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Response to our Commentator

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1. INTRODUCTION

We appreciate Professor Ennis's thoughtful comments. The study reported here is the first stage of a long-term investigation into the effect of critical thinking instruction on students' thinking about their own deeply held beliefs, and this is a preliminary presentation of our first set of results. We take it that it is the project and the methodology that are of interest rather than, at this point, the results. Professor Ennis's comments will be helpful to us in planning the next stage of the project, and in particular, in refining our use of some version of Interview Question 3, which Professor Ennis calls the fifth of our measures of critical thinking about deeply held beliefs.

2. DISPOSITIONS, SKILLS AND STRONG SENSE CRITICAL THINKING

Weak sense critical thinkers have critical thinking skills, but they do not apply them to the evaluation of their own reasoning with the same assiduity with which they apply them to the reasoning of others. This is why, if we want to differentiate the weak sense critical thinkers from the strong sense critical thinkers, measuring their critical thinking *skills* will not do the job, and why a test of critical thinking

dispositions (the CCTDI) seems on the face of it a more likely candidate than any of the various critical thinking skills tests that are available.

We have considerable sympathy with the thought that weak sense critical thinking does not deserve to be called critical thinking at all. Certainly strong sense critical thinking – critical thinking that is applied even-handedly to one’s own as well as others’ reasoning – is what we try to develop in our students. However, we think it is useful to mark the difference between the weak sense critical thinker and the person who lacks critical thinking skills. Both of them fall short of the ideal of strong sense critical thinking, but they fail in different respects. If we are trying to address the failure of critical thinking courses to develop strong sense critical thinking in students, it matters whether it is the skills or the dispositions (or both) that are not being developed.

3. CONCLUSION

We agree with Professor Ennis that the correlations between the RBPS results and strong sense critical thinking as measured by Interview Question 3 are unimpressive, as are the correlations between the CCTDI results and strong sense critical thinking as measured by Interview Question 3. We welcome his suggestion that the best way to proceed is the further development of Interview Question 3 as a measure of strong sense critical thinking about deeply held beliefs.