidence and perspectives for potential metacritique are available, critical thinking of an expansive scope requires they be engaged with (Siegel, 2017). Furthermore, I suggest critical thinking at an expansive scope requires *seeking out* the resources for metacritique. This is discussed further in Chapter 6, which addresses how critical thinking is *animated* at an expansive scope. The key point here is that critical thinking does not need to be infused with any *particular* substantive ethics or emotions, but that it ought to always extend into the ethical and emotional dimensions. Just as it must extend into the sociocultural and existential domains and seek evidence and perspectives from diverse contexts relevant to a range of dimensions. There are no guaranteed safeguards against human viciousness. However, critical thinking can protect against the dogmatism and ideology that prop up and sustain viciousness. Critical thinking is not a safeguard against bad decisions, it is a protection against the persistence and potential permanence of bad decisions. It is the ever-present possibility of change.

The risks of excluding ethical considerations from critical thinking are perhaps easiest to identify. However, failure to consider other dimensions may be equally problematic. For example, critical thinking often entails processes of emotional regulation, including conscious effort to counter emotionally charged logical fallacies and cognitive biases (Pettersson, 2020). Critical thinking that questions fundamental assumptions is also likely to be an emotional process (Holma, 2015). Furthermore, the receptivity and reciprocity required for critical dialogue requires caring and empathy (Thayer-Bacon, 1993). The notion of critical thinking as a form of reasoning also often overlooks the ontological question of how broader aspects of being articulate with and inform the conditions of possibility for thinking itself (E. Williams, 2016). However, it seems that considerations of the ontological, ethical, emotional, political, and mystical dimensions of critical thinking often do not receive the same attention in theory or practice that is given to epistemological proposition evaluation and logical argumentation. Consequently, this model aims to provide a resource for explicit reference to these dimensions of critical thinking and, more importantly and expansively for *critical being*.

These dimensions do not comprise an exhaustive list. A case could be made for including additional dimensions, such as the aesthetic or creative. I have not included the aesthetic or creative as distinct dimensions because I view them as experiences, both drawing on and permeating *all* dimensions of critical thinking. This highlights one of the main challenges of attempting to atomise an amorphous and holistic process. It can be argued that such atomistic separation of interrelated dimensions creates more problems than it solves, thus aiming for a more expansive and holistic model of critical being should focus on *reducing* conceptual

divisions and collapsing these dimensions into something more singular. This assessment has a great deal of merit. Consequently, there is no intention for this model to be final or absolute, but only to serve as a starting point for continued refinement. Furthermore, I have no intention of suggesting the desirability, or even possibility, of strictly separating these dimensions, as they are inextricably linked and each essential to constituting the others. It is difficult to think or act solely within one dimension without drawing on the others. For example, any approach to epistemology requires (implicitly or explicitly) engagement with ontology, just as ethics and politics are intertwined with the prior and each other. There is never any complete compartmentalisation of these critical dimensions.

Dimensions also articulate with domains to create further connections. It is, for example, very difficult to imagine ethics as a purely individual endeavour, there seems to be a necessarily sociocultural component. Similarly, the ontological and mystical dimensions require attention in the existential domain. I do not want to diminish the importance of these connections. However, there are meaningful shifts in emphasis and focus between domains and dimensions in actual instances of critical thinking. As has already been noted, it is possible to observe, in both theory and practice, the possibility of excessive emphasis on one dimension and/or domain without due consideration for the assumptions (often drawn from other dimensions and domains) facilitating such a focus. The discussion here is not about complete inclusion and exclusion, but about gradations of consideration and prioritisation. This model, far from suggesting a compartmentalisation of domains and dimensions, instead serves as a kind of *rubric* for navigating and identifying the interconnected complexity of critical thinking. It can help to map out and locate relevant aims and assumptions within and between contexts, situations, and applications of critical thinking.

2.5 Attributes: abilities, skills, attitudes, dispositions, virtues

Critical thinking is commonly recognised as requiring a combination of abilities, skills, and dispositions (Facione, 1990; Halpern, 2014). Some conceptions of critical thinking also suggest the need for critical virtues (Barnett, 2007; Carr, 1991; Davies, 2015b; Hamby, 2015; Lipman, 2012; Pritchard, 2013). The nature, emphasis, and distribution of these differ between theories. The model of critical thinking articulated here clusters together the action-related attributes of an individual capable of application across domains and dimensions. These attributes are what enable critical thinking. Different fields define the terms used to signify these categories of attributes differently. Critical thinking literature tends to focus on abilities, skills, and dispositions, inventories of which are readily available (e.g., Ennis, 1996; Facione, 1990; Halpern, 2014). However, the nuanced differences between dispositions and virtues do not appear to receive adequate attention. Consequently, it is worth briefly parsing out some of the subtle but important differences between abilities, skills, attitudes, dispositions, and virtues.

The use of the term ‘abilities’ in this model diverges from use in other disciplines and other approaches to critical thinking. In the critical thinking literature, ability and skill are often conflated or used interchangeably. I separate them to draw a distinction between the abilities

necessary to learn skills, and skills themselves. For example, certain cognitive abilities are required to think critically, and it cannot be assumed that every person always possesses these abilities at all times. Abilities, in this sense, may refer to inherited circumstances of birth, but may also change over time, be affected by temporary changes in mental states, or permanently altered due to circumstances. A person struck with the tragedy of dementia, severely intoxicated, or comatose after a severe accident lacks the cognitive abilities necessary to exercise the skills (even if they had them previously) required to think critically. Importantly, while certain abilities are required to acquire the skills of critical thinking, simply having these abilities does not entail that such skills will follow. Skills must be learned (Ennis, 2015; Halpern, 2014). For example, the ability to see differs from, but importantly relates to, the skill of reading. Of course, the ability to see is not necessary to acquire the skill of reading in braille. This shows the difficulty and complexity of trying to trace out 'one-to-one' correlations between abilities and skills. Attempting to delineate, define, or measure exactly which abilities are necessary to think critically would be an extremely difficult task and is certainly not one I approach here. I only want to point out that abilities, particularly certain cognitive and emotional abilities, play a crucial role in critical thinking.

The educationally vital point is that neither abilities nor skills are static. They are plastic, prone to potential decline but also open to improvement and refinement. Similarly, both permit of degree. A person can be better or worse at either seeing or reading. Consequently, a person may display gradations of proficiency in honing abilities and skills, which often requires continual practice to maintain and improve both. There is a long history of attention to the skills of critical thinking (Ennis, 1996; Halpern, 2014). There is also general consensus that the skills of critical thinking are irrelevant if people are not inclined to use them (Facione, 1990). Just as abilities do not entail skills, the latter do not entail their own application. A person can have the requisite abilities and skills to think critically, but consistently fail to do so. This is where attitudes, dispositions, and virtues become important.

Attitudes, dispositions, and virtues are closely related but importantly also separable. An attitude is akin to, but often more sustained than, a mood directed towards or in response to something. At an extremely general level, a person may have a 'negative' or 'positive' attitude *about* a topic, person, or context. However, attitudes are generally more complex than 'positivity' or 'negativity' and, like moods, they are readily changeable. Attitudes infuse people and perspectives with emotions, which influence the formation of habits and dispositions. If a person has a positive attitude towards mathematics, they are likely to pay attention in maths class. However, if they have a negative attitude towards their maths teacher, they may be inclined *not* to pay attention (or attend) the class. Attitudes feed into (in a way, ossify into) dispositions, which are more fixed inclinations to act in a particular manner (Baehr, 2016; Carr, 1991). It is likely possible to find nuanced differences between habits and dispositions, but I am content to see them as similar in the important feature of being fairly fixed (more stable than moods and attitudes) and *inclining towards action.* A disposition meaningfully shapes thinking, belief, and action with a degree (the exact measure of which is open to interpretation) of consistency (Siegel, 2016). Thus, it is essential that critical thinkers not only have certain abilities and skills but are also disposed to *use* those abilities and skills. This is what Siegel

calls “the critical spirit” (Siegel, 2017, p. 21). Importantly, dispositions also permit of degree. A person can be more or less disposed to use a particular skill or act in a particular way. Furthermore, a person can have a disposition but lack the skills to actualise that disposition (Siegel, 2016). For example, a person could be disposed to employ rigorous logic in reasoning but lack the skills to actualise this aspirational disposition. A person could also have a critical disposition but lack the knowledge necessary to think critically on a given topic (McPeck, 2016). This becomes particularly problematic when a person does not know they lack the skills or knowledge necessary to actualise a disposition. Similarly, one could be disposed towards fairness and justice, but continually act (maybe unknowingly or with a degree of cognitive dissonance) in their own self-interest. Dispositions are not necessarily positive nor defined by any degree of regular actualisation. Consequently, dispositions, while essential to critical thinking, do not set a ‘high enough bar’ for expansive critical thinking. This is where virtues become relevant.

If a disposition is positive (deemed virtuous by a shared community) and *regularly and autonomously actualised with proper motivation*, then it becomes a virtue (Baehr, 2016). Dispositions incline towards action but do not *require* actualization and do not *necessarily* have to be positive. One can have dispositions they do not act on, or dispositions towards undesirable actions. However, virtues *require* action and are *necessarily* positive (Zagzebski, 1996). This is a simplified representation of Zagzebski’s view, which is itself contested as part of the complex field of virtue theory generally, and virtue epistemology more particularly. There are problematic exceptions to this claim. For example, it is possible for virtuous actions to have tragic consequences due to circumstances beyond those of the virtuous actor. The relevant point here is the central idea of virtues proceeding from positive intentions and generally succeeding in bringing about intended actions. In this sense, there is no such thing as a negative virtue, as that would be a vice (Zagzebski, 1996). This means that the same virtue, like courage, is not a virtue in all manifestations. For example, being a courageous murderer is not an exemplification of courage as a virtue because it does not align with the normative ‘good’ of the community from which the virtue is derived and defined. Virtues are slippery concepts because it is possible (perhaps inevitable) for them to conflict or become relative within, and particularly between, contexts. My intention here is not to delve into the complexities and controversies of virtue theory. Instead, the most relevant point is that, while virtues do not require actualization in every possible circumstance, they do require a degree of regular actualisation (Kelp and Greco, 2020). One cannot be said to possess a virtue if they never act in accordance with that virtue.

The nuanced differences between dispositions and virtues deserves more attention in the critical thinking literature. However, I do not provide that attention here. I am not focused on the substantive attributes of critical thinkers but, instead, on the ‘structure’ of critical thinking. The necessary attributes of a critical thinker may vary substantially by context. However, understanding what enables critical thinking as a process in *any* context can help determine which attributes are necessary to achieve critical thinking in a given context. Of course, critical thinking cannot be separated from critical thinkers, and this is not my intention. Indeed, the ultimate aim of this thesis is to contribute towards an understanding of critical being, which is

necessarily focused on people – on actual beings. However, focusing on critical thinking as a process helps discern which attributes are necessary for a person to become a critical being within a given context, and how those attributes may need to manifest.

For example, the skills of informal logic, a positive attitude towards uncertainty, an inquisitive disposition, and the virtues of tolerance and intellectual humility (along with many other skills, dispositions and virtues) are vital (and relatively uncontroversial) attributes of anyone seeking to think critically at an expansive scope. However, how these attributes are understood depends on context. This is not just in the sense that attributes like intellectual courage and tolerance may be understood in different ways, but also because different contexts may demand different forms of these attributes. For example, the 'stakes' of critical thinking are not the same in all contexts. Exercising tolerance and intellectual courage in a liberal democracy with easy access to information and strong protections on freedom of speech is very different from doing so in a highly censored totalitarian context where criticality could have dire consequences. The analytical distinction between attributes as features of the critical thinker and not as defining features of critical thinking itself is important because attributes must remain contextually reflexive. For example, the attributes necessary to be logically coherent, effectively communicable, and achieve metacritique may vary by context (Normile, 2022). This does not diminish the importance of considering the contextually relevant attributes of critical thinkers as an essential aspect of critical thinking and as important educational aims. However, my focus here is on understanding the features of critical thinking that attributes must *orient towards and be defined by*. I argue that it is necessary to understand critical thinking as a process to help derive and understand contextually appropriate manifestations of attributes.

Finally, I must note that attributes are *cumulative,* they build and rely on one and other. This means it is not necessary to 'move past' skills and into having dispositions and virtues. Instead, these attributes work together. Indeed, it would be difficult to cultivate and actualise virtues without abilities, skills, attitudes, and dispositions. I see the culmination of critical attributes working together in coordination to consistently facilitate critical thinking at an expansive scope as critical being.

2.6 Critical frameworks: aims, assumptions, criteria, standards

There is general agreement that the process of critical thinking is necessarily criteriological (Brookfield, 2012; Ennis, 2016b; Fisher and Scriven, 1997; Normile, 2022; Siegel, 2017). There must be some form of criteria by which reasons for thought and action are justified. The origin and nature of the criteriological frameworks guiding critical thinking are a contentious point of debate. Some suggest critical frameworks can only be achieved through negotiated agreement via a form of solidarity (Rorty, 1991b). Others argue the aims of practices and traditions give structure to reasoning (MacIntyre, 1988b; 2013). Some say the very ability to recognise alternate critical frameworks, however different from one another, logically entails some kind of transcendent meta-criteria capable of facilitating mutual comprehensibility (Siegel, 2017). Still others suggest an 'inherited background' of assumptions and criteria

beyond direct rational scrutiny as the unknowable and ultimately groundless guide of reason (Wittgenstein, 1975). It is also possible that the very notion of frameworks may itself be incoherent (Davidson, 2011). Sellars argues that *any* form of thinking requires some kind of conceptual framework:

> *... anything which can properly be called conceptual thinking can occur only within a framework of conceptual thinking in terms of which it can be criticized, supported, refuted, in short, evaluated. To be able to think is to be able to measure one's thoughts by standards of correctness, of relevance, of evidence (2007, p. 374).*

The nature and origin of epistemic and critical frameworks is revisited in the next chapter as a perennial problem any understanding of critical thinking must address – but not necessarily resolve. My point here is that regardless of whether transcendent meta-criteria, some background of unknowable criteria, pragmatic utility, or nothing more than normative consensus ultimately grounds (or does not ground) critical thinking, it is easy to observe how different contexts give rise to divergent aims and assumptions and thus a plurality of critical frameworks *in the practice of critical thinking*. As Taylor notes, "in dealing with the real… barriers to understanding, we need to be able to identify what is blocking us" (2002, p. 292). This 'blocking' often arises from contextually contingent differences in the aims, assumptions, and criteria of critical frameworks.

I am not claiming *all thinking* is somehow governed by comprehensible frameworks, rules, and criteria. On the contrary, I follow others in understanding thinking as an embodied relational responsiveness to the world (e.g., Dreyfus, 2014b; Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015; Heidegger, 1966; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; E. Williams, 2016). This includes the universe of ontic matter and energy along with the world of meaning, significance, emotion, social norms, language, and so much more. However, *critical* thinking, as a type within the broader spectrum of thinking, is defined by aims and assumptions that give rise to criteriological frameworks. This is essential to its intentional and communicable nature (Ennis, 2015). Furthermore, while not *all* aims and assumptions guiding critical thinking (much less thinking in general) are (or ever can be) explicit, an essential feature of critical thinking is the possibility of metacritique – the effort to understand and interrogate the very structure of critical thinking itself (Barnett, 1997). This is discussed more in Section 2.8 below. Here, I only want to point out that the idea of 'critical frameworks' drawn on throughout this thesis is not intended to encapsulate all of thinking or being. Instead, it is deemed a useful analogy, like Wittgenstein's idea of language games (2009), for understanding an amorphous but meaningful aspect of critical thinking.

The idea of critical frameworks is important to understanding the contextual contingency and normative nature of critical thinking. Critical thinking takes place in diverse sociocultural contexts incorporating various normative aims and assumptions. Consequently, what constitutes 'good' critical thinking can vary by context and purpose. In some cases, particularly those that are highly instrumental, a critical framework can be derived from purposes. Striving to create a vaccine requires a great deal of critical thinking guided by criteria marking progress towards the aim of effective vaccination. However, in some dimensions of critical thinking,

aims may be unclear, contestable, or fail to give rise to clear criteria. For example, questions of when and how to test a vaccine on people and whether taking such a vaccine ought to be legally required calls for thinking critically in the ethical and political dimensions. What constitutes 'good' reasons, and thus 'effective' critical thinking in such a situation will depend not just on the empirical science of virology, but also the normative ethical assumptions (including medical ethics) regarding acceptable risk and ideal forms of political organization. Proceeding from utilitarian or deontological ethical assumptions will lead to divergent lines of internally coherent reasoning, as will proceeding from libertarian or totalitarian political assumptions. Critical thinking never occurs in a void; it is always contextualized and shaped by aims and assumptions drawn from multiple dimensions of potential critical consideration.

Criteria are derived from the aims and assumptions by which reasons and justification are evaluated. Lipman notes a confluence between critical criteria and what are labelled here as the dimensions of critical thinking (2012). For example, epistemology requires criteria of truth and falsity, and ethics requires criteria of good and bad. Furthermore, the *aims* of critical thinking (what one is thinking *for*) help determine the nature of critical criteria. For example, thinking critically about a painted portrait may be guided by very tangible criteria based on accurate resemblance of the subject. However, other potential criteria are far less tangible. Analysis of a portrait for the purposes of sale may draw on epistemic criteria for assessing the authenticity of the work, political criteria if the subject of the painting holds a divisive political position, and ethical criteria in considering whether the piece should be sold to a private collector or a museum.

Thinking about criteria also requires attention to standards. Standards determine the degree to which criteria must be met to constitute reasonableness (Siegel, 2017). For example, if working with a fallible conception of truth as a criterion (as most contemporary theorists would suggest), it becomes necessary to determine a standard regarding *how true* a claim must be to be seen as reasonable. This, of course, is likely to vary by context and situation. Similarly, the standards for evaluating how well claims articulate with values, efficacy, or any other criteria may vary by context or application within a context. Thinking critically about whether a friend's alleged unavailability to help you move is genuine or perhaps a white lie to avoid lending their help, is quite different from thinking critically about convicting someone of murder as a member of a jury. Thinking critically to design an aircraft is different from thinking critically about how to design a paper airplane. Standards typically relate to what is at stake and define what constitutes reasonable justification for belief and action.

Standards are an important area of consideration, as critical thinking both draws on but must also be directed towards standards. An understanding and ability to discuss standards is essential to critical thinking at an expansive scope. Someone may be able to think critically in a highly instrumental way within a critical framework, without explicit or articulable understanding of the criteria and standards guiding their thinking. However, this instrumentality limits the possibility for directing criticality at those criteria and standards. This key feature of critical thinking and means of expanding scope, known as metacritique, is discussed in Section 2.8 of this chapter. Here, I only want to point out that it is problematic to

confuse disagreement on standards with disagreement on criteria, or vice versa. Disagreeing about what is 'good enough' (standard) is very different than disagreeing about what is 'good' (criteria). Understanding this distinction is key to speaking 'with' instead of 'past' others. My concern in this thesis is more with criteria than standards, as the latter assumes understanding of the prior. It is not possible to question or discuss standards until criteria are established. The origin and nature of criteria are more fundamental and provide the starting point for discussion of standards.

2.7 Contexts

Determining which aspects of various contexts are influencing and shaping critical frameworks is an essential part of critical thinking. In the simple sense, contexts are the circumstances in which critical thinking is applied. However, contexts are also the circumstances by which the aims and assumptions of critical frameworks are *supplied.* It is not possible to talk about, much less practice, critical thinking without consideration of contexts. A context could be quite narrow, even to the point of being instrumental and/or situational. For example, performing a specific task within a particular professional practice. Contexts can also be far more general and expansive. Family, faith, and culture are all contexts in which critical thinking is practised. Contexts are multiple, overlapping, and intersecting. For example, a philosophical perspective may intersect with an academic discipline within a sociopolitical tradition. In such a case, the philosophical perspective, academic discipline, and sociopolitical tradition constitute an entanglement of overlapping and interrelated contexts which, taken together, may constitute a context of their own. Contexts and critical frameworks can be coextensive, that is, a specific context may give rise to a specific critical framework. This is particularly true in the context of instrumental endeavours. However, given their overlapping nature, one context may also encompass multiple critical frameworks. For example, the context of a multicultural democracy can be defined by shared aims and concepts, like justice and freedom, yet still give rise to a plurality of competing critical frameworks derived from divergent conceptions of those context-defining concepts (Rawls, 1971).

Trying to pull apart and delineate every specific context that shapes critical thinking and in which critical thinking is practiced would require nothing short of untangling the totality of existence. The impossibility of providing such clarity, however, does not preclude making useful distinctions. For example, philosophical and political traditions, commonly held values, and social norms are examples of amorphous but meaningfully distinguishable contexts (MacIntyre, 1988b). An ethical consequentialist and deontologist are guided by differing aims and assumptions in deciding what to believe and how to act. Democracies depends on different assumptions than dictatorships. At a less dramatic scale, the more discernible contexts of academic disciplines, professions, and institutions are often useful to delineate contextually relevant boundaries, especially for the purposes of education. What it means to think critically in geology and art history is different, and both differ from thinking critically as a parent or citizen. The multiplicity, overlap, and intersectionality of contexts is also important. What it is to think critically in art history in the United Kingdom is likely different from what it means to

think critically in art history in China. Determining how contexts give rise to critical frameworks is an essential part of thinking critically at an expansive scope.

Importantly, the contextualised nature of critical thinking is a two-way relationship. Contexts shape the frameworks of critical thinking, but critical thinking can also reshape both contexts and critical frameworks. I do not want consideration of the complexity and interdependency of contexts and critical frameworks to derail the vital understanding that critical thinking provides an opportunity not only to understand our own thinking and the world, but also to change the way we think about the world (critical frameworks) and change the world itself (contexts). To use Heideggerian terms, this amounts to recognition that we are 'thrown' into a world, the practices of which we 'fall' into (1962). This 'fallenness' is not necessarily problematic. Indeed, it is inescapable and necessary in the processes of socialisation and learning. However, a defining aspect of being human is the capacity to understand how time, contexts, and being interact. Humans have the capacity to think about what has made the world and oneself the way they are and envisage how both could be different in the future (ibid). The key to understanding this potential for intentional change is temporality. Time, combined with the human capacity for recognition of existential possibility (to think about how things could be different than they are) breaks the seemingly closed circle of context-shaping-thinking and thinking-shaping-context into a spiral capable of change and potential transformation (Archer, 2012). Key to understanding the relationship between contexts and critical frameworks is the idea of *metacritique.*

2.8 Metacritique

Simply put, metacritique is critical reflection on an aspect of a critical framework. Critical thinking must leave open the potential to question the fundamental aims and assumptions that structure and guide critical thinking. Dewey calls this 'critical reflection' (2008) and Lipman identifies it as the 'self-correcting' aspect of criticality (2012). I follow others in calling this the process of 'metacritique' (Barnett and Davies, 2015b; Brookfield, 2012; Lipman, 2012). Metacritique does not need to be evident or exercised in *every* instance of critical thinking. It is only necessary that any expansive understanding of critical thinking account for how critical frameworks may themselves be subjected to criticality. This is because failure to allow for the *possibility* of metacritique risks critical thinking lapsing into dogmatic or ideological thinking. However, insistence on 'deep' metacritique seemingly leads to logical problems of infinite regress and pragmatic problems of achieving constructive action as opposed to only deconstructive critique. The next chapter explores how the challenges of facilitating metacritique shape and, I argue, constrain dominant conceptions of critical thinking. For now, I simply want to sketch out the concept of metacritique and show how it articulates with the idea of *scope* by occurring at different *depths*.

As noted above, it is not necessary, possible, or desirable to constantly question *every* aim and assumption of a critical framework in *every* application of critical thinking. Figuring out when and what to critically question is a difficult but essential aspect of critical thinking.

Understanding the idea of scope helps in this process. For example, it is possible to question the assumption that the sun will rise tomorrow. However, outside the philosophy classroom or certain extreme geographic latitudes, this is likely not a productive application of critical energy. Critical thinking always proceeds with certain aims and assumptions. For example, academic disciplines, moral traditions, and political systems all comprise frameworks of aims and assumptions that structure critical thinking. It is not necessary for critical thinking to always call every assumption of these critical frameworks into question. This would be debilitatingly inefficient. Consequently, thinking critically within a critical framework shaped by aims and assumptions is not a failure of criticality, *so long as the assumptive nature of frameworks remains open to critique.* Without this possibility, disciplines, traditions, and politics would lapse into dogmatism, remain static, and only be changeable through force (Rorty, 1989). The idea of *scope* outlined in the next section, is a concept intended to help understand and determine to what 'depth' metacritique is necessary within a context. Sometimes, it may only be necessary to think critically about processes (e.g., does justification logically follow from reasons and evidence?), whereas at other times it might be necessary to question fundamental aims and assumptions structuring critical thinking itself.

Metacritique, as I use the term here, does not require anything metaphysical, foundational, transcendent, or universal. I employ the term in a phenomenological sense. It is not removed from or abstracted away from particular contexts but made possible by the diversity of perspectives derived from a plurality of contexts. Metacritique is facilitated by new perspectives, new evidence, new ideas. It is this 'newness', grounded very much in the particulars of contexts, that facilitates the 'meta' aspect of critique. This is not the 'meta' of metaphysics, but a more common sense of 'meta' indicating 'critique of critique', marking an additional step or layer achieved through reflexivity drawn from diversity, not objectivity. Any time an aim or assumption guiding critical thinking is itself subjected to critical scrutiny, metacritique is taking place. At an extreme, this could manifest as something like a paradigm shift, leading to a whole new framework. However, metacritique could also lead to far less profound change in a subtle or incremental manner. Furthermore, directing critical thinking at the aims and assumptions of a critical framework (metacritique) may result in the confirmation or affirmation of existing aims, assumptions, and criteria. Consequently, the result of metacritique may not be radical transformation or the shifting of paradigms, but instead stability and continuity. The essential point is that metacritique must remain *possible* for thinking to remain truly critical. As soon as this possibility is closed or restricted, so is the potential scope of critical thinking.

The relationship between critical frameworks and metacritique can be understood through analogy with the playing of a game. In such an analogy, one of the most fundamental assumptions is that a particular game (a critical framework) ought to be played. The most likely underlying aim is to 'win' the game – to think 'effectively'. However, other aims, such as enjoyment or display of style may also influence the nature of play. The rules of the game are equivalent to the criteria guiding critical thinking. Using this analogy, dogmatism is playing the game without questioning the aims or rules. This may be highly *uncritical* if it involves playing in a proscribed manner or by a dictated strategy. However, it may also include a degree

of critical (perhaps calculated is a better word) reasoning about overall aims and what moves to make in service of achieving those aims *without questioning the rules of the game*. Metacritique questions the rules of the game, the criteria of a framework. This may involve breaking (intentionally or not) the rules of the game, but not necessarily, as there are means by which the rules of a game can be agreeably changed by the participants. Another 'deeper' form of metacritique comes from suggesting the playing of a new game altogether. This may result in radical transformation akin to a paradigm shift or serve to strengthen existing assumptions and reaffirm the value of the current game. In the latter case, a new game is considered but rejected. Given the difficulty of questioning a framework from within that very framework, metacritique is often facilitated by encounters with new frameworks. In such a case, metacritique is made possible by *integration between* the aims, assumptions, and criteria of multiple frameworks. When a new game is encountered, there are opportunities to combine criticality *within* and *of* frameworks to either internally transform the rules of the existing game, or perhaps create a new game altogether.

In all these cases critique is made 'meta' through perspectival shifts (seeing things a new way), receptivity to the world (seeing new things), and engagement with diverse and plural critical frameworks (encountering new aims and assumptions). There is no need for appeal to anything ultimate or universal. I see metacritique as a 'bottom up' development, a kind of evolution, facilitated through receptivity, reflexivity, and perspectival shift. It is not a 'top down' or objective evaluation. This bottom-up view of metacritique as a kind of evolution and growth is not meant to imply a linear or inevitable arc. Within critical frameworks there are periods of stability, stagnation, regression, and radical breaks in continuity. Metacritique works within critical thinking as the engine of iterative and incremental change, while also maintaining the possibility of being the 'meta' of metamorphosis – of paradigm shifting transformation. The key point is that *metacritique must be a possibility within any expansive understanding of critical thinking*. Consequently, it is necessary to make sure this possibility is not constrained *in theory,* as such limitations are likely to also manifest in practice. This point is taken up further in the next chapter. However, before this, it is essential to show how the terms and concepts presented thus far help sketch out the idea of *scope.*

2.9 Scope: breadth and depth

There are different ways to describe the scope of critical thinking. I suggest the idea of scope as comprising *breadth* and *depth*. The image below (see p. 50) provides a graphic representation for modelling the scope of critical thinking containing breadth and depth. Breadth has four main components: context, critical frameworks, domains, and dimensions. A willingness and ability to apply critical thinking across diverse contexts, which requires engagement with diverse critical frameworks, is the most obvious measure of breadth. However, that is one aspect of breadth not included in the graphic model. This is because depicting all possible contexts would be impossible. The model does show how domains and dimensions contribute to breadth. The idea is to use this model as a rubric and reminder to orient and encourage more expansive critical thinking. For example, it is possible to imagine

(or observe) students that think critically about knowledge pertinent to a problem or subject (epistemological dimension) but fail to consider how the underlying ethical assumptions of a cultural tradition may articulate with that knowledge. This constitutes a failure to consider the ethical dimension and sociocultural domains. Similarly, a person may think critically about the ethics and politics of a sociocultural tradition without directing adequate criticality towards the individual assumptions underpinning their criticality. This would indicate a lack of breadth through neglect of the individual domain. Furthermore, considerations from the existential domain, regarding assumptions about the fundamental nature and/or meaning of certain aspects of contexts inform and form the sociocultural and individual domains. However, this consideration could remain isolated in existential contemplation that remains disconnected from the actual world of individuals and society. Each of these positions could be 'located' on this model as a means of revealing aims and assumptions that may otherwise remain implicit and thus confound critical efforts.

One way of understanding the *depth* of critical thinking relates to the extent to which the criteria, aims, and fundamental assumptions of a critical framework are not only understood but critically examined as part of the critical thinking process – the depth of metacritique. Reflection on the processes of critical thinking (playing the game by the rules) marks the minimum depth of metacritique. Reflection on processes requires awareness of aims and criteria, though not necessarily awareness of fundamental assumptions, and does not require critical thinking to be directed towards criteria, aims, or fundamental assumptions. Such a minimal application of metacritique marks a 'shallow' form of critical thinking. Questioning and potentially altering the criteria of critical thinking (the rules of the game) marks a greater depth of criticality. Consideration and potential transformation of guiding aims indicates further deepening of criticality, with questioning and potential transformation of fundamental assumptions (questioning the game itself) marking the deepest level of critical thinking.

To use a different, more concrete example, if one is thinking critically about how to build the most comfortable chair, a key criterion of criticality is comfort. This raises the natural question of how exactly the criterion of comfort is to be understood. This would amount to questioning why or for whom the chair is being built and perhaps why chairs are even needed. After all, not every culture uses chairs, and certainly not chairs of the same type in the same way. Critical thinking at this depth may result in a transformation of the chair itself and/or the critical framework informing one's understanding of chairs. Importantly, not every critical process requires such depth. This would be wildly inefficient and, in this case, may simply result in an uncomfortable or impractical chair. The important point is to demonstrate how metacritique facilitates depth and the need for critical thinking to include consideration of what depth is contextually appropriate.

My intention is not to claim that metacritique is the *only* way to understand the depth of critical thinking. For example, another important way to assess depth is to consider the number, nature, and robustness of attributes drawn on by the critical thinker. For example, skills of informal logic alone do not facilitate critical thinking of the same depth as skills of informal logic paired with well-developed critical dispositions and virtues. Examination of the attributes within a

theory of critical thinking (shown in on the right of the graphic model) provides insight into the potential depth of criticality provided by that theory. As noted above in Section 2.5, this 'depth' of attributes is cumulative. It is not the case that critical thinkers move 'beyond' skills to acquire dispositions, or that they move beyond dispositions to acquire virtues. Instead, these various kinds of attributes work in conjunction to facilitate expansive criticality, manifesting as critical being. Similarly, there is not a one-to-one correlation between categories of attributes (shown on the right) and the depth of metacritique (shown on the left). This means that all categories of attributes are relevant to thinking critically about processes, criteria, aims, and fundamental assumptions. It is, of course, relevant to consider depth of metacritique when thinking about which attributes are most desirable, and how they ought to be cultivated. For example, the skills of informal logic and a curious disposition are unlikely to be sufficient *on their own* to achieve deep metacritique.

I have followed Barnett and Davies in labelling the deepest manifestation of critical thinking as critical being (2015). This can be understood as a way of being in which all the attributes of the critical thinker work together towards criticality of an expansive scope in diverse contexts. The notion of critical being is also essential to any potential for changes of contexts or ways of thinking that may not come about through singular instantaneous effort, but instead requires the persistence and vigilance of a certain way of being to facilitate incremental change. The concept of critical being is revisited and further fleshed out in subsequent chapters.

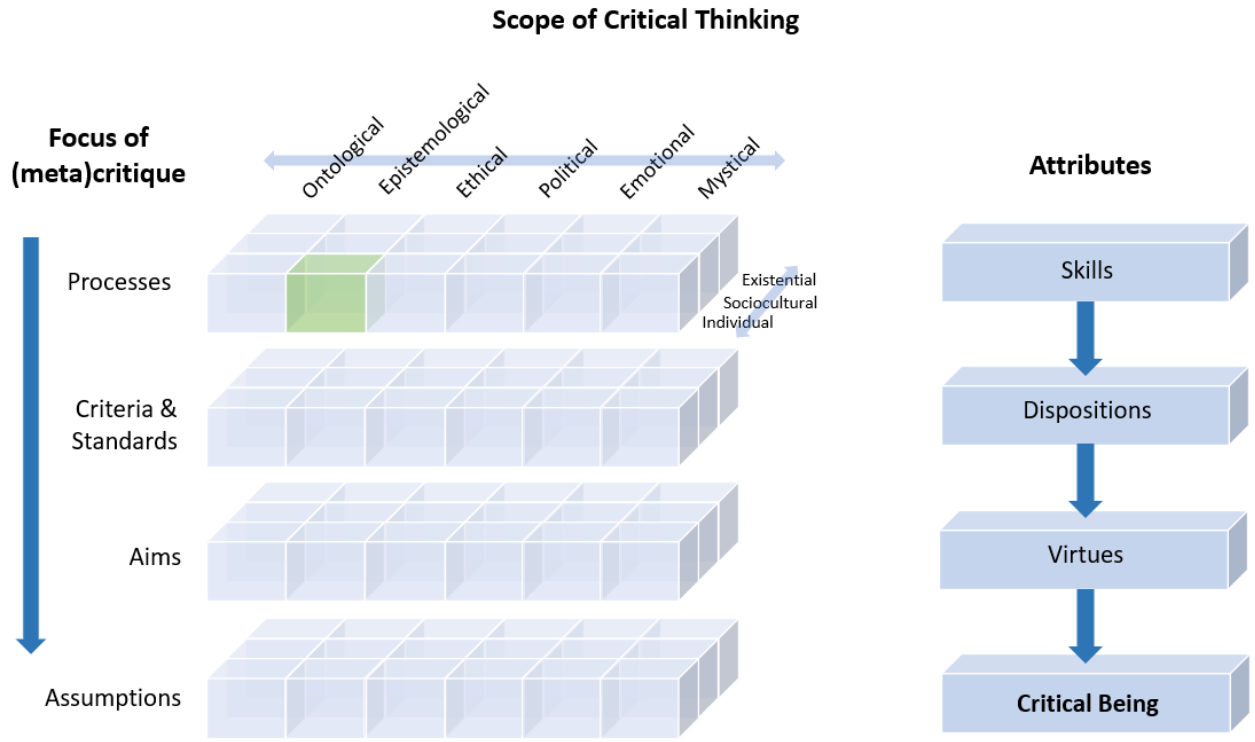

Image 1

At this juncture, it may help to return to the initial example of building a house provided in Section 2.1 of this chapter. It is possible to 'map' the various scopes of potential critical thinking exercised by the housebuilder using the graphic model above. For example, the shaded

cube on the image above indicates a primary focus on the epistemological dimension and individual domain with primary concern about processes. This indicates a narrow and superficial consideration of how best to build a house with primary concern for individual interests. If the housebuilder begins to question exactly what those individual interests are, to wonder about the criteria by which a 'good' house is evaluated, or even to question the aims and assumptions guiding the desire to build their own house, this could be indicated by shading cubes downward to indicate an increase in critical depth in the epistemological dimension, while remaining in the individual domain. Similarly, additional domains and dimensions could be considered, such as the ethical implications of certain materials, the politics of zoning regulations, or existential questions of meaning regarding how a house becomes a home. These changes to breadth could be modelled by shading in additional cubes.

Importantly, as noted at the outset of this chapter, this visual model is a *rubric* indicating gradations of focus and prioritisation. There is no pretension or intention of strictly isolating specific permutations of critical thinking. Instead, this model provides a *reminder* of the vast potentiality and interconnectivity of different domains and dimensions within and between contexts. This becomes particularly important when people must think critically together. For example, if there is not *one* housebuilder, but many different housebuilders working in the same community, it may help for them to understand each other's critical scope and, ideally, forge a collaborative understanding of critical scope for building houses in their shared community. This graphic model, and the associated terminology and concepts, provide a resource for this kind of critical collaboration. I return to this point in the implications for practice in Chapter 7.

2.10 Where to next?

This chapter has shown why the idea of scope is essential to a comprehensive understanding of critical thinking. If critical thinking aims to reach past the classroom door and into individual lives, communities, and societies then it must be equipped to do so within and across the domains and dimensions articulated here. Furthermore, if critical thinking is to be more than a dogmatic and instrumentalised process, it must maintain the potential for metacritique which is the key to any potential for changes of both thinking and the world at the 'deepest' levels. One potential critique of this approach is that the dimensions of critical thinking included in this model are nothing more than some of the commonly conceived branches of Western philosophy. Thus, I could be accused of conflating critical thinking and philosophy (particularly Western philosophy) when the prior ought not be entirely defined and understood through the lens of the latter (Norris, 1990). This is not my intention. Philosophy certainly requires critical thinking and, as I am trying to show thorough this thesis, critical thinking requires philosophy. However, I am not trying to suggest that philosophy is *only* critical thinking or that critical thinking is *only* a form of philosophy. I follow Sellars in seeing philosophy as trying to "understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (2007, p. 369). Consequently, anyone trying to understand the world is engaged in a form of philosophy.

This approach does nothing to diminish the importance of highly specialised fields of inquiry and/or practice, whether in philosophy, bricklaying, economics, or art. It simply seeks an understanding of critical thinking capable of working across all these efforts, while also contributing towards understanding how they all 'hang together'. My rejoinder, then, to the critique of conflating philosophy and critical thinking, is that so long as the two are not seen as identical or coextensive it makes a great deal of sense to map them together to some degree. They have, after all, consistently coexisted with a degree of mutual and symbiotic dependence. However, as noted in the introduction, I argue that the relationship between philosophy and critical thinking has given more attention to certain dimensions and domains (particularly the epistemological and individual) and thus limited the scope of theory and consequently also practice. This is addressed further in the next chapter.

3 Limitations of scope in critical thinking theory

As established in the previous chapter, metacritique is essential to critical thinking at an expansive scope (see Section 2.8). It creates the possibility of coming face to face with fallibility, something essential to sustained inquiry and criticality. The 'deepest' forms of metacritique are not necessary in every instance of critical thinking, nor is metacritique necessarily transformative, it may contribute to measured and incremental change, or serve to reaffirm existing aims and assumptions. However, any understanding of critical thinking that narrows or constrains the *possibility* for deep and potentially transformative metacritique is problematic. Consequently, it is important to consider how critical thinking allows for the possibility of metacritique capable of changing the aims, assumptions, and criteria that structure thinking itself. In this chapter, I argue that dominant conceptions of critical thinking draw on epistemological assumptions that restrict the potential for metacritique in theory and thus also in practice, particularly in diverse contexts.

The two key questions this chapter addresses are 1) What makes metacritique possible? 2) Given that critical thinking draws on contextually contingent normative aims and assumptions, how is it possible to avoid relativism and think critically across a diverse plurality of contexts? Addressing these questions requires considering some longstanding philosophical challenges that create tensions within any understanding of critical thinking. These include the problems of infinite regress, dogma, and circularity in the justification of knowledge. I argue that dominant conceptions of critical thinking address these questions in ways that limit potential critical scope. I begin by outlining these challenges. I then show how dominant understandings of critical thinking rely on 'transcendent' escapes from these challenges to facilitate metacritique and avoid relativism. I argue this is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, attempts to make critical thinking transcendent render it an empty process prone to relativism. Secondly, the view of transcendence put forward (most explicitly by Siegel) requires 'objective' and 'neutral' metacriteria to avoid relativism. I argue that no such perspective or criteria are possible or necessary. Thirdly, to avoid empty instrumentalism and relativism, dominant conceptions of critical thinking impose substantive 'universal values' as defining features of the 'structure' of critical thinking, which moves towards dogmatism and inhibits application in diverse contexts.

In this chapter I argue that the imposition of substantive and assumedly universal values is unnecessary to avoid relativism. Indeed, a degree of relativism (perhaps better understood as pluralism) between critical frameworks provides possibilities, not problems, for critical thinking. Plurality creates the very possibility of metacritique with no need for recourse to objectivity or substantive universal values. This is because divergent critical frameworks provide new perspectives without need for anything 'external' to *all possible frameworks* (Rorty, 1991b). Furthermore, critical frameworks need not be evaluated in their entirety (Sellars, 1997) and are unlikely to be *completely* incommensurable, much less completely incomprehensible (Taylor, 2002). Consequently, rejecting 'objective' and 'universal' criteria and values does not entail relativism. Critical thinking does not require transcendence of *all*

critical frameworks. It only requires integration of new perspectives and potentialities from different frameworks. Furthermore, the imposition of substantive 'universal' values as defining features of critical thinking constitutes a form of non-critical dogmatism. This is a particularly important point in cross-cultural contexts, where the implications of assumed universality can be profoundly problematic. Ultimately, I contend that the possibility of metacritique is not inhibited by, but facilitated through, plurality and diversity of perspectives.

In this chapter, I draw mostly on Siegel's rigorous and detailed work to represent the 'dominant conception' of critical thinking. As Williams notes, in a project from which I draw many ideas and a great deal of inspiration, Siegel provides perhaps the most dominant contemporary view of critical thinking (2016, p. 12). I focus heavily on Siegel because he is the most explicit and prolific in addressing the philosophical challenges inherent to critical thinking. I find his depth and clarity on the importance of addressing these challenges within critical thinking and philosophy most conducive to constructive discourse. While I often use Siegel's positions to demonstrate what I see as problematic within conceptions of critical thinking, I am appreciatively indebted to his work for creating the possibility of such engagement. I am also deeply appreciative of Siegel's tireless struggle to justify critical thinking as an educational aim – perhaps *the most essential* educational aim (1988; 2003; 2017). Because of my focus on Siegel, I also draw on counter perspectives from many thinkers Siegel himself engages with. So, for example, I draw on Rorty and, for a more contemporary perspective specific to critical thinking, Williams to explore the assumptions and implications of Siegel's approach. This represents a small but, I contend, very formative section of the larger critical thinking literature. This focus is part of an effort to contribute to ongoing conversations, which I suggest may benefit from being steered in some new directions, which is the aim of Chapters 4 and 5.

3.1 How is metacritique possible?

How is one to gain a perspective from which to think critically about the very structure of criticality? Must such a perspective somehow transcend the particularities of context contingent critical frameworks to be objective and neutral? Or is it possible for metacritique to proceed (and succeed) without foundations or transcendent objective criteria, but simply through the broadening of horizons provided by encounters with diverse perspectives? The essential question for critical thinking is what aims, assumptions, and criteria can possibly guide metacritique – and where do they come from? These questions must be addressed by any robust understanding of critical thinking. Unsurprisingly, such questions mirror longstanding debates within philosophy, and particularly epistemology. Specifically, these include the problems of infinite regress, circularity, and dogma in the justification of knowledge claims.

While this thesis argues for the necessity of expanding critical thinking theory beyond the epistemological dimension, critical thinking always has a substantial epistemic component. The suggested expansion of critical thinking is not intended to eliminate *thinking*. Instead, it aims to better understand how broader aspects of being articulate with and inform the conditions of possibility for thinking itself. However, given the inevitably epistemic nature of

critical thinking, it is prudent to explore this dimension, including some of the questions and problems shaping epistemology and thus also criticality. The epistemological problems of infinite regress, circularity, and dogma are summed up well by Albert, in what he calls the Münchhausen trilemma (1985). This is the idea that no knowledge claims can be justified *with certainty* because doing so either requires an infinite regress of further justification, acceptance of unjustified (and thus dogmatic) justification, or reliance on circular reasoning in which justification depends on the assumption of its own certainty (Albert, 1985). Each of these challenges comes in different permutations and each has multiple rejoinders, the study of which could fuel an entire career in philosophy. In what follows, I briefly explore these epistemological problems as they relate to critical thinking, particularly the possibility of metacritique.

Some of the most challenging problems in epistemology arise from efforts to counter skeptical challenges to the very possibility of knowledge itself. One of the most persistent skeptical challenges, recognised by Plato and Aristotle, and prominent in the work of Descartes and Hume, is the problem of infinite regress in the justification of knowledge. Justification requires evidence, but if the evidence used to substantiate justification requires justification itself, there is a risk of infinite regress in pursuit of evidence or reasons that do not require justification (Descartes, 1985; Hume, 2011). Thus, nothing can be justified or known – at least not with certainty. Consequently, to have knowledge, there must be some form of reasons for belief that can provide justification without themselves requiring justification. Furthermore, many efforts to escape this regress can be seen as requiring question-begging circularity. Knowing *that* something constitutes knowledge requires knowing *how* knowledge is constituted, which itself first requires something be known. This is the 'problem of the criterion', the question not only of where knowledge 'begins' but what criteria are used to establish that beginning. Chisholm sums this problem up as a "vicious circle", pointing out that, "before we can know truth we must have a procedure for doing so, but how can we have a procedure without first knowing some truth on which to establish such a procedure?" (2003b, p. 9).

Epistemological foundationalists, like Chisholm, suggest the need for "appeal to some form of fundamentally 'apparent' truths, capable of operating as the 'first movers' of truth-finding methods" (2003b, p. 9). He goes on to argue for sense perception and a priori concepts as the self-evident 'first movers' of knowledge (2003a). Epistemological foundationalism is only one escape from the problems of infinite regress and circularity. Others suggest empirical foundations may be lacking, but the very possibility of commensurability between critical frameworks logically entails transcendent metacriteria capable of guiding rationality, and thus criticality (Siegel, 2017). Some argue that critical frameworks are sociocultural and contextual (MacIntyre, 1988b; 2013) and thus can only be achieved through consensus and solidarity (Rorty, 1991b). Biesta and Stams draw on Derrida to claim, "…there are no pure, uncontaminated, original criteria on which we can simply and straightforwardly base our judgments" (2001, p. 68). In this view we are always embedded within a context of assumptions, the ultimate boundaries of which cannot be comprehended or transcended, yet critical thinking can reveal new possibilities without recourse to foundational, self-selected, or transcendent criteria (2001). This is an important debate for epistemology, the justification of

critique within philosophy, and questions about the nature of rationality. Critical thinking at an expansive scope, in both theory and practice, must be able to navigate the unsettled complexities of these problems *without the certainty of a solution*.

That critical thinking is a necessarily epistemological enterprise, yet cannot be defined by any singular epistemological perspective, may seem incoherent. However, I argue this helps show that epistemology alone cannot define a comprehensive understanding of critical thinking. People with different epistemological perspectives are capable of critical thinking. For example, Plato and Confucius, Descartes and Heidegger, Siegel and Rorty all have different epistemological perspectives, yet I would be reticent to claim any is incapable of critical thinking. Furthermore, there seems to be no impediment to these diverse perspectives engaging critically *together.* There may be many points of disagreement and even incommensurability, yet these diverse perspectives are mutually intelligible in a way that permits of critical engagement. Given this possibility, one of the aspects of dominant conceptions of critical thinking that most inhibits potential scope is not just an *excess* of epistemology, but insistence on a *particular* epistemological perspective (Williams, 2015; 2016).

I argue that epistemological pluralism (the mere fact that a diversity of epistemological perspectives coexists) indicates the importance of pursuit over attainment. Critical thinking is a perpetual and somewhat Sisyphean process that, by its very nature, cannot reach permanent and immutable conclusions. Critical thinking is a process, but not just in the abstract theoretical or metaphysical sense, it is a necessarily *lived* process. As Williams notes, drawing on Heidegger, "any 'knowledge' we may have of things in the world is always going to be grounded in the unitary phenomenon that is our being-in-the-world" (2016, p. 77). The facts, meanings, values, emotions, and innumerable other intricate aspects of 'being in the world' give substance to the processes of critical thinking. This is a phenomenological world of culture, relationships, practices, traditions, and languages – all of which shape the aims and assumptions of any potential critical framework. Talk of procedures of reasoning quickly becomes empty without meaningful recognition of the substantive stances – even if temporary and fallible – that support and animate any critical process. Critical thinking needs to navigate questions about the nature of knowledge without *dogmatically* tethering itself to any particular epistemological perspective (e.g., foundational, transcendent, contextual, deconstructive). However, I argue that conceptions of critical thinking dominant in higher education rely on dogmatic escapes from longstanding epistemological challenges. This stands to limit the scope of criticality in both theory and practice.

Siegel provides one of the most thorough and dominant conceptions of critical thinking in which he insists that the very possibility of metacritique requires transcendent metacriteria which provide an ultimate guide for assessment not only of critical thinking, but also of human rationality (1987; 2006; 2011; 2017). He goes on to argue that "whatever the content, an episode of thinking's being critical depends on its answering well to relevant epistemological criteria" (2017, p. 179). As a *procedure*, this makes sense. That is, critical thinking requires that justification be based on reasons drawn from evidence in a consistent and coherent manner. Just like language cannot exist without grammar, critical thinking cannot exist without a

'grammar of reasoning'. If critical thinking is being "appropriately moved by reasons" (Siegel, 1988, p. 32), then 'appropriacy' can be seen as coherence and consistency, a kind of logical grammar. However, this fails to address substantive questions about both 'appropriacy' and 'reasons'. For example, where do the aims and assumptions giving rise to the criteria of a critical framework come from and what normative assumptions help to constitute appropriacy?

Efforts to determine the nature of 'relevant epistemological criteria' steers transcendent reason back towards the problems of infinite regress and circularity. Siegel argues that these problems are avoided by recognising that transcendence, in a practical rather than a metaphysical sense, is a necessary feature of reason itself:

> *When I say that epistemic criteria transcend local contexts, I do not thereby assign to criteria some special metaphysical status. Rather, I affirm just that what people in a given context say or think is criticizable on the basis of suitable criteria whose force is independent of and extends beyond the bounds of that context (Siegel, 2017, p. 27).*

It is unclear exactly what creates this context-independent 'force'. The most plausible interpretation is what Siegel calls elsewhere the "universality of argumentative force" (2017, p. 212). The best candidate for this 'force' is logic. Reasoning requires consistency and coherence in the relationship between evidence, reasons, justifications, beliefs, thoughts, intentions, and actions. In this regard, Siegel is correct that *something* must be consistent across contexts to facilitate reasoning, much less critical thinking. This is not dissimilar to the way that 'something' (e.g., lexical reference to the world and some form of grammar) must be consistent between languages to facilitate the possibility of translation and mutual comprehension between languages. It is not necessary for two languages to have *the same* grammar or vocabulary. It is, however, necessary for *any language* to have grammar and vocabulary. Because of this, the possibility of two non-translatable languages is incoherent (Davidson, 2011). Reasoning must be consistent and coherent, *or it would not be reasoning.* If there is no logically coherent relationship between reasons and beliefs, or if what constitutes a good reason for belief or action changes *arbitrarily* without possible explanation, one is not reasoning. This aspect of reasoning (and critical thinking) does not ensure *good* reasoning or application in all contexts. People often reason poorly and can also be unreasonable. Furthermore, while reasoning cannot occur independent of contexts (what would one reason *about* independent of context?), it seems plausible to argue that this 'transcendent' feature of reason provides the possibility of engagement and evaluation in most contexts. Consequently, I am happy to concede the necessity for shared *processes* of reasoning (e.g., intentionality, coherence, consistency) as essential to critical thinking.

I argue, however, that the 'transcendence' of reason only provides an *empty* process. Agreeing that belief, thought, intention, and action must consistently and coherently follow from a universal form of reasoning leaves that reasoning thin and empty. Thin because it must have the possibility to stretch across all conceivable contexts, and empty because it does not consider the contextually contingent substantive aims and assumptions guiding and animating

reasoning. The reality of *actually reasoning in the world* makes identification of the 'suitable criteria whose force is independent' of any specific context very difficult to identify in many cases. For example, 'suitable criteria' in the ethical and political dimensions of critical thinking will vary depending on the substantive aims and assumptions of a context. What constitutes good critical thinking depends on what is being thought *about* and what one is thinking *for* (McPeck, 2016). Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, *critical* thinking is a specific kind of reasoning, the reflexivity of which requires as much awareness of aims, assumptions, and criteria as possible. This is because, along with coherence and consistency, critical thinking requires intentionality and communicability in justifying belief, thought, intentions, and actions. Consequently, an important part of critical thinking is ascertaining what 'suitable criteria' are within a given context. Appeals to transcendent features of reasoning provide an empty process, which fails to account for how the 'substance' of contexts changes the critical frameworks that guide critical thinking in practice.

Siegel is aware of the complexities created by the fact that critical thinking is a normative endeavour, contingent on contextually derived aims and assumptions. Yet, this does not discourage further appeal to the possibility and, he contends, necessity of transcendence and objectivity. Speaking to the frequency in which critical frameworks seem to diverge across cultures, Siegel claims:

> *The quality of an argument is transcultural in the sense that its normative status is independent of the cultural locations and perspectives of its evaluators. It is the character of such impersonal and transcultural evaluation, such that the quality of an argument is as it would appear to a hypothetical 'fair-minded' evaluator – rather than as it actually appears to actual, flesh and blood evaluators, with their own cultural locations and perspectives (2017, p. 219).*

It is unclear exactly how contexts are to be transcended to achieve the 'fair minded' view of this 'hypothetical evaluator'. Particularly since Siegel rejects the possibility of any completely objective or "Godly view from nowhere" (2017, p. 213). Perhaps this is why the 'fair-minded' evaluator is only hypothetical? However, it does seem possible to evaluate the quality or strength of an argument based purely on its structure of internal coherence. For example, to assess an argument as valid or invalid. However, this does nothing to indicate whether an argument is *sound* (McPeck, 2016). A valid argument need only logically cohere, regardless of the truth or falsity of premises or conclusions. A sound argument must be logically valid *and* proceed from true premises. This same structure is relevant with criterion other than truth. For example, one can make a valid ethical argument that is logically coherent and thus has 'argumentative force' for immoral and unethical behaviour. However, a 'sound' ethical argument must not only logically cohere, but also adhere to 'good' ethical premises. The parallels are not perfect, and critical thinking is far more than a process of logical argumentation, but the point should be clear; critical thinking as an empty process cannot meet the needs of education and society, which depend on cultural locations, perspectives, and contexts of application.

The kind of imagined objectivity Siegel seeks overlooks (or too greatly de-emphasises) the contextually contingent *content* of critical thinking. People holding different fundamental assumptions, different values, or oriented towards different ends can engage in equally 'good' reasoning, with premises providing reasons for supporting radically different conclusions. Religious fundamentalists, conspiracy theorists, and scientists may all be 'appropriately moved by reasons'. What matters is the *source* and *substance* of those reasons – the fundamental assumptions from which critical thinking proceeds. Furthermore, reasoning (and critical thinking) are not purely epistemological enterprises. Ethics, emotion, and non-critical modes of being in the world all influence and inform critical thinking. What is the value of removing the 'actual flesh and blood' from reasoning? What is the practical value of trans-cultural reach achieved as a process with no attention to substance and context?

This returns us to the central question of this section; how is metacritique possible? How can critical thinking be directed at the aims and assumptions structuring criticality itself? Siegel presents the problem well:

> *... one can perfectly well judge from within one's scheme, utilizing criteria internal to the scheme, but one cannot meaningfully question the scheme or its criteria themselves, for they are necessary for judgments to be made at all. The force of the idea that we are trapped within our conceptual schemes or frameworks is precisely that we cannot escape, transcend, or get outside them in order fairly, neutrally, or non-question-beggingly to assess them (1987, p. 34)*

If transcendence, objectivity, and neutrality are not options, then people are trapped in contextually contingent critical frameworks with no recourse to metacritique. This, however, is simply not the case. A lack of transcendence, objectivity, and neutrality does not resign people to intractable relativism.

Rorty argues that perspectives like Siegel's derive from the legacy of an "objectivist tradition, which centers around the assumption that we must step outside our community long enough to examine it in the light of something which transcends it, namely, that which it has in common with every other actual and possible human community" (1991b, p. 22). His point in refuting this assumption is that it is not necessary to move entirely 'beyond' a critical framework to begin questioning fundamental aims and assumptions. Furthermore, the notion of an objective and neutral perspective does not resolve the problems of infinite regress and circularity. If one were able to objectively evaluate a critical framework, what criteria would guide that 'objective' evaluation? The critique and potential transformation (or affirmation) of fundamental aims and assumptions (metacritique) itself *requires aims and assumptions.* Questioning one assumption requires drawing on others. This again seems to call for some kind of stable foundation capable of guiding critical thinking across *all possible* contexts.

However, such a stable (i.e., infallible) foundation is only necessary if one aims to question everything all at once. In his attack on epistemological foundationalism, Sellars argues that "…empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has

a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once" (1997, p. 79 emphasis in original). It is not necessary (or possible) to subject *every* aim, assumption, and criterion of a critical framework to metacritique *at the same time.* It is possible, however, to subject every aim and assumption to critique *over time.* Temporality breaks closed circularity into something more like a spiral, still self-referential but neither static nor closed. As metacritique targets all aims and assumptions of a framework over time *from a variety of perspectives at a variety of depths,* aims and assumptions can be affirmed, changed, or transformed without foundations or transcendence. This is because critical frameworks can (though not all necessarily do) permit diverse internal perspectives and variation in permutations of aims and assumptions capable of facilitating meaningful critique of their own structure. Of course, some frameworks *do not* permit this possibility. In these ideological frameworks there are certain aims and assumptions that ground criticality but are themselves beyond critique. In such cases, a framework may lack the internal resources to facilitate effective metacritique. Consequently, the perspectival resources necessary to question fundamental aims and assumptions must come from engagement with new and diverse frameworks.

Even in frameworks with no intention to limit the possibility of metacritique, there are logical limits to the potential for metacritique drawn from completely internal perspectives. There are boundaries beyond which rationality and criticality cannot reach, where there are no criteria to structure or guide thought (Wittgenstein, 1975). This can be seen as a point within infinite regress beyond which coherence ceases. In this view, it is not possible to understand the 'ultimate framework' of thinking and being. Quite possibly, because no such ultimate framework exists. Consequently, at some point along an infinite regress, certain assumptions become *pragmatically* foundational. Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of a riverbed and the idea of 'hinge commitments' to refer to these ineffable and unknowable shapeless shapers of rational possibility (1975). Rorty calls the assumptions at this point in the infinite regress a 'final vocabulary', saying, "beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force" (Rorty, 1989, p. 73). This is the point at which there are no resources for reasoning, no criteria, or frames of reference. There are no resources within the final vocabulary to critically question the vocabulary itself. However, final vocabularies (just like the riverbed and hinge commitments) are not permanently fixed (Pritchard, 2021). They are open to movement, particularly through encounters with new experiences and other perspectives. Thus, to the degree a person thinks critically about the contexts shaping their thinking, they should not see choices (whether made consciously or not) between frameworks/vocabularies as "made within a neutral and universal meta vocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old" (Rorty, 1989, p. 73). The 'finality' or fixedness of any framework is due only to the temporary exhaustion of internal perspectival resources. However, the diversity and plurality of possible frameworks provides new resources for continued expansion, continued criticality, and metacritique. This is why a plurality of critical frameworks is vital. The plurality of norms, traditions, practices, values, aims, and assumptions that form the complex entanglement of critical contexts and resultant frameworks provides opportunities for *new* perspectives capable of facilitating metacritique. When divergent frameworks, like those between cultures, are encountered it is not necessary to step

'beyond' both, to think critically. Instead, as Rorty notes, "… beliefs from another culture must be tested by trying to weave them together with beliefs we already have" (Rorty, 1991b, p. 26). Plurality creates the very possibility of metacritique with no need for recourse to objectivity.

In this process the *ideal* of objectivity is related to the *ideal* of neutrality in the 'fair-minded' assessment of reasons. I label these as 'ideals' because they are beneficial to critical thinking as exactly that, aspirational ideals. They remind people to overcome their own interests and biases to forge mutual comprehensibility and genuinely entertain alternative perspectives, seek out new evidence, and hear out new reasons. Undoubtedly, Siegel shares this aspiration. However, the claim that actual or absolute forms of objectivity and neutrality are necessary and defining features of critical thinking is problematic. Instead of objectivity or neutrality, critical thinking requires recognition that criticality is *never* objective or neutral, but always relational and social. This is because critical thinking generally takes place *with* others, but also because even an individual thinking critically in isolation is doing so from within a pre-existing structure of meaning, significance, aims, and assumptions that has been relationally and socially shaped. This is essential to Williams' effort to expand theories of thinking and critical thinking beyond individualised and 'rationalistic' epistemological processes to better account for the relational and contingent nature of being. In this effort she claims:

> *what we are redirected away from, of course, is the image of the subject – that self-sufficient, autonomous being that is in total control of what it thinks and does: the Cartesian ideal. What we are redirected towards… is an understanding of human thought as primarily receptive of or responsive to something that lies beyond itself (2016, p. 112)*

The 'something beyond the self' is a relational, sociocultural, and existential world of interaction, from which the aims and assumptions guiding critical thinking arise. Recognising this point does not entail either transcendence or determinism. Instead, it simply seeks to bring all the various dimensions and domains of critical thinking into potential consideration. This is necessary because any effort to use critical thinking to shape the world must also contend with the ways the world shapes critical thinking. Metacritique does not require 'objective' or 'neutral' metacriteria, it requires receptivity to plurality, diversity, and the world beyond the self.

A call to move 'beyond' the epistemological dimension of critical thinking is not intended to exclude or diminish the centrality of epistemology to critical thinking. Indeed, to the degree that any appeal to reasons is seen as an epistemological process, critical thinking as a process of reasoning is always going to have an epistemological element within any dimension. Sellars argues that, "the essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (1997, p. 76). Siegel seems sympathetic to this view of thinking and knowing as processes of ongoing justification (Siegel, 2017, p. 141). However, the inclusion of an epistemological element, in the bare fact of coherently drawing on reasons, is not sufficient to expand critical thinking into

the *substantive aspects of other dimensions*. A key question is *where do the criteria guiding reasoning come from*? What bounds and defines this logical space of reasons? Here, ontological, ethical, political, and other considerations are vital. For example, significant parts of any critical framework are made up of values and oriented towards ideas of what is good and/or right. This reveals another bit of slippery and difficult terrain critical thinking must navigate; avoiding the abyss of relativism, in which strands of perfectly coherent reasoning exist in parallel with no apparent means of constructive or critical interaction and mediation. Indeed, if this were the case, it would eliminate the possibility for plurality to contribute to metacritique. This leads to yet another challenge facing critical thinking, the question of how it is (or perhaps is not) possible to think critically between different critical frameworks.

3.2 Avoiding dogmatism and relativism

If the aims and assumptions shaping critical thinking are relative to contexts (e.g., traditions, communities, cultures) how is it possible to reason between divergent critical frameworks? There are at least three possible answers to this question: 1) It is not 2) It is by appeal to something universal 3) It is possible without appealing to anything universal. Dominant conceptions of critical thinking tend towards the second option. This is because the first option is seen as endorsing a strong form of relativism that would preclude commensurability or mutual comprehensibility (and thus any criticality) across diverse contexts. The third option, which I endorse, is rejected by Siegel as incoherent because it either collapses into the relativism of option one or requires the universality of option two. In other words, in Siegel's view, divergent critical frameworks must be *either* completely incommensurable *or* made commensurable through something universal.

I argue that this is a false dichotomy, that the third option need not collapse into relativism or entail universality. Critical thinking across diverse contexts does not require appeal to anything universal because, as noted in the previous section, critical frameworks need not be compared *as wholes* or completely stepped 'outside of' to facilitate metacritique. Furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that two critical frameworks will be *completely* incommensurable (Taylor, 2002). Each is likely to contain resources for potential commensurability or, at least, a degree of *mutual comprehensibility* and thus be able to avoid complete relativity. Furthermore, while the possibility of commensurability may require shared (though not necessarily universal) processes of reasoning, the imposition of *substantive* and *assumedly universal* values as defining features of critical thinking to facilitate commensurability leads towards dogmatism.

I propose this turn towards dogmatism can be avoided by recognising plurality as *navigable on its own terms*. Encounters with divergent perspectives, including differing aims and assumptions constitutive of critical frameworks does not preclude but expands critical potential. Divergent perspectives and critical frameworks are not resigned to mutual acceptance or precluded from evaluative judgment (Rorty, 1991a; Taylor, 2010). Reasoning and judgment need not come from an imagined objective perspective. Furthermore, I argue that plurality is an important part of what makes both metacritique and critical thinking across diverse

frameworks possible. A plurality of critical frameworks provides opportunities for engagement with new perspectives. Ultimately, I argue that a degree of relativism (perhaps better understood as pluralism) provides possibilities, not problems, for critical thinking.

I understand Siegel's concern, because strong relativism poses a grave threat to critical thinking. If there are no shared criteria for assessing reasons and justification, then reasoning (much less critical thinking) is not possible between relative and incommensurable perspectives. Siegel sees strong relativism as not only undesirable, but also incoherent. In his view, if two critical frameworks differ there must either be *another* framework to facilitate mediation between the two (something transcendent and universal) or there is no possibility of commensurability (strong relativism) (1987; 2017). Siegel claims, for the relativist there is, "no possibility of genuinely answering central epistemological questions. For the relativist, having given up the absolutist conception of rightness cannot assert that [any theories] are non-relatively right" (1987 p. 166). Consequently, any claim that critical frameworks are relative is incoherent:

> *Rightness (or epistemic worthiness) presupposes neutral criteria or a neutral 'meta-framework' from which rival frameworks, and the claim that framework relativism is right, can be judged. But this is precisely what the framework relativist denies. Thus, by this argumentative route as well we reach the conclusion that framework relativism is self-defeating (Siegel, 1987, p. 44).*

This apparent self-refutation (performative self-contradiction) is a common rejoinder to relativist and skeptical claims, and it is one of Siegel's most frequent manoeuvres. It is, however, a very weak argument. The claim of self-refutation mistakes the ability of universalists to make non-contradictory claims with those claims somehow being affirmed. The avoidance of contradiction is not an assurance of accuracy, utility, or truth. Similarly, the relativist only becomes self-contradictory when forced to make universal claims, to be measured by universalist standards. As a purely negative and contextually contingent claim, relativism remains coherent, even if counterproductive (Rorty, 1991b). It is also possible for many types of relativists (and there are many types) to make all sorts of positive and productive claims (Krausz, 2010), they simply need not insist such claims are universal or universally assessable (Kolbel, 2011). However, as relativism is based on contextual contingency, changes in contexts can create changes in whatever (e.g., knowledge, values, utility) is understood as relative. Relativism need not be a self-refuting universalist claim, but instead recognition of the fallibility, flexibility, and changeability of the boundaries of understanding.

By casting all non-universalist perspectives as necessarily relativistic in a strong sense – as aiming for something as incoherent as 'universal relativism' – Siegel closes off a certain receptivity to context. I argue that this is equivalent to an insistence that critical frameworks must be engaged with and evaluated *as wholes*. This glosses over the possibility that *something* within divergent frameworks may provide perspective for meaningful engagement and commensurability or at least mutual comprehensibility. If this is the case, then mediating between two frameworks does not require stepping out of both. In an encounter between two

divergent frameworks, each provides aims, assumptions, and criteria external to the other without the need for anything external to both, much less *external to all possible* frameworks (i.e., transcendent and universal). As Taylor notes, "… we can sometimes arbitrate between positions by portraying *transitions* as gains or losses, even where what we normally understand as decision through criteria – *qua externally defined standards* – is impossible" (1995, p. 42 emphasis in original). If encounters with different perspectives are combined with internal criticality there is the prospect for transition towards something deemed 'truer' without recourse to foundations, universals, or transcendence. The same holds for ideals of good and utility. There is no need to identify a single ultimate good or perfect way of doing something to be able to evaluate it as being better, more beneficial, or more useful. Relative ranking does not require absolute reference (Kolbel, 2011). It does, however, require receptivity and reflexivity. A plurality of critical frameworks does not entail relativism and is indeed essential to facilitating metacritique.

Importantly, such a view recognises that incommensurable perspectives may still be *mutually comprehensible.* This is essential to opening up the possibility of *integrating* perspectives from relative frameworks to facilitate metacritique. The idea that incommensurability does not entail incomprehensibility is important. I return to this point in Chapter 6 in more detail. However, here, it is sufficient simply to point out that it is possible for incommensurable perspectives to be mutually comprehensible. For example, a theist and an atheist can fully comprehend points of incommensurability in efforts to critically reason together on certain topics. Despite this incommensurability, mutual comprehensibility creates opportunity for reasoned judgment. For example, the criticality of an atheist and a theist are bound to be incommensurable in certain (though, by no means all) respects, in which case metacritique of a certain depth could only come in the form of one framework abandoning certain assumptions. Nonetheless, because the fundamental assumptions creating incommensurability are *mutually comprehensible,* one can *understand* how relative assumptions shape reasoning and see how (perhaps even why) they are incommensurable. Here, it could be argued that mutual comprehensibility is proof of transcendent reason. If reasoning, including critical thinking, is possible across contexts it must be because of something that transcends both. However, it is conceivable that critical thinking is not necessarily possible across *all* critical frameworks. Furthermore, and of vital importance to education, the route to shared reasoning is not necessarily through appeal to transcendence or universality, but through appeal to relevant features of particular contexts. The transcendence of reasoning should be built and maintained, not inherently expected or taken for granted. This difference between *universalizing* something as opposed to understanding it as a pre-existing universal has important implications for education in cross-cultural contexts and is discussed more below.

I must reiterate that Siegel is receptive to the value of diversity. Ultimately, his point seems to be that when it comes to the process of reasoning, all non-universalist positions either permit of reasoning, and thus affirm something universal (reasoning), or do not permit of reasoning, and thus fall into incoherence. It is not possible (without self-contradiction) to use reason to argue against reason (Siegel, 2017). There is an inescapable logic to this simplified formulation of reasoning *as a process*. I argue, however, that this approach impedes the scope of critical

thinking theory by reducing it to a form of empty instrumentalism. Part of this is the result of conflating all types of reasoning. Not all reasoning is critical (most probably is not) and while critical thinking requires reasoning, reasoning alone is not sufficient to achieve the kind of expansive critical thinking necessary to meet the needs of education and society. Framing critical thinking as being 'appropriately moved by reasons' leaves criticality thin and empty. This is certainly not Siegel's intention. However, I argue that his efforts to avoid a purely procedural form of critical thinking produces further problems, with significant implications for cross-cultural contexts.

3.3 What is at stake in the question of universality?

Siegel explores the implications of relativism through the example of multiculturalism, arguing that cultural relativism would preclude any capacity for rational or critical discussion or judgment between divergent critical frameworks (and thus potentially between cultures) because each could have internally coherent reasoning proceeding from different fundamental assumptions. He claims that, "… [because] differing ideals cannot themselves be ranked on some fair, absolute scale, multiculturalism seems to counsel that cultural ideals be regarded as relative to the cultures which recognize and embrace them." (Siegel, 2017, p. 201). The problematic assumptions here are that an 'absolute scale' and 'neutral criteria' are necessary to mediate and judge between different ideals. As argued in the previous section, once relative perspectives come into contact in a shared world of experience, they are not precluded from evaluative judgment, even in cases of profound disagreement.

The larger problem, however, is that in his effort to identify universal metacriteria Siegel draws on particular substantive values. This is deemed necessary because he recognises the risk of critical thinking becoming an empty process. He states that, "an adequate theory of rationality will perforce declare itself not only on matters of procedure, but also on matters of content" (2017 p. 164). It is one thing to argue that the *process* of critical thinking transcends contexts. It is another to suggest the *content* of critical thinking transcends contexts. Indeed, if the 'content' of critical thinking is necessarily context contingent it seems very strange to suggest any content can, much less *must,* transcend contexts. Instead, I think Siegel's point is that certain substantive values are 'defining features' of critical thinking. This is a sentiment shared by other theorists. For example, Paul provides an expansive philosophical conception of critical thinking, with nuanced consideration of the ethical dimension and the context contingency of assumptions and criteria (Paul, 1982; Paul and Elder, 2009). However, he remains committed to the necessity of underlying universal meta-criteria (Hatcher, 2016). Working with Scriven, Paul claims that critical thinking "…is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions" (Scriven and Paul, 1987, p. 3). Siegel follows this line of thinking by drawing on substantive values as essential features of critical thinking, claiming that "while, as a matter of fact, cultures do not converge on a universally held set of ideals, it is nevertheless the case that some ideals are universal in the strong sense that they are applicable to all cultures, *even to those cultures that do not recognize them as such*" (Siegel, 2017 p. 213 emphasis added). Among these values is that of multiculturalism (better understood as a combination of

aims, assumptions, and values), which Siegel claims "is itself a culturally transcendent or universal moral, educational, and social ideal in the sense that it is applicable to all cultures, even those that do not recognize or embrace it; and that it rests upon other, equally transcendent, moral imperatives and values" (2017 p. 205). I argue that this insistence on moral imperatives and universal values, whatever they may be (Siegel remains fairly vague), as the facilitators of transcultural reach requires the imposition of substantive values as somehow 'defining' critical thinking. This imperils the possibility of metacritique and steers critical thinking towards dogmatism, thus narrowing the scope of theory and practice.

Part of this imposition of substantive values onto critical thinking may arise from a blurring of boundaries between desirable educational aims and efforts to 'define' critical thinking. In his justification of critical thinking as a justifiable educational aim Siegel appeals to the need to respect the dignity of students by equipping them with the critical capacities to become autonomous and free agents (2017). This part of Siegel's efforts aims at justifying certain values as appropriate educational aims. I agree that values such as respect of human dignity, tolerance, and democracy are justifiable *aims of education*. I also recognise that critical thinking must proceed from assumptions, and these make excellent candidates for preferred assumptions to help guide critical thinking in many, and potentially eventually all, contexts. The crux of my disagreement is with how this possibility ought to be approached. I argue that if certain values are desirable, they must be built and maintained through dialogue and consensus, not imposed as assumed universals. Most importantly, as aims, assumptions, and criteria of a critical framework, these substantive values must remain open to critical scrutiny. Imposing particular substantive values from one context as somehow defining critical thinking in all contexts narrows the potential scope of criticality. Furthermore, as Mill (2015) notes, the assumption of universality, like the assumption of certainty, runs the risk of dulling the constant critical effort required to revise and sustain these ideals – to keep them from stagnating or becoming uncritically dogmatic in their contexts of origin. In this sense, there may be few things more damaging to democratic multicultural values than assuming their universality.

What is at stake in the question of universality becomes apparent when Siegel discusses educating students from "cultures that frown on rational disputation" (2017, p. 283). In such a situation he argues that "the political/educational task is to persuade them – rationally, of course – of the value of democratic institutions and practices in the actual multicultural social context in which they find themselves" (ibid). I agree completely. I also find it telling that Siegel draws on the language of persuasion, as opposed to universal imposition. I can only assume the intention is to 'persuade' such students to recognise the 'universal values' underwriting multicultural democracy. While the logical processes of reasoning employed in such an effort may be shared by all parties concerned, the meaningful content of political (democracy) ethical (multiculturalism) and other assumptions are not universals, but normative aspects of the local. Siegel, no doubt, would argue that despite their local origin some such values have transcultural universal force (2017, p. 214). If so, I argue, it is a very *weak* force. As the local, lived experience is the practical context of interaction where this process of persuasion must play out by drawing on reasons relevant to the relative critical frameworks of those parties involved. Ultimately, Siegel concludes, "when non – or antidemocratic cultural traditions conflict with

democratic public education, the latter must prevail" (2017, p. 285). Again, I agree with this sentiment as an educational aim (but not a defining feature of critical thinking) *for citizens within a democratic society.* Importantly, this seems to be Siegel's area of concern. However, once again, the 'force' of this argument is drawn from normative consensus on the value of democracy, not some universal truth regarding the transcendent superiority of democracy. To assume the latter is to make democracy dogmatic, thus leaving it prone to decay through lack of critical revitalisation and reaffirmation. Furthermore, such a statement becomes more difficult to navigate in university contexts where many students *are not citizens of the democratic societies in which they are being educated.* Should the cultivation (or imposition) of democratic values extend to these students? And if so, what is the most effective means of approaching such a project, by appeal to alleged universals or by reasoning and persuading via the contextual relevance of particulars?

I argue that receptivity to diversity, not appeal to universality, is essential in addressing profound difference and disagreement. If the aims, assumptions, and criteria guiding critical thinking differ between two frameworks, as they often do in the world of practice, it seems unlikely that appeal to universals will create commensurability because each perspective will appeal *to their own universal claims.* As Lukes notes in his reframing of Berlin's views on value pluralism, two perspectives with 'certainty' create conflict that can only be resolved by domination or elimination of one perspective (2017). There is a risk that the certainty of universality combined with the reality of pluralism creates intractable incommensurability and inevitable conflict. However, if *no* perspective has appeal to universality there is both opportunity and need for mutual comprehensibility and potential transformation. This does not eliminate conflict. It simply gives conflict a *potentially* more productive purpose – cooperation instead of domination. Along these lines, Long argues the kind of reasonable disagreement essential to liberal democratic societies contains a form of relativism resting on the idea that no clear or singular 'right way' is available (2011). In a diverse society with many comprehensive and competing world views, "none of these competing world views is uniquely justifiable" (Long, 2011, p. 317). If one view were certain and could be proven so, there would be no grounds for toleration of diversity (ibid). The whole liberal project would collapse. However, lack of recourse to certainty or universality does not undermine the multicultural project. Instead, Long claims "We can accept that liberalism is only relatively justified, but promote its values nevertheless. There is no a priori reason why an acceptance of the impossibility of universal *justification* should prevent the universal *application* of liberal principles" (2011, p. 323). It is reasonable to seek the *universalization* of certain values, but not to assume those values are somehow already universal.

I am not arguing against the possibility of reasoning between relative contexts. Instead, I am drawing attention to how that reasoning should be approached. This point is incredibly important for education, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. It is the difference between arrogant imposition and respectful conversation. The route to universality is through locality, it is a process of seeking mutual comprehensibility. Furthermore, the project will be more effective if it draws on contextually relevant reasoning as opposed to universal appeal, which

assumes the substantive reasoning originating in one context constitutes 'good reasoning' in another context. Siegel admits:

> *I may be accused of offering little more than an apologetic for 'Western' values and ideals. Haven't my arguments for transcultural ideals simply begged the question against those who challenge those ideals? I have indeed tried to defend some of the traditional ideals that characterize Western, 'Enlightenment' thought; in so doing, I might be thought to have biased my case against those cultural traditions that do not embrace those ideals… [Nonetheless], establishing the unavoidability of these ideals… these particular ideals, which are endorsed by some but by no means all extant cultures, can be justified to all who are inclined (2017 p.214).*

Here, I again agree. These ideals can be justified to those who are inclined, and perhaps even more importantly, to those who *are not inclined*. However, the evidence and reasoning of this justification is a project in transcultural dialogue, not an instance of uncovering a previously unknown universal. Furthermore, the project will better be served by recognition and respect for locality, building reasons and arguments from that locality, rather than through cultural imposition masquerading as universality.

Along these lines, Rorty argues that what can be inferred from non-universalising perspectives "… is that there is no way to beat totalitarians in argument by appealing to shared common premises, and no point in pretending that a common human nature makes the totalitarians unconsciously hold such premises" (1991b, p. 42). The democrat and the totalitarian may both be 'appropriately moved by reasons', perhaps even some of the *same* reasons. There are bound to be aims, assumptions, and criteria structuring the internal coherence of each stance that are incompatible, but mutually comprehensible. The project of critical thinking, then, becomes one of perspectival shift, aiming to educate and persuade through engagement with new evidence, ideas, and possibilities – new aims and assumptions – that may restructure the nature of thinking and thus also the world.

3.4 Where to go from here?

This chapter has explored two key questions which any understanding of critical thinking must address: what makes metacritique possible and how critical thinking is possible across a diverse plurality of contexts. These questions are essential because the possibility for deep metacritique is essential to critical thinking at an expansive scope, while 'absolute' relativism would obviate the potential for thinking critically in diverse contexts. I have argued that Siegel strives for an impossible and unnecessary 'transcendent objectivity' to realise these two aspects of critical thinking. I contend that what appears *potentially* transcendent about critical thinking are *processes* of reasoning in a thin and empty form. This is problematic because the aims and assumptions of reasons themselves are essential to meaningful and expansive critical thinking. Recognising this, dominant conceptions of critical thinking impose substantive 'universal values' as defining features of critical thinking. I argue this is a turn towards dogmatism,

limiting the potential scope of critical thinking, and particularly problematic in cross-cultural contexts.

To help understand how critical thinking may be freed of these assumptions I have argued that rejecting universalism does not entail strong relativism. This is because nothing universally transcendent is necessary to facilitate critical thinking across a diverse plurality of critical frameworks. Critical frameworks need not be engaged with as unitary or stable wholes. Instead, they should be understood as an entanglement of overlapping, intersecting, and constantly changing networks that are not only (or even primarily) epistemological in nature (E. Williams, 2016). Consequently, metacritique does not require calling the entirety of a critical framework into question *at the same time* (Sellars, 1997). Instead, perspectival shifts within a framework allow for certain assumptions to aid in the critique of others (Rorty, 1989; Taylor, 1995). Furthermore, while this possibility has logical limits (Wittgenstein, 2009), there is no need for transcendent criteria that extend beyond *any* or *all* contexts because it is possible to draw on new perspectives from *other* critical frameworks (Rorty, 1991b). This assumes the possibility of commensurability, or at least mutual comprehensibility between a plurality of diverse critical frameworks. However, no 'objective' or 'neutral' transcendent criteria or perspective is necessary because critical frameworks are unlikely to be *completely* incommensurable or incomprehensible (Taylor, 2002). Thus, there is opportunity for integration and evaluation based on the criteria and resources internal to each.

The idea of using new perspectives to expand the horizons of critical frameworks is applicable to any context, but ought to be central to universities. MacIntyre writes convincingly on the necessity for universities to help create an 'educated public' capable of embracing such opportunities for engagement with new perspectives and metacritique. Drawing on this work, MacAllister points out, "educated publics have shared standards of rational appeal (as opposed to appeal by custom or dogma) by which arguments on the common good can be judged as better or worse, more convincing or less" (2016, p. 526). Such a view encompasses both the 'universality' of reasoning and the contextuality of substantive reasons. Once divergent frameworks come into contact there is not only the possibility, but usually the necessity, of building mutual comprehensibility by drawing on aims, assumptions, and criteria internal to both frameworks to make judgments about how each should adjust and/or integrate. This may even extend to elements of *processes* where what is deemed as being 'appropriately moved by reasons' in one context is seen as inappropriate in another. Such an encounter, far from precluding the possibility of critical thinking, creates new potentialities for metacritique directed at both the processes and substance of critical thinking itself. In such a view, perspective is the key to potential metacritique. The next chapter explores manifestations of criticality in Chinese philosophical traditions as a means of modelling the possibility of deep metacritique facilitated through engagement with diverse critical frameworks.

4 Metacritique in action: Examples from Chinese philosophical traditions

In the previous chapter I argued that metacritique is possible, and strong relativism avoidable, without recourse to transcendent metacriteria or substantive universal assumptions. This chapter further substantiates this claim by exploring manifestations of criticality in Chinese philosophical traditions. The purpose of this exploration is to provide examples of critical thinking, including metacritique and navigation of plurality, in traditions different from those that generally inform dominant conceptions of critical thinking. The aims and assumptions shaping dominant conceptions of critical thinking are typically rooted in, and derived from, Western philosophic traditions (Tan, 2017; Vandermensbrugghe, 2004). However, this is not because 'the West' (a problematic term of generalisation, see footnote four on page 22) has any monopoly on criticality. Consequently, exploring Chinese philosophy may shed new light on an old concept. Light much needed in the increasingly international contexts of UK higher education. That is the primary aim of this chapter.

A secondary (but equally important) aim of this chapter is to refute generalisations and essentialisations of both Chinese philosophy and students. Scholars reviewing research on Chinese international student engagement with critical thinking in Western universities have identified tendencies to draw on reductive essentialisations of 'Confucian heritage' to explain difficulties engaging with critical thinking (Clark and Gieve, 2006; Heng, 2018; E. Li, 2017; Moosavi, 2020; O'Dwyer, 2016). In this chapter I review and contribute to a growing body of literature problematising such essentialism and generalisation. To avoid overgeneralisation and essentialisation of philosophies, culture, and people, I shift focus from inferences about how philosophy manifests in contemporary culture, specific practices, or groups of students, towards drawing on philosophy – past and present – as a 'living' resource for understanding and actively shaping the *normative* practice of critical thinking. In demonstrating the critical capacity of Chinese philosophy, I make no effort to 'explain' or describe Chinese culture or students, both of which are too diverse and dynamic to generalise. This is not to deny the interconnectivity of philosophy, culture, and individuals but simply an analytical separation facilitating focus on one aspect of an interrelated totality. My point is that Chinese philosophy contains great potential as a 'living' resource capable of informing the conceptualisation and practice of critical thinking. In service of actualising this potential, I provide examples of criticality within Chinese philosophy. Importantly, while the focus here is on Chinese philosophy, this work has relevance for anyone interested in exploring and better understanding critical thinking within and across traditions more generally.

The examples provided in this chapter show that reasoning reaches across time and cultures. As noted in Chapter 3 (see p. 56) I have no problem recognising this seemingly transcendent – but essentially empty – phenomenon. However, I am concerned with the substantive aims and assumptions of contexts and critical frameworks. The examples explored in this chapter, manifesting as traditions, differ from the 'Western Enlightenment' values used to define dominant conceptions of critical thinking (e.g., Paul and Rudinow, 1988; Siegel, 2017). They

also differ from the sociopolitical aspirations of critical pedagogy that many contemporary critical thinking theorists use to animate and expand critical scope (e.g., Barnett and Davies, 2015a; Brookfield, 2015; Burbules and Berk, 1999). Critical thinking always relies on substantive values. However, these values are context contingent and neither universal nor transcendent. Consequently, exploring manifestations of critical thinking in different contexts helps understand what makes criticality possible within and across diverse contexts. These examples show that the contextual contingency of critical thinking does not result in intractable relativism, but instead provides resources for understanding critical thinking at an expansive scope.

I begin by showing how traditions can be understood as contexts that provide the aims and assumptions of critical frameworks. I then draw on a cross-disciplinary approach, employing historical overview and philosophical analysis to show three types of criticality (or depths of metacritique) within and between Chinese philosophical traditions. These are criticality *within* tradition, criticality *of* tradition, and critical integration *between* traditions. This is done by exploring criticality within the Confucian tradition through examples from the *Analects* and the critical evolution of Confucian theory through Mencius and Xunzi. I then briefly consider the influence of Buddhist metaphysics on Neo-Confucianism to exemplify critical integration *between* traditions within Chinese philosophy. Next, I shift attention beyond Confucianism, to show criticality *of* tradition along with further critical integration *between* traditions. This is done by looking at Daoist and Mohist philosophy of the ancient Warring States Period and the impact of Western philosophy in China beginning in the 19th century. I conclude by pointing out some themes within this analysis relevant to an expansive understanding of critical thinking applicable in diverse contexts.

4.1 Traditions as critical frameworks

The primary 'contexts' under consideration in this chapter are various *traditions* of Chinese philosophy. While the boundaries of traditions are difficult to delineate, they also provide enough pragmatic clarity to meaningfully explore the practice of critical thinking. Traditions are defined by constellations of aims, assumptions, and criteria. For example, ancient Confucian traditions assume the value of learning and ritual in meeting the aims of social harmony. These, and other aims and assumptions, guide reasoning within the tradition. The fact that traditions (philosophical and otherwise) are shaped by pre-existing aims and assumptions does not preclude, but in fact creates, the possibility for critical thinking. For example, a tradition may encounter what MacIntyre calls an 'epistemic crisis' resulting from inadequacy in practical explanation or breakdowns of internal coherence (1988b; 1990). This can derive from new experiences and ideas or contact with other traditions, which creates opportunities for criticality *within* tradition, *of* tradition, or critical integration *between* traditions. However, holding any assumptions as unassailable, particularly in the face of epistemic crisis or when encountering alternatives, constitutes *uncritical* dogmatism.

It may be helpful to recall the game analogy used to describe metacritique in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.8 p. 47) The 'game' is tradition, and the 'depth' of metacritique relates to which aspects of tradition (rules and aims of the game) are subjected to critical scrutiny. For example, questioning the criteria that guide critical thinking in a tradition (the rules of the game) is different from questioning the fundamental aims and assumptions of a tradition (the very game itself). These are examples of metacritique of differing depths. I refer to these as different *types* of criticality, manifesting *within, of,* and *between* traditions. However, these 'types' are simply useful shorthand for criticality taking place at different *scopes.* My aim is to shed light on how diversity and plurality make metacritique possible. Consequently, I am concerned with examples of 'deep' metacritique, which changes the 'rules' of the game or proposes an entirely new 'game' to play. As previously noted, my intention is not to imply that this depth of critical thinking is always desirable or necessary. However, it is *essential as a possibility* to prevent dogmatic and ideological thinking. It is also the type of critical thinking many suggest is absent from Chinese philosophical traditions. Consequently, an important auxiliary aim of this chapter is to refute any such assumption. Before proceeding I want to reinforce the necessity and value of this aim, as it has important implications for the largest demographic of international students in UK universities.

4.2 Problematising the 'construct of the Chinese learner'

Why do Chinese international students struggle to think critically while studying in Western universities? This is a problematic question, laden with assumptions (that they do), cultural generalisation (that all Chinese students are somehow similar), and, very often, philosophical reductivism (the nature of that similarity is a homogeneous form of 'Confucianism'). Despite these problems, it is also a question many educators and students find themselves asking, because many Chinese students *do* struggle with critical thinking while studying abroad (Durkin, 2007; Sun *et al.*, 2018; Q. Wu, 2015; W. Wu and Hammond, 2011). Research also shows challenges with critical thinking *within* Chinese higher education (J. Jiang, 2013; L. Li and Wegerif, 2013; Tan, 2020; Tian and Low, 2011). This leads some scholars to claim 'Confucian culture' is not conducive to Western style criticality (Atkinson, 1997; McBride *et al.*, 2002). In an example of extreme generalisation, Dong claims:

> *It has been commonly acknowledged that Chinese traditional culture is generally uncritical… Confucianism shaped a tradition that valued respect for parents and the elderly, the collective good, social order, and harmony. This is in contrast with ancient Greek civilization, which valued independent thought, reason, and ability to debate and argue in public (2015, p. 357).*

It is unclear why respect for elders and pursuit of social harmony (aims shared by many Ancient Greek philosophers) are *necessarily* uncritical. Furthermore, implicit in this statement is the idea that 'Chinese traditional culture' is essentially 'Confucian'. While there is no doubt Confucian philosophy has an immense impact on Chinese culture, such an observation overlooks the diversity and plurality of culture, while also obscuring the complexities of

Confucian *philosophy* as a resource for actively reshaping culture and reconceptualising normative concepts like critical thinking.

Reductive essentialisation of Confucian philosophy is increasingly seen as problematic. Ryan and Louie contend that treating 2,500 years of 'Confucianism' as the same thing is like treating the various manifestations of Christianity as essentially homogenous (2007). After all, it could be (rather reductively) argued that Catholics, Quakers, and the Ku Klux Klan are all 'Christians'. Furthermore, contemporary politics probably exert more influence on culture, and certainly on the teaching and learning of critical thinking in contemporary China, than any philosophical tradition (T. Zhang, 2017). Along these lines, any lack of opportunity to cultivate and practice critical thinking in Chinese education as the result of historical or contemporary political circumstances does not necessarily indicate a *cultural* or *philosophical* disinclination towards, or lack of ability to engage in, critical thinking (Bali, 2015; Tian and Low, 2011). It is also important to note research showing the challenges of engaging with critical thinking in a foreign language (Floyd, 2011). Linguistic barriers should not be misconstrued as conceptual impediments or lack of capacity. Furthermore, research also shows that while many Chinese students initially struggle with critical thinking while studying abroad, they are capable of developing and learning the required skills and dispositions over time (Q. Wu, 2015). Thus, it is problematic to assume the difficulties some Chinese students face while studying abroad are the result of 'deficit' instead of merely challenges arising from *difference* (Heng, 2018). Indeed, it is likely most Chinese students do not *lack* critical thinking, but simply engage in the process differently (Evers, 2007; Mason, 2013; Shaheen, 2016).

This leads some to argue that imposing a Western-centric theory of critical thinking in culturally diverse contexts could be construed as a form of 'intellectual colonialism' (Indelicato and Prazic, 2019; Moosavi, 2020). Indeed, as Hammersley-Fletcher and Hanley point out, critical thinking may become ironically uncritical if it finds itself as a mechanism for "reproducing the interests of particular groups and constraining thought within the boundaries of Western traditions" (2016, p. 990). However, as noted earlier (see, p. 22) there is nothing 'colonial' about Western universities drawing on Western intellectual traditions and practices. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the teaching and practice of critical thinking without consideration of its conceptual heritage and underlying assumptions may simply fail to be as efficient or effective in cross-cultural contexts. What is at stake is not necessarily a matter of *aims* but of *effectiveness*. However, as I discuss in Chapter 7, questions about the *aims* of students, educators, and institutions regarding the *type* of criticality each seeks are important and potentially problematic if they remain inexplicit or unaligned.

Existing research on Chinese student engagement with critical thinking gives very little attention to how criticality manifests in Chinese philosophy. This is surprising given the degree to which Western philosophy is mined for resources (e.g., epistemological theory, logic, dialectic argumentation) for conceptualising and practicing critical thinking. If critical thinking is more than a Western construct, it would seem relevant to explore the phenomenon in other traditions. Some scholars have been making headway in this area. For example, Tan articulates a 'Confucian conception of critical thinking' as a form of action oriented judgment (2017).

Lam works to reconcile Confucianism and a generally Western-derived conception of critical rationalism (2017). Sigurosson, acknowledges Confucianism is rarely seen to promote criticality and typically regarded as conservative, reactionary, and ideological (2017). In aiming to rectify this, he argues that the "transformative self-critical attitude" of ancient Confucian philosophy exemplifies a form of deep criticality often neglected within Western consideration (2017, p. 133). However, such work seems to be the exception, not the norm. Furthermore, while these more nuanced examinations of Confucian conceptions of criticality are valuable, it is less common to see consideration of Chinese philosophy *beyond* Confucianism within the Anglophone critical thinking literature. This chapter builds on the work of those aiming to understand the value of Confucianism for critical thinking, while also expanding the project to consider other aspects of Chinese philosophy for the same purposes. The goal here is not to 'explain' culture or individual student behaviour, but to provide historical and philosophical resources for better understanding critical thinking in contexts different from those informing dominant conceptions. This process helps to show that critical thinking can operate within and across diverse traditions. Furthermore, while critical thinking must always be contextually contingent and reflexive, it is not purely bound by tradition or any single critical framework, but capable of transforming traditions and critical frameworks through metacritique.

4.3 Confucian criticality

This section explores criticality *within* tradition as an example of metacritique within the Confucian tradition carried out primarily as a form what Feng calls, "creation through transmission" (1937, p. 48). The natural starting place is with Confucius (c. 551–479 BCE), whose project is undoubtedly conservative. Confucius aims to rectify an idealised past, not to create a new future. Along these lines he proclaims, "I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity" (*Analects*, 7:1). However, transmission of the past into the present is an invariably interpretive, creative, and critical endeavour. This process of 'creation through transmission' begins to shed light on the subtle nature of critical thinking in the Confucian tradition. Here, it is important to note that many ancient Chinese texts derive from oral traditions and appear in multiple versions before reaching their current common forms (Feng, 1937). Furthermore, I am drawing on these texts in English translation, which introduces another layer of interpretation. The hermeneutic process of transmission, translation, and interpretation itself constitutes an important form of 'creation through transmission' in Chinese traditions (Ames and Hall, 2003). However, the creative and critical elements of Confucius' transmission of antiquity reach beyond mere translation and interpretation. Feng claims, "although Confucius was conservative as regards political change, he was in other respects revolutionary" (1937, p. 314). The primary thrust of this 'revolution' is the establishment of a scholarly class independent of ruling elites (Chan, 1963). The aspiration of a Confucian scholar is to become a *junzi* (gentleman).[5] The use of the term junzi embodies elements of radicality, as the word, literally meaning 'son of a royal', is stripped of

[5] Confucius' philosophical and educational concerns focus on adult men. Removing the misogyny and ageism of the time, it is evident the philosophy is applicable to all people.

its hereditary and elite connotations and opened up to the aspirations of common people (Feng, 1937). The scholarly class originating with Confucius opens the door for social status and public service based on merit instead of birth, no small feat for a society of his (or any) time.

Confucius contends that achieving individual and social harmony requires following the *dao* (way) of the ancient Zhou Dynasty through the proper practice of *li* (ritual) and diligence in *xue* (study) to develop *de* (virtue), culminating in *ren* (benevolence/humanity) which facilitates action in accordance with *yi* (rightness) to become a *junzi* (gentleman). This requires a bit of unpacking. Confucius conceives of dao as the 'way' of ideal human action, which is necessarily relational and ethical (D. Zhang, 1989). Acting in accordance with dao manifests as de (virtue). There are many ideal virtues, but the most important is ren, which can be seen as the virtue both containing and coordinating all others (Ames and Rosemont, 2011). Ren helps a person to discern yi (rightness), which is not fixed by rule but must be understood contextually (Slingerland, 2001). A Junzi, then, is a benevolent person that does the right thing in any given situation. The two key tools in becoming a junzi are study and ritual propriety.

Confucius' attention to xue (study) and li (ritual) can seem rather *uncritical* if taken as literal prescriptions of fixed rules. However, they are better understood as tools of (a type) of liberation than fixed rules guiding thought and action (Slingerland, 2001). This interpretation is not immediately evident, as the *Analects* prescribes precise rituals and specific studies. However, Confucius is clearly concerned with *active thinking,* not passive knowledge acquisition. He refuses to teach anyone who, after being shown "one corner of a square", cannot come back with the "other three corners" through their own reasoning (*Analects*, 7:8). Furthermore, while Confucius is exacting in the conduct of rituals, there are also examples of critical alterations (e.g., *Analects* 3:15, 9:3). Ultimately, there is no intention for study of tradition to comprise the totality of all knowledge, nor for rituals to prescribe 'correct' action for *every* person in *every* situation (Ivanhoe, 2000). Instead, study and ritual are tools for cultivating the virtues that sustain an *adaptive moral intelligence*. Slingerland notes:

> *… once a practice has been mastered, in the sense that the requisite virtues have been fully developed, this mastery brings with it a certain independence from the rules that constitute the practice: the master is able to reflect upon the rules and may even choose to transgress or revise them… Practice mastery thus brings with it a type of transcendence: freedom to evaluate, criticize and seek to reform practice tradition itself (2001, p. 102).*

The practices under discussion include skilled activities like music, archery, and charioteering, along with the *moral* practices necessary to navigate the social world. Thus, the 'rules' of the Confucian tradition are not provided by fixed knowledge or rituals, but by self-cultivation of an adaptive moral intelligence, guided by ren, capable of changing learning and ritual.

This is a debatable interpretation. Some agree with the intentions but argue such an approach is psychologically infeasible (Slote, 2016). Others interpret Confucius as aiming to identify universal principles to guide ethical duty with a more deontological tilt (Roetz, 1993). Despite

these interpretive debates, I argue that the Confucian focus on reflexive and adaptive moral intelligence is substantiated by the evolution of Confucianism after Confucius, particularly through the work of Mencius (372-289 BCE), who claims "a great man will not observe a rite that is contrary to the spirit of the rites, nor will he perform a duty that goes against the spirit of dutifulness" (*Mencius*, 4B:6). Understanding this 'spirit' requires critical reflection on the practices intended to cultivate virtues, and the virtues themselves, which must guide adjustment of those practices. As others have argued, this is a necessarily *critical* process of reflexive self-cultivation (Sigurosson, 2017) and moral judgment (Tan, 2017). This reflexive process is essential to understanding, and facilitating, metacritique *within* the Confucian tradition, as it creates the possibility for changes not only in practice, but for reinterpretation of how reasoning proceeds (rules of the game) from fundamental assumptions.

For example, Mencius employs 'creation through transmission' to reframe reasoning regarding obedience to social hierarchy. Some degree of allowance for disagreement and critique within hierarchy is necessary, as the idealised Zhou Dynasty from which Confucius draws his inspiration usurped power from a reigning emperor. This is a topic Confucius skirts around, but Mencius addresses at far more length, with powerful implications. In speaking with a local king Mencius asks, "If the Marshal of the Guards was unable to keep his guards in order, then what should be done about it?" The King naturally replies that he should be removed from office. Mencius then asks, "If the whole realm within the four borders was ill-governed, then what should be done about it?" At this, the king "turned to his attendants and changed the subject" (*Mencius*, 1A:7). In the next passage, perhaps getting a bit worried, the King asks, "Is regicide permissible?" Mencius replies, "He who mutilates benevolence is a mutilator; he who cripples rightness is a crippler; and a man who is both a mutilator and a crippler is an 'outcast'. I have indeed heard of the punishment of the 'outcast [of the slain king Tchou]', but I have not heard of any regicide" (*Mencius*, A:8). Mencius is making the point that a ruler failing to rule with ren is not a legitimate ruler, thus their removal from power is in accordance with yi and does not amount to a disruption of the sociopolitical order. This bit of 'creation through transmission' demonstrates a critical change in the criteriological framework guiding reasoning (rules of the game) with meaningful implications for thought and action.

Mencius' extends this critical development further while discussing the legitimacy of rulers and succession by arguing that while emperors must receive the 'mandate of heaven' (a traditional source of approval beyond human control), the disapproval of the people constitutes a sign that no such mandate has been given (*Mencius*, 5A:5). In a subtle yet highly critical move, Mencius shifts the very foundations for political legitimacy. The plight of a ruler is not merely a matter of birth or heavenly fate, but of human action (Chan, 1963). The same sentiment is expressed more explicitly when Mencius says, "the people are of supreme importance; the altars to the gods of earth and grain come next; last comes the ruler" (*Mencius*, 7B:14). These ideas diverge from the *Analects,* providing an example of 'creation through transmission' leading to criticality *within* the Confucian tradition. Fundamental assumptions regarding the necessity of an emperor and a hierarchical social order remain intact, but the reasoning drawn from these assumptions is transformed with meaningful implications for thought and action. The 'game' remains the same, but some of the 'rules' have been changed.

The subtle nature of this approach aims, and typically succeeds, at maintaining stability *while still facilitating criticality*. This is an example of metacritique from *within* a critical framework without recourse to anything beyond that framework, much less beyond *all* frameworks.

An example of more confrontational and explicit argumentation *within* the Confucian tradition is available through consideration of the most famous and perhaps more lasting of Mencius' critical innovations, his conception of *renxing* (human nature) derived from the emotional experiences of familial relations and extension of empathy to provide a moral psychology capable of orienting and animating the pursuit of ren. Put more simply, Mencius solidifies the Confucian assumption, still dominant today, that human nature is good, or at least contains the 'sprouts' of potentiality for goodness (Feng, 1937). Instead of elaborating Mencius' argument, made through a combination of thought experiment, anecdote, and analogy, it is more relevant to the purpose of this chapter, aimed at shedding light on manifestations of criticality, to look at one of Mencius' primary rivals, Xunzi (c. 310-235 BCE) who sharply critiques Mencius' view on human nature.

Chan claims Xunzi is "the most critical of ancient Chinese philosophers" (1963, p. 124). Graham sees Xunzi's work as marking an important step forward in systematic and critical philosophy, remarking that:

> *[Xunzi's] attack on the Mencian theory of human nature illustrates the progress of argumentation in the Confucian school. Mencius' case has to be re-assembled from scattered dialogues and discourses; [Xunzi] develops his in a consecutive essay… with Mencius as the named target, and a terminology clarified… by scrupulous definitions (2003, p. 244).*

Xunzi's critique of Mencius' view of human nature is pointed. Book 23 of the *Xunzi* is titled "Human Nature is Bad" and sets out to make a reasoned argument for why this must be the case (*Xunzi*). One such argument is that if human nature were indeed good, and each individual capable of looking inward to cultivate ren, "then what use would there be for sage kings? What use for ritual and yi?" (*Xunzi*, 23:160). Ritual is necessary only because human nature must be shaped through conscious rational effort. In contrast to Mencius, Xunzi uses metaphors of craftmanship regarding the need to mould (or 'mutilate' as Mencius would say) human nature as a craftsman bends wood or tempers metal. Xunzi values rationality over sentimentality and sees the need for mind and will to check the dangers of emotion and desire (Feng, 1937). This demonstrates an example of confrontational argumentative criticality *within* the Confucian tradition.

Thus far, the focus has been on criticality *within* the Confucian tradition of the classical era. Moving beyond this era provides examples of diverse, seemingly relative and incommensurate critical frameworks, engaging to facilitate integration *between* traditions. For example, after a brief but severe stint of repression under the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE), Confucianism is codified and institutionalised during the Han Dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE), with the scholarly class of Confucians becoming an integral aspect of the aristocracy and government (Feng,

1953). The thrust of Confucianism shifts from a critical philosophy exploring how best to live, towards a scholarly bureaucracy of status, politics, and power (Bol, 2008). This coincides with the arrival of Buddhism from India, beginning in the 4th century CE. There is immense diversity within early Chinese Buddhist thought and the tradition transforms significantly over time, with Chan Buddhism (which becomes Zen Buddhism upon migrating to Japan) eventually becoming the most dominant (Chan, 1963; Feng, 1953). The fundamental Buddhist aims of transcending the illusory nature of the phenomenological world based on the assumed existence of a 'truer' underlying reality challenge prevailing Confucian assumptions about the nature of the world, its relation to the mind, and the appropriate grounding of knowledge and morality (Chan, 1963). This requires Confucianism to face, and attempt to answer, new questions in new ways. Consequently, beginning in the Tang (619-907) and culminating in the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644), a diverse range of thinkers with varying and often incompatible perspectives address the more 'metaphysical' questions raised through contact with Buddhism, marking the origins of what later becomes broadly categorised (despite great internal diversity of ideas) as Neo-Confucianism (Angle and Tiwald, 2017). This is an excellent example of criticality *within* the Confucian tradition through critical *integration* of concepts from another tradition. Importantly, this process is made possible entirely through the resources internal to each tradition, there is no need for an 'objective' or transcendent perspective. Instead, various aims and assumptions are reassessed and reinterpreted based on perspectival shifts made possible through encounters with plurality and diversity.

In this process new concepts are integrated by reinterpreting existing ideas. One such old concept made new is that of *li*, typically translated as 'Pattern'. This term appears very sparsely in the Confucian literature of the ancient period (Neo-Confucian *li* 理 is not to be confused with *li* 禮 as rite/ritual in ancient texts), and rarely warrants detailed commentary (D. Zhang, 1989). However, by the Song and Ming period, this notion of pattern (along with a constellation of other revitalised concepts and terms) is central to Confucian debate (Angle and Tiwald, 2017). Chan says of li, "all things exist because of it and can be understood through it. It is universal truth, universal order, universal law" (1963, p. 519). This conveys the ambitious aims of articulating a theory for understanding the Pattern giving rise to and underlying every aspect of reality. It also indicates a substantial shift from intensive focus on ancient rituals, normative ethics, and political bureaucracy, towards a new set of concerns and concepts conducive to empirical investigation of the natural world and new theories of how the mind relates to reality (Chan, 1963). This shift is the result of critical integration *between* incommensurable but mutually comprehensible traditions.

Thus far, it is evident Confucianism contains the capacity to question and 'reinterpret' fundamental assumptions in ways that change the 'rules' guiding critical thinking, reasoning, and judgment. However, it remains difficult to gain a perspective from *within* the Confucian tradition capable of facilitating criticality *of* that tradition. Consequently, to understand a 'deeper' form of metacritique within Chinese philosophy it is helpful to look beyond Confucianism.

4.4 Beyond Confucianism

This section explores metacritique directed at the fundamental aims and assumptions of the Confucian tradition. This is done by looking at two chronologically disparate, but circumstantially similar periods of history. The first is that of the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE), also known as the time of '100 schools of thought', in which rival philosophies take direct aim at each other in confrontational critical debate. A similar such period occurs when the Qing Dynasty falls in 1911, beginning the Republican Era, during which China finds itself in a life-or-death struggle for modernisation, leading to eclectic and integrative philosophical thinking drawing on all types of criticality. Consequently, these are two exemplary periods for understanding criticality *of* tradition – a deep form of metacritique – within Chinese philosophy.

4.5 Warring States Period (475 – 221 BCE)

The Han historian Sima Qian recognises six philosophical 'schools' as having strong influence through the Warring States Period (Feng, 1937). Along with Confucianism, these include the Yangists, perhaps best understood as anarchist individualistic naturalists advocating the renunciation of society and a return to simple, self-sufficient living (Graham, 2003). Simultaneously, the Logicians explore logical and metaphysical questions similar to those central in the Greek tradition (Chan, 1963). The Legalists integrate aspects of Xunzi's Confucianism, with the argumentation of the Logicians to forge a highly pragmatic (and temporarily influential) political philosophy. The Mohists, espouse a kind of utilitarianism sharply attacking Confucian tradition at the most fundamental level, arguing against filial piety, and for elimination of unnecessary rites and rituals (Johnston, 2013). Mohism is of particular interest because it is equal to, if not dominant over, Confucianism until the Han Dynasty (Chan, 1963). It also offers one of the strongest examples of criticality *of* tradition. However, the starting point for understanding Chinese philosophy *beyond* Confucianism is with Daoism.

'Daoism' is not a school in any formal sense during the Warring States Period. Nonetheless, it exerts a powerful influence on philosophies of the time, and into the present (D. Zhang, 1998). The two most influential thinkers in early Daoist philosophy are Laozi, believed to have lived roughly contemporary to the time of Confucius in the 6th century BCE, and Zhuangzi, likely to have lived in the 4th century BCE (Chan, 1963). Laozi is traditionally credited with writing the *Daodejing.* However, like Confucius' relationship to the *Analects,* it is unlikely he directly authored anything remaining today (Feng, 1937). Instead, the text associated with his thought is compiled by subsequent followers in a variety of versions. The text bearing Zhuangzi's name is also compiled, most likely over centuries, before reaching its current form. However, the first seven 'Inner Chapters' are generally agreed to have been written by one person, presumably Zhuangzi (Graham, 2003).

The first lines of the *Daodejing* state, "*dao* that can be put into words is not really *dao,* and naming that can assign fixed reference to things is not really naming" (p. 77). This oft-cited

passage can be translated and interpreted in several ways. I follow Ames and Hall in taking this to indicate that as a process of constant transformation, dao is neither fixed nor constant, thus no fixed or constant practices (or language) can consistently align with or describe the true Way (2003). Consequently, knowledge and rituals drawn from the past are not the best means for understanding the present. For example, Chapter 38 of the *Daodejing* calls ritual propriety "the thinnest veneer of doing one's best and making good on one's word," while referring to the Confucian claims of knowledge as "tinsel decorating the Way" (*Daodejing*, p. 136). While Confucianism and Daoism share concepts like dao and de, they are conceived of in meaningfully different ways. For example, the dao of Laozi is more naturalistic and cosmological, running contrary to what Tan calls, the 'humanist' Confucian conception of dao as ideal normative behaviour (2017). This can be seen as a form of 'creation through transmission' of shared concepts predating both Confucian and Daoist thought. However, Laozi also critiques Confucian *methods* for attaining dao, shifting focus from ritual and study towards intuition and experience. I argue these divergences constitute criticality *of* tradition.

Daoist criticality is perhaps best exemplified in the *Zhuangzi,* which is a unique text for its time, and remains unique to this day. It is poetic and lyrical, filled with fantastical stories of talking animals, magic, and mystical transformations. Confucius and his disciples appear as frequent characters (indicating Zhuangzi is well read in the classics), often to espouse views contradictory to their own philosophies. The *Zhuangzi* is also filled with uncertainty and contradiction, leading many to speculate an intentional avoidance of precise articulation meant to facilitate interpretation as opposed to providing explication (Kupperman, 1996). Watson suggests, if there is a central theme to the text, it is "freedom" (1968, p. 3). But exactly what kind of freedom is Zhuangzi striving for? It appears to be different from Laozi's more explicit call towards withdrawal from the world (Slingerland, 2014). Furthermore, unlike later Buddhism, Zhuangzi does not see the material world as illusory or something that must (or even ought) be transcended (Chan, 1963). Instead, it is the *human world* of constructed meanings and arbitrary divisions that Zhuangzi aims to free people from (if he aims at anything at all). This is freedom from the prescriptions and fixed perspectives that divide and dim the power of unmediated experience.

Zhuangzi is explicitly critical of Confucians and Mohists, the two most prominent philosophies of his time, stating, "what one calls right the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong the other calls right. But if we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity" (*Zhuangzi*, p. 39). The 'clarity' Zhuangzi advocates comes from unburdening the mind from the preconceptions and habituations imposed by traditions. Only once freed from the preconceptions and constructs (including language) dividing the genuine flow of experience can one develop de and naturally (spontaneously) react, act, and interact with dao. Zhuangzi's intention is to cut beyond simple recognition of differing opinions and point out the 'groundlessness' of *any* fixed opinion or perspective. He is not suggesting changes to the 'rules' of an existing game but suggesting the need for a 'new game' altogether. In a frequently quoted and variously interpreted passage, Zhuangzi proclaims:

> *Everything has its 'that', everything has its 'this'. From the point of view of 'that' you cannot see it, 'that' comes out of 'this' and 'this' depends on 'that' – which is to say that 'this' and 'that' give birth to each other. But where there is birth there must be death; where there is death there must be birth* (*Zhuangzi*, p. 39).

Ziporyn argues this is Zhuangzi's way of recognising the necessarily perspectival nature of *indexical* knowledge. That is, whether something is a 'this' or 'that' depends on the location of the perspective of reference (Ziporyn, 2009). While I am holding something, it is 'this', when I set that thing down and walk away, it becomes 'that'. While there is obvious application of indexical perspectivism regarding perception and interaction with the physical world, Zhuangzi's deeper point is *moral* (Slingerland, 2014). Whatever 'this' a Confucian holds as 'good' can only be so in reference to a 'that' which is 'bad'. This is Zhuangzi's way of recognising that not only are divergent perspectives relative, but any apparent contradiction or opposition is only superficial, because opposites form a necessary and indivisible unity. There can be no 'this' perspective without a 'that' perspective. Furthermore, drawing on observations from the natural world, in which opposites (e.g., night/day, summer/winter, birth/death) do not simply define each other in conceptual stasis, but through processual transformation, any effort to maintain a fixed perspective in an always changing world is to struggle against dao. It is common to interpret the *Zhuangzi* as a collection of various types and degrees of skepticism and/or relativism (Kjellberg and Ivanhoe, 1996). Given that criticality is *necessarily* a form of skepticism (to at least some degree) and the importance of contextualised perspective within many contemporary philosophies and practices, Zhuangzi should be recognised as one of the most critical and curious contributors to Chinese philosophy.

I shift now to the one of the most prominent and influential philosophies of the ancient period, that of Mohism. While Mozi (479-381 BCE) is the founding figure of Mohism, the school of thought develops continuously into the Han period, with substantial shifts from the earlier to later incarnations (Chan, 1963; Graham, 2003). Mohism applies a more logical (and methodological) approach to articulating a systematic philosophy in distinct contradiction to Confucian and Daoist norms (Feng, 1937). This includes explicit critique of fundamental assumptions and aims underlying Confucian philosophy. For example, Chapter 39 of the *Mozi,* entitled 'Against the Confucians' explicitly attacks the idea of "following but not creating" by recognising that someone had to *create* the rituals Confucians so revere, thus showing the very sources of their reverence is for people that 'created but did not follow' (*Mozi*, 2013, p. 191). Here, the Mohist seems to identify a kind of logical infinite regress in the normative foundations of Confucian theory. If current practices are based on the past, what were past practices based upon?

This leads Mohists towards recognition of the need for a universal grounding for yi*,* conceived of as justice (Johnston, 2013). The central concept in this effort is the utilitarian idea of *jian ai,* often translated as 'universal love', though perhaps better understood as 'equal concern for each person' (Graham, 2003). The implications of this cosmopolitan consequentialism are profound. Mohists rail against the most fundamental assumptions of Confucianism, namely the

priority of filial piety as a source for cultivating positive moral psychology and the importance of rites and rituals in cultivating virtues capable of guiding action in accordance with yi (*Mozi*). They see the privileged and special bonds of family as problematically impeding establishment of jian ai, the excess of rituals as unnecessarily wasteful, and the perspectivism of Daoism as unacceptably anarchic and morally relativistic (Chan, 1963). For the Mohist, society requires unity of purpose and values as the foundation for calculating and justly distributing benefit (Johnston, 2013). This is clear evidence of strong criticality *of* tradition. Importantly, Mohist critiques are addressed in the *Mencius* (e.g. 3B:9) and, at greater length throughout the *Xunzi* (e.g. Books 6 & 10), showing active and explicit critical debate *within* and *between* these traditions.

4.6 Republican Era to the present

We jump forward now to the waning years of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1911). As part of an effort to overcome the challenges of internal division and external threats, the education system is overhauled, including elimination of the imperial civil service exams in 1905, marking the end of a practice over 1,000 years old (Bol, 2008). Six years later, the Qing dynasty falls, and the Republic of China is formed, marking the end of dynastic rule. Chan claims, "not since the third century B.C. have there been 'one hundred schools' of thought contending in China as in the twentieth century. The combination of Western thought and revolt against traditional heritage caused many intellectual currents to run in all directions" (1963, p. 743). The Republican Era brings about radically divergent perspectives, but all are grounded in, and aim to resolve, the same problem: how to modernise China (Cua, 2003). This is a time rife with metacritique at all depths. In keeping with the current project, I only highlight a few prominent thinkers or ideas, which exemplify the various ways in which criticality manifests during this period in Chinese philosophical history.

At this juncture, thinking critically about fundamental philosophical aims and assumptions becomes explicit. Some advocate total westernisation, others aim to integrate Chinese and Western ideas, while some argue for rectification and globalisation of Chinese traditions (Fung, 2010). Amidst these debates, Liang Qichao uses the term *lixiang* to represent "… the things that everybody imagines and are commonly taken as the most reasonable principles… inherited social customs of thousands of years" (in Xiao, 2002, p. 19). He goes on to argue for transforming, and perhaps discarding, aspects of lixiang as essential to the survival of Chinese civilisation. This demonstrates the degree to which criticality of the Republican Era is marked by intentional effort to restore, reshape, or sometimes discard the fundamental aims and assumptions of Chinese philosophy. In this effort, many philosophers see the way forward as requiring critical *integration* of Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. For example, Zhang Dongsun draws heavily on Kant to articulate a theory of culturally contextual epistemological pluralism intended to reconcile the seemingly incommensurable differences between Chinese and Western traditions (X. Jiang, 2002). Hu Shih, after studying at Columbia University with Dewey, is central to The New Culture Movement (Xinhe, 2002). It is difficult to find more explicit criticality *of* tradition than a movement founded on the aim of forging a

'new culture'. Hu draws on Nietzsche's notion of 'transvaluation of all values' to espouse the need for a 'critical attitude' towards institutions and traditions (Hu, 2013). He aims to put Confucian and non-Confucian philosophies on equal footing to be analysed through the lens of contemporary thought, claiming, "the future of Chinese philosophy would seem to depend much on the revival of those great philosophical schools that once flourished side by side with the school of Confucius in Ancient China" (Hu in Xinhe, 2002, p. 92). In this process he warns against imported 'isms' as necessarily ideological and dogmatic, thus not contributing to critical philosophy or meeting the needs of the contemporary Chinese context (Xinhe, 2002).

Ultimately, however, it is an -ism, that of Marxism-Leninism, that prevails in reuniting the Middle Kingdom into the People's Republic of China in 1949. The critically integrated philosophies guiding the Communist revolution eventually give way to *uncritical* dogmatism in the form of Maoism, which reaches its heights during the Cultural Revolution and essentially paralyzes philosophical development within Mainland China for several decades (Chan, 1963). Despite temporary devolution into *uncritical* dogmatism, there may be no better example of criticality than the creative integration of a foreign philosophical theory as the foundation for a new nation to preserve a culture facing the very real prospect of destruction. The deft manoeuvring of Deng Xiaoping navigating the transition from Maoism to the 'opening' of China, is perhaps one of the best modern examples of highly practical criticality *within* and *between* multiple traditions simultaneously (Vogel, 2011). Finally, it is important to recognise that Chinese philosophy is a dynamic and continually developing field, with an invariably comparative and/or integrative aspect (Cheng, 2002). For example, Mou Zongsan integrates Kant and Heidegger with Buddhist and Daoist philosophy to 'reconstruct' Confucianism, while also making meaningful contributions to Western theory (Lee, 2021). Li Zehou integrates Daoist and Buddhist thought, along with careful analysis of Kant and eclectic integration of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Foucault into a unique post-Marxist (better interpreted as neo-Marxist) philosophy (Zijiang Ding, 2002). This might better be considered 'world' philosophy (Mou, 2009). The Western imperialist legacy creates an imbalance of power that *requires* China to engage with Western philosophy in a way the West has not been forced to reciprocate. Many Western scholars have taken great interest in Chinese philosophy, but not with a sense of cultural survival on the line, as was the case in 19th and early 20th century China. This is an imbalance contemporary philosophers should be working to eliminate (Rošker, 2020). Thankfully, the increasing internationalisation of education provides just such an opportunity.

4.7 Implications for critical thinking

First, I want to address the important secondary aim of this chapter, which cautions researchers, practitioners, and students against making inferences about culture or students based on reductive essentialisations of 'Confucianism', which may fail to consider the complexity of actual Confucian *philosophy*. Importantly, this approach does not preclude the fact that some aspects of Confucian philosophy, particularly those ossified into sociocultural traditions, may discourage development of critical capacities and the practice of criticality. My point is that this does not indict the *entirety* of Confucian philosophy as *necessarily* incompatible with

critical thinking, nor does it obviate the *potential* of that philosophy for deeply meaningful criticality. Furthermore, Confucianism is not the only resource within Chinese philosophy with relevance to critical thinking. Consequently, the research and practice of critical thinking may benefit from more nuanced consideration of Chinese (and other) philosophical traditions.

Second, I want to draw attention to how this analysis sheds light on the possibility of metacritique between diverse critical frameworks without need for recourse to any objective perspective or universal values. It could be argued that, far from refuting universalising ideals of critical thinking, I have in fact helped to show the 'universal force of reasons' to which Siegel (2017) appeals. However, I see such a claim as having no more significance than showing the 'universal force' of language. Recognising that both reasoning and language are common to most (perhaps all) human populations is neither surprising nor profound. This commonality is likely better understood through the lens of evolutionary biology as opposed to anything philosophically transcendent or metaphysical (Rorty, 2008). Nonetheless, the important point, particularly for education, is not *that* reasoning and language occur in diverse contexts, but how they work *within and between diverse contexts*. Knowing that a series of utterances is part of a foreign language is very different from understanding that language. Understanding a new language leans on certain features of all known languages (some form of lexis and grammar) but is primarily dependent on engagement with the substantive similarities and differences between the familiar and foreign. I do not want to go too far down the road of conflating critical thinking and language. The two are not coextensive or perfectly analogous. Indeed, the next chapter explores how the ineffable can meaningfully contribute to critical thinking. The fundamental point for this chapter is that the 'force of reasons' alone is not sufficient to understand, much less expansively animate, critical thinking. Furthermore, no predetermined substantive values – or at least not those of modern Western philosophy – are necessary for critical thinking to take place at an expansive scope. Instead, what this analysis reveals is the importance of the contextually contingent critical frameworks that create the possibility for, and within which, reasons operate. The power of critical thinking is not just in its drawing on reasons, but in its understanding of how the world shapes reasoning and, most importantly, the potential to change the way people reason.

This broad overview cannot do justice to the depth of specific concepts, theories, and debates within Chinese philosophy. However, it shows metacritique operating at different depths, as indicated by criticality *within* traditions*, of* traditions*,* and *between* traditions. The depth of critical thinking is evident through examples of changes to fundamental aims and assumptions structuring thinking itself. However, this analysis also shows great breadth of critical scope. This breadth is evidenced by the fact that the locus of engagement between Chinese philosophical traditions is not primarily epistemological. As Graham notes, the primary concern of the Chinese tradition is not to find out what is true, but to determine how best to live (Graham, 2003). The focus is less on understanding the nature of existence and more on thinking about how to live within existence (Cua, 2003). Ultimate truth is of a lower priority (sometimes seen as an impossibility) than normative consensus (Feng, 1962). Because of this, the primary dimension of consideration is not epistemological, but ethical. There is no need for theoretical intermediaries between knowledge and ethics, as both are understood as necessarily

enacted ways of being (Frisina, 2002). In much Confucian theory, knowledge without action is of little interest, and all action necessarily has an ethical dimension, which is unavoidably relational and inextricably linked with emotion. Terms like epistemology do not fit perfectly into Chinese philosophy (Zheng, 2017). In fact, the word 'philosophy' had no equivalent in Chinese until translated from the West in the nineteenth century (Cua, 2003). This creates substantial problems when trying to relate Chinese theory to Western philosophical categories. For example, there are ongoing debates regarding whether Confucianism is deontological, virtue-based, or role-based (Angle, 2021). The important point here is that a lack of epistemological focus does not entail a lack of 'reasoning'. Instead, it indicates that the aims and assumptions guiding reasoning within and across Chinese philosophical traditions draw more explicitly on resources from other critical dimensions, like the ontological, ethical, emotional, political, and mystical. Along these lines, the next chapter further explores how the Chinese philosophical concept of *wu-wei* may help expand an understanding of critical thinking.

Before proceeding, however, I want to point out one further way this exploration of criticality in Chinese philosophical traditions demonstrates the breadth of critical thinking. That is through greater attention to the sociocultural domain. First, I must note (against some common generalisations) that there is no lack of appreciation for the individual in Chinese philosophy. Quite the contrary, *self-cultivation* is often a central focus, particularly of Confucian theory and practice (Sigurosson, 2017). However, the individual is recognised as being necessarily and inextricably integrated into social relations (Ames and Rosemont, 2011). What an individual *is* depends on their relations to the world and others. For example, in a family each person has a relational role necessarily defined by others. There can be no mother without a daughter, nor a daughter without a mother. A mother and a daughter cannot be seen as the same in relation to one and other without stripping both of what they are. The relationships giving meaning to the social world manifest in *roles* (ibid). Having a daughter makes one a mother at the most basic level but *being* a mother is a role that require ongoing action, and being a *good* mother is a role that requires ongoing action guided by ren towards yi. Consequently, just as ritual and learning help to train moral virtues towards acquisition of adaptive moral intelligence, roles help to train moral virtues towards application of that adaptive moral intelligence in a relational world.

Because of this inevitable relationality, *self-cultivation* entails care and concern for others. In making this point, Feng cites a maxim, "desiring to maintain oneself, one sustains others; desiring to develop oneself, one develops others" (1937, p. 71). Even Xunzi, despite his rather grim view of human nature, draws on *self-cultivation* as the focal point of Confucian practice (e.g., Chapter 2 *Xunzi*, 2014). Similarly, Neo-Confucian conceptions of li, while varying in many ways, agree on the necessity of *introspective* reflection as a means of understanding the underlying principles of universal Pattern (Sor-hoon, 2009). The individual is essential to but also inseparable from the totality of social relations, which manifests at a larger scale in social and political organisation. Individuality is not subjugated to 'collectivism' but understood as always contextually situated. Consequently, what is considered 'good' or 'beneficial' must be guided by an understanding of contextual contingency. For example, the Confucian ideal is to

extend relational understanding through the social and political spheres. Mencius 4A:5 says, "the Empire has its basis in the state, the state in the family, and the family in one's own self" (*Mencius*, 2004, p. 79). The individual is essential to, but also inseparable from the totality of relations. Daoism is also focused on relationality (Littlejohn, 2009). Even if (in extreme forms) forsaking the normative relations of Confucian tradition, there is attention to the world beyond the self, a cultivation of receptivity to interact with dao in an efficacious manner (Slingerland, 2003). This reaches towards the *existential* domain and *mystical* dimensions of critical thinking, which are explored further in the next chapter. I must, however, note that emphasis on the priority of ethics and recognition that being is inextricably relational are not novel to Chinese philosophy, nor absent from Western traditions. For example, parallels (though not perfect) can be drawn between Confucian and Aristotelian ethics, or perhaps even better to MacIntyre's Thomist reinterpretation of Aristotelian ethics (Slingerland, 2001; 2011). The same is true for Daoist and Heideggerian approaches to understanding the contextual and relational nature of being (May, 1996; Parkes, 1990).

My point is not to advocate a particular notion of the self as essential to critical thinking. Instead, I want to point out the value and opportunity to explore *different* approaches to understanding how thinking works within and across the individual, sociocultural, and existential domains. My aim is to show how Chinese philosophy, viewed as a 'living' resource can help inform and expand an understanding of critical thinking. This thesis is not a comparative endeavour. I only want to draw attention to how exploration of diverse traditions can expand critical thinking beyond the epistemological dimension and individual domain. If understandings of critical thinking draw too heavily on the individualised rationalism of Enlightenment philosophy, then those approaches stand to problematically narrow the understanding and practice of critical thinking. Indeed, I argue, a truly expansive understanding of critical thinking should include consideration of non-critical modes of being. Consequently, in the next chapter I draw on what I call the 'mystical dimension' of critical thinking to show how criticality can be expanded into *critical being*.

5 The mystical dimension of critical thinking: Moving towards critical being

The previous chapter explored manifestations of metacritique within and between Chinese philosophical traditions to exemplify critical thinking in contexts different from those generally drawn on to inform dominant understandings of critical thinking. This foray into Chinese philosophy refutes any notion that critical thinking is *necessarily* or *only* a Western construct. It also shows no need for an objective perspective, transcendent metacriteria, or universal values to meaningfully engage with criticality across diverse contexts. Instead, what is needed is an understanding *of those contexts.* This chapter keeps one foot in Chinese philosophy while also coming back to Western traditions to understand how expansion into the existential domain and mystical dimension can move critical thinking towards critical being and thus help achieve the aims of this thesis, which are to forge an understanding of critical being applicable at an expansive scope in diverse contexts without reliance on substantive universal assumptions.

This chapter sketches out the 'mystical dimension' of critical thinking as a way of organizing and analysing a variety of non-critical experiences typically excluded from consideration in the conceptualisation and practice of critical thinking. The term 'mystical' carries connotations and implications that may confuse or derail understanding of my intended use. There is nothing necessarily theistic, much less religious, about the mystical as employed here. Instead, it is a term intended to encompass a wide range of non-critical experiences and modes of being that share some general but important characteristics. These characteristics are outlined in the next section. I deem this dimension necessary because, while these characteristics are quite general, they also help draw attention to features of non-critical experiences that can meaningfully articulate with critical thinking. There are many types of experience and modes of being that could fit within the mystical dimension. My intention is not to identify all of them, but only to establish the mystical dimension of critical thinking as a viable and valuable tool for conceptual analysis that others can draw on and add to.

I do this by focusing on two examples from within the mystical dimension of critical thinking. These are wonder and the Chinese concept of wu-wei, a form of efficacious non-critical action. I argue that wonder can not only motivate and guides critical thinking but constitutes an integral part of criticality itself. I then briefly look at curiosity, wonder, critical thinking, and contemplation as complementary aspects of critical being. The second example I draw on is that of wu-wei, which provides a two-way relationship between critical thinking and non-critical modes of being. The inevitability of 'breakdown' experiences within wu-wei offers opportunities to critically reflect on the aims and assumptions of practices, while efficacious interaction with the world during wu-wei experiences creates chances for spontaneous receptivity to new possibilities in both thought and action. Finally, I draw attention to the fact that both wonder and wu-wei incorporate forms of *unlearning*, which facilitate discovery of new (perhaps previously unimaginable) perspectives to inform and potentially transform

critical thinking. This is essential to sustaining the metacritique necessary for critical thinking to avoid uncritical dogmatism.

In this chapter, I develop the idea of critical being more explicitly by moving critical thinking beyond mere *thinking* through greater consideration of *being.* Following Barnett, I argue that a notion of critical being is needed to meet the broader needs of education and society (2015). I stick to the spirit of his work, aiming to facilitate more expansive and active forms of criticality in education and society, but approach the idea with more emphasis on the ontological and (I contend) mystical nature of the *being* component. This is necessary (as Barnett also argues) because the criticality needed to meet educational and social aims is not solely an epistemological enterprise. As Burbules and Berk point out, "… criticality is a way of *being* as well as a way of thinking, a relation to others as well as an intellectual capacity" (1999, p. 21). Consequently, a fuller understanding of critical thinking requires consideration of more than just thinking.

I see critical being as an *expansion* of critical thinking, not an entirely separate concept, because thinking and being are mutually interdependent (see Chapter 1, Section 1.7). As Lewin notes, drawing on Heidegger, "Thinking is responsive, entailing an attention to being, which is why the question of thinking directly follows the question of being" (2015, p. 226). Importantly, *being human* (in the ontological sense) is also dependent on thinking. Reflection on the nature of existence or, to use a Heideggerian phrase, 'taking a stand on one's being' (1962) requires thinking. Being shapes thinking and thinking shapes (and can re-shape) being. Thus, a more expansive understanding of critical thinking's potential requires better consideration of being. Consequently, the understanding of critical being I sketch out here is not separate from, but an expansion of, critical thinking. Even if this expansion is seen as constituting something 'new', it is not *separate* from critical thinking. Indeed, it must still *include* critical thinking. Critical being is not possible without critical thinking and, I argue here, critical thinking is not *desirable* without greater consideration of being. Furthermore, it is the latter, more expansive form of criticality that education and society require.

Expanding critical thinking into critical being requires not only clarification of what is meant by criticality, but also greater attention to *being* (Barnett, 2007). This is important because much of being human does not involve conscious thinking, much less *critical* thinking. People are often irrational, and rationality is frequently applied more as a process of rationalisation than critical evaluation or calculation. This is something recognized in philosophy and psychology, and increasingly confirmed by cognitive science (Haidt, 2001; Mercier and Sperber, 2017; Pinker, 2021). Indeed, certain curbs on critical thinking seem both inevitable and desirable. They are inevitable because we cannot think critically about anything without first having a background against which to give criticality meaning, structure, and substance (McPeck, 2016). They are desirable because we do not want to live in constant critical deliberation of every aim and assumption guiding our thinking. Indeed, from an evolutionary perspective, we would not survive if stuck in a quagmire of constant critical deliberation. Consequently, I am not arguing that critical being requires constant criticality. It does, however, require attention towards how critical and non-critical aspects of thinking and being articulate.

In this chapter, I argue that critical being (as opposed to just being critical) must incorporate receptivity to *non-critical* experiences to realize its potentially expansive scope and transformative power. There are many possible approaches, across multiple disciplines, that could contribute to this project. Here, I focus on two types of experience, those of wonder and wu-wei, as examples to show the potential for integrating critical thinking into a broader conception of critical being.

This approach is necessary because the larger experience of being is not always, or only, a process of careful calculation and reasoning within the existing 'rules' of rationality (Dreyfus, 2014b; Heidegger, 1962). Intuition, insight, altered states, and all sorts of other *non-critical* experiences essential to being provide important fodder for criticality (James, 2020). Drawing on James, I bring a broad range of non-critical experiences, which share some important general features, together in what I call the mystical dimension of critical thinking. As noted above, this is a difficult dimension to define. However, I contend it is essential for a comprehensive understanding of critical thinking – and certainly one of critical being – to have a place for explicit consideration of non-critical experiences and modes of being. This is because there is a two-way relationship between critical thinking and non-critical modes of being, with each capable of informing and influencing the other. Expansive critical thinking, manifesting as *critical being,* requires attention to this relationship. This two-way relationship is essential to understanding why critical thinking (and the aims of higher education) must take what Barnett calls an "ontological turn" towards greater consideration of being (Barnett, 2007, p. 9). It is uncontentious to argue for thinking critically *about* non-critical experiences. However, I argue that it is also possible for non-critical experiences to transform (or at least inform) critical thinking. This is the more contentious (but vitally important) point I aim to make through consideration of wonder and wu-wei.

One may protest that non-critical states are exactly what critical thinking is *not.* So, why is their consideration important for understanding critical thinking? Because these are the states people live and act in with great frequency. Consequently, if we want not just to be beings capable of criticality, but aspire to realize *critical being,* we must focus more on the connections between critical thinking and the rest of being. Of course, 'non-critical experiences' is an exceedingly broad categorisation. This is why I draw on the (only slightly) more refined notion of mystical experiences as a category of non-critical experiences with some shared features that incline towards beneficial articulation with criticality. These features are outlined in the next section.

5.1 Defining the mystical

I am drawing on a very general and intentionally broad idea of 'mystical'. There is nothing necessarily theistic about the mystical dimension as I employ it here, and certainly nothing religiously dogmatic, as that would be overtly uncritical. My focus is on mystical experiences, not mystical traditions, or practices. Such experiences may be brought about through concentrated effort (e.g., meditation, breathing practices, exercise, music), ingestion of psychoactive substances, or occur unexpectedly without any intention or effort (Hollenback,

2000). However, in this thesis I am focused on the effects of mystical experiences, not the causes. The academic study of mysticism and mystical experiences remain active fields approached via multiple disciplines, which delineate between various types of experiences with more nuance than is applied here. The generality of the mystical dimension I sketch out simply aims to bring more of being into the conceptualisation and practice of critical thinking, while also drawing attention to some common features of certain states of non-critical being that constructively articulate with critical thinking to help constitute critical being.

To provide some shape to the mystical dimension and the types of experiences it includes, I draw on the basic but time-tested work of James (2020). He notes that mystical experiences have four main features; they are ineffable, noetic, transitory, and passive (ibid). Ineffability means mystical experiences cannot be conveyed to others through language. This, of course, does not prevent people from trying to convey the nature of such experiences (Cardena and Pekala, 2014; Jones, 2016; Katz, 1978). A degree of ineffability may account for the abundance of metaphor, paradox, and more literary/poetic approaches in attempting to communicate mystical experiences (ibid). The noetic quality of mystical experiences indicates their status as something more than imaginings or feelings. James notes, "although similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect" (2020, p. 143). Finally, mystical experiences are also transitory and passive. They are passive by virtue of lacking conscious intentionality during the experience and typically transpiring as instances of receptivity, sometimes including a feeling of being acted upon or through (James, 2020). Of course, intentionality may impose itself before and after mystical experiences while trying to facilitate them or understand their nature and meaning (Hollenback, 2000; Wulff, 2014), including through critical thinking. Finally, mystical experiences provide a temporary contrast from 'normal' perception and consciousness – they are altered states of consciousness (Cardena and Pekala, 2014).

A key point for this thesis is that mystical experiences, like those of wonder and wu-wei, are exactly that – experiences. This imbues them, through their noetic nature, with the potential to provide something like knowledge by acquaintance as opposed to knowledge by description (Cardena and Pekala, 2014). However, the potential for mystical experience to operate as grounds for epistemological justification (James held they could not) are highly contested. I do not suggest all mystical experiences have veridical value. They cannot necessarily operate as justification for new knowledge claims. This means, 'I saw it in a vision' is not sound reasoning in a critical dialogue. However, some mystical experiences reveal things later confirmed to be true or help inspire and steer inquiry in directions that reveal truth and/or meaning through other modes of inquiry. Furthermore, the power of mystical experiences to justify belief and action regardless of veracity is well documented, particularly in the context of theistic faith, though such experiences may also prove valuable when inquiry itself requires a kind of 'faith' independent of any theism (James, 2003). Regardless of veridical value, it is important to note that mystical experiences have strong and lasting impacts on those who experience them (Wulff, 2014). Even if a mystical experience cannot constitute knowledge, it can inspire and direct the pursuit of knowledge, often in unforeseen and novel directions made possible through

shifts in perspective. Similarly, mystical experiences can reveal and reorient relations of care and meaning regarding the self, others, and the world. This is an important aspect of animating expansive critical thinking, which is discussed further in the next chapter. Furthermore, mystical experiences have a strong emotive – and thus potentially motivational – force and are well-equipped to open and inspire forms of connection beyond the self (Marshall, 2005). Consequently, mystical experiences do not need to provide truth or knowledge to serve critical thinking, as they can contribute in other ways. In this chapter I outline the power of wonder and the experience of wu-wei as two examples of mystical experiences capable of contributing to critical thinking.

My intention in sketching out this mystical dimension of critical thinking is not to get drawn into discussion of what is or is not 'mystical'. Instead, I want to draw attention to the general features outlined above as aspects of many (but not all) non-critical experiences that help to identify and understand those kinds of experiences. For example, mindlessly watching television can be a non-critical state that is passive and transitory. It is not, however, generally ineffable (beyond complete comprehension and incommunicable) and experientially noetic in the 'mystical' sense. It is possible, of course, for television and film to inspire wonder and contemplation, to move one towards a mystical experience of the type set out here. The pertinent point for justifying the mystical dimension of critical thinking is that not all non-critical experiences share the same characteristics or the same potential to constructively contribute to critical thinking. My aim in outlining the rough and general mystical dimension is to provide a category for recognising and organising non-critical experiences that, as I will show through the examples of wonder and wu-wei, stand to contribute towards critical being. The common features bounding the mystical dimension provide points of reference, reflection, and critical direction.

5.2 Wonder

What is wonder? Gazing into the incomprehensible vastness of the night sky, the power of a favourite song, encountering a perplexing practice in a foreign land, the rapt awe of a child seeing a hammerhead shark in the city aquarium, the jumbled intricacies of that city and the marvellous engineering of the aquarium, the very fact that something as odd as a hammerhead shark exists, the inexplicable fact that *anything* exists, the capacity for contemplation of existence itself. These are all potential sources of wonder drawn from nature, art, and daily life. Wonder can be found anywhere and takes many forms (Schinkel, 2020). Consequently, wonder is difficult to define. No single description can capture the variety and nuances of the experience. It is not a single 'thing' but instead manifests in a multitude of ways (Vasalou, 2012). For example, Hepburn draws attention to inquisitive wonder, inspired by a desire to understand *how* or *why* something is the way it is, and existential wonder at the very fact *that* something is, along with meta-wonder at one's own capacity to wonder (1984). Schinkel follows similar contours in distinguishing inquisitive and contemplative 'deep' wonder, with the prior being more akin to curiosity (discussed more below) and the latter better equipped to reveal previously unknown potentialities (2019). Wonder is typically understood as directed

not just towards the unknown, but towards things deemed potentially *unknowable* (Rubenstein, 2008). We wonder at what we cannot comprehend. However, wonder does not require complete novelty or the impossibility of future understanding. It is possible, and vitally important, to find wonder in the familiar – in what is already known (Hepburn, 1984). Furthermore, if wonder precluded the possibility of future understanding, it would be of little value as the starting point and driving force of inquiry.

Wonder can be problematic. For example, resignation to wonder at unexplained phenomenon may inhibit pursuit of explanation, leading to a 'foolish wonder' of ignorance (Hepburn, 1984). Dwelling in deep wonder may lead a person to overlook important practical matters. For example, Arendt suggests Heidegger's fixation on a kind of wonder too far removed from the political realities of lived experience led to the 'idiocy' (he was a member of the Nazi party) of his ethical and political decisions (Rubenstein, 2008). Based on such concerns, wonder may be seen as something we should move *past* on the way to knowledge. In such a view, wonder would merely be a means to the ends of relieving the anxiety of the unknown (Hepburn, 1984). However, such a reductionist view does not align with experience, which shows that we can continue to find wonder in things 'already known' (ibid). For example, knowing what causes the sky to change colour as the sun sets does not eliminate the possibility of finding wonder in a sunset. This view also obscures the emotive power of wonder as a valuable source for emotional and moral motivation *and education* (MacAllister, 2018). Furthermore, closing one 'gap' in knowledge has (at least thus far in human history) tended only to reveal new gaps. Consequently, despite its risks, wonder seems to retain value for life, inquiry, and education.

The role of wonder in philosophy and society has been the subject of much scrutiny. Fuller begins his exploration of wonder with a quote from Socrates, "Wonder is the feeling of the philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder" (Socrates in Fuller, 2006, p. 32). Lloyd and Rubenstein both provide historical genealogies of wonder within Western philosophy, showing how its conceptualisation and role have changed over time (Lloyd, 2018; Rubenstein, 2008). The very possibility of such accounts supports the claim that wonder is essential to philosophy. Importantly, it is not just epistemology that finds value in wonder. Adorno and Horkheimer cite hyper-rationality, exercised as instrumental reason striving for effective manipulation of the natural world and effective sociopolitical control, without regard for anything other than efficiency, as key causes of the calamities of the twentieth century (1992). Heidegger argues that wicking wonder and mystery from the world transforms nature, including people, into a 'standing reserve of resources' ready for exploitation (1954). There are dangers to a world deprived of wonder.

Consequently, it is no surprise to find ample consideration of wonder in education. In his exploration of science education Hadzigeorgiou claims wonder drives inquiry in all areas (2014). Furthermore, many cognitive developmental psychologists see wonder as enriching the pursuit of knowledge and increasingly recognize curiosity, wonder, and creativity as "complimentary processes in cognitive development" (Bazhydai and Westermann, 2020, p. 162). Pedersen notes the centrality of wonder to human flourishing and argues it must thus be essential to education (2020). Deikman draws on a quote from Einstein to drive home the

relationship between wonder, science, and the mystical "The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead" (Einstein in Deikman, 2000, p. 12). Simply put, philosophy, science, society, and education cannot be healthily sustained without the awe, inspiration, and humility supplied by a sense of wonder.

While wonder is difficult to define in any static or singular way, it tends to include the general features of mystical experiences, and thus fit within the mystical dimension of critical thinking. These features are helpful both in understanding the nature of the experience, and how it may articulate with other modes of being and thinking. Most forms of wonder, particularly those deep and contemplative in nature, are ineffable, transitory, and passive (Hepburn, 1984). Addressing the ineffability of a mystical type of wonder, Wittgenstein notes, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*... they are what is mystical" (Wittgenstein, 2005, p. 89 emphasis in original). This sentiment recognizes that human experience can exceed the capacity for articulation and such experiences may still play important roles in our being. Wonder, like mystical experience, is also transitory and passive. This is not to say a person cannot develop a stable and consistent disposition towards wonder or other mystical experiences. However, the nature of wonder, especially in intense forms, is not conducive to permanence. Being held rapt in awe at every facet of existence may inhibit one from getting much done, and make the doing of some things (e.g., driving a car, performing surgery) rather dangerous. As for passivity, even when wonder is actively sought out, it is not something projected onto the world, but a response to something in the world (Hepburn, 1984). Consequently, it seems relatively uncontroversial to suggest wonder shares with other mystical experiences in being ineffable, temporary, and passive.

More challenging is to argue that wonder, often oriented towards the unknown and potentially unknowable, is a noetic experience. A common feature, particularly of deep wonder, is confrontation with what is *not* known, or recognition that what was *thought* to be known, is different than previously assumed (Schinkel, 2017). As Rubenstein says, "Genuine wonder makes the known itself unknown" (2012, p. 148). There are few experiences more profound, or vital to critical thinking, than realizing something *known* true may not be so. This begins to reveal the value of wonder to critical thinking, which requires exactly such processes of 'defamiliarization'. How, though, can dissolving existing knowledge constitute a form of *knowing*? Here, I argue that *unknowing* is noetic in nature. To do this, I follow Smith in pointing out an important distinction between sheer ignorance and the *knowledge that we do not know*, with the latter providing a positive impetus for receptivity and inquiry (2016). The very possibility of inquiry rests on a belief there are things we do not understand. Similarly, critical thinking often depends on problematizing things assumed to be known. Further contributing to the noetic nature of wonder is the fact that experiences of wonder are typically *embodied.* This facilitates a move away from knowledge by description towards knowledge by experience (Cardena and Pekala, 2014). In consideration of wonder, Hepburn recognizes this phenomenon as the difference between *knowing* and *realizing* something (Hepburn, 1984). The latter is derived from direct *experience,* imbued with emotive power.

So, what can wonder contribute to critical thinking? The sensible starting point is with the emotive power of wonder as a motivational force, inspiring and driving critical thinking. Importantly, while wonder is always emotionally laden, it is not necessarily a single emotion, nor always necessarily pleasant (Bazhydai and Westermann, 2020). The complexity and variety of emotions linked with wonder make it a valuable resource in learning about, exploring, and educating the emotions (MacAllister, 2018). For example, Hepburn argues that wonder, particularly of nature, may provide experience with "a range of emotion that the human scene, by itself, untutored and supplemented, could not evoke" (1984, p. 20). In this view, the emotions elicited through wonder may be outside prior experience and understanding. Thus, instead of interpreting experiences of wonder through existing emotional maps, such experiences reveal new emotional terrain.

This is important because emotions are more than simply motivational forces external to critical reasoning. On the contrary, emotions are essential aspects of reasoning, and thus criticality. In her extensive work on reasoning and emotion, Nussbaum notes, "Emotions are not just the fuel that powers the psychological mechanism of a reasoning creature, they are parts, highly complex and messy parts, of this creature's reasoning itself" (2001, p. 3). Thinking and feeling are inseparable constituents of being human. This does not mean we cannot use thought to regulate emotion, it simply recognizes that we *cannot think without emotion*. Any aspiration for 'emotionless rationality' is doomed to fail, or worse, succeed at the expense of our own humanity. Thinking critically in the ethical, political, and many other dimensions would simply not be possible without emotions. Consequently, beyond simply supplying motivational force, wonder provides opportunities for emotional education, including expansion of the emotional terrain which operates as an integral part of critical being.

To further understand how wonder helps expand critical thinking into critical being, I now turn to a distinction between wonder and curiosity. I suggest that exploring this distinction sheds important light on the relationship between critical thinking and contemplation as complimentary aspects of *critical being*. Curiosity tends to be closed and specific; it asks a question and seeks an answer (Schinkel, 2019). Wonder inspires and evokes something more emotional that moves beyond mere instrumentalism (Fuller, 2006). While curiosity aims to amass knowledge, wonder revels in uncertainty (Rubenstein, 2012). Opdal recognizes that curiosity operates within a framework of aims and assumptions saying:

> *Curiosity is a motive that can move a person to do all kinds of research, but within an accepted framework. As such it will be the force behind much of what we do, within daily life, technology and science, and it should be encouraged also within education. Wonder, on the other hand, is not a motive, but an experience or state of mind signifying that something that so far has been taken for granted is incomplete or mistaken. This could lead to philosophical inquiries into the frames themselves, and eventually to changes in the perspective itself (2001, p. 342).*

The capacity for wonder to facilitate changes in perspective and thus the very framework of curiosity shows that curiosity and wonder are not opposites, nor at odds, but instead complimentary aspects of *being.* This is less of an argument than a simple observation. Curiosity can lead to wonder, and wonder may reveal new potentialities for curiosity. It is somewhat of an oversimplification, but still constructive, to consider curiosity as an *active* expression of *passive* wonder. Which comes first, curiosity or wonder, matters less than that both support each other to sustain critical being.

The relationship between wonder and curiosity is like that between critical thinking and contemplation. As noted previously, critical thinking is often conceived of as a tool for pursuing curiosity, a closed and instrumental process drawing on frameworks of established aims and assumptions. This is not always problematic, as there are often pragmatic reasons for such instrumental focus. Contemplation, however, is more open and receptive. In contemplation there are no predetermined aims or assumptions; it is a wandering of attention that permits new possibilities, including new perspectives on existing aims and assumptions (Lewin, 2015). Just like curiosity and wonder, I argue that critical thinking and contemplation are complementary aspects of *critical being*. But why combine criticality and contemplation? Why not just let them be separate modes of thinking? I argue they should be connected because contemplation is necessary to sustain the metacritique essential to preventing criticality from becoming dogmatic. The ability to question fundamental aims and assumptions is greatly facilitated by receptivity to perspectives from *beyond* existing experience and critical frameworks. Wonder and contemplation, through their open and non-pre-determined nature, are potential sources of new perspectives. My intention is not to downplay the centrality or value of curiosity or instrumental critical thinking, but to point out how wonder can direct and expand curiosity just as contemplation can direct and expand critical thinking. These are not skills or practices to be separated, but necessary components of a holistic process – the process of *critical being.*

I conclude this section with a more concrete example. Among the key contributions of wonder to critical thinking is the direction of attention beyond the self. This includes the capacity to embody non-anthropocentric perspectives (Chang, 2020; Marshall, 2005). As an example of this, Fuller uses the life of John Muir (1838-1914) to show how contemplative wonder can shift critical frameworks. Muir is a key figure of the modern environmental movement in the United States, inspiring lasting changes in both laws and ways of thinking. Fuller argues that mystical and wonderous experiences with nature helped him develop new perspectives that,

> *…took him beyond an anthropomorphic vision of nature. Having shifted to a perceptual frame of reference that wasn't circumscribed by the human ego, Muir acquired a truly biocentric vision of nature… Wonder led him to see the value of nature wholly independent of human need or desire (2006, p. 50).*

Fuller suggests that Muir's experience was not one of mere curiosity, but of mystical contemplation. Through such experiences Muir transformed the aims and assumptions structuring his way of thinking and acting in the world.

Some may argue that transformative changes in perspective and ways of thinking, like those of Muir, do not require wonder, but only an open mind and active imagination. I contend that while an open mind and active imagination are essential aspects of critical thinking, they may not be sufficient to reveal *previously unimaginable potentialities*. Wonder can help people experience things in new ways, and to experience entirely new things. This is invaluable to critical thinking. Through its receptivity to the world, unencumbered from expectations and preconceptions, wonder can inspire both curiosity and contemplation capable of shifting the fundamental aims and assumptions of critical thinking. While I do not suggest such transformation is always necessary or desirable, it is my claim that wonder can contribute to more expansive forms of critical thinking by drawing from the broader experience of *being.*

5.3 Wu-wei

What is wu-wei? Fluidly moving around the kitchen to make the perfect cup of tea, an entranced musician performing with perfection, the seemingly automated drive to work, the unstoppable athlete and unparalleled craftsperson, or the savvy socialite that seems to know just the right thing to do in any situation. These are all examples of potential wu-wei experiences. The concept of wu-wei is prevalent in Chinese philosophy (Chan, 1963). It is commonly translated as 'effortless action', though it remains a difficult idea to convey or capture in a single phrase and is conceived of differently within and between philosophical traditions across time (Slingerland, 2003). For the purposes of this article, it is not necessary to dwell on the difference, but instead to focus on important commonalities. In all permutations, wu-wei is understood as reflexive interaction attuned to the patterns and principles of dao*,* the 'way' of the natural and social world (Littlejohn, 2009). Lewin notes that wu-wei "…yields the power and dominance of the autonomous subject in favour of a harmonious immanence with the world" (2015, p. 233). This 'immanence with the world' creates the possibility for reflexive spontaneity conducive to efficacious action, seemingly without effort. Wu-wei is the process of effectively, efficiently, and harmoniously being in the world.

Like wonder, wu-wei shares the defining features of mystical experience. It is ineffable, in that people experiencing wu-wei cannot describe their experiences at the time and often struggle to do so after the fact (Slingerland, 2003). It is noetic in that wu-wei manifests as *knowledge in action*. To be in wu-wei is to know how to do something, even if that 'know-how' remains seemingly 'unconscious' (ibid). Some may argue that the ideal is to achieve a permanent state of wu-wei, thus making it not transitory. As discussed below, this is somewhat paradoxical. Regardless, whether it is possible or desirable to sustain a permanent state of wu-wei, lived experience shows that it tends to be transitory. Wu-wei is also passive. To experience wu-wei is to let the world act on and through you, as opposed to acting 'on' the world in a predetermined way (Lewin, 2015). This can sound problematically passive and reactive. However, because wu-wei manifests as action with the capacity to alter contexts, it is better understood as a receptive and responsive form of efficacious and harmonious *interaction* with the world.

Like critical thinking, wu-wei is contextualized by normative aims and assumptions. For example, the wu-wei of Confucian philosophy generally accords with the dao of normative ethics, often derived from conceptions of human nature (Tan, 2017). On the other hand, the wu-wei of the ideal ruler in the *Daodejing* is responsive to a more naturalistic notion of dao, yet still operates within an assumptive sociopolitical structure (*Daodejing*, 2003). The wu-wei of the *Zhuangzi* recognizes the groundlessness of normativity and the power of existential possibility in navigating the absurdity of fixed conventions, yet still tends to remain grounded (but perhaps less attached) to a world of normativity (*Zhuangzi*, 1968). Wu-wei cannot escape the inevitable 'background' of meanings and significances giving rise to the aims and assumptions that make being and thus also wu-wei possible. Efficacious interaction with the world requires some sense of what it means to be efficacious. This is perhaps why wu-wei is often exemplified through skilled practices, where 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' are more easily evident. For example, a butcher or wood carver in a state of wu-wei reacts to the flesh of the ox or the wood of the tree *with purpose*. Furthermore, they must train, with great critical effort, to internalize not only the skills, but also the aims and assumptions that guide efficacious action. Importantly, however, the larger intention of wu-wei is for application in all aspects of life, including efficacious *ethical* action (Slingerland, 2003). In this thesis I focus on the *phenomenological experience* of wu-wei, not its ethical ideals. This is a potentially problematic deviation from how wu-wei is understood within and across various Chinese philosophical traditions. However, I argue that examining the phenomenological experience of wu-wei provides valuable insight into its potential for helping critical thinking expand towards critical being. Hopefully, this can serve as a starting point for future inquiry, with more nuanced attention to the diversity and complexity of wu-wei as a concept and practice.

The essential point is recognition of the intersection between critical thinking, context, and wu-wei. The aims, assumptions, and actions of wu-wei cannot be predetermined, yet there is a kind of inherent (and inherently ethical) intentionality guiding the very possibility of wu-wei. This intentionality is not egoistic or individualistic but instead comes from relational participation as part of an interconnected world (Ames and Hall, 2003). The intentionality of wu-wei cannot be subjectively individualized because it involves an interplay between individuals and contexts; between shaping the world and being shaped by the world. This means that, like critical thinking, wu-wei relies on contextual aims and assumptions but requires openness to transformation of those aims and assumptions. In the case of wu-wei, this possibility comes from letting go of preconceptions to non-coercively (and thus receptively) engage with the world. This receptivity creates something like metacritique *guided by the world* as opposed to by the individual. To experience wu-wei is to let the world 'come to you' as opposed to attempting to exercise control in forcing the world to be a certain way (Lewin, 2015). Wu-wei embodies both intentionality and indeterminacy.

This idea of an intentional practice free of predetermined intentions is paradoxical. As is the idea of *working* to achieve effortless action. Slingerland notes:

> *The question that inevitably arises is this: how is it possible to try not to try? How can a program of spiritual striving result in a state that lies beyond striving? It would seem that the very act of striving would inevitably 'contaminate' the end-state (2003, p. 6).*

This paradox is most apparent if wu-wei is seen as a sustained state – one cannot both try and not try *at the same time.* However, as a transitory part of a temporally extended process, one can move between states of 'effort' and 'non-effort', criticality and non-criticality. This is readily evident in lived experience. Consequently, in Chinese philosophy, discussion of wu-wei often raises questions about how to manage the relationship between critical effort and effortless action, particularly regarding moral cultivation and action (Slingerland, 2003). This is one of many contributions Chinese philosophy can make to understanding critical thinking. The important point for this chapter is that wu-wei is a concept, practice, and range of experiences explicitly focused on the relationship between critical and non-critical modes of being. This makes it an excellent resource for better understanding the idea of *critical being.*

As noted above, wu-wei is a spiritual and ethical ideal. However, it is also a descriptive account of a common phenomenon. Consequently, it can be helpful to explore how this phenomenon has been recognized in other traditions. To do this, I very briefly draw on Western psychology and Heideggerian ontology (mostly via Dreyfus) to shed light on wu-wei as an important mode of human experience. This is not a comparative endeavour, but only an effort to provide additional scaffolding for understanding the experience of wu-wei. Psychologically, wu-wei is akin to what Csikszentmihalyi calls 'flow', in which a person absorbed into an activity, acts with a seemingly unconscious fluidity (1990; 2014). This is an experience often exemplified by athletes, artists, and craftspeople, but also capable of manifesting in a myriad of daily activities from putting on shoes to walking across the room and opening a door. Csikszentmihalyi suggests flow states can be differentiated from the latter more mundane examples by level of interest and the increasing complexity required for mastery (ibid). While Csikszentmihalyi's work is valuable to my aims in exploring critical thinking, I draw more on the concept of wu-wei because, as Slingerland notes, it has a relational orientation towards a larger whole beyond the self, which distinguishes it from the more psychological, individualized, and sometimes instrumentalized conceptions of flow states (2014). Furthermore, a focus on increasing complexity overlooks the possibility and value of finding flow in the familiar and comfortable (ibid). Wu-wei is perfectly at home in routine, familiar, and unchallenging tasks. This creates the possibility of finding new forms of engagement with familiar modes of being. Much like finding wonder in the familiar, this can be a valuable perspectival resource for critical thinking.

Ontologically, wu-wei seems to articulate with aspects of Heideggerian ontology. Connections between Heidegger's thought and various Eastern philosophies and spiritual traditions have given rise to a substantial literature (e.g., May, 1996; Parkes, 1990). I simply want to suggest that philosophers drawing on Heidegger and giving particular attention to embodied cognition and the 'skilful coping' central to human experience seem to recognize the phenomenon of wu-wei, even if unfamiliar with its Chinese incarnation. For example, Dreyfus (2014b) draws on

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to argue that 'skilful coping' lacks rationality yet is still directed by an intentionality operating within a pre-existing background of meaning and significance (ibid). This means the very possibility of putting on shoes and walking across a room, much less 'getting in the zone' to create a fine work of art, are all dependent on skilfully coping with the 'background' of the world we are 'always already in', and inextricably a relational part of. In many cases, as in wu-wei states, analytical thinking does not guide this 'coping' with the world. Instead, action is a process of *interaction* with the world. As Dreyfus states:

> *Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's understanding of embedded-embodied coping… is not that the* mind *is sometimes* extended into the world *but rather that, in our most basic way of being – i.e. as skillful copers – we are not minds at all but* one with the world *(2014b, p. 259 emphasis in original).*

Importantly, we do not only 'cope' with the ontic matter of the universe, but also the ontological world of meanings. A person may put on their shoes with intention, for any number of reasons, but they are unlikely to be thinking critically about the ontological status (the meaning) of their shoes. They interact with such meaning 'transparently' (Heidegger, 1962). To the degree this skilful coping with meaning proceeds transparently, a person is 'one' with the world of shoes, floors, and doors. However, this non-critical mode of being is not 'mindless', nor devoid of intentionality. Merleau-Ponty notes that the world of meaning 'solicits' a kind of intentionality (2002). Chairs are *for* sitting, floors are *for* walking on, and doors are *for* going in and out. The 'for' in each of these cases arises out of the background of significance, meaning, and practices comprising the world a person is a part of and skilfully coping with (Dreyfus, 2014b). The important point here is that a form of 'transparent' yet efficacious interaction with the world, both ontically and ontologically, is a fundamental aspect of *being.*

While the parallels are not perfect, I argue that wu-wei incorporates the ontological phenomenon of skilful coping with the psychological capacity for flow to navigate the complexity of *being* in the world. Consequently, wu-wei provides not only insight into how criticality articulates with other modes of being, but also a conceptual framework and *practice* for coordinating both criticality and being into *critical being*.

I argue that wu-wei has an important two-way relationship with critical thinking. Moving in one direction, critical reflection on 'breakdowns' in wu-wei experiences provides opportunity to think critically about the aims and assumptions underlying and guiding action. In such situations it is possible to critically consider, and reconsider, the world one aims to move efficaciously through via wu-wei. Moving in the other direction, wu-wei unencumbers people from preconceptions (and potentially concepts themselves) in a manner conducive to revealing new perspectives within and beyond existing critical frameworks. Consequently, a process of being including both wu-wei and critical thinking facilitates greater receptivity to the world shaping us, while also opening the possibility for shaping that world.

One aspect of the educational value of wu-wei comes from the possibility of critical reflection on states of non-critical engagement with the world in a kind of hermeneutic cycle offering

opportunity for interpretation and transformation in both the structure of critical thinking and non-critical being. In this cycle, one of the most obvious points of intersection between wu-wei and critical thinking arises when the 'flow' of navigating the world is disrupted, when 'skilful coping' proves ineffective. Such points are common in examples from more complex tasks, like arts, athletics, and crafts. But they also occur at the most basic level. For the person putting on shoes and leaving a room, if a lace breaks, the floor is not flat, or the door does not open, the process of skilful coping is potentially interrupted, and critical thinking may be drawn into the activity. Heidegger calls these cases of 'breakdown' which require thoughtful engagement and may contribute to the disclosure of new meaning within the world (Heidegger, 1962). Similarly, Dewey recognizes such inevitable discontinuities to non-analytic fluidity, as opportunities for rational reflexivity, and essential to the structure of human thinking and learning (Dewey, 2018).

Importantly, a true master of wu-wei may *not* have their flow interrupted by something as menial as the breaking of a shoelace. They may efficaciously respond, even in a seemingly critical manner, to resolve the problem. For example, by finding another way to bind their shoes, abandoning the assumption that shoes need laces, or that people need shoes. This kind of 'problem solving' (often predicated on acceptance, adaptation, and changes of perspective) within wu-wei could be seen as an aspect of critical being. However, it is an example unlikely to manifest without prior critical and reflective effort, perhaps drawn from study, refinement of skills, and reflection on previous disruptions to wu-wei. Consequently, the educational value of breakdowns in wu-wei cannot be overlooked. These moments provide opportunity for critical thinking to focus on resolving breakdowns *within* the existing framework of aims and assumptions and to reconsider those aims and assumptions altogether. Thus, there is a cycle in which the 'flow' of efficacious being can be altered through moments of criticality used to redirect the intentionality inherent in wu-wei.

This opportunity for redirection and refinement runs in both directions. Just as reflecting on a disruption to wu-wei provides opportunity to critically consider the aims and assumptions orienting action within a context, the experience of wu-wei can inform the aims and assumptions of critical thinking. The idea that wu-wei is contextually bound is not meant to imply such boundaries are hard, closed, and prescriptive. Instead, wu-wei shares the Heideggerian idea that we are 'always already in a world' defined by meaning, aims, and assumptions (1962). Indeed, thinking is only made possible through what Heidegger calls, "relatedness" as a form of receptivity to the world (1977, p. 355). As Williams notes, drawing on Heidegger, "our thoughts are what they are by virtue of something *beyond* ourselves – something we do not and cannot fully control" (2016, p. 186 emphasis in original). That something is the world into which we are 'thrown' and that shapes us before we have the capacity or opportunity to intentionally shape it (Heidegger, 1962). Consequently, thinking, including critical thinking, cannot be seen solely as a process of 'shaping the world' but must attend to how the world shapes thinking itself (Heidegger, 1954). Williams concludes that existence is a conditional and co-dependent affair requiring a kind of "way-making" (2016, p. 117). This choice of words is revealing, as wu-wei is efficacious accordance with dao, which can be understood *as a process of way-making* (Ames and Hall, 2003). This is a process that

requires both receptivity and activity. Wu-wei embodies both as essential aspects of being. The receptivity inherent to wu-wei provides opportunity for reflection on how the world shapes being and thus also thinking. Importantly, the world *is not fixed or static*. New meaning, aims, and assumptions can be discovered and/or created (Kompridis, 2011). This can be done through intentional criticality, but also through spontaneous innovation within non-critical wu-wei, which is well equipped to disregard preconceptions while responsively interacting with the world in a way that may disclose new possibilities. Receptive experiences like that of being in wu-wei may reveal not only better ways to do things, but entirely new things to do. This is an example of how non-critical modes of being can inform, or potentially transform, critical thinking.

The suspension of criticality and engagement with the transparent flow of skilful coping characterizing wu-wei may seem antithetical to critical thinking. However, I argue the relationship is not one of opposition, but complementarity. Wu-wei complements critical thinking in two important ways. First, while wu-wei is contextually contingent it is not completely bound by criticality or rationality. This, like experiences of wonder, creates the possibility for receptivity to new perspectives capable of inspiring inquiry and expanding the potentiality of metacritique. Second, when wu-wei breaks down there is opportunity for critical reflection on the 'background' of pre-existing meaning and significances shaping the aims and assumptions animating both efficacious action and critical thinking. This is a kind of peek behind the curtain of transparent skilful coping. Importantly, this contact with the 'background' of being cannot necessarily be achieved through critical thinking, or perhaps any kind of thinking (Wittgenstein, 2005). Instead, the non-critical *experience of being* provides the most constructive and efficient insight into those things shaping being, and thus also thinking. Once again, this creates otherwise unavailable perspectives for metacritique.

Importantly, this two-way relationship between critical thinking shaping wu-wei and wu-wei shaping critical thinking is only possible as part of a cyclical flux between breakdown (or at least non-wu-wei) experiences and wu-wei experiences. This is a potentially contentious point. It is possible to argue that breakdowns are not part of wu-wei. As noted above, the goal of a permanent state of wu-wei creates some paradoxical problems and there are serious questions about the desirability of a permanent state of wu-wei, which would seem to permanently side-line criticality. Conversely, it may be argued there is a 'wu-wei of criticality' in which case critical thinking would fall *within* wu-wei. Indeed, wu-wei is, at its core, an efficacious form of *judgment.* A person in wu-wei is making decisions, perhaps even critical decisions, guided by a structure of intentionality. For example, in the *Zhuangzi,* when Butcher Ding encounters a difficulty in his otherwise effortless action, he steps back to contemplate before proceeding (*Zhuangzi*, 1968). Whether this judgment could count as critical thinking and whether it is internal or external to the wu-wei experience is a point of debate. These are important questions for understanding the concepts of dao and wu-wei. However, as I draw on the phenomenological experience of wu-wei here, I make no assertion to the desirability or possibility of wu-wei as a permanent state nor to the possibility or desirability of folding critical thinking entirely into a wu-wei state. Instead, I see the inevitability of moving in and out of wu-wei as complementary aspects of being. While this is a potentially contentious

oversimplification of a complex philosophical concept, it is worth noting the abundance of literature and practices associated with various interpretations of wu-wei strongly imply (even if somewhat paradoxically) the need for rational, critical, and effortful cultivation of this arational, non-critical, and effortless state (Slingerland, 2003). Thousands of years of philosophy and countless spiritual practices have *effortfully* aimed at understanding and cultivating wu-wei. This shows recognition (even if only implicit) of the complementarity of effort and non-effort, of critical thinking and non-critical experiences.

At this point, we can see an important connection between wonder and wu-wei. Schinkel argues that contemplative wonder *defamiliarizes* the world by stripping away existing classifications, categories, and assumptions (2019). Contemplative wonder opens us up for receptive engagement with the world. This is exactly what is necessary to attain a state of wu-wei. Zhao (2019) draws attention to Chapter 48 of the *Daodejing* which states, "In studying, there is a daily increase, while in learning of way-making (dao), there is a daily decrease: one loses and again loses. To the point that one does everything non-coercively (wu-wei)" (2003, p. 151). What is 'lost' as one becomes attuned with dao is learned aims, assumptions, and perspectives that force a preconceived way of thinking and being onto the world. The loss of this 'learning' allows for receptivity to new perspectives, ways of thinking, and modes of being. The wonder at work in such a process is that of *defamiliarization,* where what was once 'known' is seen in a new light. This *unlearning* clears space for new possibilities drawn from the receptive interaction with the world in a state of wu-wei.

The two-way relationship between critical thinking and wu-wei is essential. This is what justifies not just the value of wu-wei as a potentially educative experience, but the value of wu-wei in expanding critical thinking towards *critical being*. An analogy from sports can demonstrate this two-way relationship between wu-wei and criticality. Basketball players in the 1940s spent a great deal of time thinking critically about technique and strategy as part of their training, with the aspiration of getting 'in the zone' (a wu-wei state) while playing. Their offensive efforts focused primarily on getting as close to the basket as possible to maximize their chances of making a basket. If players regularly succeeded at getting 'in the zone', guided by the assumption that these were the best ways to meet the aim of victory – the best ways to efficaciously navigate the world of basketball – then the world of basketball would have remained unchanged. However, one day during a college basketball game in 1944, Bob Kurland found himself with the ball under the basket and, without thinking, jumped up and slammed it directly through the hoop. When asked about the action he noted that it was an 'accident', something he had done spontaneously in the flow of the game (Wittry, 2021). This act of contextual receptivity to the world in a state of wu-wei changed the world of basketball forever.

As 'dunking' became a more common part of the game, other players experienced frequent 'breakdowns' in their wu-wei while trying to play defence against this new phenomenon. These breakdowns in wu-wei provided experiential insights into the need to change a fundamental assumption, namely that you must shoot the ball into the basket instead of jumping up and throwing it directly through. Consequently, new offensive and defensive schemes were made

possible and necessary. A similar transformation took place when players began getting 'in the zone' shooting effectively from greater and greater distances. This ultimately led to the introduction of the three-point line, marking a transformation in the very structure of the game. Players acting receptively from within wu-wei caused their opponents to have continual breakdown experiences, which required changes to fundamental assumptions and transformed the very structure of the game. This is a narrow and highly contextualized example, but it serves the purpose of showing both 'directions' of interaction between wu-wei and critical thinking. Criticality must be receptive and responsive to what happens in non-critical states, while also reflecting on breakdowns in those states as possible indicators of the need for new perspectives.

5.4 A note on the importance of attributes

This chapter has shown how the experiences of wonder and wu-wei can expand critical thinking towards critical being. It focusses on the nature and value of these experiences, not how they may be facilitated. The latter question, which is of the utmost importance to education, must include consideration of policies, curricula, educational environments, and pedagogies. This is discussed in Chapter 7 when considering implications for practice. Another essential aspect of expanding critical thinking to achieve critical being is consideration of attributes. For any educational practice aiming to cultivate critical being, it makes sense to focus on students *as beings* (Barnett, 2015). That is, to focus on the development of the attributes necessary to facilitate wonder, wu-wei, and receptivity to their critical potential. As noted in Chapter 2, which attributes and how they best manifest to facilitate expansive critical thinking varies by context (see Section 2.5). This thesis focuses more on the 'structure' and processes of critical thinking, not the attributes of critical thinkers. However, it is vital to note that this is not intended to overlook or diminish the importance of attributes. Consequently, it is worth making a few comments on the importance of attributes, and showing how this thesis can contribute to future work aimed at understanding which attributes are desirable for critical thinking and how they might be cultivated.

From this chapter it should be clear the idea of critical being warns against any partitioning of thinking and being when considering the attributes of critical thinkers. For example, humility, inquisitiveness, and open mindedness are generally necessary attributes (whether conceived of as dispositions or virtues) for critical thinking (Baehr, 2016). However, these attributes should not be confined *only* to epistemic reason evaluation or seen as *only* relating to thinking. The same attributes are essential for receptivity to the value of non-critical experiences like wonder and wu-wei. Furthermore, there may be attributes conducive to wonder and wu-wei that have not traditionally been considered beneficial to critical thinking because they orient towards *non-critical* experiences. For example, having a sense of awe in both the novel and the familiar, or being able to unencumber the mind in contemplation or wu-wei may not be appreciated as attributes valuable to critical thinking. I argue, however, that they are essential to *critical being*. There are undoubtedly many more potential examples. My aim here is simply to join Barnett in pointing out the need to consider not just the kinds of *thinkers* education aims to cultivate, but also the kinds of *beings* (2015). The mystical dimension of critical thinking sketched out

in this chapter, and the attention given to the relationship between critical and non-critical states provides new resources to help discern what kinds of attributes are needed to facilitate critical being. This thesis does not explore these attributes in detail, but it does help justify and support such exploration in future work.

6 Animating critical thinking: Pragmatic assumptions

In Chapter 2 I outlined a model for understanding the scope of critical thinking. In Chapter 3 I argued that some of the assumptions underlying dominant conceptions of critical thinking unintentionally narrow its potential scope. Chapter 4 explored criticality in Chinese philosophical traditions, modelling the possibility of expansive critical thinking in contexts different from those underwriting dominant theories. Chapter 5 focused on how the mystical dimension can expand critical thinking towards *critical being* through attention to relationships between critical and non-critical modes of thinking and being.

In this chapter, I show how critical thinking can be *animated* at an expansive scope without the uncritical imposition of substantive universal values or predetermined aims. This is vitally important because seeing the *possibility* of expansive critical scope does not make clear everything necessary to realise that potential. As already noted, the attributes of critical thinkers (as beings) certainly play a major role in motivating and actualising critical thinking. However, I argue there are also 'structural' features within critical thinking that facilitate application, that move towards expansive potential, and perpetuate the process. Consequently, in this chapter I argue for *pragmatic assumptions* regarding features of critical thinking necessary for animating criticality at an expansive scope. These are the pursuits of truth, meaning, and mutual comprehensibility. It is tempting to think of these as 'defining features' of critical thinking. As features of the process without which thinking could not be considered critical, much less expansive. Indeed, I contend that these pragmatic assumptions are essential to expansive critical thinking. I cannot imagine the possibility of expansive criticality – reaching towards critical being – without these features. However, in keeping with the spirit and theory of this thesis, I also cannot contend that any such features are completely predetermined or permanently fixed. I cannot let my lack of imagination potentially limit my understanding of critical thinking. Consequently, I use the term *pragmatic assumptions* to indicate the vital utility of these features in animating critical thinking at an expansive scope, while also recognising the possibility of metacritique focused on these very features.

I argue that without the pragmatic assumptions that critical thinking ought to pursue truth, meaning, and mutual comprehensibility, the process risks becoming not only empty but also stagnant. A process without action ceases to be a process. Thus, I concur with Barnett that critical thinking requires action, not only to be of use for education and society, but as an essential part of critical thinking itself (1997). However, by 'action' I simply mean continued engagement with critical thinking, with attention to scope. There can be nothing predetermined in the substantive nature of critical action, other than the possibility of further criticality, as that would risk dogmatically narrowing the scope of critical thinking. My intention is not to neglect the importance of critical thinking manifesting in critical action. Instead, I aim to identify what in critical thinking allows for critical action at the most expansive (least dogmatically constrained) scope. I argue there are *pragmatic assumptions* regarding the essential features of critical thinking that help perpetuate criticality without imposing contextually contingent aims or dogmatic assumptions on the process in a problematically narrowing manner. As in previous

chapters, my focus here is on the 'structure' of critical thinking as a process, not on the attributes of critical thinkers. This is not to deny the centrality of attributes or actual people to critical thinking. It is simply in keeping with the focus of this thesis.

Before proceeding, I must draw attention to a recurrent theme in this thesis, the need to separate the aims of education and society from an expansive understanding of critical thinking. As noted in the introduction (see Section 1.6) this is necessary because expanding critical thinking through predetermined aims and assumptions risks becoming ironically dogmatic. As seen in Chapter 3, the same issue of dogmatism arises if substantive values are used to avoid empty instrumentalism and relativism (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3). Some may argue that separating the aims of education and needs of society from critical thinking is a matter of semantics, or worse, moves towards the kind of empty instrumentalism I am working against. However, understanding critical thinking in diverse and cross-cultural contexts requires this nuanced separation. If context specific aims and assumptions are used to define critical thinking itself, the practice is unlikely to find success in diverse contexts, or worse, may end up working as an ideological instrument for the imposition of values from one context onto another. This is exactly the complaint some levy against 'Western-centric' conceptions of critical thinking (Biggs, 1997; Indelicato and Prazic, 2019; Moosavi, 2020). However, as seen in Chapter 3, efforts to protect against such impositions raise the risks of empty instrumentalism and/or relativism. The relationship between educational aims and critical thinking is discussed further in the next chapter. For now, I only want to point out the need to consider what *within the structure of critical thinking* animates the practice in ways that can avoid these risks.

In discussing these pragmatic assumptions of critical thinking, it is important to recognise there are many other potentially *desirable* features for critical thinking to work well within and between contexts. For example, using a kind tone of voice or drawing on a particular vocabulary of discourse can greatly facilitate the 'good practice' of critical thinking. However, it is possible (but usually not desirable) to engage in critical thinking and discussion using an unkind voice and drawing on a range of potential vocabularies. It is not, however, possible (at least as I conceive it) to think critically at an expansive scope without any reference to truth, attention to care (which includes understanding meaning), or lacking mutual comprehensibility. While I am greatly concerned with what constitutes 'good practice' within and across critical contexts, my effort here is to strip critical thinking down to those essential elements that create the conditions for the very possibility of critical thinking. Without these features, I argue, critical thinking could not occur, much less be practiced in better or worse ways. Of course, as noted above, I cannot (at risk of self-contradiction) insist that these features are somehow foundational, ultimate, or fixedly 'define' critical thinking. Consequently, I frame them as well-justified and highly *pragmatic assumptions* capable of animating critical thinking at an expansive scope across diverse contexts without dogmatic predetermination.

In this chapter I address the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility as features of critical thinking deemed necessary for expansive scope in diverse contexts. I argue that lacking a notion of truth, some degree of care, and/or mutual comprehensibility within and between critical frameworks precludes the possibility for criticality at an expansive scope. This same

relationship of dependence is not true of other efforts to expand and animate critical thinking, such as the reliance on substantive values or predetermined educational or sociopolitical ends. For example, critical thinking can proceed from and lead towards a plurality of conceptions of justice and forms of political organisation. There is nothing about critical thinking that implies a *necessary* convergence in frameworks or perspectives (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015). In acknowledging this, I am not resigned to relativism. Quite the contrary, my intention is to show that critical thinking requires, as part of its structure, something that animates perpetual engagement within and between pluralistic and diverse frameworks. Furthermore, I am not forsaking particular values or ideals as worthy educational and social aims. Instead, I argue that the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility animate critical thinking in ways that can realise educational and social aims, like those of justice and democracy, in new and unforeseen ways that would potentially be excluded if predetermined ends were used to define and animate critical thinking. How critical thinking can help to balance tensions between determinant and indeterminant educational aims is discussed further in the next chapter.

The features of critical thinking identified in this chapter can animate criticality at an expansive scope across diverse contexts where ideological assumptions (e.g., critical pedagogy, liberal democracy) may not hold the same sway in critical frameworks. Importantly, the goal is perpetual *pursuit* without expectation of any final or ultimate ends. Critical thinking does not aim to achieve certainty in truth, explicate the totality of all care and meaning, or forge universal comprehensibility. These features are better understood as orienting ideals, they are perpetual and recursive, with no aspiration for 'attainment'. This may sound worryingly instrumental, empty, devoid of ethical consideration, or potentially *unethical*. For example, this line of thinking could head down the path of critical assassins and serial killers. However, this possibility serves as a reminder of the importance of scope. It is the very fact that an assassin *can* be a critical thinker in some domains and dimensions (e.g., individual and epistemological) that requires expansion of critical thinking into the ethical dimension and sociocultural domains. The contextually contingent aims and assumptions of those domains and dimensions inform the critical frameworks that guide critical thinking. For example, instrumental efficacy is a reasonable criterion of critical thinking for an assassin *in a very narrow sense.* However, when criticality is broadened into other domains and dimensions, new resources (including new aims, assumptions, and criteria) become available as parts of critical thinking. Contextual contingency, including domain and dimension specificity, is what accounts for the distinction between an evil assassin and an honourable soldier, or between a courageous patriot and a zealous traitor. Context, perspective, and scope matter. My effort here is to show what animates and motivates expansive critical thinking within and across diverse contexts towards something like critical being. A way of being in which people regularly consider the implications of scope and engage with expansive criticality as part of their day-to-day life. I want to know what within the structure of critical thinking prevents an assassin or serial killer from simply settling into a narrow and instrumental form of critical thinking that fails to call fundamental aims and assumptions into question. These are stark examples, but hopefully, they make apparent why this issue of 'animation' is so important.

6.1 Truth

The pursuit of truth provides a relatively uncontroversial feature to animate and guide critical thinking (Ennis, 2016b; Facione, 1990; Lipman, 2012; Paul, 2020; Siegel, 2017). However, the critical thinking literature tends to gloss over the problematically contested nature of truth, different conceptions of which are subject to vigorous debate within philosophy and across disciplines. This might be why the topic of truth tends to remain in the background, seemingly assumed as central to critical thinking, but rarely 'defined' in any particular or explicit way. This makes sense because, as discussed in Chapter 3, it seems impractical and undesirable to require resolution of longstanding philosophical questions, like the nature of truth, as necessary preconditions for understanding and engaging with critical thinking. This is the case, in part, because critical thinking *is one of the means for pursuing such settlement*. Thus, as Barnett notes, critical thinking must be able to work across diverse ontological and epistemological terrain (1997). Thankfully, as shown in Chapter 4, it is also evident that critical thinking *can* work across diverse ontological and epistemological terrain.

Truth is a tricky topic. It is simultaneously self-evident and common sensical, yet often the source of profound disagreement, and philosophically precarious and elusive. Along these lines, James notes that truth is "a very ticklish subject" (1987, p. 227). To further complicate the topic of truth, some contend we are now living in a 'post-truth' age. This, however, is an overly cavalier dismissal of something that has consistently proven vital, even if ultimately undefinable. The notion of a post-truth age is also incoherent. If it is 'true' that we are living in a 'post-truth' age, then the very truth of that fact would indicate that we are not (Devine, 2018). The self-refuting notion of post-truth is like claims to 'universal relativism' or the 'certainty of skepticism'. There is, however, something very important to recognise in the current attention (or lack of attention) to truth, just as there is something important to recognise in the persistence of plurality, and power of uncertainty. People consistently need to make decisions, which must be made with some degree of solidarity and mutual comprehension to be of any use in a social and shared world. Some notion of truth is one of the key concepts orienting and organising the human ability to do things together, not to mention the ability to navigate, interact with, and understand the world (James, 2019). Consequently, some notion of truth, even if contested, is essential to critical thinking.

My intention is not to derail or devolve all critical endeavours into debates on the nature of truth. This is neither necessary nor desirable *most of the time*. It is possible for people with different conceptions of truth, different and incompatible fundamental assumptions, to think critically together. This is, in part, because incommensurable assumptions, including those about truth, are often *irrelevant* to collaborative social endeavours, including critical thinking (Lukes, 2017). For example, a theist and atheist may share an understanding of truth in relation to much (or even most) of their understanding of the world. This could include mathematics, physics, language, science, and all manner of things in which they understand and *use* the notion of truth in the same way. They may disagree about the truth of how the world came into existence, what happens after death, and what forces ultimately govern existence. However, these fundamental and ultimately incommensurable views, are not relevant to many critical

endeavours. The two can critically engage in designing a new computer program or think about the most equitable form of political organisation without their relative assumptions about the origins and order of the universe (issues primarily of the existential domain) becoming relevant. However, if a common loved one falls ill, and the theist insists on treating the friend only with prayer, while the atheist insists on the use of modern medicine, divergent fundamental assumptions and conceptions of truth become pressingly relevant. There is a need to expand critical thinking into the existential domain and consider metacritique of fundamental assumptions. The context and scope of critical thinking matter. The more expansive critical thinking becomes, the more likely fundamental assumptions about the nature of truth will come into play.

What matters in this example is not that both people hold the same things to be true, or even that they have the same understanding regarding the nature of truth. Instead, what is necessary for critical thinking is that both have a conception of truth that can become part of the critical process. This includes considering the coherence, consistency, and communicability of any such conception. This is no small task, but it is essential to the animation of critical thinking. Few people (including most philosophers) have singular coherent and consistent conceptions of truth that are communicable *in their entirety*. Consequently, as critical thinking operates across domains, dimensions, and contexts there is a need to continually check for internal coherence and consistency. Does a notion of truth hold up in the face of new evidence, reasons, and experiences? This effort does not necessarily lead to agreement or singularity. For example, the theistic and atheistic friends will not necessarily settle on a shared understanding of truth. Instead, they may only reveal the incommensurability of their relative notions of truth. However, this provides a starting point for building mutual comprehensibility, which helps identify where aims and assumptions align and diverge, which may need to be subjected to metacritique, and when it may be necessary to draw on other sociocultural and/or existential resources to resolve seemingly intractable disputes or make decisions despite intractability. This is discussed further in the section on mutual comprehensibility.

The simultaneous necessity and indeterminant ambiguity of truth as a necessary feature of critical thinking is reminiscent of the somewhat paradoxical fact that critical thinking is necessarily epistemic yet cannot be tethered to any particular epistemology. Critical thinking requires a notion of truth yet cannot define truth with any certainty. This creates a challenging situation. I argue that the pursuit of truth is a well-justified pragmatic assumption within an expansive understanding of critical thinking, but I cannot claim to have a singular grasp on exactly how truth must be understood. That is, I cannot make a universal claim about the nature of truth. Here, again, we find ourselves caught in Albert's trilemma (1985), falling into infinite regress, moving in circles, or relying on dogma. However, I argue it is possible to make practical decisions about what is required for critical thinking to be consistent and coherent. In this regard, it is fair to claim critical thinking requires a fallible notion of truth. This is not the same as making a universal (and thus self-refuting) claim that truth certainly cannot be certain. Instead, it is only necessary to recognise that *critical thinking requires a fallible notion of truth to function*. This is because truth construed as certainty halts the process of inquiry once one

supposes such certainty has been attained. Along these lines, Rorty sees the tradition of striving for certainty as a thinly veiled pursuit of power:

> *[Claims to truth as a form of certainty are] claims to have read the script of the drama we are acting out, thus relieving us of the need to make up this drama as we go along. Every such power play is, for Heidegger as for Dewey, an expression of the hope that truth may become evident, undeniable, clearly present to the mind. The result of such presence would be that we should no longer have to have projects, no longer have to create ourselves by inventing and carrying out these projects (1991a, pp. 33-34).*

In this view, 'obtaining' truth conceived of as certainty would be the end of inquiry. It would be the end of the Sisyphean endeavour that is criticality. Furthermore, as history shows, perceived certainty invites intellectual stagnation, oppressive impositions of values, and potential totalitarianism (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1992).

I do not mean to imply that Rorty's notion of truth, which is ambiguous and highly contentious, is somehow definitive or 'correct'. Siegel, adamantly disagrees with Rorty, instead claiming critical thinking requires an 'objective' notion of truth that is not (like Rorty's) contingent only on normative solidarity but instead on a world independent of human subjectivity (2017). This is perhaps Siegel's way of holding out hope for an objective perspective from which to mediate metacritique. Focusing on the existential domain and ontological dimension, such a view could also be seen as acknowledging the value of ontological realism to critical thinking. It is certainly easier and more productive to think critically with others if all parties involved acknowledge living in a shared world that exists independent of human subjectivity. This, of course, moves towards difficult and highly debated territory in philosophy and several other fields. The relevant point here is that Siegel also acknowledges that truth is elusive and difficult to discern and that "because we lack direct access to truth, we have no choice but to approach truth by way of justification" (Siegel, 2017, p. 141). Whatever the nature of truth, this lack of 'direct access' leaves critical thinking dependent on justification, which is ever-shifting, never final, and not certain.

My point here is that even those with conflicting notions of truth tend to recognise the necessity of fallibility to criticality. There is simply too much evidence from the scope of human history to show the folly of thinking even the most obvious truths may not be subject to future revision. As Mill warns, a person should never "assume that *their* certainty is the same thing as *absolute* certainty" (2015, p. 19 emphasis in original). The functional power of a fallible conception of truth serves to perpetuate the possibility of critical thinking, necessitates dialogue, and lies at the heart of inquiry. In other words, there are *good reasons* to hold truth as fallible. Consequently, as James notes, "We have to live today by what truth we can get today, and be ready tomorrow to call it a falsehood" (1987, p. 238). This does not eliminate or resolve debate as to the ultimate 'nature' of truth, but only recognises what Popper did well to point out, which is that certainty and truth should be separated (1972). Claims to the latter need not, indeed best not, rest on assumptions of the prior. The case for this approach to truth as the best assumptions

currently available (Dewey, 2008) cannot be made by appeal to anything universal or certain. Instead, it must be made by appeal to contextually relevant evidence. No transcendent or objective perspective is necessary, and no sense of absolute certainty desirable.

Some notion of truth is necessary to facilitate the processes of reasoning essential to critical thinking, and some (e.g., fallible) approaches to truth seem better suited to supporting and sustaining critical thinking. The key point is that it is not possible to think critically without starting from some kinds of assumptions, and those assumptions deemed most reliable and consistent tend to be viewed as truths. As Sellars notes, "anything which can properly be called 'knowing how to do something' presupposes a body of knowledge *that;* or to put it differently, knowledge of truth or facts" (2007, p. 369 emphasis in original). Truths, even when conceived of as fallible, are assumptions essential to the possibility of critical thinking. This fallibilist reduction of truth to assumptions raises questions about how to avoid complete relativity. If two critical frameworks consistently and coherently follow from divergent conceptions of truth they may be incommensurable, and thus critical thinking between the two impossible. However, as noted in Chapter 3 (drawing on Sellars and Taylor), *complete* incommensurability of *entire* critical frameworks is highly improbable – at least if that framework permits of receptivity and reflexivity (see Section 3.3). Furthermore, as discussed below in Section 6.3 regarding the building of mutual comprehensibility, the shared and relational nature of being in the world requires the pursuit of truth to be more than an individual endeavour. This is not to imply, as Rorty might insist, that truth is merely a matter of solidarity and consensus (1989; 1991b). Instead, it is only recognition that truth is not something bound only in the individual domain. It plays an important role in relation to others and the world. Furthermore, the *pursuit* of truth is rarely a purely individual endeavour. Once new information, evidence, perspectives, and reasons are available they must fit into (or potentially help reform through metacritique) any critical framework that aims to remain coherent and consistent. To put this another way, the pursuit of truth (however it is understood) must remain receptive, reflexive, coherent, and consistent – not wilfully ignorant – or it ceases to be critical.

The pursuit of truth, in conjunction with the relational nature of being, introduces *trust* as an essential component of critical thinking. Focusing on the importance of trust (in ideas, others, oneself, and the world itself) helps reveal how 'post-truth' thinking does not actually dispense with truth, but instead changes the standards of trust. Jandric notes that post-truth ideologies rely on trust without adequate relation to truth (2018). This creates misplaced, dogmatic, and decidedly uncritical trust, which is used to justify reasons as part of pseudo-critical thinking. I say 'pseudo-critical' because *unjustified* trust is simply a form of dogmatism, thus cannot serve as a resource for genuine (much less expansive) critical thinking. Trust must be justified, and in many situations, it is difficult to find a better justification than truth. However, once assumed fallible, truth itself cannot always be trusted (enter infinite regress). Consequently, critical thinking requires continual attention to the relationships between truth and justification based on *standards* of trust. Perhaps most importantly, critical thinking requires recognition that it is possible to be wrong, that facts can be proven false *within and between the resources of diverse perspectives*. This is the pursuit of truth, without which expansive critical thinking is not possible.

When it comes to questioning the nature of truth, what needs to be moved beyond is Truth with a capital 'T' as an ultimate arbitrator for all perspectives and grounding for all justification (Rorty, 2008). What cannot be moved beyond is the need to appeal to and interrogate truths and facts as parts of reasoning and critical thinking (Cooper, 1993). Devine notes, "To think beyond the binaries of truth and non-truth means abandoning the privileged position of being able to adjudicate what truth is. It does not mean, however, abandoning a proper respect for interrogating truths and demanding justification" (2018, p. 167). Once truth is no longer understood as an absolute binary, a notion of trust helps navigate the slippery slopes between degrees of truth. This is necessary and possible because fallibility permits for degrees of probability. Certainty may not be an option, but *degrees* of probability are extremely relevant (Hume, 2011). The near certainty of the sun rising tomorrow is not the same as the perceived certainty of one set of values as superior to another. Consequently, it is more reasonable to trust in the prior than the latter. Trust is a way of evaluating degrees of truth without the need for certainty. Trust is a *standard* for truth and other criteria of critical frameworks (see Section 2.6). Relevant critical questions pertain to gradation. How true/good/useful does something need to be to contribute towards justification of reasons in a given context and situation?

Trust is also essential to evaluating what sources, evidence, and information are brought into the processes of critical thinking (Siegel, 2017). It is vital to critically consider which sources of evidence to trust. Along these lines, *honesty* would certainly seem to be a desirable attribute of any rigorous critical thinker. This is not to say one cannot both think critically and be dishonest. That, unfortunately, is possible – though inevitably requires narrowing and compartmentalising criticality. As a relational sociocultural practice, critical thinking is eroded by dishonesty and disingenuous engagement. Honesty is not only essential to genuinely pursuing the truth, but also often required in *accepting* what that pursuit reveals, which is not always easy or comfortable, particularly if incompatible with existing aims and assumptions. Consequently, it is necessary not only to be honest in communicating with others (this is discussed more below regarding mutual comprehensibility) but also with oneself.

Ultimately, Critical thinking cannot rely on a *singular* conception of truth any more than it can rely on a *singular* epistemic perspective. The key point is that critical thinking depends on the *pursuit of truth.* Furthermore, critical thinking requires thinking critically not just about what *is* true, but what truth *is*. This is relevant in building mutual comprehensibility (discussed below), considering which aims and assumptions serve as the starting points for critical frameworks, and establishing the appropriate *scope* of critical thinking.

6.2 Care

The notion of care I draw on here is twofold. It includes the more everyday usage indicating kindness, compassion, and patience with ideas, others, and oneself. This understanding of care most commonly manifests in the attributes of critical thinkers. For example, empathy, openness, and compassion are generally desirable attributes of critical thinkers. As noted in

Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5), exactly how these attributes manifest is context contingent and not the focus of this 'structural' analysis of critical thinking. However, it is important to note that care of this type is a well-justified pragmatic assumption that helps understand how critical thinking can be animated at an expansive scope. Simply put, critical thinking that is genuinely receptive and reflexive requires one to be both careful and caring.

I also draw on a more ontological understanding of care as an essential part of *being,* which is necessary for the very possibility of thinking. This Heideggerian notion of care draws attention to the importance of understanding and navigating meaning and significance as essential aspects of being. For Heidegger, a defining feature of being human is 'taking a stand' on one's own being (1962). To exist is to care about existence. This idea of care may be better translated as 'concern' because it is not necessarily the care of kindness and affection with a positive connotation (Blattner, 2013). Fear, anger, disdain, sorrow, and anxiety are all manifestations of care. As Käufer puts it:

> *[human] existence is such that its own being is always an issue for it, and therefore existence is always self-construing. We confront the question of how to exist, and we answer it by pressing into a set of possibilities and understanding the world and ourselves in terms of our ability to take up these possibilities" (2015, p. 102).*

Simply put, the world is made intelligible and thus thinking possible through care in this ontological sense.

I argue that, as a defining feature of being, care is also a necessary feature of critical thinking and, particularly, *critical being.* Care is perhaps the ultimate animator of critical thinking. After all, the pursuit of truth must itself be animated by something. This is a complex topic, leading towards questions about what animates human rationality. There are many (not necessarily mutually exclusive) possible candidates, like appetites, passions, curiosity, wonder, and desires. Any potential list of the component 'parts' of rationality would be quite long and inevitably incomplete. However, most ideas for what might animate rationality and thus also criticality share in being *affective*. This is just one of the many ways in which emotions are *necessary* to rationality, and thus also criticality (Nussbaum, 2001). As Crowell notes, "A purely rational being could not care for itself or anything else; however skilled it was at calculating and reasoning, if it lacked affect nothing could matter to it" (2015, p. 222). Consequently, some form of emotional comportment is essential to both the pursuit of truth and criticality. This is why I make the pragmatic assumption that care is essential to animating critical thinking at an expansive scope.

Heidegger outlines a 'care structure' as essential to understanding the fundamental ontology of being human (1962). It is not necessary to elaborate this structure and its associated Heideggerian terminology in detail. Instead, I only want to draw attention to some very basic features of this structure with relevance to critical thinking. Heidegger's care structure comprises 'thrownness', 'fallenness', and 'existentiality' (McManus, 2015a). Thrownness is the fact that, as Wrathall points out, "Humans are born into and shaped by a world that they do

not control, with traits and characteristics they do not choose" (2015, p. 211). Fallenness is the inevitable and necessary process of learning the significances and meanings, social norms, and ways of being that familiarise one with the sociocultural background of thinking and being (Heidegger, 1962). Fallenness can result in a life of inauthentic conformity, where one is shaped by the contexts of the world without ever realising the possibility of reshaping those contexts (Dreyfus, 1991). This unreflective (uncritical) fallenness into the world does not mean a person fails to think, perhaps even critically (in an instrumental and non-expansive manner), but instead that a person fails to recognise the degree and nature of their contingency. Their thinking and being precludes metacritique of any substantial depth. However, fallenness is not negative, it is necessary (Heidegger, 1962). Fallenness facilitates acquisition of the aims and assumptions of various intersecting contexts that make critical thinking possible. It is only after being thrown into a world and falling into frameworks for making sense of that world that it becomes possible to think about change. This possibility is reliant on existentiality.

Humans have the capacity to recognise existential possibilities, ways things could be different than they are. We also have a sense of time. This capacity for understanding temporality means that thrownness (past) and fallenness (present) can be explored and understood, and that projection into the future (existentiality) can provide new possibilities (Archer, 2012). As the relations of care that shape thinking and being are understood they can also be intentionally reshaped. In Heidegger's thinking, this process need not always be critical, or even guided by explicit or articulable thinking (1966). However, it is certainly possible to see the potential – indeed, I argue, the necessity – of engaging with this basic care structure as an essential component of critical thinking. This is because care both animates the process of critical thinking (including the pursuit of truth) and provides a focal point for potential metacritique. What people care about and find significant and meaningful (in both the mundane and more emotive senses) does a great deal to shape their thinking and being. Consequently, critical being requires attention to care.

The intersection of care and temporality is essential to understanding the relevance of Heidegger's care structure to critical thinking. This comes from the capacity to think critically about the past, to understand the present, and act towards the future. To use the terminology of critical thinking, this amounts to recognising contextually contingent aims and assumptions shaping a critical framework (thrownness), understanding how to think critically within that framework (fallenness) and remaining receptive to new possibilities and perspectives as resources for metacritique (existentiality). All parts of this structure are interdependent. This structure can seem pessimistically deterministic, as if people are 'determined' by the world they are thrown into and resigned to think and act only by the norms and understandings of the current contexts they have fallen into. Indeed, this is the case *to a degree.* However, people are not merely 'products' of their past or 'functions' of their present. Awareness of this structure *over time*, of past and present contextuality and contingency in conjunction with future possibilities, creates the opportunity for change (Wrathall, 2015). This is where I argue critical thinking can play an important role. In this sense, people are defined not just by what they have thought and done, but by what they will (and will not) think and do. Indeed, Heidegger sees this

'projection' forward as a definitive feature of being human (1962, p. 276). I see it as an essential feature of critical thinking.

A thought experiment can help demonstrate the importance of existentiality (projection into the future) as essential to understanding being, and thus also critical being. Imagine a person is cloned in every regard, including every personality trait and memory. The clone is an *exact* replica, identical in every regard, but at the moment of cloning becomes separately embodied. At the exact moment of replication, it seems a single individual 'self' inhabits two bodies simultaneously. This is because every aspect of the past and present of these two separately embodied beings is identical. Sharing exactly the same past would 'determine' an identical present *in the moment the clone is created.* However, once the two are separately embodied, the 'determinism' of that past does not hold complete sway over the potentialities of the future. With the separately embodied capacities for perception, cognition, emotion, and action the two become individuals based on how they draw on the past and present to comport themselves towards the possibilities of the future. Each moment that passes increases individuation to the point where it would seem ridiculous not to think of each as a unique individual. An essential aspect, defining the *being,* of these two individuals would be shifts in their relationships of care, their comportment towards relational involvement in the world, and the 'stand' they take on themselves.

This 'pressing into the future' definitive of these two beings need not be a critical process at all, and I would never argue that it should be a critical process in its entirety. Indeed, as argued in the previous chapter, non-critical experiences may prove powerfully formative in the 'individuation' of these two beings. Experiences of wonder and wu-wei could allow the world to 'impose' itself on each person in ways that reveals or conceals possibilities and potentialities for both critical and non-critical thinking and acting. However, quite importantly, there is also clear potential for critical thinking to play a role in this process of self-determination. Here, I suspect that Heidegger's notion of authenticity (as a form of relational agency) could provide further insight into the potentiality of critical being. This, however, is a complex and contentious concept (McManus, 2015b) that I do not have space to develop here. Instead, I only want to draw attention to the vital roles of care and temporality in this ontological sense as essential to understanding being, and the possibility of critical being. It is comportment towards the indeterminacy of the future that reveals possibilities and perspectives for metacritique, thus facilitating potential changes in the contexts of the world, including those that shape thinking and being themselves.

Another vital feature of care is that it often manifests as meaning. Consequently, consideration of care requires attention to meaning. This is important because truth becomes more ambiguous and potentially problematic in situations where various forms of socially constructed meaning, like those of norms and values, do more to guide critical thinking. This is why the pursuit of truth alone is not enough to adequately animate critical thinking across all domains and dimensions. Attention to meaning, understood as part of care, is also essential. Like care, meaning is employed here as a multifaceted idea with both every-day and more ontological implications. Meaning encompasses consideration of what signs, symbols, language, and

practices indicate or signify – and how they are interpreted. What words, gestures, and behaviours 'mean' varies by context in important ways. Along these lines, Noddings and Brooks recognise efforts to understand meaning as an essential and highly practical aspect of critical thinking. This begins, quite understandably, with linguistic considerations (understanding the meaning of words) but also extends into questioning the contextualised meanings of concepts like equity and justice (Noddings and Brooks, 2017). Furthermore, what people value, what they find significant and meaningful, goes a long way towards determining the aims and assumptions that guide thinking and action, including where and how people seek truth, just as what people believe to be true shapes how they make meaning of the world. It is necessary to know what words and symbols mean, just as it is necessary to know what is valued, important, and significant for critical thinking to proceed, particularly in diverse contexts where there may be substantial variation in meaning.

I also argue that critical thinking requires an understanding of meaning as a manifestation of care in the more ontological sense discussed above. Seeking an understanding of meaning works to explicate implicit aspects of contexts and critical frameworks. This more ontological exploration of meaning reveals and conceals the aspects of context that create the very possibility for critical thinking (E. Williams, 2016). To use a Heideggerian example, the simple act of recognising (much less using) a hammer is relationally entangled with other things (nails and wood), purposes (building a home), and practices (carpentry) that give the hammer meaning (Heidegger, 1962). While the ontic[6] facts of what a hammer 'is' may remain stable, a hammer is a different thing *in a meaningful sense* depending on whether it is in the hands of a sculptor, metal worker, or murderer. A hammer dropped into a context without nails, wooden-built homes, or carpenters would retain its ontic properties but cease to be a hammer *in a meaningful ontological sense.* Indeed, the people of such a context may attribute meaning to the object in a way that makes it an entirely new thing (e.g., a religious symbol, a decorative ornament, a weapon of war), while it also remains (in its material constitution) exactly the same thing. The constellations of meaning and significance that shape what things 'are' in this meaningful sense, greatly impacts critical frameworks. Consequently, seeking to understand meaning in this more ontological manner is an effort to reveal some of the deepest and often most implicit aims and assumptions of the 'background' that shapes critical frameworks. This provides the opportunity for expansive and potentially transformative critical thinking.

Attention to care also requires attention to the complex relationship between truth and meaning. This can be seen, in a very general way, as a manifestation of the is-ought distinction. Most famously associated with Hume, this is the argument that it is not possible to derive normative ideals (how things ought to be) from empirical observations (how things are) (2011). This distinction is open to challenges. For example, for some things, what they *are* entails how they *ought to be*. As MacIntyre notes, the 'is' of being a pocket watch implies the 'ought' of fitting in a pocket and accurately telling time (2013). From the facts that an alleged pocket watch is too big to fit into a pocket and fails to accurately tell time it is possible to derive valuative

[6] I follow Heidegger (1962) in differentiating the ontic (the physical matter of the universe) from the ontological (the human ascription of meaning).

judgments, namely that it is not a 'good' pocket watch (ibid). Once it is known what a pocket watch *is*, something is known about how it *ought to be*. However, this only shows the ways in which purposes, practices, and the paraphernalia they entail are normative constructs of *meaning*. In a society that either has not encountered clocks, or has no need to account for time in the manner provided by a clock, the 'ought' of an oversized pocket watch reverts to the 'is' of a strange ticking object. As noted above, things taken for granted as 'things' are entangled in pre-existing networks of normative meanings and significance (Heidegger, 1962; 1967). Critical thinking is not a matter of mere truth and facts, but also depends on how truths and facts are interpreted, integrated into systems of meaning, and oriented towards ends. Consequently, if critical thinking is sequestered in an epistemological dimension and animated only by the pursuit of truth, it remains ill-equipped to draw on and integrate aspects of other domains and dimensions, thus limiting the potential scope of critical thinking. Similarly, if assumedly universal values are imposed on the 'structure' of critical thinking, the meaning-revealing power of criticality is constrained. Critical thinking cannot rely on predetermined values because part of what it must do is seek to reveal and interrogate values themselves. Seeking to understand meaning, including the relationships between meaning and truth, is an essential part of critical thinking.

Considering the relationship between truth and meaning is particularly important in a 'post-truth' age, in which meaning (particularly manifesting as values) sometimes supplants truth as the primary bearer of justification for thought, belief, and action (Haidt, 2016; Legg, 2018). I argue that completely conflating meaning and truth does great violence to critical thinking. For example, construing the normative values of one context as universal truths applicable in all contexts, stands to greatly impede critical thinking across diverse contexts. This is not to suggest that critical thinking should (or could) be value free. Quite the contrary, values are invariably essential parts of critical frameworks (Paul and Elder, 2009). My point is that no *single* set of fixed or predetermined understanding of meaning, including values, can define critical thinking. Similarly, it ought not be assumed that seemingly universal truths will be interpreted and understood through the same systems of meaning and significance across all contexts. Consequently, I contend it is essential to see truth and meaning as interdependent parts of a larger whole. Meaning could not be constructed or conveyed without some sense of truth, nor could truth be made sense of without some structure of meaning (Sellars, 2007). It is networks of truth and meaning that give structure to critical frameworks and define the rough boundaries of context, like those of traditions, disciplines, and practices. Both truth and meaning are essential to critical thinking. Instead of aiming to prioritise one over the other, it seems more productive to consider how their relation fluctuates across various critical dimensions. Here, it is helpful to refer to the idea of critical scope. As critical thinking expands to work across multiple domains and dimensions, the place and prominence of facts and values within critical frameworks must be navigated and negotiated. This means, for example, that it is not necessary to choose between what is true and what is good as a guide to critical thinking, but instead to try exploring how the two relate within critical frameworks and contexts.

It is important to note that care – and particularly understanding meaning – *must* expand beyond the individual domain. This is necessary not only because it is undesirable to conceive of

critical thinking as a process of purely individualistic care or subjective 'meaning-making', but also because the nature of care as an aspect of being, thinking, and acting is contingent on a pre-existing 'background' and takes place in relation to a world both constitutive of, and beyond the self (Dreyfus and Taylor, 2015). It is not possible to think critically in a vacuum; it is a process that always begins from a network of pre-existing critical frameworks of aims and assumptions shaped by shared understandings of truth, care, meaning, and significance (Wittgenstein, 1975; 2009). Consequently, expansive critical thinking must be directed at how meaning articulates with and shapes the aims and assumptions of a critical framework in relation to the world beyond oneself. This approach to meaning draws attention to the fact that a great many things (knowledge, values, aims, and assumptions) must already be in place to create the conditions of possibility for criticality. This has profound implications for education, which are considered in the next chapter.

Just as the pursuit of truth introduces a need for trust into critical thinking and honesty amongst critical thinkers, attention to care introduces the need for empathy as a form of receptivity, and kindness as a desirable attribute of critical thinkers. Care is always contingent on an already existing world, and while constitutive of individual beings, care is only possible in relation to the world beyond any individual (Crowell, 2015). *Care constitutes being through relation to the world*. Empathy (not limited only to the human world) is a form of receptivity to this contingency and relationality. Empathy expands the world beyond individuals, making it possible to discern relations of significance and meaning that shape contexts and critical frameworks. Empathy of this sort is both an intellectual and emotional responsiveness to the world, which facilitates the perspectival shifts necessary for potential metacritique and expansive critical thinking. Empathy involves the ability to understand and perhaps even embody the ideas and emotions of others (Nussbaum, 2001). However, it also extends to understanding the networks of relations that give something like a chair or hammer meaning. Trying to understand what a hammer is (beyond describing mere physical properties) without considering its relationships to the world is incoherent. For example, understanding a hammer invariably includes understanding the idea of nails, the building of homes, and craft of carpentry. Similarly, understanding a chair – as simple as that sounds – is tangled up with cultural norms about how chairs are used, ideas of comfort, questions of cost, fond memories of sitting in conversation, or less fond memories of sitting in classrooms. The list of possible relations is far too immense to articulate, much less list. Nonetheless, this inarticulable network of relations and meanings shapes not only how the 'facts' of simple objects like the hammer and the chair are understood, but also how other people and critical frameworks are understood.

I argue that empathy, as an emotive driver for receptivity, helps move thinking beyond the self to explore relations of care. It may sound odd to have empathy for a hammer. If so, I suggest thinking critically about the potential variances of meaning a hammer may be entangled in and defined by. From the hammer as part of a symbol on a flag, to the hammer as an essential instrument of a profession, to the hammer with sentimental value because it was owned by a loved one long passed, or the hammer wielded by a frenzied psychopath. This understanding of empathy expands the concept in a fashion similar to how Heidegger uses the idea of care, as recognition of an inevitable comportment towards the world, which broadens the concept

beyond the every-day usage. This broader notion of empathy is a way of recognising the need for receptivity to variety and flux in potential meaning. It is a receptive facet of care, of recognition that one does not only comport oneself towards the world, but also must remain open to how the world impresses itself onto a person. In this way, receptivity through empathy is a way to explore care and reveal new perspectives. As noted in the previous chapter, non-critical experiences, like those of wonder and wu-wei, can contribute a great deal to criticality in this regard. Through receptivity to the world beyond the self, they can reveal new perspectives, possibilities, and relations of care that integrate into a cycle of critical and non-critical states capable of meaningfully informing critical being.

Finally, just as honesty is desirable (but unfortunately not always necessary) to the pursuit of truth, it is desirable for empathy, particularly towards other beings, to be infused with kindness and generosity. These attributes may manifest differently in different contexts. However, it is fair to generalise (just as with honesty) that kindness and generosity benefit the building of mutual comprehensibility necessary for expansive criticality. Once again, I must reiterate that attributes are not the primary focus of this thesis. However, I hope this analysis makes clear how understanding the features of critical thinking, including the pragmatic assumptions laid out in this chapter, can help reveal desirable attributes of critical thinkers.

Truth and care work within critical thinking to elucidate the contextually contingent and relational nature of being, creating opportunities to shed light on implicit aims and assumptions previously beyond the reach of critique. This is essential to revealing new possibilities, which allow for the intentional shaping of the world, ways of thinking, and ways of being. This is necessary because people are born into an entanglement of contexts (e.g., cultures, traditions, societies) that shape a starting point for critical (and all other) thinking before they have the capacity or opportunity to intentionally shape those contexts or critical thinking itself. In this way, the pursuit of truth and attention to care in sociocultural and existential domains are part of the liberating potential of critical thinking in the individual domain.

6.3 Mutual comprehensibility

The pursuits of truth and care are vital to expanding the scope of critical thinking. The final pragmatic assumption considered here is pursuit of mutual comprehensibility. This can be seen more simply as the effort to be understood and understand others within and between critical frameworks. Like the other features, complete ‘attainment’ is not necessary or expected. However, continued *pursuit* is required to animate critical thinking at an expansive scope. Mutual comprehensibility is necessary because two people may think critically with coherence and consistency *within* relative critical frameworks that are incompatible, incommensurate, or seemingly incomparable with each other (Feyerabend, 1981; T. Kuhn, 1996). If differences in the aims, assumptions, criteria, and standards guiding critical thinking are not mutually understood, people end up speaking past instead of with each other. This is not desirable for critical thinking, education, or society. I argue that seeking mutual comprehensibility is the key to animating critical thinking across critical frameworks. This is necessary precisely because it

is possible to think critically *within* a context without any concern for the comprehensibility of other contexts. Sometimes, this is unproblematic, desirable, and productive. For example, such narrow and instrumental focus is not problematic when engaging in highly instrumental and specialised tasks. Such examples of critical thinking are limited in scope *for good reasons*. However, just as expansive critical thinking does not permit wilful ignorance regarding relevant issues of truth and care, it also cannot permit refusals of receptivity to diversity. This need is particularly acute in cross-cultural contexts, though also relevant to any context with a plurality of perspectives *and an intention of expansive critical thinking*. The pursuit of mutual comprehensibility is what motivates and animates critical thinking across diverse contexts. This requires identifying and dealing with the kinds of incommensurability commonly claimed as sources of intractable relativism. I argue this is possible because, as shown in Chapter 3, critical frameworks need not (indeed, probably cannot) engage *in their entirety, all at once* (Sellars, 1997). Instead, as explored in Chapters 4 and 5, there are a myriad of ways in which critical frameworks overlap, diverge, and interact to facilitate new perspectives and possibilities, including those of metacritique.

Furthermore, the shared and relational nature of thinking and being requires *mutuality* of comprehensibility. The necessity of interacting and relating to others as parts of a shared world requires comprehensibility to move beyond the individual into the sociocultural domain (Dreyfus, 2014a). As explored in Chapters 4 and 5, expansive critical thinking also requires movement into the ontological, ethical, emotional, political, and mystical dimensions. Seeking mutual comprehensibility helps identify when the scope of critical thinking should be expanded. It is also essential to animating this expansion and making it possible across diverse frameworks and contexts. Building mutual comprehensibility helps discern the relevant boundaries of critical thinking, including identifying which aims and assumptions ought to be targeted for metacritique, and at what depth. The capacity for plurality and diversity to contribute to expansive critical thinking (what I argue for in Chapter 3) is contingent on the ability to understand meaningful and relevant differences between critical frameworks – *even if those differences are incommensurable.*

Incommensurability does not entail incomprehensibility. To put this in simpler language, difference, and disagreement about aims and assumptions do not need to prevent understanding those aims and assumptions. I argue that even in rare cases where two critical frameworks seem completely incommensurable – incomparable in every regard – mutual comprehensibility is still possible. It is exactly this possibility, without necessity of complete attainment, that critical thinking must pursue. The fact that incommensurable perspectives can still be mutually comprehensible is evident in examples from history. As Taylor points out, Europeans arriving in the Americas encountered radically different cultures, including some that engaged in human sacrifice. These practices, far from being incomprehensible, could be understood (or misunderstood) through the ideas of religion, ritual, and tradition internal to European critical frameworks (Taylor, 2010). If indigenous Americans had entered European cathedrals to observe the ritual of communion, in which wine and bread are believed to be transformed into blood and flesh to be consumed by congregates, this too would have been difficult, but possible, to comprehend. However, the deities and cosmology underwriting both traditions (fundamental

assumptions) would remain contradictory and incommensurable. A person could not reasonably believe both simultaneously, nor measure the merits of one by the other. Nonetheless, there would be ample resources for mutual comprehensibility, as both traditions share a common aim of understanding and explaining the world but do so by proceeding from very different assumptions.

Similarly, a geocentric view of the cosmos is completely incompatible with a heliocentric view of the solar system. As Kuhn points out, one cannot 'grow' into the other. Instead, completely new assumptions are required in the movement from one paradigm to the other (T. Kuhn, 1996). Nonetheless, the reasoning leading to each view of the cosmos, and the abandoning of one view for the other, is completely comprehensible. Quantum mechanics and classical physics both describe the world with precision, yet they are incompatible at a fundamental level. I cannot claim to understand either, but there are those that can understand both. This is possible because there is nothing about their incommensurability that precludes understanding both. Instead, the key feature of these examples is that one cannot reasonably draw on incommensurable or incomparable assumptions *simultaneously*. It is incoherent to reason in one moment from a geocentric perspective and in the next from a heliocentric perspective. The laws of classical physics cannot be applied to explain quantum mechanics. This inconsistency creates incoherence and breaks down the potential for critical thinking. Furthermore, once the explanatory power of a new or adjusted framework is understood, it is not reasonable (much less critical) to ignore these new understandings in favour of reversion to prior perspectives (Taylor, 1995). This, of course, can and does happen but it is distinctly uncritical, lacking in receptivity, reflexivity, and coherence. the idea of scope helps determine the *relevance* of incommensurable assumptions. For example, the origins and arrangement of the cosmos are unlikely to be relevant to someone thinking critically about how best to build a bridge or resolve a budget crisis. Figuring out the appropriate depth of metacritique is an important part of critical thinking. Working to build mutual comprehensibility helps meet this need.

The important point here is that incommensurability and incomparability do not prevent mutual comprehensibility. Instead, understanding that certain aims, assumptions, criteria, or standards are incommensurable can be vital to critical thinking. Mutual comprehensibility can help prevent frustrating and futile efforts at critical dialogue. It can help people speak with instead of past each other. Seeking mutual comprehensibility is essential in navigating relative critical frameworks. It helps to identify relevant points of disagreement or incommensurability that indicate needs for changes in scope. For example, by inclusion and consideration of additional domains and dimensions of criticality, or by identifying the aims and assumptions towards which each framework can direct metacritique. Finding relevant points of disagreement and incommensurability is vital to critical thinking at an expansive scope. This justifies the pragmatic assumption that seeking mutual comprehensibility is an essential feature of critical thinking.

Making a case for the value (I argue, necessity) of pursuing mutual comprehensibility is more straightforward than understanding how people are to be *motivated* towards this pursuit. Critical thinking is of little value without consideration of what, if anything, *animates* efforts

to think critically between relative frameworks. It is much easier and more comfortable for people to pursue internal coherence within critical frameworks and simply disregard external challenges to that coherence. Confirmation bias (along with a long list of other cognitive biases) is a common, powerful, and problematic force in human reasoning (Mercier and Sperber, 2017).

I argue the motivation for thinking critically between diverse and potentially incommensurable critical frameworks comes from the *mutuality* of being in the world. The inevitably relational and social nature of being in the world requires the pursuit of *mutual* comprehensibility. The mentality of 'you do you' or desire to 'find your own truth' only works in a world where people never need to do anything together. This, however, is not how the world works. For example, return to the atheist and theist with a common friend that has fallen ill and is unable to contribute towards any decision regarding a course of action.[7] This fictional (and extreme) theist adheres to beliefs that reject modern medical interventions, while their atheistic friend does not. As already noted, this does not necessarily matter in many of their collaborative endeavours, including the possibility to think critically together about many things. However, the mutuality of a shared friend requires that they think critically *together* about what to do. Should their friend be treated only with prayer, or should they go to hospital? It is the relational need for action in a shared world that makes previously irrelevant fundamental assumptions relevant, and thus motivates *mutual* comprehensibility.

Seeking mutual comprehensibility helps to reveal the assumptions relevant to critical thinking. If both the atheist and theist are to think critically *about this topic,* then both must be receptive and reflexive, including remaining open to metacritique directed at the aims and assumptions giving rise to disagreement or incommensurability. Remember that both people have proven capable of thinking critically about all sorts of things in all sorts of contexts. In addressing questions about how to take care of their mutual friend, the pursuit of mutual comprehensibility helps recognise boundaries of relevant scope. In this case, it is likely to quickly become clear the two friends hold incommensurable fundamental assumptions in the existential domain, with relevance to their shared context, and thus the situation requires deep metacritique. In such cases, a person's 'critical spirit' may simply not be strong enough to confront the challenge. The world of everyday experience is rife with examples of this kind of intentionally limited critical scope. This, once again, is where the depth of attributes becomes important. A person with sharp critical skills but lacking in the dispositions and virtues necessary to achieve expansive critical thinking may not be willing or able to think critically in a situation that requires metacritique directed at fundamental assumptions. However, if the theist and atheist both aspire towards *critical being* they cannot simply turn away from the challenges of thinking critically about the mutually relevant issue of their friend. They must decide whether to go to hospital or commence prayer.

[7] I am not claiming theism and modern medicine are somehow incompatible. I only use this overly stark example to illustrate important points about incommensurable fundamental assumptions.

In such a stark example, it may seem easy to identify the relevant incommensurable aims and assumptions. However, even in such cases this essential step can be overlooked. For example, the friends could each be riled to anger, thinking the other does not *want* their friend to get better. They could erroneously think their disagreement is about differing *aims* when it actually arises from differing *assumptions*. They both want their friend to get better but are reasoning from different assumptions as to how that aim should be achieved. During critical discussion, the atheist is likely to point out the preponderance of evidence showing medical treatment is substantially more likely to lead to a full recovery, while prayer is far more likely to lead to continued illness or even death. This pursuit of truth could provide shifts in perspective that facilitate metacritique for the theist – but not necessarily. If the theistic friend responds by saying this evidence is unpersuasive because the aim of prayer is not necessarily health in this life, but salvation in the eternal beyond, then both the aims and assumptions of these two critical frameworks have diverged in an incommensurable manner. The evidence of one framework cannot be judged by the assumptions of the other. Failure to recognise this will lead the two to speak past each other and preclude meaningful critical engagement. Identifying the source of disagreement or incommensurability is an essential step towards mutual comprehensibility and the possibility of thinking critically together.

Identifying points of incommensurability does not guarantee eventual agreement. Indeed, sometimes it only seeks to facilitate meaningful disagreement. For example, prior to establishing mutual comprehensibility, the theist and atheist do not really disagree because they are not *able* to meaningfully disagree. Disagreement requires a degree of understanding. If relevant aspects of a critical framework are not mutually comprehensible, even if remaining contradictory and incommensurable, they are not in disagreement so much as they are incapable of meaningful engagement. This is why critical thinking must strive for mutual comprehensibility, even if what is comprehended is incompatible or incommensurable. This is necessary to show where thinking is happening in parallel and where there are points of possible connection, *even if that connection is a point of disagreement or incommensurability*. To put this another way, finding enough common ground to disagree in a mutually comprehensible way is a critical 'success' because, through mutual comprehensibility, there comes the possibility for new perspectives and thus also metacritique.

For the theist and atheist, it is possible that neither friend can rely on proving the other wrong because their disagreement stems from the inability to share reasoning – from incommensurability. If the theist's faith is defined by belief *without* reasons, then reason cannot refute their faith. This, however disagreeable to the atheist, is *comprehensible.* It is also definitively uncritical. Consequently, mutual comprehensibility reveals the point at which two fundamental assumptions become mutually exclusive and the possibilities of critical thinking drawing on those assumptions are closed off. At such a point, it would seem that critical thinking is no longer possible. What can be done at such a juncture? Is it necessary for one side to simply concede the argument because they could not change the fundamental assumptions of the other? Is it necessary to resort to force? Must the two be resigned to talk past each other without any hope of making anything other than a seemingly arbitrary decision regarding the life of their friend? I argue, certainly not.

Instead, such an impasse indicates the necessity of expanding critical thinking beyond singular assumptions. This is possible because critical frameworks need not be set against each other in totality. Furthermore, the more mutual comprehensibility is built, the better equipped each party becomes to engage with critical thinking *within* their own critical frameworks *via resources acquired from other critical frameworks*. Failure to change one fundamental assumption does not necessarily preclude all productive critical thinking. For example, while the theist may be unmoved by efforts to change their fundamental theistic assumptions, it may be possible to reason through appeal within their critical framework, perhaps by making the case for medicine as an extension of divine creation. This may resonate *within* the theist's critical framework in a way that facilitates reasonable agreement despite the continuation of incommensurability regarding other assumptions. For some, this may veer towards manipulation or reasoning in 'bad faith'. This is a possibility that requires ethical attention, as such an approach could be used maliciously. However, it is also a highly pragmatic approach that can reveal new possibilities for both parties. As noted above, the possibility of malicious application ought not constrain critical thinking but, instead, calls attention to the need for its expansion into other dimensions, particularly the ethical, emotional, and political. The key point here is that building mutual comprehensibility can help animate critical thinking in some of the most difficult circumstances, it protects against resignation or abandonment of criticality at the junctures which most require critical attention.

The *mutuality* of being also requires expansion into the sociocultural and existential domains. The theist and atheist are clearly engaged in the individual domain and, through their relation to each other and a shared friend, a degree of the sociocultural domain. They are also drawn towards the existential domain because a decision must be made regarding a mutually regarded aspect of the world (their friend) despite the incommensurability of aims and assumptions structuring their respective critical frameworks. Ultimately, the friend must either be prayed for or sent to hospital. If the theist and atheist find themselves at an incommensurable impasse, unable to effectively or critically reason together, resources can be drawn from the broader sociocultural domain where social norms, laws, and institutions provide aims and assumptions that structure critical frameworks beyond both individuals. In aiming to resolve their dispute, it will become very relevant whether these friends live in a theocratic society that forsakes modern medicine or one that values medical science. It will also matter what weight that society gives to individual liberty, what institutions exist to arbitrate such disputes, and any number of other potential factors. This is not to say the aims and assumptions of sociocultural critical frameworks somehow have priority or are necessarily 'correct' – indeed, they are often exactly what metacritique aims to change. It is simply to point out that the sociocultural domain provides aims and assumptions that can help guide critical thinking in the face of incommensurable individual and relational perspectives.

This is a good juncture to remember that the existential domain is not one of pure abstraction, but a domain that draws attention to the world beyond both individuals and societies. That is, to the world itself. In this case, attention to the existential domain could reveal empirical evidence that modern medicine is more effective than prayer in treating the kind of illness that

has befallen the friend of the atheist and theist. Thinking critically in the existential dimension would require attention to these aspects of the world, it would also point towards the need for metacritique of fundamental assumptions regarding the very nature of the world, thus bringing theistic belief/non-belief into question. Ultimately, if the theist and atheist comprehend each other well enough to discern the sources of their incommensurability, they can *choose* (or perhaps be compelled) to draw on the resources of sociocultural critical frameworks and/or experience *in the world itself* to identify evidence, reasons, and potential points of metacritique within other domains and dimensions to determine a course of action, even if this leaves one or both discontent and in disagreement. The shared and social nature of the world often requires action without complete commensurability, much less agreement. This is a difficult experience that critical thinking can positively contribute towards, even if only by laying bare such a necessity.

This may seem like a slippery slope towards relativistically 'agreeing to disagree' or undue deference to social norms. However, it is vital to remember that critical thinking requires continued and persistent effort to pursue truth, explore care, and build mutual comprehensibility. Identifying points of incommensurability is not an invitation to simply 'agree to disagree' because the building of mutual comprehensibility provides new footholds for the pursuits of truth and care, which must also retain the features of coherence, consistency, and communicability. Just as the pursuit of truth introduces the idea of trust, and attention to care elicits a need for empathy, the building of mutual comprehensibility requires reciprocity. The pursuit of mutual comprehensibility needs to be mutual. If one party does not seek to understand the other, then mutuality is lost, and criticality cannot proceed. Pursuing mutual comprehensibility should not lead to complacency but further criticality. This does not mean commensurability (much less agreement) must be achieved. It does, however, indicate that critical thinking need not necessarily be discarded when incommensurability is encountered. Instead, this should be seen as an opportunity and invitation for further critical thinking, particularly when points of incommensurability become contextually relevant. This often requires expansion into the sociocultural and existential domains, the aims and assumptions of which can help move forward in the face of intractable disputes, while themselves remaining open to metacritique. As noted by Sellars in Chapter 3, this cannot necessarily happen *all at once.* However, an expansive understanding of critical thinking, along the lines of *critical being,* can integrate critical thinking into a sustainable process of perpetual, even if sometimes piecemeal, engagement.

At this juncture, having raised the potential for drawing on sociocultural critical frameworks, it is certainly possible to see inclusive democracy, freedom of information, and freedom of expression as desirable features of those frameworks. Indeed, it could be argued that liberal democracy is an effort to manifest critical thinking at a sociocultural scale. In his formation of critical thinking, Dewey is unambiguous about the necessity of democracy to criticality and, particularly, of criticality to democracy (Dewey, 2018). The idea of mutuality outlined here also points towards the idea that pluralistic liberal democracy is not contingent solely on agreement, but also on the possibility of *mutually comprehensible* disagreement (Lukes, 2017). It can be easy to overlook the importance and privilege of profound disagreement. However, I

once again contend that while contextual conditions, aims, and assumptions like those of democracy and freedom of expression have profound impacts on the possibilities and forms of critical thinking, they cannot *define* critical thinking. It would seem greatly limiting to assume one cannot think critically in non-democratic contexts, even with limitations on access to information and freedom of expression. Doing so may take different forms, require different attributes, and may come with much higher stakes. However, it seems vital, and highly desirable, that critical thinking *can* operate in such contexts to create the possibility for change – even if the nature of that change cannot be predetermined. This is where my approach to critical thinking reconnects with the aims of education and society, which is the focus of the next chapter.

7 Implications for practice in UK universities

This thesis provides resources (e.g., ideas, terminology, concepts) that contribute towards ongoing discussions regarding a range of questions in higher education. This includes debates about the purposes, aims, curricula, pedagogies, and environments of UK universities. In this chapter, I draw attention to a few implications in each of these key areas as a means of demonstrating the relevance and applicability of the ideas developed through this project. I make distinctions between the purposes, aims, curricula, pedagogies, and environments of universities to help organise ideas. However, I recognise the mutually dependent and intertwined nature of these facets of education and institutions. Some of these facets, like curriculum and pedagogy, are essentially inseparable (Barnett, 2013). However, I contend there is value in making *analytical* distinctions between these facets of education to help structure analysis and understand the interconnected parts of larger processes. Finally, as noted in the introduction (see Section 1.3), I focus primarily on universities with undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in mind. That is because these are the programmes that claim to require and aim for the most expansive forms of critical thinking (OECD, 2019; QAA, 2019).

The implications discussed in this chapter remain generally broad. They are not precise prescriptions. A degree of generality is deemed appropriate to leave room for the interpretation and flexibility necessary to accommodate implementation in diverse contexts. Higher education is not just one thing, nor are universities homogenous in nature or needs. In places, I draw out more specific implications, like the necessity of explicitly addressing critical thinking at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study. However, I am acutely aware of the vast distance that can exist between idealistic implications and actual implementation. The latter must address structural realities with complex and often competing variables, interests, and stakeholders. Moving from implications to implementation is also a necessarily localised endeavour that requires contextual awareness and much higher degrees of specificity. This is particularly true in the UK, where devolved higher education systems differ in fundamental structure between nations. For example, universities in Scotland generally offer four-years of undergraduate study. This system is better equipped to deliver a liberal education (something I suggest is valuable to critical thinking) than the three-years of undergraduate study provided in England. Similarly, taught postgraduate study across the UK tends to be one year in duration, which creates significant challenges for meeting ambitious suggestions for curricular breadth and depth. Some, but certainly not all, of the implications for practice raised here may point towards the need for radical reconsideration of higher education policy and structure. This is fitting, as critical thinking at an expansive scope often results in questioning 'taken for granted' aims and assumptions – in this case, regarding the nature and organisation of universities. However, I do not have space in this thesis to discuss the practical possibilities, including the many structural and organisational impediments, of every implication. Instead, I simply want to draw attention to how this thesis can constructively contribute to discussions in key aspects of higher education.

In this chapter, I argue that realising critical thinking at an expansive scope requires an expansive conception of the purposes of universities, which must avoid over-instrumentalization and segmentation. Furthermore, the multifaceted (and contested) purposes of higher education, and substantive contexts of universities, contain inherent tensions that need not be eliminated, but instead navigated and negotiated with critical thinking. One way to achieve this is by conceiving of universities as places that explore the possibilities of being (Dall'Alba, 2011). Moving from these broader purposes towards more specific aims, I conclude that cultivating critical being is best served through a somewhat existential interpretation of liberal education as aiming to provide the resources and impetus for critical being. At the curricular level, I draw attention to the need for breadth, as understood through exposure to diverse critical frameworks and depth via requirements for questioning of fundamental assumptions within specialised areas of study. I suggest the terminological and conceptual model of this thesis can serve as a rubric to help evaluate the scope of critical thinking within universities, schools, institutes, programmes, and courses. I also argue for the necessity of providing both stand-alone critical thinking courses and explicit attention to critical thinking within disciplines and subjects at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This is necessary in large part because the internationalisation of higher education requires shared resources and understandings to facilitate critical engagement, even if that engagement results in disagreement or incommensurability. Here, again, I contend that the philosophically informed understanding of critical thinking outlined in this thesis can help by providing resources for critical thinking within and across diverse contexts. I then discuss implications for pedagogy, with particular focus on the more novel aspects of this thesis relating to the idea of critical being. I contend that drawing on critical being to orient aims and pedagogy can help balance the determinant and indeterminant aspects of higher education. This leads to consideration of implications for university environments, particularly the need for academic freedom, to support critical thinking. I conclude by briefly reflecting on a key point relevant to all facets of university education, which is the need for critical dialogue in which people (teachers and students) speak with instead of past each other.

7.1 Purposes: Exploring being and balancing tensions

This thesis supports existing views that if ideas about the purposes of higher education narrow, so does the practice of critical thinking (Barnett, 2013). If universities are focused on economically oriented instrumentalism, then they will become places that understand and practice critical thinking in narrow and instrumental ways (Barnett, 2011; Barnett and Fulford, 2020). Similarly, over-emphasis on research tends towards narrow and fragmented specialisation (MacIntyre, 2009). Of course, universities should prepare people for work and build highly specialised expertise (Winch, 2002). The suggestion here is that these should not be the *only* purposes of higher education or universities. At least not, I argue, if UK universities also want the teaching and practice of expansive critical thinking to be one of their guiding purposes. An important implication of this thesis, which maintains the importance of separating the context-specific and necessarily determinant aims of education from the contextually-reflexive and indeterminant features of critical thinking, is that the latter should guide and

inform the prior. Critical thinking cannot be defined by any single context *but is only possible as part of contexts.* Universities are an entanglement of overlapping and intersecting contexts, filled with substantive ideas, aims, assumptions, and values. Critical thinking should help navigate and balance the substantive ideas, including competing and complementary purposes, that shape universities and UK higher education.

Pointing out that we ought to think critically about the purposes of universities is not particularly profound. However, the approach of asking not what education needs from critical thinking, but what an expansive form of critical thinking needs from education is less common. Such an approach is necessary and valuable because debates on the purposes of universities risk falling into a certain circularity of ossified critical frameworks, lacking the perspectives necessary for potential metacritique. As Barnett notes, there is a need for greater *imagination* in how universities might be conceived (Barnett, 2013). I see this as an effort towards recognising new possibilities and perspectives as resources for expansive critical thinking about the fundamental nature and purposes of higher education. Along these lines, I contend that realising an expansive form of critical thinking requires universities capable of cultivating *critical beings.* Barnett argues this requires an "ontological turn" in conceptions of the university (Barnett, 2007, p. 9). I have argued in this thesis that a similar turn is necessary in how critical thinking is understood. The idea (and aim) of critical being makes certain demands on how higher education is perceived. Others have followed a similar line of reasoning. For example, Dall'Alba argues for:

> *re-framing debate about the purpose of the university through a shift in focus from knowledge and skills to possibilities for being, as these relate to higher education, research and engagement with society. A key argument here is that the university has the potential to open and interrogate possibilities for being, at individual and collective levels, in ways that promote attuned responsiveness to questions and issues in our contemporary world (2011, p. 113)*

She draws on Heidegger's notion of care as a guide to achieving this aim. As shown in the previous chapter, care contributes towards the conditions for the possibility of critical thinking (see Section 6.2). In Heidegger's view, it also constitutes an essential feature of *being* (1962). Consequently, critical attention to care is synonymous with critical attention to being. Dall'Alba goes on to argue that universities should be social institutions that explore the possibilities of being, stating that, "When we call into question and revise taken-for-granted assumptions or perspectives, other ways of being are made possible" (2011, p. 117). In a similar vein, Gibbs draws on Heidegger to argue that universities should be places ingrained with a degree of ontological questioning that "enables students to see how the enframing [of disciplines and traditions] has engulfed them" (2020, p. 129). Universities need both to help build critical frameworks, but also to make them explicit and call them into question. I agree with these sentiments, though I see no reason to shift away from knowledge and skills to give attention to context contingency or possibilities for being. On the contrary, knowledge, skills, and possibilities for being are inextricably intertwined.

The internationalisation of higher education makes this turn towards the possibilities of being a particularly important point, as it removes the risk of dogmatically imposing the aims and assumptions of one context on the critical thinking that should underlie the whole educational endeavour. For example, it seems reasonable to expect UK universities to have certain responsibilities to UK society. However, as higher education becomes increasingly more international, it is less clear exactly which societies universities are 'serving'. This is not to imply that 'meeting the needs of society' is somehow a zero-sum game that cannot simultaneously serve multiple societies along with trans-cultural and more global needs (though, this is bound to be difficult). However, it is certainly relevant that significant portions of UK university students, particularly at the postgraduate level, are not from the UK and do not continue to live in the UK after their studies (UKAS, 2019). Indeed, some university programmes are populated almost exclusively by international students (ibid). This becomes problematic if there are misalignments between stated university aims, teacher expectations, and actual students (Macleod *et al.*, 2019a). Most obviously relevant to this thesis, as touched on in Chapter 4, is the possibility that many students may have very different understandings of, and experiences with, critical thinking. Consequently, the internationalisation of higher education requires rethinking some of the taken for granted aims and assumptions underlying ideas of what universities are, and what they are for.

Given these challenges, I argue that orientation towards attention to being provides a better 'grounding' for critical thinking than orientation towards predetermined values or political aims. Attention to being is likely to encompass and bring into dialogue diverse perspectives on knowledge, values, politics, and many other things – without the taint of predetermination regarding critical evaluation. This is not a call to abandon fundamental purposes and aims (like those of democracy and justice) of UK universities. Instead, it is a call to recognise these substantive aims are not universal or inevitable, that they are parts of critical frameworks that can be expanded and potentially improved through metacritique facilitated by contact with diverse perspectives. Furthermore, it is a call to give more attention to the actual students and teachers in universities, including consideration of the sociopolitical contexts they come from and aim to contribute towards.

A substantial implication here is that UK universities must clarify the scope of critical thinking they aim to teach and practice with greater specificity and attention to diversity. Universities are uniquely equipped to cultivate critical thinking at an expansive scope, including criticality *within* tradition, *of* tradition, and critical integration *between* traditions. Given the increasingly diverse demographic of UK universities, it seems impossible to avoid criticality *of* traditions without severely limiting the scope of critical thinking. It also seems like a squandered opportunity not to draw on that diversity for potential criticality *between* traditions. However, this raises some challenging questions. For example, should UK universities engage with types of critical thinking not taught (or allowed) in other contexts? After all, this may be one reason many international students choose to study abroad, and if not, it may be an opportunity worth contemplation. Conversely, perhaps universities should bend towards critical aims better aligned with the backgrounds and likely future contexts of application for international students? I cannot address these questions at length. However, the understanding of critical

thinking outlined in this thesis implies that universities should both support and require *all* students from *every* background to seize the opportunity provided by diversity of traditions and perspectives to identify and critically reflect on their own aims and assumptions in any context that calls itself 'critical'.

A recurrent tension in the purposes of education arises from the need to balance specific and determinant purposes with open and indeterminant possibilities. Education is not just learning; it is learning *particular things for particular reasons* (Oakeshott, 1989). There is, by definitional necessity, a certain degree of determinacy to education. It has aims, relies on assumptions, and takes place in diverse but also very substantive contexts. Consequently, some aspects of universities are intentionally *temporarily uncritical.* This leads Oakeshott to see learning, which is certainly a central purpose of education, as a paradoxical activity, "it is doing and submitting at the same time" (1989, p. 43). I argue that this echoes the relationship between critical and non-critical states as part of a broader understanding of being. Passivity and activity are only in contradiction if forced into a single moment. However, temporally extended they become compatible and complementary parts of a larger process of being. However, as I continue to insist, critical thinking must remain open and indeterminant. Critical being does not require being critical all the time, but instead attending to the integrated flux of critical and uncritical modes of thinking and being. Consequently, instead of seeing tensions in the purposes of education as irreconcilable or paradoxical, I suggest they simply point to the fact that education is processual. It is an ongoing process, a mode of being, that incorporates a multitude of different strands and arcs of aims and assumptions. As Carr notes, differing perspectives on the underlying purposes and appropriate aims of education need not be framed as incommensurable and thus irresolvable by rational negotiation and evaluation (2010). Furthermore, I contend it is not necessary to 'resolve' tensions about every fundamental aspect of education but instead to navigate the complexity with balance. This is where the idea of scope in critical thinking becomes vital. Understanding the potential for critical thinking at an expansive scope can help navigate and balance the complementary and competing purposes of education.

7.2 Aims: Liberation and critical being

Moving from the purposes of universities towards their *aims* is a subtle step. I see this step as indicating a degree of specificity. Purposes are the larger underlying concepts that give rise to more specific aims. For example, one purpose of universities is to train and qualify people for specific roles in society (Winch, 2002). However, what those roles are, what constitutes acceptable training and counts as qualification can vary and thus give rise to diverse and potentially divergent aims. This variance is particularly relevant when educational purposes are as amorphous as 'attention to being'. I argue this is a worthy and necessary purpose of universities, but it is also necessary to consider how more specific aims will help realise this purpose. I see this as something like a Rawlsian distinction between concepts and their various conceptions (Rawls, 1971). Consideration of aims, curricula, and pedagogies each take steps out of the general and towards the more particular and practical.

Disciplines and subjects provide some of the most clearly delineable boundaries of contexts within universities. They also provide some of the most obvious aims. Chemistry students need to learn chemistry and history students need to learn history, but both also need to learn to think critically. Brookfield argues that "The point of getting students to think critically is to get them to recognize, and question, the assumptions that determine how knowledge in that discipline is recognized as legitimate" (2015, p. 529). Extending this beyond disciplines and leaning towards critical pedagogy, Brookfield goes on to say, "Teaching critical thinking… involves teaching people to see behind the apparently normal façade of daily life to realize how ideological manipulation works to keep people quiet and in line" (2015, p. 531). There are, of course, questions about how discipline-specific critical thinking can or cannot extend into criticality in daily life. This is addressed more in subsequent sections of this chapter. Here, however, I want to agree that education (especially higher education) ought to encourage this more expansive effort to look behind the taken-for-granted within disciplines and daily life.

While I agree with the aim of cultivating critical thinking within both disciplines and daily life, I contend that this effort cannot be animated by any predetermined assumptions about what lies behind any given façade. Instead, as argued in the previous chapter, critical thinking ought to be animated by the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility. Understanding norms and expectations is a first step towards understanding how the world has shaped disciplines, subjects, practices, society, and the very nature of thinking and being. Only after looking *at* these things is it possible to potentially look *beyond* them with critical thinking. Undoubtedly, relations of power play a prominent role in shaping the world, thinking, and being. However, what lies behind the façade of taken for granted norms – the background that makes thinking possible – is not just a calculated and intentional 'machine' of malice and control. Unearthing new truths and unravelling the relations of care that shape the aims and assumptions of thinking and being can also shed light on love and beauty, on meaning and purpose, on things worthy of preservation and protection (Hodgson *et al.*, 2017). To be clear, I trust Brookfield recognises this positive potential. He is simply drawing attention to the educational need for critical interrogation of inherited institutions and traditions, with particular attention to those that are unjust and uncritical. These are excellent educational aims, which both require and are well-suited to cultivate expansive forms of critical thinking. Furthermore, proceeding through my approach, by focusing on what an expansive understanding of critical thinking requires of higher education, many of these aims are strongly implied as desirable, and the insistence on critical thinking itself is essential.

However, I maintain that the separation of educational aims and an understanding of critical thinking at an expansive scope is important, particularly in contexts characterised by diversity. This is because some of the most established aims of UK universities are not necessarily implied by something in the 'structure' of critical thinking with the degree of specificity or predetermination needed by UK universities and society. For example, I am strongly in favour of UK universities aiming to educate in ways that support and sustain democracy. However, there is nothing about critical thinking that *requires* such aims. This becomes pertinent in contexts where many students are from non-democratic contexts. Preparing students for

participation in democratic societies is a justifiable and important aim of UK higher education, but it cannot be a defining feature of critical thinking. This separation allows the latter to be applied to consideration of the prior. It also helps prevent problematic assumptions, like the idea that students from non-democratic societies cannot think critically. This is not to deny the fact that democracy, freedom of speech, and access to information are conducive to developing and practicing critical thinking. This is discussed below regarding implications for university environments. The point here is that *universities need to have more determinant substantive ideals and values than what critical thinking itself requires.*

Critical thinking does not imply particular sociopolitical and ethical ideals with the strength and vigour required to meet important educational and social aims. UK education and society are not the inevitable result of transcendent reasoning. It is not the case that any culture, if people simply thought critically enough, would invariably realise the same ethics, norms, politics, and economics of the UK (or the US, or any other specific context). These are not inevitable, nor the only reasonable ways of being. This does not devalue these aspects of the UK context; it merely draws attention to the fact that these contexts are the result of contingent circumstances. These circumstances include a great deal of both critical and uncritical thinking. The arcs of tradition that brought these contexts about were no more predetermined than those that will carry them forward. Consequently, it is necessary for UK universities to have aims that are more specific and deterministic than what can be implied by an expansive understanding of critical thinking.

This may seem like a retreat into an empty notion of critical thinking. To a degree it is, and I argue this is necessary to facilitate the kind of expansive critical thinking that can manifest as critical being. It is in the 'emptiness' of this retreat that one can unencumber oneself from traditions and expectations, aims and assumptions, to realise new perspectives and possibilities. This is the 'clarity' of Zhuangzi (see Section 4.4) that cannot be conscribed by even the most important educational aims and assumptions, but instead must be allowed to work around, through, and on those aims and assumptions. Consequently, while I support the robust, specific, and critical aims of education put forward by (for example) critical pedagogues, I contend that the strength and specificity of these aims is not implied by an expansive understanding of critical thinking. Students should be required (a determinant aim) to look behind the various façades of critical frameworks, but what happens while looking behind the façade is a matter of indeterminant possibilities, not inevitabilities.

Because of this, I see an expansive form of critical thinking as more strongly implying the necessity of a liberal education. My intention here is not to set 'liberal' and 'critical' education against each other. They are very compatible. Both, after all, strive for a type of liberation. However, given my aim of addressing diversity, particularly cross-cultural diversity, I see the humanistic focus of liberal education as well-suited to contextual reflexivity and a focus on being. The coordinating aims of a liberal education (as conceived here) are liberation of the mind through the pursuit of knowledge in service of human flourishing. This must respect and reflect the diversity of forms such flourishing does and might take. It must also respect various forms of knowledge and ways of knowing – the vastness of possible ways experience becomes

comprehensible (Hirst, 1972). I contend that these aims of a liberal education do well to serve all domains of critical thinking. They strive to liberate individual minds from the dogma of tradition (Nussbaum, 1997). However, there is recognition that doing so requires an understanding of the sociocultural domain, the ways in which traditions shape knowing and being. As part of this process, the pursuit of knowledge and insistence on critical reflexivity also pull towards the existential domain, where new ideas, possibilities, and perspectives can facilitate metacritique. I see the aims of pursuing knowledge, understanding experience, and striving for human flourishing as pointing towards an underlying focus on being. This ontological – and somewhat existential – step is not necessarily taken in classical liberal education. However, this existential tinge is evident in more modern incarnations of liberal education, which recognise diversity and contingency as opportunities to explore the possibilities of humanity (Cuypers, 2018). This aligns well with attention to both being and criticality, thus helping to bring about critical being. I also see liberal education as having a more constructive balance between continuity and change, transmission and potential transformation, deconstruction and construction. This is conducive to application in diverse contexts where sociocultural and political norms, aims, and assumptions may vary widely. Whatever context education finds itself embroiled in, questions of being remain relevant. Again, my aim here is not to create unnecessary divisions or tensions. I simply want to qualify and justify my focus on a somewhat existential form of liberal education as being well suited to cultivate and sustain critical thinking at an expansive scope, particularly in diverse contexts. As is hopefully clear in what follows, this does not preclude, but instead integrates, many of the aims of critical (and post-critical) pedagogy.

A focus on liberal education may seem counter intuitive to those that see such an education as a prescriptive induction into tradition and thus focused on reproduction and problematic predetermination. This, however, is a superficial and perhaps intentionally obtuse view of liberal education. Liberal education is understood in a variety of ways, but however it is understood, it is clearly *not* a matter of narrow specialisation or vocational preparation (Hirst, 1972). Indeed, it is primarily an effort towards *liberation.* Drawing on the Greek and Roman origins of the idea in Western traditions, Nussbaum notes that what is 'liberated' through this form of education are the minds of students from the shackles of *dogmatic* tradition (2002). In this view, there is recognition of the unavoidability and necessity of aims and assumptions, like those of traditions and practices, as guides to critical thinking (Hirst, 1972). However, *criticality must be a part of both the transmission and the tradition* (Peters, 2007). In some ways, if there remains a Socratic heart in UK universities, critical thinking *is* the tradition into which students are being inducted and helping to transmit between generations. This 'liberating' potential differentiates induction into a tradition from indoctrination into an ideology. Peters does well to recognise the simultaneous needs for induction into society, transmission of tradition, and cultivation of critical reflection, with explicit attention to avoiding indoctrination (1966; 2007). Similarly, Oakeshott argues that mere 'socialisation', framed purely as learning to navigate social norms, is antithetical to formal education (1989). The latter *must* include critical reflection and permit the possibility of change. 'Progressive' educationalists like Dewey also recognise the necessity of transmission between generations, which brings about the possibility of growth and evolution of ideas, as essential to education (Nardo, 2022). A liberal education aims to induct students into the critical frameworks of knowledge, society, and tradition that create the possibility for metacritique of those very frameworks and traditions. This is necessary because one cannot critique knowledge, society,

or tradition (or any critical framework) without first having a perspective from which to do so. There are parallels here to the Confucian practice of 'creation through transmission'. While tracing out potential similarities and differences between liberal and Confucian education is beyond the scope of the current project, it is worth noting that both recognise not only the inevitability, but also the necessity, of thoughtfully and intentionally transmitting tradition as essential to the possibility of criticality *within, of,* or *between* traditions.

A liberal education also resonates with a focus on possibilities of being as an underlying educational purpose. The central feature of a liberal education is a humanistic focus on the development of *people* as opposed to the achievement of extrinsic ends (Nussbaum, 2010; Oakeshott, 1989; Peters, 1966). Education and knowledge are seen as valuable in themselves (Hirst, 1972). This view does not preclude attention to economic, social, and political aims. However, the overarching aim is for *liberation* from the various ways in which context, convention, and tradition instrumentalise being. A liberal education protects the pursuit of human flourishing from instrumentalization and segmentation (MacIntyre, 2009). It is a notion of education that gives (or at least has the potential to give) explicit attention to being and criticality, thus it is conducive to achieving expansive critical thinking along the lines of critical being. Importantly, this notion of liberal education is also attentive to contextual contingency. What the liberally educated mind is liberated from is the rigidity of inherited critical frameworks, of dogmatic ways of understanding, thinking, and being in the world. Cuypers notes, in balancing between continuity and change a liberal education should aim "at the development of personal autonomy and critical thinking in contrast to authoritarian indoctrination and liberal conformity" (2018, p. 705). The first step in freeing the mind is recognition of contextuality (thrownness and fallenness) as a means of facilitating the possibility of metacritique (existentiality). A liberal education deploys critical thinking to help navigate the simultaneous need for determinant and indeterminant educational aims. It also aims to *expand* criticality through attention to contexts, perspectives, and metacritique.

One vital implication that can be taken away from this analysis is that students should be *required* to look behind the various façades of the many contexts they are shaped by, embedded in, and capable of shaping. This amounts to perhaps the most obvious demand an expansive understanding of critical thinking makes of universities, which is that it remains a core educational aim. The implications of this, though, are far reaching. Beginning in the individual dimension this requires directing critical attention at oneself. As MacIntyre notes, universities must require students to engage in "radical self-criticism" (2009, p. 362). This must extend into the sociocultural and existential domains, requiring questioning of the taken for granted aims and assumptions of critical frameworks, whether they are those of a subject, discipline, practice, or tradition. This is what provides the potential perspectives to facilitate metacritique *within, of,* and *between* traditions. Furthermore, the diverse cross-cultural contexts of higher education provide unique perspectives to help expand critical thinking. This does not mean universities must unmoor themselves from important substantive aims to become either completely cosmopolitan or somehow cater to the relative criticalities of every student. UK universities need to have purpose and aims relevant to UK society and the lives and societies

of international students. However, the more perspectives available to critically reflect on these aims, the more likely they are to be met through critical thinking instead of ideology.

For example, critical thinking should not be constrained by any particular conception of justice. The history of justice makes the necessity of this point painfully clear. Many things once considered just are now considered unjust, or even abhorrent. Consequently, if any particular conception of justice becomes a defining part of critical thinking, then the scope of potential criticality is curtailed. The same is true for other potential aims, like those of democracy. This subtle but important separation provides opportunity to distinguish between what education demands of critical thinking, and what critical thinking demands of education. I argue that the latter question needs more attention to prevent unintentionally narrowing critical thinking through imposition of overly-determined aims and assumptions. Critical thinking must avoid ideology and dogmatism, even if that dogmatism is in service of righteous causes. After all, being righteous is not the same as being 'right', nor is righteousness likely to facilitate the receptivity and reflexivity necessary to forge mutual comprehensibility and thus facilitate critical action in the sociocultural and existential domains.

7.3 Curriculum: Breadth, depth, and explicit teaching of critical thinking

Oakeshott calls education "an emancipation achieved in a continuous redirection of attention" (1989, p. 69). Education can be a vehicle for identifying new perspectives and possibilities – for pushing into the indeterminant future. However, given limited resources, including constraints on time, not all perspectives are worthy of exploration, and possibilities are *not* limitless. Consequently, it is quite important to consider what education encourages or discourages directing attention towards. Given the value of liberal educational aims to cultivating critical being, it makes sense that a curriculum for liberal education would also be desirable. This, however, is far from straightforward. The fundamental aims of a liberal education (as interpreted here) are to pursue the liberation of one's mind, expand understanding of the world and experience, and pursue human flourishing. That is no small project, nor is it a project that will be understood the same way by everyone within, much less between, different contexts. Thus, determining what a curriculum for such an undertaking should include and exclude is far more difficult than, say, a curriculum aimed at indoctrination, technical specialisation, economic instrumentalization, or even political radicalisation. Consequently, in this section I do not argue for what constitutes a 'liberal education curriculum' or articulate any single curricular ideal. Instead, I point out some general implications for curriculum salient to critical thinking at an expansive scope. This includes attention to breadth through engagement with diverse critical frameworks and depth through questioning of fundamental assumptions. It also includes consideration of both explicit and embedded teaching of critical thinking.

Realising expansive critical thinking through the cultivation of critical being requires a degree of curricular breadth. This is in line with a liberal education, which generally requires students to engage with a range of subjects and disciplines regardless of their course of study. However, this need for breadth creates challenges of depth. As MacIntyre notes, "The superficial

generalist is as much the product of a defective education as the narrow specialist" (2009, p. 348). How are the curricular boundaries and balances of breadth and depth to be determined? Which is more essential, geology or chemistry, history or literature – and which history and whose literature? Limitations of time and space require difficult decisions about general university requirements, programme design, course content, and pedagogy. This is nothing new to education. To a large extent *this is education.* The thoughtful, intentional, and critical selection of certain things (invariably at the expense of others) to direct attention towards – and ongoing debate and negotiation about *who* does this selecting. Universities may aim to open existential possibilities and point towards an indeterminate future, but they cannot do so blindly or haphazardly. It matters what direction they point. It matters what the attention of both teachers and students is directed at and drawn towards.

I contend that the model of critical thinking developed through this thesis can help make strategic curricular decisions. For example, one 'measure' of adequate curricular breadth could be exposure to different dimensions of critical thinking within and across critical frameworks. That is, making sure students encounter subjects and disciplines with significantly different manifestations of critical thinking. This is very much in line with Hirst's argument for the importance of introducing students to different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing. He claims that a well-balanced curriculum should aim at:

> *achieving an understanding of experience in many different ways. This means the acquisition by critical training and discipline not only of facts but also of complex conceptual schemes and of the arts and techniques of different types of reasoning and judgment* (1972, p. 303).

For example, an engineering student might find literary critique quite different from the type of critical thinking engaged with in their field. Similarly, a literature student might find biology provides different critical frameworks from what they are accustomed.

The idea of depth can also help in discerning curricular contents and boundaries. How familiar does an engineer need to be with literary critique or a literature student with biology? Surely, they do not need to 'transform' the discipline through metacritique. That is something very few dedicating their life to a field ever achieve. Instead, following Hirst, I suggest students should dig deep enough into subjects to recognise and understand relevant differences in the processes, criteria, standards, aims, and assumptions informing critical thinking within and between fields (Hirst, 1972). Learning to recognise such differences is an important skill in itself, and the experience of engaging with different critical frameworks has great potential to instil an appreciation for the importance of perspective. Furthermore, *breadth can add to depth* as new perspectives are brought into contact, creating possibilities for criticality *within, of,* and *between* disciplinary frameworks. This is essential to planting the seeds that may sprout into mutual comprehensibility, to understanding relevant differences as starting points for perspectival exploration and critical contemplation, which may ultimately lead to recognising new possibilities. As MacIntyre agues, we need a scope of critical thinking that allows us to:

> *... recognise when some of our assumptions do need to be made explicit and put in question which type of assumptions it is that we need to examine on this or that*

> *particular occasion. What would it be to be able to do this and to do it well? It would involve knowing both how to draw on the relevant findings of a range of disciplines and how to evaluate the reliability of those findings (2009, p. 352)*

Critical thinking at an expansive scope requires curricular breadth with explicit attention to opportunities to engage with different aims, assumptions, and critical frameworks. It does not require endless breadth, nor transformative depth in every subject, domain, or dimension. Instead, in many areas, the aim is to lift the veil of ignorance, to gain the knowledge that one does not know, which can provide humility, along with a positive impetus for receptivity and further inquiry (Smith, 2016). Curricular breadth exposes students to different types of knowledge and ways of knowing. Curricular depth shows the possibility and power of metacritique. Both provide invaluable *perspective* to help understand the importance of critical scope.

It is easy to recommend an 'expansive' curriculum. It is far more difficult to devise one, and even more challenging to implement. Due to constraints of time, resources, and individual interests it is not reasonable to expect every teacher or student to engage with the broadest or deepest forms of metacritique in every discipline or context. However, it is reasonable to expect (perhaps to set as a standard requirement) striving for deep metacritique in certain areas of specialisation. This is, ostensibly, already the case for many degree programme requirements (QAA, 2019). What lacks in this depth of critical thinking, which is discussed more below, is explicit attention to the process and power of questioning fundamental assumptions. Whether in auto mechanics, history, astrophysics, or literature – having something 'known for sure' dissolve into uncertainty is a profound experience with immense learning potential, particularly if teachers and students take time to reflect on the possibility of parallel experiences across contexts, domains, and dimensions (a matter of breadth). Such forays into the scope of critical thinking (via both breadth and depth) provide possibilities for curiosity, contemplation, and wonder – all of which support the building of critical being.

The conceptual, terminological, and graphic model provided in Chapter 2 of this thesis (see p. 50) can make it easier to explicitly build curriculum in a way that contributes towards expansive critical thinking. The graphic model can be used as a rubric to check for curricular coverage. For example, does a programme include courses that draw on or dwell in different critical domains and dimensions, that draw on different aims and assumptions in understanding the pursuit of truth and interpretations of care? Similarly, at the course level, are different dimensions and domains of subjects addressed and are resources for metacritique available? At the most general level, this is likely to manifest as making sure all students engage with science, philosophy, humanities, and arts to some degree regardless of their course of study. Of course, this alone is not sufficient. Simply making an engineer take an art history course, or requiring a poetry student to study statistics is more likely to engender boredom and/or animosity than criticality. Consequently, I argue there is also a need for explicit attention to *why* and *how* this curricular breadth supports expansive critical scope.

I argue it is necessary to teach critical thinking explicitly at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The question, then, is how such teaching should fit into 'the curriculum'.

This is challenging because I see no sense in talking about a university (much less all higher education) as having 'a curriculum'. A university is not a primary school trying (for better or worse) to provide everyone with the same opportunities and experiences. Instead, universities are in large part defined by the fact that they *do not* provide the same thing to everyone (never mind the fact that not everyone attends universities). Yet, there are certain aims, like critical thinking, that are claimed to be part of the university-as-a-whole. This is problematic. Ellerton puts this well, stating that:

> *Critical thinking permeates the talk and spirit of syllabi but the substance of it fails to materialize. It has become the Cheshire Cat of curricula, in that it seems to be in all places, owned by all disciplines, but it does not appear, fully developed, in any of these (2015, p. 409).*

Making 'the university' responsible for critical thinking is problematic because 'the university' is a composite of parts. When it comes to determining how aims like the teaching and practice of critical thinking are being met, it is necessary to give more careful consideration to what is happening within and between each part of the university. The better coordinated these parts become, the more plausible achieving university-wide aims becomes.

This leads to one of the more concrete implications of this thesis: that critical thinking should be taught both as a stand-alone subject and addressed explicitly within disciplines. This is not a new idea (e.g., Ennis, 2016a; Nosich, 2016; Paul, 2012), nor is it uncontested (McPeck, 2016; Moore, 2011). Central to this issue are questions about the generalisability and transferability of critical thinking. Achieving expansive critical thinking of the type universities aim for requires high degrees of generalisability and transferability. McPeck and Ennis give articulate voice to this debate. Ennis advocates the teaching of general skills of informal logic and argumentation, coupled with development of key dispositions, as a way of cultivating 'general' critical thinking (1996; 2015). McPeck argues that critical thinking is necessarily subject specific and the application of general skills will not deliver adequate criticality across contexts without the knowledge required to apply skills within each context (2016). Others give greater attention to the roles of dispositions as essential in motivating and enabling self-guided acquisition of the skills and knowledge necessary across contexts (Halpern, 1998). A robust literature focusing on both theory and practice has arisen around this debate. Including an increasingly common middle position, which recognises potential value in both general and more subject-specific approaches (Ennis, 2016a; Mason, 2013; Moon, 2008). I contend this middle position makes by far the most sense. Some aspects of critical thinking (e.g., logic and many attributes) are more general, and others (e.g., subject knowledge, contextual norms) highly specialised. I follow this latter perspective, contending that both stand-alone and subject-specific teaching of critical thinking is possible and valuable.

The more novel contribution I wish to make through this thesis is the contention that approaching critical thinking as a stand-alone subject requires attention to theory and philosophical underpinnings in addition to skills and dispositions. This is a less common recommendation. However, I contend attention to theory is imperative because a degree of

theoretical understanding is necessary to facilitate adaptive application and acquisition of context contingent skills and dispositions *as a critical being.* As Giancarlo and Facione point out, "Any conceptualization of critical thinking that focuses exclusively on skills is incomplete" (Giancarlo and Facione, 2001, p. 30). Similarly, Bailin and Battersby argue that general critical thinking courses tend to focus on decontextualised individual argument evaluation and are thus insufficient in meeting more expansive aims, claiming that "a major weakness of traditional critical thinking courses is that they do not focus on the kind of comparative evaluation that we make in actual contexts of disagreement and debate" (2015, p. 125). This leads them to argue for teaching critical thinking as *a form of inquiry* with applicability across contexts (ibid). I see this as recognition of the need for a theoretical understanding of critical thinking that is applicable at an expansive scope *but always contextually contingent.* It is not necessary to know every aspect of potential contingency, *but it is vital to understand the nature of contingency* and processes of critical inquiry that can make enough of the aims and assumptions of contextually contingent critical frameworks explicit enough to facilitate critical thinking.

Along these lines, I argue that general approaches to critical thinking should not be approached only (or even primarily) as a set of transferable skills or dispositions but as an introduction to an expansive understanding at a theoretical level, with the aim of helping students self-determine which knowledge, skills, and attributes are necessary to think critically in a given context. A 'general' introduction to critical thinking should introduce the idea of scope, the importance of contexts, and the pragmatic assumptions of critical thinking in ways that prepare students to seize on the opportunities provided by both explicit and embedded attention to critical thinking in disciplinary (and other) contexts. I argue that only with this scaffolding and support is it reasonable to expect the critical thinking embedded (and expected) within subjects to gain purchase. This is not to imply that existing elements of 'generic' approaches to teaching critical thinking, like attention to logic, forms of reasoning, and cognitive biases are not also valuable. Indeed, I contend they remain vital. Similarly, cognitive science and psychology should be welcomed into theoretical and practical teaching and applications of critical thinking. Ideally, much of this would be done *before* higher education. However, as university teachers regularly note, particularly given the diversity brought about through internationalisation, this is not necessarily the case (Durkin, 2007; Macleod *et al.*, 2019a; Sun *et al.*, 2018; Q. Wu, 2015; W. Wu and Hammond, 2011). This is an area in need of further research (Macleod *et al.*, 2019b). It is also an indicator of the need for more honest and accurate alignment of university purposes, aims, curricula, and pedagogies (Macleod *et al.*, 2019a). If universities are setting the teaching of expansive critical thinking as a core curricular aim without addressing the realities of students, teachers, or curriculum, then they are not 'aiming' in any meaningful manner. The idea and model of scope laid out in this thesis could help understand and refine this aim.

Determining how to situate stand-alone critical thinking courses within the university is a challenging question (Davies, 2006). One example is to situate such a course as a general university/college/school level requirement at the outset of study, followed by programme/degree level requirements aimed at helping students recognise and draw on more

embedded and context specific critical requirements and opportunities at the course-level (Ennis, 2016a). Constraints of time and resources make efforts to encourage breadth of critical thinking difficult to balance with the need for depth within fields of study. Furthermore, aiming for depth of critical thinking in some areas may fall outside the resources or expertise of teachers. Difficult trade-offs are required when decisions need to be made about how best to approach critical thinking. However, *there is ample opportunity for the ideas presented in this thesis to contribute to 'curriculum transformation'*. I say this because there are universities around the world, including in the UK, currently in the process of 'transforming' curriculum.[8] This is an ambitious aim wrought with tensions pulling in different and sometimes contradictory directions. Consequently, I contend not only that any such process ought to be guided by thinking critically about suggested curricular changes, but also by the idea that cultivating expansive forms of critical thinking – manifesting as critical being – ought to be a fundamental and orienting aim of any university curriculum. Thus, curricular 'transformation' can be guided by attention to what universities need to do to meet the needs of critical thinking. The terminological and conceptual framework of this thesis provides resources for discussing, analysing, and strategizing these kinds of efforts. This thesis may also provide a *starting point* for making sense of the overabundance of otherwise empty calls for criticality in curricula, courses, and feedback. For universities to require critical thinking, they must also meaningfully communicate an understanding of what critical thinking is and what it is for. Of course, any such vision must also be realised and modelled via pedagogy.

7.4 Pedagogy: Teaching, learning, and study

Perhaps one of the most obvious demands critical thinking makes of pedagogy is for a degree of transparency in reasoning. Peters notes that teaching "requires us to reveal our reasons to the student and, by so doing, to submit them to… evaluation and criticism" (1966, p. 39). For Peters, this is essential to the criticality that must be inherent in tradition to prevent induction into that tradition from becoming a form of indoctrination into ideology. Furthermore, submission to evaluation and criticism requires relevant aims and assumptions to be explicit and open to metacritique. This is particularly important in cross-cultural higher education contexts where some taken for granted aims and assumptions are not common to all teachers and students. Pedagogy needs to create opportunity for critical frameworks to emerge and become explicit. This emergence ought to be multidirectional. By that, I mean that teachers should make the critical frameworks of subjects (and other relevant contexts) as accessible as possible. However, teachers cannot be expected to know or understand the contexts or critical frameworks of every student. Instead, they should be adept at providing the resources necessary for students to map the terrain of their own critical frameworks, including an understanding of how these frameworks have been shaped by various contexts. Put more simply, teachers need to encourage (perhaps require) students to identify, evaluate, and communicate the fundamental aims and assumptions shaping their thinking.

[8] For example, University of Edinburgh (2023) *Curriculum Transformation Programme*. Available at: https://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/teaching-matters/curriculum-transformation-programme

Chapter 4 drew attention to the risks of essentialising and generalising students based on differences that can be misconstrued as deficits. This points towards the need for teachers to have much greater awareness and knowledge of the contexts their students come from and may return to. In the case of cross-cultural contexts, this could manifest as explicit training for teachers with diverse cohorts of students. As noted above, not everyone can be an expert on *every* context. Thus, the onus is on all participants to explore the limits of their own assumptions in service of helping others do the same. And because it can be difficult to gain a perspective from *within* a context to facilitate criticality *of* that context, diverse educational environments offer opportunities for engagement with perspectives conducive to expanding critical possibilities (MacAllister, 2016). Such a process, however, requires *explicit* attention to differences between contexts (e.g., traditions, disciplines, backgrounds) to create meaningful critical dialogue. This is explored in a little more detail in the section of this chapter addressing critical dialogue. However, I must briefly touch on some of the implications for pedagogy drawn from the more novel aspects of this thesis. For example, attention to the mystical dimension of critical thinking as a means of exploring the articulation of critical and non-critical states as part of critical being.

Chapter 5 explored this in some detail through examples from wonder and wu-wei. However, wonder, contemplation, and efficacious receptivity to the world rarely appear on exams or ranking tables. Consequently, realizing the potential of these experiences to expand critical thinking towards critical being requires consideration in policy, curriculum, and pedagogy. To make room for the possibility of critical being, education policy must deviate from excessive emphasis on measurable performativity to leave time and space for the unmeasurable and ineffable. Curriculum must allow for a balance of structure and freedom, breadth and depth, that provides opportunity for curiosity and contemplation. However, I raise these points here in reference to pedagogy because many of the implications for policy and curriculum are (while relevant and valuable) potentially radical in their suggestions for changes to the structure, organisation, and oversight of universities. Consequently, the most realistic point of leverage for infusing universities with a sense of wonder is through pedagogical relationships, even if those relationships are constrained and strained by existing structures. Simply put, I argue there is still room for teachers to inspire students, to fuel their curiosity, and encourage contemplation. Universities ought to be wonderful places, where wonder can be found, and connected to (not destroyed by) critical thinking. My intention is not to pile another responsibility on teachers – that they must also be inspirational sources of wonder. Instead, I want to draw attention to the importance of receptivity to the broader spectrum of being as an essential part of pedagogical relationships. Both teachers and students ought to bear responsibility for this receptivity.

Along these lines, this thesis may help fit critical thinking into ongoing debates regarding differences between ‘learning’ and ‘study’. A growing body of literature argues that excessive focus on predetermined ‘learning’ outcomes frames education as solely the transmission and reproduction of a discrete and closed world (Lewis, 2018). This concern can rightly be targeted at liberal education if it fails to sustain the critical spirit essential to seeing transmission of tradition as a *starting point* instead of an endpoint of education. The latter draws on

predetermined and closed learning; the prior provides the necessary structure to reveal new possibilities through study. In this sense, study is a more contemplative and open endeavour, a non-coercive process receptive to new possibilities and transformative potential. This allows space for integration of perspectives not yet known or even imaginable. Importantly, this is not the 'study' employed to pass a test or learn a skill, but a *contemplative* form of non-coercive study without predetermined or instrumentalized aims. As Lewin notes in exploring the importance of contemplation to education, "to teach is to draw attention to the world and then, in a sense, the learning is between the world and the student" (2015, p. 229). Biesta frames this as a process of 'existential pointing' towards engagement with the world and recognition of possibilities without predetermined outcomes (2022). The suggestion is not to shun *all* predetermined educational aims, assumptions, or the notion of learning. As made clear in this chapter, I contend that universities require both determinant aims and receptivity to the indeterminacy of criticality. The point is that if expansive critical thinking is an educational aim, the structure of critical thinking, nature of learning, and endpoints of education cannot be entirely predetermined or permanently fixed. Leaving room for, and giving attention to expansive critical thinking, including non-critical experiences like wonder and wu-wei, can positively contribute to the essential indeterminant aspects of education, to the disclosure of previously unknown and unimagined possibilities.

Giving *attention* to the broader range of being does not require dictating the nature of that being. Instead, it opens the possibility for understanding the broader and deeper influences shaping thinking and being in the world as a means of facilitating intentional change. Critical being is empowering, not determining. This view, however, raises serious paradoxical problems regarding how to determinedly aim for indeterminate objectives, how to 'try not to try' (see Section 4.7). As noted in Section 7.1 above, there is a perennial tension within the aims of education between preservation and transformation. As Arendt says, "our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look" (2006, p. 189). How can education shape with intention but without predetermination?

I argue that the philosophically informed understanding of critical thinking developed through this thesis can help understand and meet the challenges of balancing the predeterminate and the indeterminate aspects of education. This includes an idea of critical being that draws on non-critical modes of being. Consequently, teaching in universities must make room for attention to the broader spectrum of being and receptivity to new perspectives which may arise from the defamiliarization of wonder and contemplation, critical reflection on breakdowns in wu-wei, or from the non-critical flow of experience itself. The indeterminacy of these experiences can bring complementarity and balance to the aims and pedagogies of higher education. Of course, the pertinent question is *how* exactly this space is to be made and how these experiences are to be cultivated. These are vital and challenging questions that require context-specific consideration. However, I suggest that one approach to making 'room' for expansive critical thinking in pedagogy can come from concerted efforts to facilitate critical dialogue with explicit attention to the idea of critical scope, difficult questions, and the building

of mutual comprehensibility – to speak with instead of past each other. Before addressing this key point, which gathers together and draws upon all facets of the educational endeavour, I want to point out some important implications of this thesis for university environments.

7.5 Environments: Academic freedom

Thinking critically at an expansive scope makes demands on the university environment. The most obvious being for some form of academic freedom. Academic freedom is a complex and heated topic in contemporary universities around the world (Watermeyer *et al.*, 2022). I cannot wade too deeply into the nuances of this debate in this thesis. Indeed, it is difficult (but very important) to even 'define' what academic freedom is or what it entails. Just like critical thinking, most agree on its necessity, but many disagree on its nature. I contend that the understanding of critical thinking provided in this thesis, particularly the idea of expansive scope, makes an excellent *starting point* for considering what academic freedom should entail. Consequently, this thesis can contribute to ongoing debate and discussion regarding this vital element of universities.

Just as with the purposes, aims, and curricula of universities, I argue it is worth reversing the common direction of consideration regarding the relationship between academic freedom and critical thinking. It is common to see arguments that academic freedom is essential to *allowing* the kinds of critical thinking universities and societies need (Stone, 2015). However, providing academic freedom does not necessarily lead to this critical thinking taking place. Proclamations of academic freedom can themselves become dogmatic and enforcement of academic freedom policies can become ideological (Pinker, 2021; Williamson, 2021). Freedom is not somehow naturally or inevitably critical. Conversely, denying academic freedom does not necessarily eliminate critical thinking. Regimes of censorship and oppression in education and society can be overcome through critical thinking and critical action. Lacking certain material freedoms cannot completely curtail the freedom of mind and spirit (Freire, 2017). Consequently, something more than a conducive environment is necessary for critical thinking to thrive in UK universities. This is why I suggest starting with critical thinking to help justify and shape notions of academic freedom. The question, then, is what does critical thinking require of academic freedom?

The most obvious answers are unfettered access to information and freedom of speech. If access to information is limited, it is very difficult to acquire the knowledge, understanding, and information necessary to think critically. Similarly, if freedom of speech is restricted, it is far more difficult to think critically with others, thus limiting opportunities to engage with a diverse plurality of critical frameworks as a means of expanding critical thinking. This is not to imply that freedom of speech and academic freedom are synonymous. Instead, it is to recognise that discussing the limits of toleration around a balance of rights and responsibilities, including those around speech and action, is an essential facet of academic freedom (Butler, 2017). As noted above, these are not necessary conditions for criticality, but they are undoubtedly desirable and favourable conditions. The UK generally provides and protects

these freedoms (e.g., UK.GOV, 2023), at least in policy if not always in practice. However, academic freedom is not something that must simply be protected against 'external' threats, like those of government and business interests. There are a plethora of competing and complementing forces in what Barnett calls the 'ecology' of freedoms (2022).

Perhaps the largest internal threats to both critical thinking and academic freedom are dogmatism and ideology (Watermeyer *et al.*, 2022). Cultivating critical being requires pursuit of truth, care, and the building of mutual comprehensibility at an expansive scope *without predetermination*. This requires diverse perspectives, consideration of how critical and non-critical modes of thinking and being articulate, and opportunities to encounter the unknown as a means of revealing previously unimaginable possibilities. Universities should facilitate this expansiveness. Otherwise, they risk becoming echo chambers that reinforce certain critical frameworks and foreclose possibilities for critical thinking (Macfarlane, 2022). This can happen as the result of a strong focus on predetermined aims and assumptions, like those of particular values or conceptions of justice, without adequate allowance or opportunity for critical scrutiny (Haidt, 2016). What can be lost in this focus on determinant aims is openness to alternative perspectives and indeterminant potentialities as essential parts of critical thinking that protect ideas from becoming ideology. This marks an imbalance between the determinant and indeterminant aspects of education. Approaching universities through the lens of what is required to cultivate critical being can help restore this balance.

Advocating academic freedom does not mean universities must be an anything-goes free for all with limitless tolerance. Tolerance must have boundaries, otherwise it devolves into relativistic resignation. If 'anything goes', then tolerance is meaningless (Popper, 1973). It is the possibility of some things being intolerable that gives tolerance meaning (Taylor, 1995). Absolute tolerance would also create a perplexing, and very dangerous, requirement to tolerate intolerance itself (Siegel, 2017). Freedom and tolerance must be bounded and relational to be meaningful. The boundaries of both must be navigated in the individual, sociocultural, and existential domains. These boundaries are essentially determinations on which critical frameworks are acceptable, which aims and assumptions are open to metacritique, and which (if any) are not. Academic freedom is a discussion about what scope of critical thinking is necessary and tolerable, which truths and permutations of care are trusted or questionable, and which (if any) foundational. As should be clear by now, these boundaries vary by domain, dimension, and context. Freedom is not a 'thing' to be obtained, it is a balance to be maintained between and within a multitude of dynamic relations. Deciding on which aims and assumptions work as the starting point for critical thinking in a given context is a complex matter with profound implications for education and society. Critical thinking is defined by indeterminacy and openness, yet dependent on some form of determinacy and structure. This is where education comes in. Education cannot define the entirety of criticality, nor determine the ends of critical thinking, but it can contribute a great deal towards establishing the background against which critical thinking becomes possible. This means it is necessary to make choices regarding which 'background' assumptions may best serve the cultivation of expansive critical thinking. This struggle (both collaboratively and sometimes combatively) plays out within various disciplines, manifests in policy and curriculum, is inescapably political, and

unavoidably ethical (Apple, 2018; Giroux, 2020). This is something critical pedagogy does well not only to recognise, but also to take a stand on, through the assertion of suggestions for what ought to constitute the educational 'background'. However, my intention here is not to advocate any particular (and certainly no universal) framework for resolving the complexities of academic freedom. Instead, I simply want to point out the intersectionality between academic freedom and the intentional shaping of the very structure of critical thinking. Deficiencies in the prior impede possibilities in the latter. There is certainly a great deal more that could be said about the relationship between critical thinking and academic freedom. I hope the work done in this thesis contributes towards such efforts.

Before moving on, I must raise a final very pertinent point, which is that expansive critical thinking is often difficult and uncomfortable. This means that, while universities should be safe and tolerant places, in that they are free from bigotry, discrimination, and threats of (or actual) harm. They need not necessarily be *comfortable* places. Confusing the discomfort of questioning deeply held beliefs and assumptions, encountering diverse perspectives, or engaging with uncomfortable ideas with being *unsafe* reveals a solipsistic fragility that is not conducive to criticality. Learning, education, and particularly critical thinking can be difficult and uncomfortable endeavours (Barnett, 1997; Thayer-Bacon, 1993; Walters, 1991). However, difficulty and discomfort are not necessarily or inherently *unsafe.* The language of violence, including the potential violence of language, can be invoked to *avoid* critical thinking (Pinker, 2021). This is not to deny the power of words or importance of respectful dialogue. However, even radical and adamant disagreement, *if it remains reasonable and critical*, need not be unsafe, much less violent. The purpose of universities should not be to confirm and make comfortable, but to question and struggle in service of growth and improvement of oneself, society, knowledge, and the world. Consequently, students should be *required* to engage with ideas and lines of questioning with which they are not comfortable (MacAllister, 2016; MacIntyre, 1988a; 2009). This is essential to revealing new possibilities and perspectives. Universities should provide environments where this is possible. That requires preparing both teachers and students for this kind of engagement through explicit attention to the potential difficulty and discomfort of thinking critically at an expansive scope. Frailty and fear, indignation, and anger are enemies of expansive critical thinking. They incline towards the 'comfort' of uncritical dogmatism and ideology. It seems naive to expect liberation of the mind and the power to shape both thinking and the world – the future itself – to be earned without difficulty and struggle.

7.6 Critical dialogue: Speaking with, not past

Ultimately, perhaps one of the most important implications of this thesis is the necessity of critical thinking to be a relational and social endeavour that involves critical dialogue with others. In such a process, it is imperative that people (teachers and students) can speak with instead of past each other. Critical thinking often aims at making decisions, deciding what to believe, or how to act. This moves the critical thinker towards certain ideas, beliefs, or actions and away from others. Similarly, critical thinking frequently engages with contested and

polarising topics, which often tend towards 'for-or-against' positioning. It is vital to recognise that as critical thinking becomes more expansive, it also becomes more nuanced and complex. Efforts to mutually comprehend diverse perspectives from across various domains, dimensions, and contexts does not necessarily lead to convergence on simple or clear positions. Sometimes the 'result' of critical thinking is the addition of new positions that may not be either 'for or against', or the recognition of new questions. This does not preclude the need to make decisions and take action. It can, however, help prevent a false sense of certainty that can forestall receptivity and reflexivity. The hallmark of a good critical thinker is a willingness to change their mind. It is tragic that contemporary political discourse in many places sees changing one's mind as a sign of weakness, a failure to blindly and dogmatically commit to a position regardless of what new evidence and perspectives become available. We should want citizens and leaders that change their minds when given good reasons. That, indeed, ought to be one hallmark of an 'educated' person.

False binaries of 'for or against' contribute to speaking past instead of with each other. This is because complex issues are riddled with tensions and paradoxes. For example, in thinking about positive and negative liberties, along with rights and responsibilities, efforts to provide something to one group often denies something to another (Berlin and Williams, 1994). This is a feature of the complex and imperfect workings of ethics and politics. It is not *necessarily* an indicator of malice or discrimination towards either group. It is often the case that the desire to provide and restrict rights can be simultaneously justified (Berlin, 1969; 1994). What is necessary, then, is exploration of intersectionality and tensions without reduction to binary antagonism. A contemporary example of this manifests in some debates between advocates of women's rights and transgender rights, where nuanced tensions between positive and negative liberties are entangled with biological facts and differing approaches to meaning that create an incredibly complex terrain which ought to be navigated with a nuanced and expansive approach to critical thinking. However, if the first instance of disagreement in this (or any) critical engagement is met with reduction to a singular 'position' (for or against), it is not possible to navigate the topic. Navigation requires the ability to move between different perspectives to build the mutual comprehensibility necessary to align points of concern, aims, and assumptions in a manner that facilitates 'speaking with' instead of 'speaking past' each other. This complexity may not result in convergence on a singular position, or even consensus. However, it may provide enough understanding to move critical discourse forward and make informed, even if imperfect, decisions.

When it comes to this kind of critical dialogue, it is tempting to say that opinions do not matter, particularly given the frequency with which critical discourse is stalled by claims along the lines of, 'well, that's just your opinion'. Such statements indicate a lack of effort to pursue truth, understand care, and build mutual comprehensibility. This phrase, left unattended, is the end of critical thinking. However, opinions are often a great *starting point* for critical thinking. Considering the *reasons* supporting an opinion can point towards facts and values, aims and assumptions, that can contribute to critical thinking. Opinions can orient, but not guide, critical thinking. The latter is a slippery slope towards many logical fallacies and all manner of cognitive bias (Mercier and Sperber, 2017). This view is standard fare for most critical thinking

theories and courses. The key point of relevance here is that making the implicit explicit is essential to expansive critical thinking. Consequently, opinions should be viewed with critical suspicion, as entry points for revealing the 'background' of aims and assumptions that implicitly structure thinking and being.

The idea of scope is also essential to helping people speak with instead of past each other. Not every aim and assumption of every context needs to constantly remain in the critical fray. However, all aims and assumptions must remain open to *potential* metacritique. Nonetheless, sometimes critical thinking relies on, or perhaps leads to, aims and assumptions that remain quite stable. These aims and assumptions become acceptable, desirable, and highly practical, settling into formative aspects of un-critical being. This process is easy to observe with both skills and knowledge. Once a skill is learned, it does not require critical attention to exercise. Similarly, history is replete with examples of taken-for-granted knowledge (truths), which formed the aims and assumptions of critical frameworks, that once altered through metacritique required construction of entirely new critical frameworks (T. Kuhn, 1996). The ideas of a heliocentric solar system and the laws of gravity operate as assumptions that rarely need to be brought into the critical fray for potential metacritique. Similar 'foundational' assumptions are evident in the ethical dimension. The assumption that slavery is morally abhorrent is not one that requires regular critical scrutiny. Instead, it is desirable for this assumption to be sublimated into the structure of thinking, into ones very being, so that it facilitates a type of critical phronesis, becomes part of the efficacious action of wu-wei. Expanding critical thinking into critical being does not require always being critical, it requires attention to the integration of critical and non-critical states as parts of a unitary whole.

It is, however, imperative that the reasoning supporting 'taken for granted' assumptions remain transparent and accessible. I contend this is necessary because these are not objective, transcendent, or universal 'truths'. This is an assertion many (especially some philosophers) may reject. However, I argue that critical thinking, education, and society are best served through this pragmatic assumption. Retaining critical attention to the reasoning underlying seemingly unassailable assumptions is the difference between criticality and dogma (Mill, 2015). Few things can be more damaging to cherished values and hard-fought progress than forgetting where they came from and letting them lapse into rote ideology. For example, it is vital not just that students learn slavery is wrong (a determinant aim) but that they understand the reasoning why (a determinant and critical aim). Continued reflection on the latter, while perhaps uncomfortable, sustains the justification of vital assumptions and may also lead to unforeseen innovations relevant to other spheres of reasoning (indeterminant aims). For example, there are many lines of coherent ethical reasoning leading to the conclusion that slavery is wrong. This is part of what gives the assumption such force. However, subsequent reasoning about rights, liberties, or politics – while in agreement about the injustice of slavery – may benefit from exploring the diversity of underlying justifications for this fundamental assumption.

For example, asking students, 'Can slavery be justified?' is likely to receive a strong and unanimous response of 'no, it cannot'. The next question is the uncomfortable one. If this is

the case, then how are we to understand the fact that slavery *has been justified* by many (if not most) civilisations throughout human history, including by people revered as brilliant critical thinkers? The intention of such a question is not to find a justification for slavery, it is to help lay bare the different facets and features of critical thinking. There have been many justifications for slavery, each of which can be dissected with attention to coherence and consistency and scrutiny of the truths (or falsehoods) and relations of care (or lack of care) that supported the aims and assumptions of a critical framework capable of justifying such an abhorrent practice. Such an effort does not require sympathy or agreement with these perspectives. As Pinker notes, "To understand is not to forgive" (2021, p. 309). Mutual comprehensibility does not require agreement or acceptance. The point of such an exercise is to show the power of *mutual comprehensibility* as a tool for expansively engaging with diverse critical frameworks in a manner that does not rest on dogmatic dismissal, but instead on critical engagement. Such engagement may lead to dismissal of ideas *for good reasons*. This is important because it would be devastating to education and society to forget the horrors narrowly instrumentalised critical thinking can deliver (Adorno, 2020). If the adamant assertion that slavery is wrong becomes purely dogmatic, and not the result of critical reasoning, then it is robbed of its deeper ethical, emotional, and rational power. The same is true for any other assumption that seeks this kind of 'fundamental' or 'settled' status as part of the 'background' that shapes thinking and being. As noted in Chapter 3, if certain values are desired as 'universal' it seems more effective to strive towards that status through *universalization* via appeal to locally contextualised critical thinking, as opposed to imposition under the guise of objective universality. This becomes particularly important in cross-cultural contexts where failure to recognise the need (and opportunity) to expand critical scope can lead to people speaking past instead of with one and other.

8 A practical example

This thesis focuses on theory. Consequently, as noted in the previous chapter, the implications for practice remain general. This is in part due to limitations of space. However, it would also run counter to the understanding laid out in this thesis to provide overly prescriptive or completely predetermined suggestions for policy and practice. The purposes, aims, policies, structures, curricula, pedagogies, and environments of universities should remain receptive and reflexive to local contexts, conditions, and change. However, this thesis also aims to show the ability of philosophy to contribute towards expansion of both the theory and practice of critical thinking. Consequently, I feel compelled to provide a more practical example of a pedagogical resource based on the philosophically informed understanding of critical thinking and being outlined in this thesis. This could be done in a number of ways, including suggesting specific policies, development of curricular maps for integration of critical being into a programme of study, or suggestions for substantial changes to university structures and procedures. However, I believe there is more room in pedagogy for practical and readily applicable suggestions that do not require substantial or systemic change, but can fit within existing systems, programmes, and courses. Pedagogy, after all, is the point where policy and curriculum are ultimately put into practice.

In what follows I provide a rough example of a resource to support critical dialogue within a university classroom. Given limitations of space, this is best seen as a glimpse into how the theory of this thesis can inform practice. Such approaches and materials require further refinement and adjustment to meet context-specific needs. My aim here is simply to show how a concrete practical resource can draw on the understanding of critical thinking and being outlined in this thesis. This includes use of the terminological and conceptual resources developed, explicit attention to the idea of scope, and sensitivity to diversity.

Critical thinking cannot be reduced to a step-by-step process. There are many different rubrics, templates, and detailed texts that provide structure and guidance for critical thinking (e.g., Ennis, 1996; FfCT, 2023; Halpern, 2014; D. Kuhn, 2015; Lipman, 2012; Noddings and Brooks, 2017). These can be valuable tools. However, I argue it is problematic if these tools come to be seen *as the thing itself*. To be clear, I do not mean to imply that the scholars providing examples of processes, structures, and resources *intend* to conflate those materials with the entirety of critical thinking. In general, each also draws on and adds to theory as an essential part of their efforts. However, the importance of underlying theory risks being lost as part of the educational scurry that arises out of trying to meet vast and abstract aims. In such circumstances, a series of steps, a guided discussion structure, or even something as robust as systematic applications of logic can come to be seen as coextensive – as *defining* – critical thinking. This, I contend, is problematic and not something I want to contribute towards. As noted in the previous chapter, I see value in cultivating an understanding of critical thinking at a theoretical level, as part of building a kind of philosophical and rational fluency that facilitates adaptive application.

However, I do not want this thesis to be isolated on an island of 'pure theory' without concern for how to navigate the waters of practice. Consequently, I recognise that while an understanding of theory is essential, discussion of domains, dimensions, contexts, and critical frameworks can seem quite distant from the discrete and concrete challenges faced in the classroom and daily life. Consequently, it is important for any philosophical discussion of critical thinking to trace a path from the theoretical to the practical. In what follows, I provide an example of how the understanding of critical thinking outlined in this thesis, including the notion of scope, may help facilitate critical thinking through a contextualised example. The example drawn on is a very open question, 'How can we best address the climate crisis?'. This kind of question could guide critical discussion in either a stand-alone critical thinking course or embedded into a subject specific context. Essentially, any 'big question' could serve this purpose. The 'steps' provided here are intended more as a rubric to help orient and remind participants of relevant opportunities for expansion of critical thinking. Any use of such a rubric should allow for (and indeed encourage) digression, alteration, and addition. While engaging with this process it may also be beneficial to reference the graphic model (see p. 50) to help orient and map various changes in critical scope. Finally, this is not a linear process to be completed strictly in sequence nor only once. Instead, (despite the linear presentation) this is a network of prompts that should contribute to a cycle of continued refinement, both within and between sections and as a full process. The left side of the table contains larger orienting questions, with guiding sub-questions on the right. I present the rubric here in sections, with notes after each part aimed at elucidating how the rubric draws on the understanding of critical thinking outlined in this thesis.

I have intentionally selected a broad topic, as opposed to a more closed question or scenario that leads towards predetermined potential courses of action (e.g., for or against positions). This is because one of the most important steps in critical thinking is often determining *what part* of a larger issue to think about. More closed and focused scenarios, like those often found in critical thinking textbooks (e.g., Ennis, 1996; Halpern, 2014) are extremely helpful in honing particular attributes. For example, recognising logical fallacies, working against cognitive biases, or engaging with moral conundrums. Furthermore, while more closed and focused questions can be somewhat decontextualised, they can also (as in the texts referenced above) draw on very relevant and real-world situations to facilitate meaningful and contextualised opportunities for critical thinking. My intention in starting with such a broad question in this example is to include attention to establishing the scope and focus of inquiry (what is being thought about) as part of critical thinking.

8.1 Clarifying contexts

1) Who are we?	a. How do we relate to the topic? b. How do we relate to contexts? c. What are the circumstances of our thinking (e.g., why, where, when, and how are we thinking about the topic)?
2) What are we thinking about?	a. Are we thinking about the same topic? b. Which part(s) of the topic(s) are relevant? c. Are we thinking about the same things?
3) Which domains and dimensions are relevant?	a. Are any domains or dimensions more or less prominent? b. Are any domains or dimensions excluded? c. If so, are they potentially relevant?

This stage of questions provides a first step towards establishing an appropriate scope of critical thinking, primarily through consideration of topics, contexts, and relevant breadth. The first question may seem simple and self-evident, but it is remarkable how often this vital question is overlooked. Even if the 'we' of this question is an individual thinking in isolation, that person must be prepared to recognise how contexts shape their thinking, how they are situated within and relate to an already existing world. The 'we' in this question could also be quite expansive. For example, a discipline, profession, community, or culture. This question also addresses aspects of perspective. Thinking critically as an evolutionary biologist might be different from thinking critically as a mother, *even if thinking about the same thing*. These questions draw attention to the fact that people must consider how they are situated and related within various contexts of critical consideration (Lipman, 2012). These questions call for attention to positionality and perspective.

For the purposes of this example, the 'we' I want to draw on is something like a small discussion group in a UK university. The first question, then, is an invitation to relate to the topic and each other, revealing potentially relevant contextual factors with implications for the appropriate aims and scope of critical discussion. For example, there are important contextual difference in considering the climate crisis for a person from a coastal village in Bangladesh and an affluent engineer in a New York high-rise. These contextual differences do not preclude mutual comprehensibility, but they certainly require receptive and reflexive critical attention.

The second question may also seem simple: the aim is to think critically about climate change. However, that aim is so vast it is essentially empty. This may lead to people speaking past instead of with one another. For example, discussing the causes and effects of climate change is very different from discussing science and technology as a means of resolving the climate crisis, and both differ significantly from thinking about necessary changes in values and behaviour or the need for considerations of fault, responsibility, and ecological justice. Identifying which facets of an issue are being brought into dialogue is an essential aspect of

understanding the appropriate scope of critical thinking. This does not mean it is necessary to choose only one facet of a complex topic for consideration. Indeed, for a topic like climate change, it is vital that all these facets are brought into critical dialogue. However, this needs to be as explicit as possible because different facets of a topic are likely to be predominantly situated within different domains and dimensions. For example, focusing on science and technology as solutions to the climate crisis could orient towards the individual domain and epistemological dimension. Conversely, the notion that changes in values are required is likely to pull towards the ethical dimension and sociocultural domain. If one person is fixated on science and technology, and another on values and behaviour, there is a need to expand critical thinking to encompass the domains and dimensions relevant to both. The scientist may be called to think more about the ethical and political dimensions, along with the sociocultural and existential domains, while the moralist may be drawn to consider what is being asked for in the individual domain, with greater consideration of the ontological and epistemological dimensions. Most importantly, while both the scientist and moralist may already be thinking at an expansive scope within and across these domains and dimensions, they may have different understandings of truth and care that result in divergent aims, assumptions, criteria, and standards structuring critical frameworks. In other words, they may have different *perspectives* within common domains and dimensions of consideration that provide opportunity for expanding critical scope.

8.2 Establishing frameworks and building mutual comprehensibility

4) What is true?	a. What do we 'know' to be true? b. How does truth change in different domains, dimensions, and contexts of consideration?
5) What do we care about?	a. What relationships of care are relevant? b. How is meaning relevant? c. How do relationships of care and meaning change in different domains, dimensions, and contexts of consideration? d. What is the emotional valance of the topic?
6) What are our processes and criteria for evaluating reasons?	a. What processes of reasoning are relevant (e.g., logical argument, ethical appeal, instrumental utility)? b. What criteria are relevant to evaluating reasons (e.g., soundness, goodness, effectiveness)? c. What standards are relevant (e.g., how true, good, useful)?
7) What are our fundamental aims and assumptions?	d. Do aims and assumptions change by dimension and domain? a. Where do aims and assumptions agree or disagree? b. Do we have any incommensurable aims and assumptions? c. Do differing aims and assumptions provide ***internally coherent*** reasoning?

Questions four and five ask each participant to explore some degree of infinite regress in their own thinking. Truth makes for a good starting point, as it does not take long to identify assumptions of truth relevant to contexts and topics. Care can be a bit more difficult to untangle, but a good starting point is with core values and aims based on what is 'known' to be 'good' and/or 'right'. Once these aspects of truth and care are identified, one should think about how they are justified. This exploration of infinite regress feeds into question six, which identifies the structure of critical frameworks, including an understanding of what constitutes 'good' reasoning in the given context. This leads to question seven, which aims to shed light on the most fundamental aims and assumptions guiding critical thinking. Differences and divergences amongst any of the questions in this stage of inquiry may indicate the need for increased scrutiny to internal coherence *within* critical frameworks. This is often the case when there are differences in knowledge (truth) and values (care) but consistency in processes, criteria, and fundamental assumptions. However, if there are divergences in fundamental aims and assumptions, this stage of inquiry may reveal plurality and diversity *between* critical frameworks.

For example, the assumptions that climate change is occurring, that humans are contributing to these changes, and that these changes constitute a crisis are all fundamental to discussion of any facet of this topic. Obviously, if question seven reveals someone in the critical discussion does not share these assumptions, it will be difficult for dialogue to continue without building mutual comprehensibility. Can the person that does not share these assumptions provide a coherent and well-reasoned case? The immediate reflex may be to assume that such a case simply cannot be made. However, it is important to remain receptive to *how* a person approaches making their case. Do they deny climate change by drawing on 'junk science' (an issue of truth)? Do they dismiss climate because they are afraid to face it (an issue of care with relevance to the emotional dimension). Have they uncritically trusted sources of authority (an issue of truth and trust)? Do they acknowledge climate change, and perhaps even the human contribution, but interpret this as somehow unproblematic (an issue of care and coherence)? The consistency and coherence (or lack thereof) of each line of reasoning must be probed and explored with relevance to questions four, five, and six to help determine how the pursuit of truth, relations of care, and processes of reasoning define relative critical frameworks. The aim of this stage is not necessarily resignation into 'agreeing to disagree'. The evidence and reasoning from this stage sets up the next phase of questioning, which explicitly calls for the possibility of metacritique.

This set of questions draws explicit attention to something that is important throughout this kind of critical process, attention to emotional valence. It is vital to understand how different topics, facets of topics, contexts, aims, and assumptions relate to the emotional dimension of critical thinking (Holma, 2015; Thayer-Bacon, 1993). This is necessary not only to maintain respectful dialogue, but also to recognise how the emotional dimension exerts influence and plays a role in critical reasoning across contexts, domains, and dimensions. Importantly, attention to the emotional valence of topics and emotional dimension of critical thinking is not aimed at *avoiding* particular emotions, like potential discomfort, but at understanding the *reasons* for such emotions and how these emotions articulate with reasoning – including the

possibility of themselves becoming reasons. This may seem like a somewhat convoluted circle, or worse, an invitation for 'appeal to emotion' as a form of epistemic justification. My point is simply that emotions are not something to rationally 'move past' in critical dialogue. They can indicate important aspects of reasoning, inspire lines of inquiry, and sometimes work to justify thought and action (Nussbaum, 2001). For example, empathy (and a slew of associated emotions) are vital parts of the moral psychology necessary to motivate and justify many actions beyond self-interest (Nussbaum, 2013). The emotional dimension of critical thinking is not an invitation to 'argue from emotion', it is a reminder that we cannot think critically without emotions, thus it is vital to consider how emotions fit into critical frameworks and processes of reasoning.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that disagreement or misalignment of aims and assumptions at a fundamental level (e.g., denying climate change) can derail discussion towards topics that seem as if they should already be settled. This can be annoying and inefficient, but it cannot be ignored. A decision of appropriate scope must be made regarding the relevance of incommensurable assumptions. Can a person that denies climate change meaningfully contribute to critical discussion on the topic? How much effort ought to be spent in the 'detour' of addressing these fundamental assumptions, particularly if the end point is likely to be incommensurability and radical disagreement? These are not questions with one-size-fits-all answers. First and foremost, it is important to mutually comprehend the points of disagreement and incommensurability and establish that all parties are receptive to ongoing genuine criticality. It is possible for people to remain receptive and genuine in their critical efforts but fail to find agreement or commensurability. In such cases, it is then necessary to decide, based on context, how to proceed. Is it necessary to take a detour into thinking critically about aims and assumptions that were previously taken for granted? Is it necessary to confirm certain aims and assumptions as the grounds for moving forward, even if not all parties agree? Is it possible that carrying incommensurable aims or assumptions into critical discussion may prove productive at a later juncture? Are there other domains and dimensions of consideration that may be relevant, perhaps helping to find common or at least commensurable ground? The key point is that aims, assumptions, and reasoning are made explicit enough to facilitate mutual comprehensibility and inform decisions about how critical dialogue proceeds.

It is also necessary at this (and every) juncture to reaffirm commitment to critical thinking. It is possible, and not uncommon, for people to 'hijack' critical discussion through explicit and often adamant disagreement on fundamental assumptions (Halpern, 2014). The intention is to force attention towards 'proving' assumptions to prevent continued thinking based on those assumption. Done intentionally or not, this weaponizes infinite regress and forsakes efforts to build mutual comprehensibility. Sometimes this takes the form of hiding behind plurality framed as intractable relativism (Siegel, 2017). It can also become a form of 'silencing' through refusal of receptivity, which limits possibilities for reflexivity. *In such cases, a person is opting out of critical dialogue*. This is an often-overlooked possibility in the teaching and practice of critical thinking. Not everyone always agrees to participate. This is where aspects of context, in this case a university classroom, become relevant. As noted in the previous chapter, realising expansive critical thinking requires universities to have environments that *require* engagement

with critical thinking, even if difficult and potentially uncomfortable (J. Williams, 2016). Consequently, opting out of critical thinking, whether intentionally or through unintentional disruption via lack of receptivity and reflexivity, constitutes a failure on the part of a student to meet the *responsibilities* of study, and a failure on the part of the university to inspire and facilitate the meeting of this critical challenge.

Radical disagreement and incommensurability are particularly challenging and potentially damaging to critical thinking. However, they are also the easiest kinds of aims and assumptions to make explicit. Consequently, I do not want to overshadow the more challenging work of identifying important differences in more nuanced and embedded aims and assumptions. For example, everyone could share in the assumptions that climate change is happening because of human actions, and this constitutes a crisis. Yet, one person could contend it is essential to do whatever is necessary to address the climate crisis *so long as it does not negatively affect the economy.* The rationale for this could be justified by a view that economic sacrifices will bring more harm than any benefits gained through environmental preservation. Another person could proceed from the assumption that the current generation has a moral imperative to act in ways that help future generations flourish. Someone else might assume a similar moral imperative as directed towards all living beings, present and future. All of these perspectives could align in *agreement* with the need to 'address the climate crisis'. However, the nuances of aims and assumptions within and across domains and dimensions are important, as they can provide diverse insight and perspective. For example, relating to a forest as a resource to be managed in a balance between economic utility and the 'value' of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is very different from seeing a forest as invaluable to the spiritual wellbeing of life on earth, including humanity. Both perspectives may lead towards the aims of protecting forests, but moving towards this shared aim from different assumptions may become relevant at a certain *scope* of critical thinking. It is not enough simply to 'agree', it is vital to understand the *reasons* for agreement. Again, this does not mean all reasons for agreement must converge, just that they are available as explicit parts of the critical process.

Finally, just as radical disagreement can derail critical thinking, strong agreement can lead to stagnation. If everyone in a group agrees on the same aims and assumptions, perhaps even for the same reasons, it is worth considering the possibility that new perspectives may still be valuable. A good starting point for this line of inquiry is reconsideration of the first set of questions. If there is a great deal of commonality regarding participants, contexts, and facets of a topic it is possible critical dialogue is taking place in an insular critical framework. This is not *necessarily* problematic. Indeed, it can be quite helpful, particularly in instrumental applications of critical thinking. However, the risks to expansive critical thinking should also be clear, particularly if there is homogeneity and agreement from the outset, as this is quite different from consensus or convergence resulting from critical dialogue. Deciding when to seek new critical frameworks and perspectives is another aspect of determining appropriate scope. That is why question seven must explore aims and assumptions with nuanced attention to how truth and care contribute to coherent and consistent reasoning, *regardless of agreement or disagreement on aims and assumptions*.

8.3 Establishing appropriate scope

8) What breadth of critical thinking is appropriate?	a. Do we need to change consideration of contexts (e.g., disciplines, subjects, traditions, culture)? b. Do we need to change the breadth of domains or dimensions?
9) What depth of critical thinking is appropriate?	a. Do we need to question processes, criteria, purposes, or fundamental assumptions? b. Within or between which domains and dimensions? c. Within or between which contexts?
10) What type of critical thinking is needed?	a. Do we need criticality *within, of,* or *between* critical frameworks?

The differences and similarities in truth, care, aims, and assumptions from the previous stage of inquiry help to establish the appropriate scope of critical thinking. Question eight revisits the importance of contextual contingency and perspective given the outlining of critical frameworks from the previous stage. For example, if differences in truth, care, aims, and assumptions arise it is worth checking for correlations to aspects of context such as discipline, tradition, or culture. This is a question of addressing breadth of context. Similarly, this is a time to consider breadth of domains and dimensions. For example, considering relations of care towards ecological systems, animals, or a particular patch of meadow may introduce new aims, assumptions, and criteria into critical consideration. This is true in the individual domain (a person may have particular affinity for a specific place) the smaller-scale end of the sociocultural domain (an industry may depend on particular ecological resources) and the larger-scale end of the sociocultural domain (a culture/society/country may draw significance and/or sustenance from a particular environment). Furthermore, the existential domain brings in both a requirement for receptivity to the world and attention to fundamental questions and understandings of meaning. The existential domain is simultaneously empirical and metaphysical. Temperatures and water levels can be measured, but questions may remain as to whether these measurements are to be understood through the lens of ecology or theology. At a certain depth of critical thinking these assumptions may become relevant. The aim in this stage of inquiry is to establish relevant scope.

In this stage of critical dialogue, the graphic model of scope provided in this thesis (see p. 50) may provide a helpful rubric for mapping out various positions and possibilities. While the terminology of domains and dimensions might be somewhat abstract the graphic model can help make aspects of scope more explicit. For example, questions like, ‘are we thinking about the political dimension of this issue?’ or, ‘do we need to reconsider the criteria of the ethical dimension of this issue?’ can help probe and expand critical consideration. Importantly, these questions need not be asked with this exact terminology. The more natural-sounding questions of ‘what about politics?’ or ‘how do we know this is good?’ can suffice. However, the more

precise and meticulous language and structure of the model provided in this thesis can serve as a rubric to remind participants of the possibilities of scope. It can also orient and systematise an approach to exploring and expanding critical scope. For example, participants may notice some domains or dimensions have not been touched on in discussion, or that discussion has not reached the depths of metacritique in certain areas. This may indicate a lack of relevance, but it could also indicate an opportunity (or need) for expansion of critical scope.

Questions nine and ten address the difficult but essential need of determining what aims and assumptions ought to be subjected to metacritique. For example, is it *relevant* whether climate change is part of the random unfolding of a chaotic universe or part of a divine plan? For many potential lines of thinking and courses of action, *it may not matter.* For other lines of thinking and courses of action, it may matter very much, particularly if these assumptions impact the aims, criteria, or standards guiding reasoning. The preceding process of clarifying critical frameworks, including fundamental aims and assumptions should help identify gaps in knowledge, differences in criteria, and disagreement or incommensurability between aims and assumptions. For example, different criteria and processes of reasoning are relevant to the pursuit of reduction in carbon emissions, preservation of ecosystems, and a more equitable distribution of resources and responsibility for action. These are not necessarily incompatible, much less incommensurable, but attention and agreement are needed regarding how such complexities ought to be combined. Obviously, the strongest indictor of a need for deep metacritique is disagreement or incommensurability of fundamental aims and assumptions. However, difficult questions still arise when aims and assumptions are agreed, as there may still be need for metacritique. This is where perspectival exploration becomes important.

8.4 Perspective and metacritique

11) What perspectives are available?	a. How do truth/facts inform perspectives? b. How do care/meaning inform perspectives? c. What type of criticality can these perspectives provide?
12) How can new perspectives and possibilities be identified?	a. Pursuit of new truth? b. Attention to different relations of care? c. Can receptivity to alternate frameworks help? d. Can unencumbering thinking from aspects of critical frameworks help?
13) What attributes are needed?	a. Are there contextual impediments to critical thinking? b. How might attributes manifest to facilitate metacritique?
14) What has happened and what should we do next?	a. Is commensurability possible? b. Can disagreement be resolved? c. What does this situation of critical thinking require (e.g., consensus, decisive action, agreement to disagree?) d. Have beliefs, thoughts, or actions changed? e. What is it most important to think critically about?

With context defined, aims and assumptions made mutually comprehensible, and points of potential metacritique identified, it is possible to begin perspectival exploration. The aim here is not simply to explore a topic from new perspectives for the sake of novelty but to remain receptive to how different perspectives can inform potential metacritique. Of course, metacritique is not simply a matter of perspective, but may also require new information, evidence, directing of attention, or understandings of care. For example, wanting to resolve the climate crisis in a just and equitable manner may be in tension with environmental realities that are not responsive to human notions of justice. A point of tension like this indicates a need for further inquiry. This is a reflexive stage likely to lead only to further questions. Where is more information needed? Where are new understandings necessary? This is also a stage, as indicated by question eleven, where it is helpful to consider what *type* of criticality might be required. This involves taking inventory of existing perspectives with attention to how they may articulate, integrate, or conflict. This points towards both what type of criticality is required, but also (in question twelve) what new perspectival resources might help.

The previous sets of questions aim at revealing and making explicit, at identifying differences and commonalities to delineate meaningful boundaries. This set of questions is an invitation to explore the terrain revealed by that 'mapping' process. This is where receptivity must be at a maximum with the 'narrative imagination' (Nussbaum, 2002) fully engaged. This is the stage of reflection, looking back on the preceding stages to understand what has been laid bare, to trace out the contours of different critical frameworks. This may require attempting to unencumber oneself from the very aims and assumptions that have been made explicit, as it is possible the resources necessary for metacritique are not readily available within the parts of contexts and frameworks disclosed through the critical process thus far. If the prior questions focus on curiosity, this is the time for contemplation and wonder.

Most importantly, this is not the end of a linear critical process. It is only completion of one 'cycle' of inquiry, which should be repeated. Consequently, the most likely answer to the final question of, 'what should we do next' is 'we should go through this process of critical dialogue again'. Ideally, repeating the cycle of inquiry, even focused on the same general topic, will not yield the same 'results'. First and foremost, it is likely that the questions and understandings of contexts will change with each cycle. Perhaps homing in on something specific, or perhaps integrating increasing diversity with an effort to increase coherence. However, to keep this process from becoming a mere exercise of mental acrobatics, it can help to introduce the need for some form of decision to manifest in action. For example, to decide on a particular course of action. Ultimately, this is vital, as critical thinking often needs to not only inform, but manifest as action (Barnett, 1997). This is where the 'luxury' of a university setting should be fully exploited. The luxury of time, space, and an environment in which expansive critical thinking is valued, cultivated, and (ideally) *required* means it is possible to continue critical dialogue with the hope of identifying new possibilities and further expanding scope. Consequently, it is likely best not to introduce instrumentalised aims (the need for specific decisions) until after going through the cycle more than once. This allows questions and

possibilities to arise out of the process, instead of being imposed on the process from the beginning.

This is just one tool, or exercise, in helping to understand and engage with the idea of critical scope. It could unfold within a single session or expand across a full academic year, incorporating reading, research, and lectures. There are a plethora of existing resources to aid in stimulating and guiding critical thinking (e.g., Barnett, 1997; Brookfield, 2012; Davies, 2015b; Ellerton, 2015; Ennis, 1996; Facione, 1990; Halpern, 2014; D. Kuhn, 2015; Lipman, 2012; McPeck, 1990; Moon, 2008; Paul, 1982). My intention is not to evaluate these, nor to proffer this rough example as some kind of panacea for critical thinking. Instead, it is just that: a rough example, showing the possibility of connecting theory and practice. Most importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, this example aims to further clarify the conceptual and terminological model of scope by showing how it might be put to use.

9 Conclusion

This thesis is not an effort to discard or entirely replace existing understandings of critical thinking. Instead, it is an effort to revise, rethink, and adjust existing ideas. More than anything, it is an effort of *expansion.* In this chapter I briefly review the key contributions to knowledge made by this thesis, address some limitations, and consider how this project may contribute to future work.

9.1 Contributions to knowledge

This thesis addresses a need, recognised in existing literature and serving as a starting point for this inquiry (see Sections 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6), for UK universities to cultivate and practice more expansive forms of criticality. Meeting this need is essential to addressing the complex challenges of a diverse and interconnected world. Expansive criticality is essential to both transforming and sustaining knowledge, values, and the fundamental assumptions that guide and structure not only education and society, but also thinking and being. In this thesis, I contend that achieving an understanding and application of criticality at an expansive scope requires attention to how people with different (perhaps radically divergent) perspectives, knowledge, and values can speak critically *with* (instead of past) each other in genuine critical dialogue. I argue that realising criticality at an expansive scope is not merely a matter of *thinking* but an issue of *being.* Getting more people to *be* more critical requires attention to the broader spectrum of being. In this thesis, I develop a philosophically informed understanding of *critical being.* I contend that critical being involves expanding critical thinking through attention and receptivity to diversity of ideas and experiences, including non-critical modes of thinking and being, which can create new perspectives and possibilities for the metacritique essential to facilitating and sustaining the expansive criticality needed in both education and society.

I focus on UK universities as places that (I contend) should both cultivate and practice *critical being*. I argue that universities should not only aim to develop thinking in specialised areas, like those of disciplines and professions, nor should critical thinking be approached as an 'empty' decontextualised set of skills and dispositions. This means universities should not *only* develop critical engineers and literary critics, nor *only* hone the skills of informal logic and argumentation, but instead ought to cultivate critical *people* that are willing and able to integrate and enact criticality as a part of their very being. This aim of education more broadly, and universities in particular, has been recognised by others (e.g., Barnett, 2015; Brookfield, 2012; Davies, 2015b). However, what is less frequently recognised by others in the higher education and critical thinking literature is that realising criticality at this scope requires greater attention to how critical thinking articulates with non-critical aspects of thinking and being. Expansive criticality, manifesting as critical being, is not a matter of always being critical, it is a matter of understanding and navigating criticality *at an appropriate scope.*

What constitutes the 'appropriate' scope of critical thinking in any given context or situation cannot be predetermined. This is exactly why it is vital to understand the idea of scope. Navigating the complexities of diverse contexts and situations as a critical being requires intentional, effortful, coherent, and communicable judgment and justification in determining

boundaries of critical scope. Thinking back to the housebuilding analogy from Chapter 2 (see page 33) the seemingly simplest aspects of an undertaking, like the selection of a particular building material, can illustrate the immensity of potential critical scope. How does the housebuilder select the best nails for their project? Should the criteria for selection be affordability, durability, or environmental sustainability? Or perhaps they should use screws, some other form of joinery, or maybe they don't need to build a house at all? Such considerations correspond to issues of scope regarding various domains (ontological, epistemological, ethical, emotional, political, mystical) and dimensions (individual, sociocultural, existential), at differing depths (processes, standards, criteria, aims, and assumptions) with attention to intersecting contexts and critical frameworks (e.g., family, community, ecology). The fact that choosing a box of nails (not to mention all the other components of a house) could connect to critical consideration of labour practices in a different part of the world, the global climate crisis, and questions about fundamental assumptions pertaining to ideas of what constitutes a home shows the powerful and important nature of scope. This potentiality of scope could paralyse a person with an overabundance of critical possibilities. The aim of critical being is not to live in constant criticality but to use criticality to understand and adjust ways of thinking and living. A major part of critical being is determining what to think critically about. This is fundamentally a question of scope.

Once the importance and power of critical scope are understood, approaches to critical thinking as forms of instrumentalised problem solving or hyper-specialisation bounded by disciplinary or professional contexts can no longer be seen as sufficient in meeting the needs of education and society. Instead, the scope of critical thinking must be expanded through recognition of its possibility and applicability in all aspects of life. This requires attention to the dynamic flux between critical and non-critical modes of thinking and being. It requires receptivity to new possibilities that are not bounded by current critical frameworks. This is not to imply that critical being is a move away from thinking and reasoning. Instead, critical being recognises that expansive forms of criticality require attention to *more than just thinking and reasoning*. This includes attention to the contingency of both thinking and reasoning – attention to *what makes thinking possible and where reasons come from.* No form of excessive hyper-rationality can expand criticality in the manner needed by education and society. Instead, more attention to the various modes of being that bound and shape thinking itself are necessary. Essential to this effort is recognition that we are part of an interconnected and shared world that shapes being and can be shaped by being. Realising this potential transformative power requires attentiveness to oneself, others, and the world. It requires attention to how contexts shape being, how being shapes thinking, and the possibility for this relationship to move in both directions. Coherent reasoning is certainly central to this effort. However, other modes of thinking and being, particularly those that draw attention and care beyond the narrow confines of the individual domain, are also vital and not always purely or primarily the products of coherent, much less explicit, reasoning. This is why it is problematic to conflate critical thinking, reasoning, and rationality. People can reason uncritically, and rationality is often more a process of retrospective *rationalisation* than proactive reasoning (Mercier and Sperber, 2017). My point is not to suggest removing reasoning from critical thinking, or the latter from a larger understanding of rationality. Critical thinking requires reasoning and I staunchly advocate an idea of rationality that includes criticality. My aim is to build a more expansive understanding of criticality that gives attention to the relation and interaction between different modes of

thinking and being. Thus, my understanding of critical being is not *only* a call for more reasoning and rationality, but for more *humanity*, with humanity (very importantly) understood as a contingent and relational part of a shared world comprised of far more than explicit reasoning.[9]

I argue that the expansion of critical thinking toward critical being is essential to realising criticality within and across diverse contexts. It is also essential to fending off dogmatism and ideology. In the understanding of critical being I develop in this thesis, perceived certainty – whether in the laws of science or ethical norms of a community – cannot serve as grounds for righteous universalisation, but instead should be understood as parts of a perpetual critical process. This process requires recognising the boundaries of understanding constituting critical frameworks – whether those of a specific practice, discipline, or an entire tradition – are not universal, ultimate, or immutable. There are always new perspectives and possibilities, often revealed through encounters with others and the world, that can change or potentially transform what might currently be taken for granted. This idea of fallibility has long been central to critical thinking theory. However, as I have shown in this thesis, dominant conceptions of critical thinking often rest on universalistic underpinnings which risk (unintentionally) narrowing the potential scope of critical thinking in theory and practice (see Chapter 3). This narrowing is the result of well-intentioned efforts to avoid longstanding philosophical challenges that seemingly pose risks to the very possibility for critical thinking. Chief among these challenges are questions about what makes metacritique possible. How is it possible to think critically about the very criteria, standards, aims, and assumptions that structure critical thinking itself?

Dominant conceptions of critical thinking contend that metacritique (a feature essential to expanding the scope of criticality) requires something foundational, universal, or somehow transcendent of all critical frameworks. Advocates of this view raise the spectre of intractable relativism as the inevitable result of unmooring criticality from substantive universal values. This thesis shows why building an ideal of critical thinking on assumedly universal aims, assumptions, and values is deeply problematic, particularly in diverse and cross-cultural contexts (see Chapters 3 and 4). It also shows why this is not necessary and how an 'ungrounded' approach to critical thinking is both more inclusive and expansive without lapsing into relativism or imposing dogmatic universalism. I argue that diversity and plurality can provide the perspectival resources necessary for metacritique. No 'ultimate' critical framework is necessary because critical thinking is not an 'ultimate' process that must (or can) engage every aspect of understanding in totality simultaneously. Instead, the piecemeal engagements of diverse and pluralistic critical frameworks can be navigated with attention to the possibility of identifying new but mutually comprehensible perspectives from within each to facilitate metacritique.

This links to, and helps address, another key problem recognised in the higher education and critical thinking literature; overly individualistic and excessively epistemological approaches

[9] In this understanding, contingency and relationality are not only oriented toward other humans, but toward all aspects of the world. This includes non-human beings but also the natural environment, concepts, language, and all the 'stuff' of both human and non-human existence.

to critical thinking (e.g., Thayer-Bacon, 1998; E. Williams, 2016). The individualisation of critical thinking poses several major impediments to expanding the scope of criticality and outright prevents the possibility of critical being. This is because *being is necessarily relational*, rising out of a pre-existing network of sociocultural relations, while also embedded (and embodied) in relation to a world not only beyond the self, but beyond humanity. Failure to recognise the sociocultural (others) and existential (world) domains of criticality strips away vital perspectival resources that structure and, via metacritique, potentially restructure the individual domain, varieties of overlapping and intersecting contexts, and ways of thinking. Hyper-individualism can forestall critical thinking in multiple ways. It can lead to unjustified universalism (what I think applies to everything) and intractable relativism (what I think cannot be understood or judged by others). Both are fatal to criticality. Thinking *for* oneself is essential to critical thinking, but trying to think *by oneself* constrains critical potential. Recognising that one can only think as part of an already existing and always relational world requires attention to the aspects of being that shape the possibilities of thinking and thus also critical thinking *in relation to the world*.

Recognition of contingency and relationality are essential to expanding critical thinking into critical being. This 'ungrounded' approach to critical thinking is necessary in cross-cultural contexts, where the various contexts shaping fundamental assumptions and aims sometimes give rise to incommensurable critical frameworks. This is why my focus on cross-cultural contexts as a lens through which to interrogate dominant understandings of critical thinking is particularly helpful. It shows why universalism fails. Why context specific aims and assumptions, like those of substantive values or overly determinant educational aims (e.g., those of a specific educational context like a UK university), should not be mistaken as 'defining features' of critical thinking. The philosophical resources drawn on to suggest the possibility for expansive critical thinking freed from foundations, universal assumptions, or notions of transcendent objectivity are not new, nor are the endorsements of navigable pluralism (e.g., Berlin and Williams, 1994; Lukes, 2017; Rorty, 1991b; Taylor, 1995). These questions connect to longstanding philosophical debates. However, while these debates tend to play out in philosophy more generally, I have applied them to critical thinking in an original way. Consequently, through this thesis, I have added something new to how philosophical perspectives are folded into an understanding of critical thinking.

Importantly, the idea of scope must be paired with an understanding of what *animates* critical thinking *at an expansive scope* – what can *motivate* and *perpetuate* critical being. The pragmatic assumptions I identify as essential to animating critical thinking at an expansive scope are not entirely novel. However, I contend that my approach and organisation add something new to an understanding of critical thinking. I explore the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility with the idea of scope in mind, thus revealing important nuances between each essential component (see Chapter 6). Furthermore, my ontological approach to care is relatively unique in critical thinking theory and important to understanding the contextual contingency necessary for application within and between diverse contexts. Attention to mutual comprehensibility also marks an important contribution to theory and practice. This idea derives from explicit attention to radical disagreement as an unavoidable

part of education and society that ought not negate, but expand, the possibilities of criticality. This, I believe, is an important contribution to knowledge. Particularly to understanding how diversity provides opportunities and resources for the expansion of critical thinking. The idea of diversity as a resource for criticality is a point often recognised and advocated in existing literature (Banks, 2007; Brookfield, 2012; Lipman, 2012; Siegel, 2017; Vandermensbrugghe, 2004). However, as noted above and detailed in Chapter 3, there are assumptions underlying dominant understandings of critical thinking that unintentionally inhibit this possibility. Thus, a novel contribution of this thesis is attention to how critical thinking theory can be reconceptualised, including the ideas of scope and pragmatic assumptions, to better take advantage of the potential for diverse perspectives to expand criticality.

This effort to 'add something new' to an understanding of critical thinking is taken forward through the exploration of criticality in Chinese philosophy. This exploration serves several purposes. First and foremost, it exemplifies how traditions often excluded from consideration in dominant conceptions of critical thinking can be drawn on to better understand *and expand* criticality. The Chinese philosophical traditions considered do not share the assumedly 'universal' assumptions underpinning dominant conceptions of critical thinking. Yet, criticality is clearly possible and present in these traditions. Furthermore, the relational, emotional, and ethical orientation of Chinese philosophy helps show how criticality can expand beyond individualistic and rationalistic constraints. Importantly, while I have focused on Chinese philosophy in this thesis, I trust similar projects focusing on other traditions could yield equally valuable insights.

Approaches like this may help better understand the challenges faced, and opportunities provided, by international students studying in UK universities. In this thesis I problematise generalisations about Chinese international students, providing valuable insights into the largest demographic of international students studying in UK universities. This is done by drawing on Chinese philosophy as a 'living' resources capable of informing contemporary understandings of critical thinking. Ultimately, my aim is not to argue for a distinctly 'Chinese' form of critical thinking. Instead, I contend that providing students with resources and insight into criticality drawn from a more familiar and relevant cultural context may simply *be more effective* than doing so from a western-centric or allegedly universalistic perspective. This effort contributes to a growing area of research and discourse focused on helping universities address the challenges (and opportunities) of increasing internationalisation.

The value of the 'ungrounded' and indeterminant approach to criticality put forward by this thesis is most uniquely explored in Chapter 5, where I outline the mystical dimension of critical thinking to help elucidate the idea of critical being. This effort to integrate critical and non-critical experiences into an understanding of *critical being* is perhaps my most novel (and thus also contentious) contribution to knowledge. In this effort, I draw heavily (and thankfully) on the work of others. However, the demarcation of a mystical dimension of critical thinking and drawing on the examples of wonder and (perhaps most uniquely) wu-wei provides new insights into existing ideas. Previous notions of critical being focus on critical action in particular contexts for determinant purposes. For example, Barnett draws on the iconic image (and idea)

of a pro-democracy student protester standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square in 1989 as an exemplification of critical being (1997). This brave soul provides important insights into how criticality can manifest at an expansive scope, extending into the sociocultural domain and drawing on the ethical, emotional, and political dimensions. I agree that this attention to action in the world is an essential feature of critical being. However, it is not the *only* feature nor the only kind of action with relevance to critical being.

In this thesis I draw attention to the reciprocal flux within and between critical and non-critical modes of being. Boundaries between such states can be difficult to define. However, I contend that the mystical dimension of critical thinking laid out in this thesis provides a rough and broad category for recognising and organising experiences and modes of being with shared characteristics conducive to expanding critical thinking toward critical being. I draw on the examples of wonder and wu-wei to show the power of perspective and receptivity to the world beyond the self (and beyond anthropocentrism) in providing resources for metacritique capable of changing and transforming both thinking and the world. These perspectival resources can help expand critical frameworks which can otherwise become logically confining. When Siegel and other theorists raise the logical question of infinite regress, of how to gain a perspective to critique the criteria that guide critique, I suggest the answer need not be some set of transcendent or objective metacriteria, but instead engagement with diversity and plurality. As noted above, diversity and plurality can come in the forms of alternative traditions and perspectives (different critical frameworks). However, new perspectives can also come from the mystical and wonderous, or through efficacious non-critical engagement with the world. These 'non-critical' experiences are conducive to contemplation and the unencumbering of preconceptions that shape and bound criticality. I argue that the reciprocal flux (I do not suggest wonder or wu-wei can or should be permanent states) between critical and non-critical modes of being provides opportunity for perspectival expansion and thus metacritique. For example, contemplation can fuel curiosity and the 'unlearning' of absorption into the world can reveal new possibilities – new ways of thinking and new things to think about. These non-critical experiences can help expand the confines of critical frameworks, providing new footholds for metacritique. In this sense, an equally apt image for exemplifying critical being might be that of a craftsperson, an awe-inspiring landscape, or a moving piece of music. Understanding critical being requires understanding non-critical being and the reciprocal relation (over time) between both.

This approach to critical being has profound implications for learning and education more broadly, including the purposes, aims, curricula, pedagogies, and environments of UK universities. The implications for practice discussed in this thesis are intentionally general due to the scope of the project. This is discussed more below as both a limitation and an opportunity for future development. The implications for practice are not (on their own) entirely new ideas. For example, I am not the first (nor hopefully will I be the last) to argue against the economic instrumentalization or hyper specialisation of higher education. Similarly, there is a long history of arguments for (and against) the value (and form) of a liberal education. However, I have reached these 'familiar' positions via less familiar routes.

I contend that approaching implications for practice from the perspective of what is necessary to realise critical being, as opposed to using the substantive aims of context-contingent universities to define critical thinking, provides a valuable and unique contribution to knowledge. As UK universities become more international, and tough questions about purposes and aims continue to arise, it may become increasingly helpful to interrogate these educational issues through the lens of critical being. For example, UK universities may need to be more honest and explicit about the *types* of critical thinking they aim to cultivate. What, really, is expected of students studying in the UK. Should they be encouraged, perhaps required, to question fundamental aims, assumptions, and values wherever they may come from? My answer is a resounding yes. Consequently, having plurality and diversity in the classroom provides a unique opportunity to undertake exercises in expansive criticality with recourse to a variety of perspectives. Such an approach is not contingent on cross-cultural diversity, but instead provides an example of how diversity of various forms and origins can be utilised as a resource for expanding critical thinking.

I argue that seizing this opportunity to draw on diversity as a resource for expanding criticality requires *explicit* attention to teaching critical thinking in UK universities. Debates on how to integrate the teaching of critical thinking into various levels and forms of education, including universities, are longstanding. This thesis argues for the necessity of addressing critical thinking explicitly, with attention to underlying theory, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This, I contend, is essential to facilitating genuine and expansive critical dialogue as a guiding purpose, central aim, ongoing process, and 'outgoing' contribution (in the form of critical beings) of UK universities. Furthermore, the increasingly international demographic of UK universities makes explicit attention to critical thinking even more necessary, as the 'taken for granted' assumptions guiding criticality may diverge substantially between students with different backgrounds. In my own university teaching, amidst efforts to facilitate discussion in master's level courses on education for democracy, I have heard (on more than one occasion) international students from non-democratic contexts lean over and ask a peer, 'which one is democracy?', receiving the response, 'I think it's the one where people vote?'. How effectively, or critically, can a discussion premised on the assumption that democracy is the best form of political organisation proceed if participants not only fail to share that assumption, but also lack an understanding of the concepts framing that assumption? In such a situation it seems pedagogically irresponsible not to address both differences in assumptions and gaps in understanding. Fortunately, far from 'derailing' the aims of discussion, doing so can become a way to *expand the criticality* of such a discussion *for everyone involved*. Failure to recognise and address these kinds of challenges, which are actually *opportunities,* is bound to lead to a great deal of talking *past* each other, instead of *with* each other in the classroom. I argue that explicit teaching of critical thinking could help teachers and students recognise and engage with these kinds of situations. It could help turn the challenges of plurality and diversity into opportunities for expanding criticality.

The inclusive aims of drawing on diversity as a resource for expanding criticality reinforce my assertion that the particularistic aims of education (in the case of this thesis, those of UK universities) should not be allowed to make dogmatic impositions on critical thinking. I argue

for separating the aims and assumptions of specific contexts from a larger understanding of critical being. Some may wonder why it matters (or whether it is necessary and/or desirable) to separate the aims of education from an understanding of critical thinking and being. Indeed, if education is conceived in a very broad sense, such a separation may *not* be necessary. However, the facet of education under consideration in this thesis is UK universities, which (justifiably) have many decidedly determinant educational aims derived from the sociopolitical contexts they are parts of. These include aims that support democracy and various (though not always coherently compatible) forms of social justice. My effort is not to argue against these aims. Instead, I follow Mill in warning that there is nothing more dangerous to treasured knowledge and values than failure to subject them to critical scrutiny (2015). Consequently, any settling of educational or social aims and assumptions into taken for granted positions of unassailability risks crippling criticality in service of dogmatism and ideology. Simply put, universities *need* to be inclusive places, and this inclusivity ought to entail uncertainty, tension, and disagreement. How, indeed, could genuine diversity exist in universities without disagreement?

This leads me to contend that the primary questions regarding critical thinking and universities are not about how to cultivate criticality that draws on and serves liberal democratic aims and assumptions, but about what criticality requires of universities *to cultivate critical beings.* There may well be a confluence between liberal democratic politics and expansive criticality. It is certainly easier to imagine critical thinking flourishing in contexts that allow unfettered access to information and freedom of expression. However, it is also possible for critical thinking to flounder in these contexts. Critical thinking does not entail democracy and democracy does not entail (but does require) criticality. Consequently, for critical thinking to serve democracy or any other educational and social aims, it must have room to be unfettered, to explore the indeterminant and unforeseen – to expand toward critical being. Universities should question the fundamental assumptions they aim to support and perpetuate, including prevailing forms of politics, economics, and conceptions of social justice. As noted above, the opportunity for that scrutiny to receptively engage with diverse and divergent perspectives should be cultivated and seized upon. I contend that universities are one of the few privileged places where the time, expertise, and opportunity to undertake this exploration can be realised. I follow MacIntyre in seeing universities as having a capacity and responsibility help individuals and societies critically reflect on themselves (MacIntyre, 1988a; 2009). Universities are, or I argue ought to be, on of society's 'reflective organs'. It is vital to critically question the ideas and values held most dear, taken most for granted, as this is essential to the continued reinvigoration and potential transformation of the ideas and values that shape our thinking and our world. Universities ought to help meet this vital need, which is eroded by excessive uncritical predetermination.

This is why I contend that UK universities should draw on exploring the possibilities of being (with an eye toward flourishing) as a central purpose shaping their overall aims, curricula, pedagogies, and environments. The idea of critical scope can help realise this vast and somewhat amorphous purpose. Expanding criticality into the ontological, ethical, emotional, political, and mystical dimensions, along with the sociocultural and existential domains helps

to explore and understand the contingencies and potentialities of being. Similarly, expansive criticality is essential to addressing the elusive and ever-changing questions regarding what forms flourishing can, could, and should take. Consequently, I argue that UK universities ought to *require* students to call their very being into question. To focus critical thinking on their most fundamental and taken for granted aspects of knowledge, identity, and relation to the world. To complete university without experiencing criticality at this scope is a missed opportunity for individuals, universities, and societies. I do not contend that everyday living must always entail criticality of this scope. That would make for some agonising and inefficient living. However, I contend that the opportunity to experience and explore critical thinking at such an expansive scope, to see how it can be woven into the very fabric of one's being as a relational part of a complex, diverse, and dynamic world, is one that can and should have a lifelong impact on a person, on communities, and on the world. This is an impact UK universities should not only be trying to make, but prioritising. This is a tall order, but also something dearly needed to meet the needs of education and society in an increasingly interconnected yet ideologically fragmented world.

Through this thesis I argue that this ambitious and expansive approach is necessary because the interconnectivity of the world, the pace of change, and the scale of challenges facing education, society, and humanity require critical beings. Attention to, and care for, the world beyond the self is an essential feature of critical being. This is a vital point. Philosophers and educators have long grappled with questions about how to balance and navigate the complex and sometimes competing interests of self, others, and world. Addressing these challenges, Nussbaum sees a need in both philosophy and education for a 'moral psychology', rooted in the inextricable entanglement of ethics, emotions, and rationality essential to motivating and facilitating engagement with a diverse and interconnected world (Nussbaum, 2001; 2013). In this thesis, I argue that the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility across the various domains and dimensions of criticality motivates and animates critical being. Again, the idea of scope is essential, as not every aim and assumption of a critical framework is relevant to every critical endeavour. However, living in a shared world prevents any genuinely critical being from secluding themselves in the righteousness of perceived certainty or the solipsism of a self-selected 'reality'. The world requires us to do things together, and criticality is essential to making this a potentially constructive endeavour.

Critical thinking has long been seen as a tool to help understand and adjudicate between diverse perspectives. This thesis contributes to this longstanding aim through greater attention to critical scope across contexts, dimensions, and domains. This is essential because the world requires people capable of carrying on critical dialogue at an expansive scope in diverse contexts. Some problems, like those of the climate crisis, are global in nature. However, thinking about such issues is also invariably local, drawn from the aims and assumptions structuring critical frameworks in specific contexts. Business executives in London skyscrapers and villagers in coastal Bangladeshi villages may all think critically about rising sea levels, but to think critically *together* they must expand the scope of criticality beyond the known and familiar – beyond themselves. In this thesis I show that this expansion can be animated by the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility. This can help move criticality from the

individual into the gradations of relations constituting the sociocultural domain (moving from thinking about self to thinking about others). However, further expansion remains necessary, beyond the sociocultural and into the existential domain. This expansion encompasses engagement with the meanings and relations of significance that shape values, views, and understandings of the world. However, the existential domain also requires attention directed beyond the merely human *to the world itself.* The existential domain is not merely an imposition of human subjectivity onto the world, but a receptivity to the ways the world impresses itself onto humanity. This movement into the existential domain, combined with attention to the multifaceted dimensions of criticality (including the mystical), may help provide the perspectival resources, the recognition of new possibilities, that can facilitate the kinds of metacritique necessary to navigate the increasing complexity interconnectivity of a shared world.

A final overarching aim of this thesis is to reveal the continuing value of philosophy to critical thinking. I want to show that philosophy is not inept in its efforts to contribute to critical thinking, but instead essential and highly capable of continuing to help in the ongoing effort to understand and actualise critical thinking at an expansive scope. Through this thesis, I reconnect philosophy and critical thinking in ways that help meet the needs of education and society, while also bringing new perspectives to the value of the relationship between critical thinking and philosophy. Perhaps most importantly, I hope this thesis (or work that comes from it) can help people speak with each other in critical dialogue, even if in disagreement, instead of past each other in pseudo-critical and non-receptive dogmatic and ideological opposition. This could take many forms. For example, this thesis could help people recognise the unavoidably bounded nature of criticality by drawing attention to the contextual contingency of thinking and being. However, it should also make clear that, far from being a deterministic constraint, the bounded nature of thinking and being is fluid and moveable. Attention to the factors of contingency – the givenness of the world – can help expand criticality and facilitate the possibility of moving the 'boundaries' of thinking and being. Critical being requires receptivity to contextual contingency as a starting point for transforming (or potentially reinforcing) contexts and contingency. This thesis can also help people recognise the profundity and power of uncertainty, indeterminacy, and receptivity as essential features of criticality. This may lead to identification of new questions to ask, new facets of topics to consider, and new ways of reflecting on a range of experiences.

As noted at the outset, this thesis is an eclectic effort at bringing together a range of philosophical considerations to shed light on questions and concepts central to a philosophically informed understanding of critical being. Several unique contributions arise throughout the thesis. These have been briefly revisited in this section. However, it would not befit the spirit of this thesis to claim every (or any) of these contributions certain or unassailable, nor to suggest singular interpretations and implications. A central theme of this thesis is recognition of unforeseeable possibilities, of the balance between the determinant and indeterminant aspects of thinking and education, and the power of perspectival expansion. I do not want to so carefully prescribe the 'contributions' of this thesis that I conscribe the critical spirit from which these contributions come, and to which they aim to add. To put this another

way, I encourage any reader that has made it this far to employ their own criticality in service of finding ways this thesis can contribute to knowledge – or more aptly, being.

9.2 Limitations

It is important to remember that this thesis proceeds from the assumptions that UK universities strive to cultivate critical thinking at an expansive scope, are struggling to do so because of limitations within existing critical thinking theory, and that this struggle is made more difficult by the increasingly international nature of higher education. As noted in the introduction (and discussed more below), these are contestable assumptions. However, because this thesis is a somewhat eclectic exploration and integration of ideas, I contend that rejecting some of these assumptions does not necessarily devalue the overall project. For example, it could be argued that universities *should not* aim to cultivate critical being. I am inclined to disagree. Nonetheless, there is still value in the work done to clarify an understanding of critical scope and the idea of critical being. Similarly, some may suggest critical thinking should not be expanded towards critical being, that the appropriate scope of critical thinking is and ought to remain individual and epistemological. Again, I am inclined to disagree. Regardless, the idea of scope is still valuable to an argument *for* this 'narrow' conception of critical thinking. Even if I have provided something to be refuted, I have still provided something.

As noted in the introduction, I engage with a select portion of critical thinking literature and draw on a select range of philosophical perspectives. These limitations of scope are unavoidable. As this thesis should make clear, it is not possible to question everything all at once. This (or any) inquiry must proceed from certain assumptions to question others, and it can only do so with a limited number of perspectival resources. Consequently, I have tried to clarify and justify the reasons for the assumptions and perspectives that frame this project (see Section 1.2). Nonetheless, drawing on a different portion of critical thinking literature and/or different philosophical perspectives might lead towards different conclusions. However, I see this less as a limitation than an invitation for others to draw on this thesis as an example of how to explore, interrogate, and integrate theory. It would be deeply ironic and hypocritical of me to suggest this thesis provides a singular, definitive, or immutable understanding of critical thinking. All I can do is proffer this thesis as a potentiality, a point for consideration in further reasoning, and (most of all) hope it can provide some practical utility by meaningfully informing what people believe, how they think, and the actions they take in forming and implementing theory, policy, and practice.

There are limitations relating to assumptions in other aspects of this understanding of critical thinking as well. Through this thesis, I have shown that the certain features of critical thinking are not only 'good' but logically necessary for criticality to function. For example, it is vital to assume truth fallible because any perceived attainment of certainty ends inquiry. This, however, can only be an assumption, as making such an assertion with certainty is incoherent. Similarly, care is necessary to animate both the pursuit of truth and understandings of meaning. Perceived fixedness or universality in manifestations of care and meaning fail to recognise

plurality and diversity, thus inhibiting expansive critical thinking. This assumes the centrality of care to being and a malleability of meaning, all of which could be contested. The pursuit of mutual comprehensibility assumes its own possibility. This is necessary to critical thinking because rejection of mutual comprehensibility as a possibility gives way to intractable relativism. I contend that critical thinking at an expansive scope is made possible by these assumptions, which must also be open to question, but such questioning itself requires assumptions. Once again, infinite regress, circularity and/or dogma seem inevitable (Albert, 1985). I argue that this inevitable trilemma, far from being problematic, is part of the engine that drives critical thinking. It is not necessary to 'resolve' these matters. Instead, critical thinking requires awareness and consideration of how to navigate tensions and dilemmas as an integral part of thinking and being. When is it necessary to move further into infinite regress, when will circularity suffice, and what assumptions are worthy of temporary dogmatism? These are questions about the appropriate *scope* of critical thinking in different contexts. For example, the aerospace engineer does not question the fundamental assumptions of gravity and aerodynamics, instead, they lean upon them. A physicist, however, may find reason to question these fundamental assumptions. Furthermore, both may benefit from considering how their thinking articulates with ethical, political, and other dimensions of criticality. No ultimate foundations or objective perspectives are necessary to make practical decisions of critical scope. Ultimately, I must acknowledge that the understanding of critical thinking laid out in this thesis is dependent on a constellation of aims and assumptions that may themselves be open to metacritique. Again, I do not see this as a problem but as an invitation to critical dialogue.

Perhaps the largest potential limitation of this thesis is that it could be seen as essentially unnecessary and/or incoherent. For example, it could be argued that expanding critical thinking into critical being is a problematic (and perhaps incoherent) conflation not only of fundamentally different things, but fundamentally different *kinds* of things. Everything falls under the umbrella of being, but it is important to understand the different aspects, actions, and kinds of things that constitute that most expansive category. To reduce or expand everything into 'an aspect of being' strips that significant phenomenon of its varied and unique facets and robs people of the resources of specificity necessary to understand and enjoy being in the world. Critical thinking is a species of thinking and a *part* of being. Consequently, expanding critical thinking too far beyond epistemic reason evaluation by blurring these boundaries might risk losing focus on the intentional effort to understand a specific part of the whole. It could be losing sight of the tree by focusing only on the forest. Put another way, expanding critical thinking too far simply turns it into something else altogether. Furthermore, there is still a need for the skills and dispositions of the 'narrow' kind of critical thinking I have been critiquing. Indeed, critical being seems *dependent* on these 'narrower' incarnations of critical thinking. Thus, they are perhaps best considered different things, with one building on the other.

To this critique I simply reply that I want to see and understand both the forest and the tree. It may not be possible to focus on both *simultaneously*, but it is certainly possible to move focus between the two and understand that, while focusing on either, it remains a part of the other. The potential problems of expanding critical thinking so far that it becomes something else

also work in the other direction. Criticality cannot be atomised into parts, into decontextualised skills and dispositions, removed from the bigger picture of actually being in the world. It is possible not just to lose sight of the forest for the tree, but to lose sight of the tree in examining one branch, leaf, molecule, or atom. The world is filled with issues of scope that immensely effect experience, thinking, and being. I value conceptual and terminological clarity and precision, so I can see a case for parsing logical thinking, critical thinking, critical action, criticality, and critical being into distinct terms, each drawing attention to distinct facets of thinking, acting, and being. Just as I value ecology, molecular biology, and particle physics – all of which 'see' a forest and tree quite differently. When it comes to *critical being*, I argue for the value of seeing different ways of dividing up the concept as analytical divisions of the larger 'forest' that is being. Consequently, attention to being, and the relationship between critical thinking and different facets of being, remains essential to a fuller understanding of all types of thinking and being – to the bigger picture. I want to contribute towards an ability to fluidly shift focus from atoms, molecules, leaves, branches, trees, forest, and questions about what lies beyond the forest. All as part of an interconnected and more expansive understanding of criticality.

For those that may contend critical thinking should be carved out of a more expansive understanding of critical being as an intentionally narrower and focused form of thinking, I still contend that a core *aim of education should be to cultivate critical being.* That is, to equip people with the theoretical understanding and attributes necessary to understand the idea of critical scope and discern the *appropriate* scope of critical thinking within and between diverse contexts and situations. Education needs people that can see both forests and trees and understand there is far more still to be seen and understood within and beyond both. This requires attention to scope and context contingency, which includes consideration of how critical and non-critical modes of being articulate. Ultimately, I argue that critical being delivers the best possibility of realising the expansiveness of critical thinking needed in education and society. Thus, I see this thesis as both coherent and necessary.

Another potential critique is that my decontextualised focus on theory has excluded actual people and the practicalities of how those people can *become* critical beings. The idea of educating for critical being raises many questions about exactly *how* this ought to be done. What practices and methods are necessary to cultivate critical being? My aim in this thesis has been to build an *understanding* of what critical being is, as a necessary step to any potential cultivation. This leaves a noticeable dearth in discussion of specific or concrete methods. My hope is that this gap in knowledge can be addressed, by myself and others, using the resources of this thesis as a starting point.

Exploring ideas of how to cultivate critical being requires attention to attributes, which is something this thesis recognises as vital, but does not discuss in detail. Existing literature does well to explore many attributes, particularly skills and dispositions (e.g., Ennis, 2016b; Facione, 1990; Halpern, 1998), with increasing attention to virtues (Baehr, 2016). This thesis focuses on the 'structure' of critical thinking, not on the attributes that define people as critical thinkers. This is not intended to downplay the importance of attributes to critical thinking.

Instead, it is recognition that attributes are so important and complex that a detailed treatment of them would require an additional thesis. It is important, though, that I acknowledge any educational practice aiming to cultivate critical being, must focus on students *as beings* (Barnett, 2015). That is, to focus on the development of skills, dispositions, virtues, and other character traits necessary to facilitate critical being. This must include not only an understanding of what attributes are desirable, but of *how* they may be cultivated through education. There are certainly methods, practices, questions, and attributes more or less likely to facilitate critical thinking at an expansive scope. These will vary by person and, even more, by context, making any effort to explicate fixed or universal practices or character traits difficult and potentially problematic. Thus, while attributes themselves (as categories for organising character traits) are essential to critical thinking, their exact substantive nature cannot be entirely predetermined. However, this does not deny a large degree of *predictability* in which attributes are likely to be necessary and/or desirable for critical thinking.

My aim in this thesis is to focus on features of critical thinking that can help reveal which attributes are needed within and between contexts, and how they may need to manifest to achieve critical being. This is perhaps a novel contribution of this thesis, which is important because, while some attributes of critical thinkers are likely common to any context, others may vary. For example, thinking critically in a context with open access to information and strong protections for freedom of speech is very different than thinking critically in a highly censored and oppressive sociopolitical context. While a degree of bravery may always be a desirable attribute of critical thinkers, in the latter context this attribute takes on more importance, with much higher stakes, and may need to manifest differently. Consequently, the attributes of a critical thinker should be derived from what is required to enact the process of critical thinking, including the possibility of deep metacritique, in any given context. I do not intend to diminish the importance of critical thinking attributes as an essential aspect of critical thinking or as educational aims. Instead, my intention is to provide the features of critical thinking as a starting point for figuring out what attributes must orient towards and be defined by. Only with this understanding is it possible to move on to considering effective methods for cultivating appropriate attributes.

Another potential limitation, or line of critique, might be that this thesis ignores the importance of fundamental skills, like those of logic and argumentation. My intention is not to *ignore* these skills, but to build upon them. I am not aiming to displace dominant conceptions of critical thinking, but to *expand* them. For example, in recognising the problems created by framing critical thinking primarily as a form of logical reasoning, I am not arguing against logic or reasoning. Quite the contrary, I argue that just as education ought to strive for literacy and numeracy, logical literacy (an essential *part* of critical thinking) should be a core educational aim. However, just as literacy is more than the decoding of grapheme-phoneme correspondence, understanding of grammar, and learning of vocabulary, critical thinking is more than mere logical reasoning. Higher order literacy is not rule-bound or prescribed, it moves beyond mere words and into the world of ideas, opening up possibilities and providing access to new perspectives, ultimately facilitating both criticality and creativity. Similarly, critical thinking of an expansive scope must not be conceived of *only* in terms of logical

instrumentalism – it is not just critical 'reading' that is necessary, but critical literacy. I do not aim to displace 'being appropriately moved by reasons' from critical thinking, but to expand the theory and thus also the practice of critical thinking by removing the substantive universal assumptions which constrain its potential scope, particularly in diverse contexts.

A final potential limitation of this thesis I want to consider (there are many I have not touched on here) is the focus on UK universities. In some ways, this is a superficial limitation in that many higher education systems around the world share critical thinking as an aim, and most universities in democratic societies do so with meaningful overlap in other important contextual factors. Nonetheless, there are meaningful differences not only between the UK and other potential contexts of application, but also *within* the UK. As noted in Chapter 7, the devolved nature of education in the UK allows for structural differences between nations that stand to greatly impact some suggested changes, particularly those requiring more time and freedom in curriculum. Similarly, the economics and nature of funding for both research and tuition vary between universities and localities in ways that greatly impact the practicality of potential changes to practice, which may also require changes to structure. However, it is important to note this is a reason I approach implications for practice by inquiring into what critical being requires of universities. Because the understanding of critical being developed in this thesis is not defined by the aims and assumptions of a specific context (e.g., UK universities), it may have greater applicability in contexts that typically have divergent aims and assumptions. Furthermore, while UK universities provided a useful lens to focus this thesis, the ideas developed through this work can extend into other educational contexts and, ideally, beyond formal education.

9.3 Future directions

As a piece of philosophical inquiry, this project provides ample opportunity for further theoretical engagement. Hopefully, this philosophically informed understanding of critical being will provide valuable insights into theory and practice. Whether such engagement comes as efforts to build on, improve, or contest what has been put forward here, this thesis will have served its purpose so long as those efforts contribute to ongoing critical thinking.

In this thesis, I contribute to ongoing conversations that draw on a 'roughly' Heideggerian ontology as a resource for understanding critical being. In this project, that is most evident in my consideration of contextual contingency as creating the conditions for the possibility of critical thinking and identifying care as a pragmatic assumption necessary for animating critical thinking at an expansive scope. As noted in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.2), it could be worth exploring how the Heideggerian notion of authenticity maps onto the structure of criticality. This could be further connected with notions of self-cultivation from Chinese (and other) traditions to potentially 'triangulate' on an important phenomenon within (or perhaps giving shape to) critical being. Such an approach also leans towards the psychological and sociological in ways that could build helpful cross-disciplinary connections in critical thinking theory.

Along these lines, bringing more consideration of cognitive science into understandings of critical thinking should always be welcome.

Another area of important intersectionality worth further inquiry is that of critical thinking and academic freedom. Both are high priority and 'hot button' issues in contemporary higher education. However, both seem to be variously and sometimes vaguely understood, creating ample opportunity for people to speak past instead of with each other. It could be valuable to explore how the understanding of critical thinking outlined in this thesis articulates with the conceptualisation and practice (or protection) of academic freedom. Given the divisiveness of political rhetoric in many places, including universities, it seems there is a need for greater attention to critical dialogue. A lack of receptivity to diverse perspectives and passive participation in contexts with a homogeneity of perspectives are equally erosive of critical thinking. Universities ought to be places where some of the most difficult discussions can take place in service of discovering new possibilities, truths, and relations of care. These same discussions may also serve to maintain and reinforce important aims and assumptions with justified reasoning as opposed to dogmatic insistence. Universities should help do the difficult work of navigating and negotiating the boundaries of tolerance and possibilities of being. Furthermore, they should seize upon the opportunity provided by cross-cultural diversity to pursue critical being for the benefit of all individuals and societies involved.

I would also like to see the work done in this thesis applied in practice. Connections between theory and practice are easy to pepper into academic writing (this thesis included) but much more difficult to navigate through the difficult waters of actual implementation. I recognise this as a potential limitation of this thesis. However, *theory is important.* As this thesis shows, inexplicit assumptions in theory can lead to unintentional impacts on practice. Some areas worthy of more practical or applied consideration include ongoing professional development for those that teach in higher education. For example, the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education offers a potentially high-leverage point for introducing and exploring critical thinking theory and practice. Future research could target how critical thinking is approached, conceived, and engaged with as a part of such programmes. I have also begun work on a curricular map for implementation of critical being in higher education and example resources for teaching critical thinking both as a stand-alone module and integrating it into other subjects. There are already resources addressing both these areas (Barnett, 2007; Davies, 2006; Ennis, 2016a; McPeck, 1990; Thomas and Lok, 2015). My intention is for this thesis to contribute to refining and creating practical resources of this type. As noted in Chapter 7, there are some timely and concrete opportunities for moving from implications to implementation through contributions to ongoing efforts by universities to update curricula and pedagogies.[10] Explicit attention to critical thinking could also be integrated into required research methods courses for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees with the same opportunity to use such provision as a form of research. Such suggestions require more fleshing out and detail than can be provided here. However, I contend that this thesis provides fertile ground for future work. In

[10] For example, University of Edinburgh (2023) *Curriculum Transformation Programme*. Available at: https://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/teaching-matters/curriculum-transformation-programme

such work, I hope attention to diversity, including cross-cultural diversity, remains a focal point.

As noted in the section above, perhaps one of the most obvious and necessary extensions of this work is towards greater attention to the attributes of critical thinkers. In this thesis I have explored the idea of critical being without detailed attention to *actual beings.* I contend this approach is justified because attributes are context contingent to a large degree. Furthermore, an improved understanding of the 'structure' of critical thinking as a process can help shed light on the nature of desirable attributes (see Sections 1.7, 2.5, 5.4). I intend for this project to contribute towards future work in discerning and understanding the attributes of critical thinkers within and across contexts – and how those attributes can be cultivated. For example, in Chapter 6 I outline the pursuits of truth, care, and mutual comprehensibility as pragmatic assumptions essential to animating critical thinking at an expansive scope. This leads towards identification of trust, empathy, and reciprocity as important characteristics of critical thinking and critical thinkers. Similarly, and perhaps more novel, the idea of the mystical dimension of critical thinking outlined in Chapter 5 attends to how critical and non-critical states articulate over time to support critical being. This provides a new lens for consideration of attributes that may previously not have been considered relevant, much less vital, to critical thinking.

Similarly, this thesis may inspire research aimed at exploring or demonstrating criticality through philosophical traditions less prominent or dominant in contemporary theory and practice. These do not necessarily need to come from Chinese philosophy. However, drawing on examples from this thesis, Xunzi, Mozi, and Zhuangzi may not exert as 'measurable' of an influence on contemporary culture and education, but their philosophies could contribute to understanding and potentially reimagining criticality. It could be instructive to investigate Xunzi's forms of argumentation, the implications of *jian ai* for critical thinking, or explore the interplay between embodied cognition, skeptical perspectivism, and criticality in the *dao* of Zhuangzi. I hope this thesis inspires further inquiry into the broader critical resources within Chinese (and other) philosophical traditions and their applications for critical thinking theory and practice.

This thesis can also contribute to future empirical research. As noted in the introduction (see Section 1.2) this project began as an empirical study. Consequently, I see great potential for the understanding of critical thinking developed here to be used as a framework for future empirical research. It could help identify lines of inquiry, devise questions, and to analyse data. For example, this project could be drawn on to create opportunities for action research based on designing and delivering a stand-alone critical thinking course with attention to how such provision impacts any number of factors, from conceptions of critical thinking to performance on coursework. This could be done on a smaller scale, providing pre-sessional or mid-sessional critical thinking workshops, and following up on student engagement with critical thinking prior to and after such an intervention. On a larger (and likely more impactful) scale, a course explicitly focused on critical thinking could be offered at undergraduate and/or postgraduate level, providing a plethora of potential 'data points' for evaluating impact. Such research could draw on the understanding of critical thinking outlined here as a resource for interpreting such

data. For example, in understanding and analysing student and staff conceptions of and experiences with critical thinking. This is an active area of research (e.g., Durkin, 2007; Fakunle *et al.*, 2016; Jansen *et al.*, 2019). However, existing studies tend to draw on philosophically 'thin' definitions of critical thinking and generally fail to account for the idea of scope. The work done in this thesis could improve these aspects of similar research in the future.

Finally, I must note that to maintain a manageable scope, this thesis has focused on UK universities. However, I hope the attention this thesis gives to contextual contingency and diversity can help universities in contexts significantly different than those of the UK make inroads into understanding what critical thinking is, what it can be, and how it might be achieved within the unique circumstances of a given context. It is also imperative that critical thinking is a part of formal education at all levels. Consequently, a very necessary and natural extension of this thesis would be to work towards understanding implications for other levels and types of education. Indeed, it is possible to extend the theory laid out here beyond higher education, beyond formal education, and even *beyond education*. I argue that critical thinking at an expansive scope is important for the wellbeing of individuals and society. It is both an individual and social good, one that may help to address both individual and social problems. Consequently, the responsibility and opportunity for cultivating critical being does not rest in any single part of the individual or society. Education is one important part of 'learning to be human' (MacMurray, 2012), but humanity cannot depend entirely on formal education, classrooms, and curricula. Similarly, learning to become a critical being is something that ought to find traction in many facets of life outside the formal classroom. These are areas worth further exploration.

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