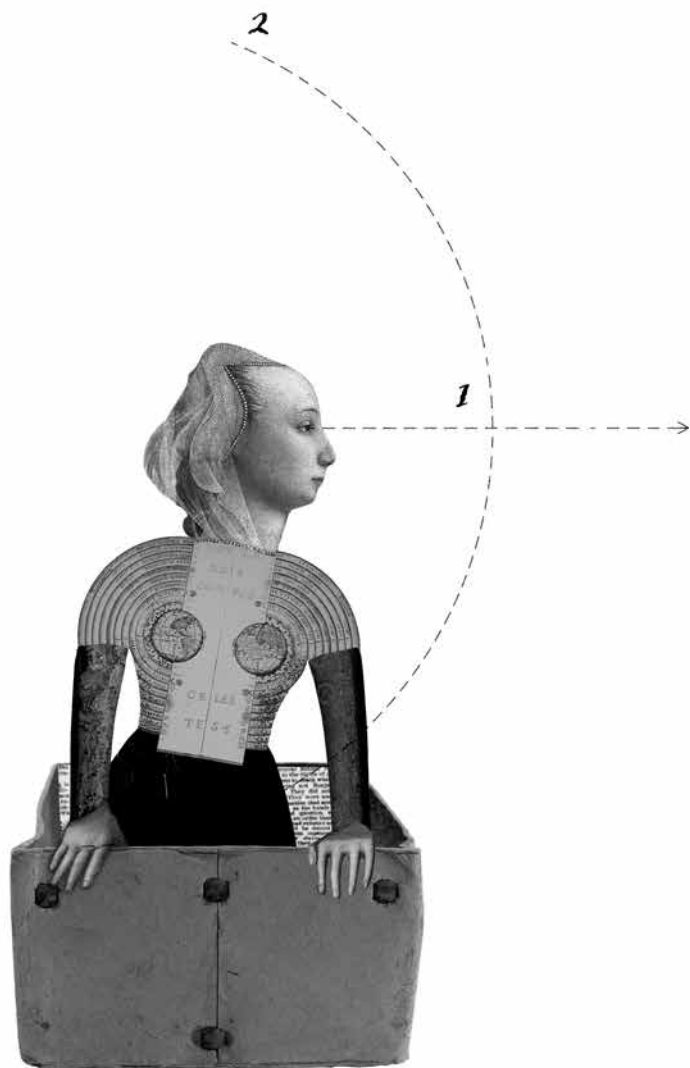


GIGI TEVZADZE

A GUIDE TO CRITICAL
THINKING



SULAKAURI
PUBLISHING



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: WHY PHILOSOPHY AS THE CRITICAL THINKING EXPERIENCE?	9
THE MAIN QUESTIONS OF CRITICAL THINKING	23
Pythagoras and Plato	24
Pythagoras (570 – 495 BCE)	25
What is the outcome of this information?	
Plato (428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BCE)	33
What determines this information? Why does it exist?	
Zeno of Elea (490 - 430 BCE)	39
Is the information based on the actual, empirical data or is it only the conclusion of a discussion?	
Epicurus (341 – 270 BCE)	47
Is the information erroneous, true or just probable (neither true nor false)?	
Summary of the Section on the Main Questions of the Critical Thinking Method.	52

THE MAIN STATEMENTS OF THE CRITICAL THINKING METHOD	55
Jeremy Bentham (1747 – 1832)	57
Every human action lies between pain and pleasure	
Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE)	63
Tragedy frees us from passion through empathy	
Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882)	69
The diversity of the living world has one common basis	
Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939)	77
Our culture, in which we live and die, creates a solid system of taboos which we comply with and are unable to resist due to our inner, unsurpassable instinct of aggression	
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900)	85
There are two types of moral: that of masters pointing to the good and bad, and of slaves which divides the world into the good and evil	
Ernest Gellner (1925 – 1995)	93
Nations and nationalism are the ideological constructs of the 19th century	
Mary Douglas (1921 – 2007)	101
It is the institutions that think not people	
Hannah Arendt (1906 – 1975)	107
The totalitarian regime is the modern political system and is different from authoritarian reign. You have no right to succumb to totalitarianism	

John Dewey (1859 – 1952) 113

The school doesn't prepare students for life. The school itself is part of the social life. The social system and social progress depend on the school

Thomas Kuhn (1922 – 1996) 121

The development of science is based not on the empirical data but on paradigm fluctuations, which in their turn are based on the consensus existing in the academic society

Marshall McLuhan (1911 – 1980) 129

The medium is a message

Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) 137

The everyday culture we believe has existed for ages was created quite recently

Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) 143

Is the existing order of human culture and concepts absolute?

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951) 149

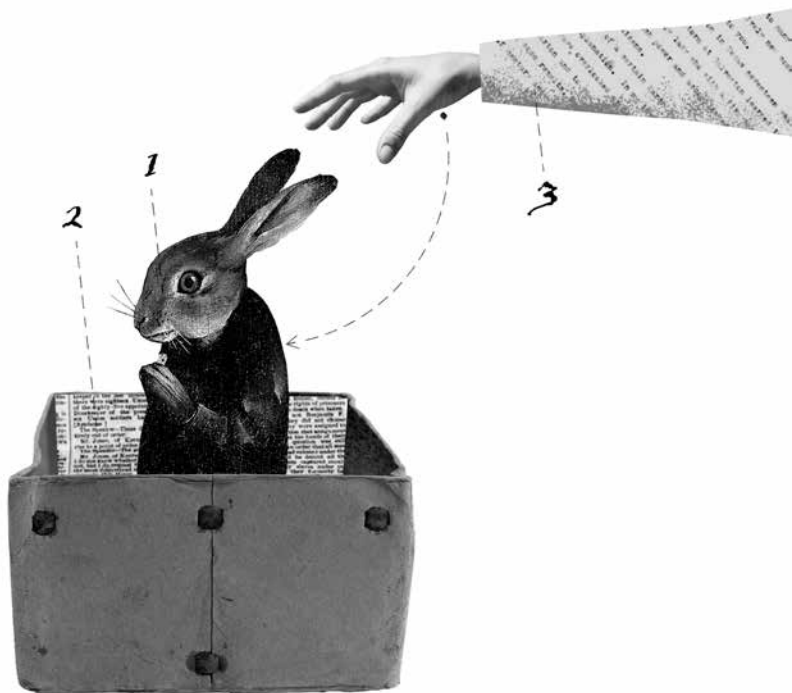
Does language reflect the reality? Or does the language prompt and shape the reality?

René Descartes (1596 – 1650) 155

I think, therefore I am

Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) 163

Objects are complexes of our perceptions. While perceiving objects, we construct them in accordance with the rules existing in our consciousness.



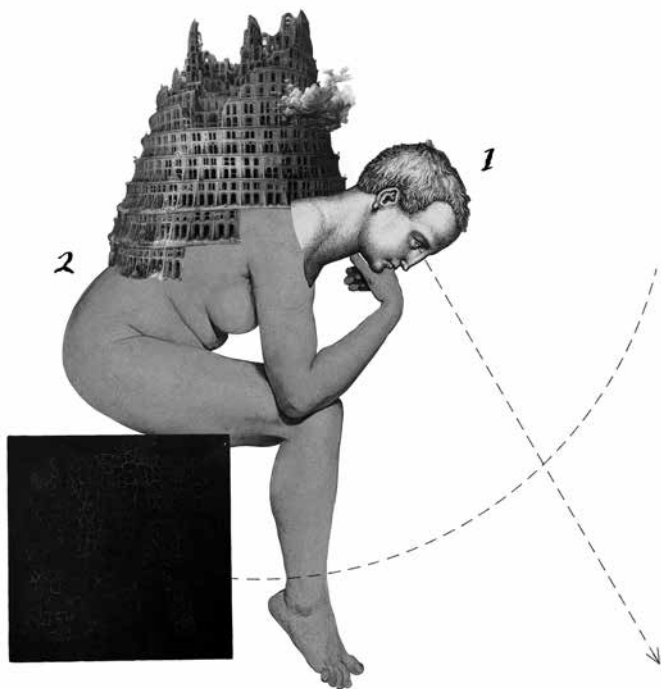
WHY PHILOSOPHY
AS THE CRITICAL
THINKING EXPERIENCE?

Critical thinking is an important if not the most important skill in the modern world. Many aren't aware that there are two concepts of critical thinking. One is more popular and is connected to an adequate interpretation of a text and its content, the skill relatively easily checked through school tests.

However, this skill is not enough in our modern world. The reality demands that we not only understand what mass media or other sources provide, but to assess how true or false the information is.



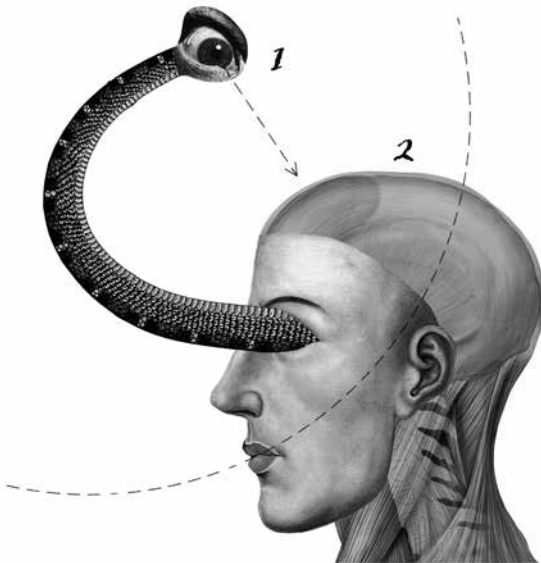
Consequently, the modernity demands the skill of looking slightly beyond the information, thinking about the motives and their analysis, otherwise success is impossible in today's, more so tomorrow's world. Every sphere or direction you have already chosen or are about to choose requires navigation through a massive flow of alternative information with the aim of sifting and selecting, which is rather hard if one is only equipped with the skill of simply acquiring the information.



It is nowadays that the critical method became useful and practical, the method applied by many philosophers throughout centuries: it implies distancing ourselves from the object under observation, thinking out of the box in which we exist and focusing on the origin of the object or the box itself. Today, the method regarded as the domain of the purely cognitive process

has become applicable in our everyday life. Critical thinking as a method and skill is the road to success in every sphere – business, science, art or politics.

In short, one of the main characteristics of the modern world is that not only philosophers see the necessity to think outside the box, to look at the box in which we exist from the outside. Philosophy has spent centuries working on the methods and ways of ‘leaving the box’, that is why the most valuable experience of critical thinking is to be sought in philosophical texts.

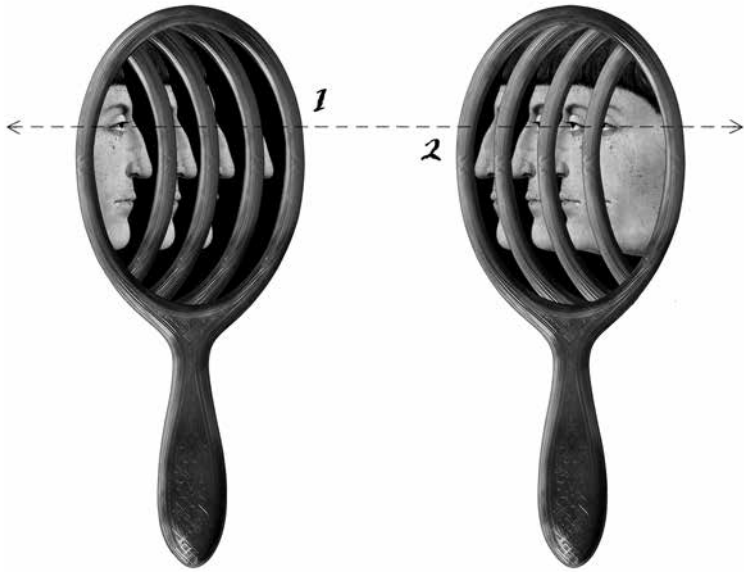


Ultimately, this book is not only an attempt to present the experience of critical thinking, but also a clear example of how philosophy should be taught in the 21st century: as the experience of critical thinking and its history.

In fact, the history of philosophy adopted by the majority of universities today belongs to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831) whose aim was to bring the entire history of philosophy to his own, thus demonstrating that his philosophy was the logical result of the development of philosophical thinking. There were several attempts to write alternative histories of philosophy, but they failed to avoid Hegel's main idea that philosophy evolves, develops from the simple to more complex, from less plausible to more plausible, from less all-encompassing to more all-encompassing.



In a sense, philosophy is historical or developmental, but I believe it is the result of not applying critical thinking throughout its development rather than its trait. There is no philosophical text



demonstrating the critical thinking approach in full. Every single text reflects the time it was created in, and as a result, despite their authors, such texts cover the topics that dodged critical

thinking, instead they mirror the mood and general disposition of the epoch, the knowledge and lack of discussion rather than a purely philosophical, critical approach.

The critical part of philosophy complete with discussions based on critical approach and results does not change or lose value with the passage of time. The outcome of critical approach retains its significance regardless of which century it was achieved, for instance, the issues critically discussed by Pythagoras, Plato and Kant are as topical today as they were in the past, and have not been refuted or disproven by others.

Considering the dual nature of philosophy – combining historic and critical traits – the present book does not offer the theories of individual authors in full as opposed to popular textbooks on philosophy. The book only contains short descriptions of discussions that I believe are precise manifestations of critical thinking.

On the other hand, it does not mean that only the selected texts of the authors demonstrate critical approach. Needless to say, there are other texts that are the result of critical thinking and other authors who reverted to critical approach but are not included in this book. Ultimately, the aim of the present book is to encourage readers to use their analytical skills, to construct their own critical thinking through guidance, so the number of samples is likewise important.

The aim of critical thinking is amassing knowledge and information, but are the received information and knowledge absolute? How is the information we accept as trustworthy and unquestionably obvious created? Is it possible that the information we take as true is in fact false, while what we believe is false can be true? How do we acquire knowledge? What are the rules that regulate the ways we receive information about the outside world? These are some questions that have left the exclusive sphere of philosophy as such and have become issues of common interest. The preciseness of information, its validity, accessibility and subjectivity – these are the question any modern person may ask. I would like to believe that this book will equip readers with the necessary tools to deal with the challenges of the modern world and be successful.



The book consists of two sections:

The first includes the questions related to critical thinking, or the main issues of philosophy that originated in Ancient Greece and became the foundation of critical approach.

The second section covers those statements that are still valid for critical thinking though they may have been put forward a hundred or two hundred years ago. I have no ambition of claiming that I have included all statements of all authors that are the result of critical approach. Firstly, it is virtually impossible and secondly, it would have been more appropriate for research rather than an introduction to developing critical thinking. My conviction is that this book will assist readers to apply a different, 'an outside' look at the prevalent views existing around us, at the traditional or falsified information, and many beliefs and social facts based on them.

A list of recommended literature for further reading is provided at the end of each chapter in case readers wish not to restrict themselves with only familiarizing with the questions and

statements related to critical thinking. The list will enable those interested in philosophy to deepen their knowledge about the history and development of critical approach.

