Introduction:
What Is Critical Thinking All About
& Why Does It Matter?

We are what we think, having been what we thought.
--Hindu proverb

Why Critical Thinking Matters

Would you like to become a more logical thinker? Would you like to be taken more seriously as a reflective and reliable thinker? Would you like to give your own voice more weight and credence? Would you like to learn how to more successfully process, support and present your own views? Would you like to understand and support positions on political, ethical, scientific, religious or personal matters in a sharper and more rational manner? Would you like to become more aware about the foundations of your own beliefs, and the beliefs of those around you? Would you like to learn about basic errors people make in reasoning, how to detect them, and how to avoid them?

If you answered yes to at least one of the questions above, then critical thinking matters to you. If you are unsure about your answers to the questions above, consider the following hypothetical examples, and ask yourself this: How could these imaginary characters improve in terms of thinking and communication? What do you think they are doing that could be done better? Try to indentify, in specific terms, what exactly is going wrong, in terms of thinking and communication.

1. Steve goes in to a dealership to buy a new car. He is served coffee, jokes, stories, pats on the back, smiles—and much bull manure. He hasn't developed a "nose" that can smell the stench of the manure; he can't detect the fallacies hurled at him, and soon he finds himself hoodwinked into buying a car, gadgets and insurance he doesn't need.[1]
2. Sam finally gets a job interview at the company he has been pursuing work in for the past three years. He is asked the question, "So what can you do for our company and what makes you the right person for the job? Give us two strong

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[1] A colleague once told me that Thomas Nagel wrote that "critical thinking" aims at helping us develop "BS Detectors." I have yet to find Nagel's written source, but I nonetheless credit Nagel with the idea.

arguments in your favor." Sam immediately begins to ramble on about how he "just loves" the company and how "great" he would be.

3. Sergio goes on a date with a co-worker that he really likes. The topic of religion and God is brought up. His date asks him why he believes what he believes. He brashly replies, "I was raised to believe in my religion and the holy book says God exists. It's just what I believe. That's it. Hey, do you watch European soccer?"

4. Salma is new to NY. She is having lunch with some co-workers. Salma asks her co-workers what they think about the use of *hijab* (the veil or headscarf). One co-worker snappishly says, "It's forced on women; it's imposed on them to lower women's self-esteem." Another co-worker shakes his head forcefully and says, "I know it's used to oppressively hide beauty. I'm with the French—ban it! Absolutely!" Yet another co-worker replies, "I would never use such a thing! A veil? It's ridiculous..."

5. Salina's grandmother has suffered a second stroke and is now in the hospital, in an ever worsening condition. Salina meets two of her friends for some informal discussion and counseling about whether or not the practice of euthanasia is morally justifiable. One of Salina's friends hotheadedly barks-out, "It's wrong—we shouldn't play God!" and the other friend dismissively murmurs, "Who is to say what's right and wrong?"

6. Salvatore meets his date and she asks him what movie he would like to see. He responds, "Let's not see the chick-flick. Let's go see the dude-flick, *Seek and Destroy, Part V!*" She asks him, "What do you mean by the use of these phrases? And, is it accurate and fair to judge films this way when you haven't even seen them?" He yaps back, "Oh, don't analyze it! Why do you always over-analyze things! Three strikes! We're done!"

7. Sally meets her cousins for lunch. One of them asks her what she thinks about marriage, and gay marriage in particular. She quickly responds as follows: "Traditional marriage is just natural—it's just what people do. But gay marriage is just weird and disgusting."

8. Sarah asks her boyfriend if he thinks she should buy a new hybrid American made car, a used foreign made sports car, or something else. He instantly replies as follows: "Buy the new Mustang! And make sure you get sixteen inch chrome wheels. What are you thinking?"

9. Sarantino is considering asking his dating partner if she wants to be together in a monogamous relationship and no longer date other people. Sarantino asks his friend about what he should do. His friend shoddily responds: "That's bad game man. There is nothing more to say. Let's go get a beer."

10. Simon's father finally confronts Simon about why Simon is no longer going to church. Simon finally let's his position out of the bag: "Because I now believe in evolution." His father calmly replies, "Okay; so, why do you believe you can't have both God and evolution?" Simon yells out, "Because it's true because it's scientific fact!"

These examples above basically illustrate two problems: a) The inability to critically think things through, because of the lack of critical thinking skills and a lack of

understanding of what constitutes good and poor reasoning (a cognitive issue); or b) the lack of a critical thinking approach, goals and interests (a value and motivational issue); or c), both. This book aims at helping you become the kind of thinker that cares about, understands, and seeks to solve for weaknesses, problems and dysfunctions regarding both a) and b). In other words, it aims at helping you become a more critical thinker.

So what, after all, is critical thinking? Here is our working definition: *Critical thinking is the autonomous and active process of understanding, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing information in an open-minded and objective manner, according to reliable standards and methods, so as to arrive at reasonable, accurate and fair conclusions about what to do and what to believe.*

Introducing CT as an "Existential Project"

The unexamined life is not worth living.
--Socrates

You have now been introduced to a lengthy definition of critical thinking. The chapters that follow consist of an unpacking and teasing-out of that definition. I think it is important that critical thinking not only be defined, but that it is also "framed" in a certain way so that the reader obtains a deeper and wider sense of the importance of critical thinking. The following is my attempt at such a "framing", the framing of critical thinking as "existential" and not simply as some academic definition and exercise.

Ultimately, the essence and true aim of critical thinking is a deeply personal one. It is an *existential* project, a life-long project which calls upon each of us to become a certain kind of person—*to become a critical thinker*. It is the call to live what Socrates called "the examined life", a life that is reflective, deliberate, purposive and mindful. Since the end-goal of the examined life is the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, as opposed to the pursuit of power, status or wealth, then it follows that we must work on building up our rational capacities while breaking down that which resists, obstructs and defeats reason.

Ideally, this existential project requires us to actively carry out two processes that require daily, life-long mental effort: the process of continually building up critical thought and knowledge, and the process of breaking down uncritical thought and ignorance. We shall call the former process *constructive thinking*, and the latter *deconstructive thinking*. The former process is about *addition*, and the latter process is about *subtraction*.

The Constructive Aspect of CT

The **Constructive Aspect of Critical Thinking** involves *building-up* methods, mindsets, logic skills, standards, concepts, metaphors, schemas, knowledge, theories and attitudes that help us think critically. For example, we need to build-up a sound, reliable and objective information base so that we can make accurate analyses, syntheses and evaluations. We need to cultivate a strong set of skills in inductive, deductive and abductive logic so that we know how to draw sound inferences and make wise judgments. We need to learn how to construct strong definitions. We need to build an

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understanding of how assumption, bias and language influences our thinking and how it functions in reasoning and argument. We need to understand how to apply various criteria, schemas and theories to create new connections and interpretations. We need to assemble knowledge regarding how persuasion works, especially in the form of fallacy and rhetoric, and in the form of analogies and metaphors (as Friedrich Nietzsche has shown, understanding is often, if not always, built upon extension of previous understanding via analogy and metaphor).[2]

The process of constructing is clearly a creative process. So, the background condition of what is being addressed here—cognitive construction—is an important attitude and frame-of-mind that can be called the **creative mindset**. Nourishing and reinforcing creativity as a cognitive-launching-pad is a key part of the constructive aspect of critical thinking. Here is why.

First, a certain level of diminished inhibition and fear, together with a certain level of tolerance and respect for variation, forms the point-of-departure from which new, creative ideas and creative challenges to commonplace notions can take flight. Second, our thinking develops and progresses by way of expanding our current cognitive limits. Expanding our personal and societal cognitive horizons comes about by way of valuing and nurturing growth—creative development—in ourselves and in others; it involves, in other words, choosing to endorse a truly *learning-oriented* value schema, and choosing to exist in a way that realizes that schema in action. This kind of action involves building-up both the outside and the inside, outer-space and inner-space, both external runways and that inner cockpit known as the human mind.

With respect to external environments, the project of critical thinking involves creating the social spaces and interpersonal contexts in which objective and open thinking most often takes place, meaning, building-up civil, fair and rational environments that foster and sustain critical thinking. This means constructing and sustaining environments that nourish and reward curiosity, freedom of thought, deliberation, respect and critical dialogue—dialogue that is free of fear, humiliation and domination, and which seeks understanding and reasonable belief through examining thought in an open and creative exchange of ideas.

With respect to building-up a critical mental life, we need to build-up a **receptive mindset**. We have to take on an attitude of one who is willing to receive new ways of thinking instead of immediately rejecting that which is different, foreign and "other." This is the kind of attitude of a thinker who sees him or herself on a quest to fly beyond, to see new things, to listen, to travel and gather understanding and knowledge from others.

One should also cultivate a **skeptical mindset**—a non-defensive, intellectually courageous and humble approach in which we "take things with a grain of salt", meaning, we ask questions instead of immediately, mindlessly believing things. It also means that sometimes, we ask tough, potentially uncomfortable questions, questions about why people believe what they believe and how they define their terms. Now, having a skeptical attitude does not mean believing in nothing or no one at all. Rather, it means having an inquisitive and investigative attitude. It means having a deep sense that we humans are *fallible*, meaning, that we often make mistakes and that we could be wrong about what we believe and what we think. This kind of non-arrogant and curious attitude

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[2] See F. Nietzsche, "The Gay Science" sections 120 – 250.

leads us to humbly acknowledge our vast ignorance about ourselves, others and the world *in order to seek* understanding and enter standpoints different than our own, so as to diminish ignorance and error. Thus, instead of leading to apathy or cynicism, such a skeptical attitude would steer us to *seek* new vistas, new territories, new challenges, in order to travel about and learn from different mindscapes and landscapes.

In conclusion, there are various ways of building-up and steering our minds. All the above rests on a specific choice: the choice to pilot our minds using the power of reason—to take on a **Logocentric mindset**[3]. There are other powers we could choose from, other ways of being and thinking; we could choose instead to let our minds be guided by other captains (e.g., one could let mere feeling, or ego-dynamics, or some external authority manage the control board and steer one's mind).

To switch to a spatial metaphor, it means using reason to travel beyond our own particular and partial cognitive borders so as to fly beyond ego, authority and mere feeling, and enter instead the mind-space of logical and objective reasoning—the **Logosphere.** The Logosphere is a heightened mind-space that we can enter and dwell within; an ideal "place" where our minds can meet for the non-dominated, free and equal exchange of logos (reasons), not to win or conquer or fight or flee, but to truly advance wisdom, justice and understanding, and search for the best logos, wherever that leads.[4] When we are truly there, high-up in this "ideal mindscape", circulating ideas as free and equal persons in the Logosphere, for the sake of understanding itself, we truly meet each other, not as means, not as mere tools for profit or power, but as ends-in-themselves.[5] This is one of the most noble and respectful modes of relating and being-with another person.

The Deconstructive Aspect of CT

The **Deconstructive Aspect of Critical Thinking** involves ***breaking down*** barriers that keep us from thinking in an objective, logical, fair, careful, reflective, deliberate, creative, inquisitive, reliable and rigorous manner. There are two tremendously powerful kinds of barriers that block our curiosity and ability to think in this manner. Let's explore these barriers.

The first barrier is found within we ourselves—our very own *internal walls*. If we are driven to fallacy and rationalization as we "fight" to make our idea "look good", or our opponent's idea "look bad", *because* we desire to advance or protect our own particular interests, or our group's interests, then we will employ reason as a mere tactical instrument for the sake of realizing **ego-satisfaction** or **ethno-satisfaction** (i.e., group-satisfaction). Making judgments and decisions that are driven by desires to protect or

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[3] "Logos" is a very rich word with a rich history (especially in Western philosophy). Typically, the word logos refers to "reason", "rational thinking patterns" and "rational speech." I am using the word "Logocentric" here to refer to "reason-centered", meaning, focused on using rational thinking patterns and discourse", and being centered on "seeking reasons, and the use of reason, to search for truth and wisdom."

[4] That such a place exists, and that we, as rational agents, should and can enter it, is perhaps the foremost ideal of truly critical inquiry and discourse. I trace this notion back to Parmenides, who once said that true lovers-of-wisdom follow the Logos, "wherever it leads."

[5] I am here drawing from the philosopher Immanuel Kant, and his highest ideal of what it means to be fully human, as represented by his "categorical imperative" and his notion of "a kingdom of ends." See his, "Metaphysics of Morals."

advance mere satisfaction, instead of being driven by valid logic and sound evidence, leads to inaccurate and unreliable assessment of the following: risk, probabilities, options and various environmental realities. This kind of tactical thinking that is purely **egocentric** or **ethnocentric** in its orientation, is not critical thinking, for such strategizing thinking does not aim to truly apply the basic features of critical thinking (i.e., open and objective thinking) for the sake of realizing the goals of critical thinking. Consider these two definitions and descriptions to see why:

- *Egocentrism:* The position that one's own views and values are primary, relevant, important and superior because they are one's own; the belief that one's own point of view is *the* central point of view; that my way is the right way *because* it's my way (if others disagree, they can take the highway).
- *Ethnocentrism*: The position that one's group's views and values are primary, relevant, important and superior because they are the ways of the group; the belief that one's group's point of view is *the* central point of view; that our way is the right way *because* it's our way (if others disagree, the same advice above cross-applies).

To enclose oneself and cognitively settle-down within the comforting walls of the **Egosphere** or **Ethnosphere**, and to use reason simply to defend and wave the regional flag of such mind-caves, is to select, weigh and interpret data, and draw inferences in ways that lead to us to distorted, unfair, unreliable beliefs and outcomes.[6]

To not settle for the ease, comfort and security of mere ego-nooks and mere ethno-crannies, and to instead engage in critical thinking, we have to make the following, basic decision: We must move beyond the Egosphere and Ethnosphere and their respective "tactics", and move into the Logosphere so as to utilize the features, methods and standards of critical thinking for the sake of fairness, accuracy, wisdom and understanding itself. This decision to aim for the Logosphere and become Logocentric must be followed by *praxis*—by cognitive-verbal-personal-social action.[7] This is why the project of becoming a critical thinker is here being framed as "existential."

Moving from the Egosphere into the Logosphere is not easy, for making this transition involves becoming aware of, while trying to transcend, ego-insecurities, ego-defense mechanisms, ego-anxieties and the reactive and dysfunctional thought and behavior which they often produce. These ego-walls constitute internal, mental barricades that we must work on *deconstructing*. For example, if one engages in discussion with

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[6] The Egospheric motive and goal does not exclude Ethnocentric motives and goals. Indeed, the opposite is the case: an extension of the Egosphereic motive and goal is what makes Egospheric thinking possible. Additionally, the Egospheric motive does not determine all of our thoughts. Thus, I disagree with the post-Freudian notion, found explicitly in Perls, that all thinking is mere ego-driven rehearsal ("Denken ist Probearbeit" in Freud's own words).

[7] Aristotle distinguished praxis from poesis. Praxis is the kind of "making" which involves making justice, making friendship, making logical arguments and processes, making a good life, etc. Poesis is the kind of making which involves physical fabrication, e.g., making a poem, or a chair, or a dog-house. Note that the making of justice or rational environments in the world may sometimes involve the use of strategic thinking. In other words, critical thinking may justify strategic thinking. However, the kind of strategic thinking it would justify would be strategy and tactic which aims, not at mere ego-centric goals, but rather, the goals of critical thinking itself.

others with the aim of dominating the other so as to feel "superior", or with the aim of simply "gaining attention" so as to obtain un-met ego-needs, then one will not be engaged in genuine critical thinking. Since genuine critical thinking aims at reflective, accurate, fair, and objective thought, such ego-dynamics and issues block our ability "to do justice" to the issues at hand, and to the others who present them. (This aspect of justice, which I call **epistemic justice**[8], is very important in critical thinking, and it will be further explored in the following chapter.)

Making the transition from Ethnospheric thinking to Logospheric thinking is often also difficult. The discomfort and the demands in moving from the Egosphere to the Logosphere (noted above) also apply here; but there are additional difficulties. In decentering the group and questioning its supremacy as a source of belief, value and truth; in detaching and stepping back from the group, so as to test the soundness of the "the ways of the group", the individual risks being ostracized from the group—*or worse*; and, the individual also risks experiencing a deep fear, anxiety and self-loathing that might arise from feelings and thoughts of being "disloyal", "faithless" or "phony."

The walls that buttress and form the boundary of the Egosphere and Ethnosphere are made of various rigid bricks and stubborn bonding agents. Let us explore some of the materials of which such walls are made.

One barrier that keeps people from thinking critically is the extreme manifestation of **primal, reactive emotions**. For instance, a primal and reactive love-of-ego or love-of-group, not actively disciplined and guided by reason, can manifest itself in unfair and dysfunctional processes and outcomes. The same goes for primal ego-fear, ego-envy, ego-hate, ego-resentment and ego-guilt; and, primal ethno-fear, ethno-envy, ethno-hate, ethno-resentment and ethno-guilt.

It is important to note that not all primal reactive emotion is ethno or egocentric in nature. Some primal reactive emotion is simply associative and automatic (i.e.,"reflexive"). Consider the form fear takes as manifested in various phobias. For example, imagine a horse, a dog or a human person who suffers from altophobia (fear of heights) or aquaphobia (fear of bodies of water or of drowning). We can adequately explain such phobias without introducing the notion of self-centeredness or group-centeredness. The problem with such primal reactive emotion, be it egocentric or not, or ethnocentric or not, is that such emotion leads to an overemphasis, exaggeration and mis-weighing of data. Such fear may lead us to perceive a threat in such a way that proper perspective is lost; this can lead to poor judgments, i.e., judgments which keep us from correctly identifying both the true problem at hand and a reasonable, reliable, sound solution to that problem.

For example, consider primal reactive hate. This emotion can generate intense feelings of disgust and aversion. If such feelings steer one's mind, instead of intentional, reason-centered thinking, then we most likely will not arrive at sound solutions to interpersonal problems or social problems involving differences in sexuality, race, ability, class or religion. If we do not critically filter and rationally contain such feelings, then we will lose-out on the reflection needed to truly understand how to rationally deal with problems; we will also not devise rational and reliable ways of carrying out fair, due processes that should guide our judgments and courses of action.

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[8] Epistemology is the study of belief and knowledge. "Epistemic" means "having to do with belief and knowledge."

Another material that composes ego-walls and ethno-walls is **unqualified absolutism**. This kind of absolutism is the unrefined, primitive outlook which holds that one's views and practices are completely right and alternative views and practices are dead wrong. It is the position that there is one right point of view—one's own or one's group—*and all other points of view are illegitimate and inferior*. From this point of view, the purpose of most communication boils down to is this: To show others that we are right, and they are wrong. Instead of learning and understanding one another through *dialogue*, we try to impose our perspective through *monologue*. Communication then becomes an exercise, not in creative sharing and growth, but in mere defense or mere offense, for the sake of protecting ego or group interests. To engage in critical thinking, and critical communication, we must, to repeat, transcend seeing thought and communication as mere tactical instruments for ego gratification and group conquest.

Another material that specifically composes ego-walls and ethno-walls is **unqualified relativism**. This is an interesting internal barrier to be discussed in the peculiarly American context. Unqualified relativism is the opposite of unqualified absolutism. Unqualified relativism is the position which holds that *no one* has a better or worse answer or better or worse point of view. Such relativism has various sources.

One source is a simple cognitive root, a fallacy—the fallacy of *hasty generalization*. Let me explain. Consider this: It is the case that *some things* are "relative" to culture or the individual. For example, whether or not it is appropriate to use a napkin on one's lap, or to eat with chopsticks or forks, is indeed "relative to culture." These are matters of cultural politeness and decorum. Here is another example: Whether or not one prefers black olives over green olives is a matter of taste, which is relative to the individual. But from these particular instances it is incorrect to conclude that *everything is relative* to culture or the individual. Some things, but not all things, are relative; thus, we should qualify our claims about what is and is not "relative."

The second broader source of unqualified relativism rests in a mix of complex cognitive, motivational and affective variables; e.g., misinformation and lack of critical thinking skills (cognitive issues); fear and resentment (affective variables); or, laziness, indifference or unconcern with truth (motivational variables). For instance, if a friend, relative, citizen or stranger asks us, in a calm and c ivil fashion, for our position on some matter, and we merely throw up our hands and give up (a flight response), or become defensive (a fight response), it is most likely that unqualified relativism is at work. Here are some varieties of expression that are rooted in this type of relativism that I have heard on the streets and in the classroom, and that I have collected from observing people on various television shows:

- "Hey, *that's what I think*, so what's left to say? It's all just opinion."
- "Hey, that's your spin; you've got yours, and I've got mine!"
- "Who's to say? No one! It's all relative."
- "You know what, *talk to the hand*--that's my opinion, and I have a right to it."
- "Yeah? Well, what-ever!...What-ever!"
- "Hey, this is what me and my friend's do—who's to judge! No one!"
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again, what is existentially, fundamentally "at issue": To choose to become a certain kind of thinker, to take on a certain kind of identity; and, to exist daily and press forward in a particular mode of existence—*critical existence.*

It is very important to ponder the nature and influence of the psychological barriers discussed above since such barriers constitute the primary set of blockades against critical thinking. But there is another set of barriers that do not centrally involve ego-issues, motivational issues, or questions about value or how we choose to live. The other barriers I am now referring to may still block critical thinking *even after* a person has chosen to live a critical existence. These other barriers are therefore simply cognitive, meaning, they simply involve how people fail to reason well because of the lack of skills and lack of understanding. In other words, some people may *desire* to think critically but they may lack *know-how*; and, they may not even understand that they are thinking uncritically. Thus, another set of internal barriers to critical thinking is simply not knowing what critical thinking is and not knowing how to do it. For instance, a person may lack an understanding of certain concepts, such as, objectivity and logical inference; and, they might lack skills regarding how to avoid fallacies and how to draw valid or strong inferences. I mention these internal barriers last, the barriers of unknowingness and skill deficiency, because they are often overcome only after a person has made the decision to both value critical thinking, take on an identity as a critical thinker, and expect that they can learn how to think critically.

External Barriers to CT

There are also external barriers that keep people from thinking critically. In other words, external, environmental forces may threaten, stress, or influence us into relinquishing our ability to think autonomously, carefully and rationally. Perhaps the most dangerous and insidious kind of social environment which acts as an external barrier to critical thinking is that of **authoritarian and oppressive environments**.

For example, consider the business person who refuses to object to a CEO's poor decision, because of the company's tyrannical and stifling "business culture." Such a culture sets up walls to critical thinking in that it *censors* dissent, and reinforces *group conformity* and a "yes-man" and "yes-woman" mentality. A family or a nation might constitute such an environment. Patriarchal cultures, fundamentalist cultures, terrorist cells and various cults perhaps also come to mind. These kinds of environments reward obedient followers who blindly follow the commands of "the authorities", while punishing those who "speak truth to power." Such domineering and barren environments are antithetical to the kind of free and open environments that foster dialogue, interpersonal understanding, rational inquiry, rational problem solving, rational compromise, constructive criticism, and new perspectives. Not only are such environments a dangerous threat to our own minds and intellectual integrity, but they are also destructive of democratic, fair and rational decision making processes and institutions.

We who live in the modern Western world have been fortunate enough to live under constitutional republics and in political cultures in which freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, and autonomy are highly valued. However, an interesting and peculiar irony can be found in the consumer culture of late-capitalism that has become

dominant in the Western world. The irony is that political apathy and cynicism, and conspicuous consumption, have all contributed to a culture that has diminished the value of authentic, autonomous, critical thinking. Now that the iron walls and curtains of state-based authoritarianism and state-driven political repression have been weakened, we have seen the rise of new external cultural walls that keep us from critically thinking.

For instance, a creeping wave of voter and citizen **apathy** and **cynicism** hinders some from critically thinking about issues and policies that deeply affect us all. In the post Vietnam, post 1960s era, there seems to have been a widespread surge of mistrust of politicians and "the system" that has washed over our culture. Watergate, Whitewater, and numerous other political scandals, and CIA, FBI and military scandals, have most likely contributed to the cultural tide of apathy and cynicism.

In addition, with the advent of modern media and television culture, political discourse and political campaigns are now more image-bound, crude, hasty and nasty (then again, some have argued that they are just as nasty as they always were). We see, more than ever, due to widespread media coverage and access, politicians slipping into different personas when dealing with different groups or classes. This too seems to have generated an increased sense of mistrust. Now there is nothing wrong, per se, with knowing one's audience, building audience rapport and connecting with the masses. However, it seems that this mistrust is driven by various practices that cross the line from legitimate attempts to persuade, to illegitimate mask-wearing, the use of worn-out platitudes, "blowing with the wind", and insincere promise making. This is especially true when such practices are used, not to authentically connect with the masses, but to "win" votes with conflicting messages from rival constituents at the behest of PR advisors. For instance, it is only reasonable that people second-guess the sincerity and authenticity of a politician who claims to be "pro working class", and yet continuously makes promises and major concessions to big-business, in direct opposition to working-class movements and interests. Things get worse when we see both currently dominant political parties utilizing the rhetorical tactics of holding attractive babies, surrounding themselves with charming little children, or smiling alongside the elderly, for the purpose of creating campaign "photo-ops."

Moreover, some of the most misleading and bogus forms of persuasion on television come to us, not from corporations, but from political advertisements. The use of "negative campaigning", and rise of "spin doctors" and "double-speak", has most likely also contributed to voter apathy and cynicism. The Republicans and Democrats are both scrambling, as linguist Geoffrey Nunberg notes, to understand and harness the rhetorical power of "re-framing" and "re-messaging" information so as to manufacture belief and desire.[9] Media consultant Don Sipple concludes, after analyzing various political ads in three states, that modern political discourse in the U.S. is more and more resembling what he calls "political food fights."[10] Instead of directly dealing with the issues, and instead of having empirically based, reasoned policy discussion about important economic and social problems, negative campaigning and wily rhetoric has, unfortunately, become the norm. As long as the public continues to support such candidates and their fallacious

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[9] Geoffrey Nunberg, "Words Failed the GOP; Will Dems Get the Message?" (*LA Times*, Section M, p. 2, 11/19/06).
[10] "Ad Nauseam: As Candidates Sling Whatever Mud They Can, the Real Issues of the Day Aren't Even Addressed" by Don Sipple, *LA Times*, 11/5/06, M1.

tactics, while being complacent and not expressing widespread public denunciation at their use, the situation is not likely to change.

Consumerism a way of thinking and as a way of life has also erected some barriers to critical thought and reflection. A few of consumerism's central ideas and values are: 1) instant gratification; 2) unreflective acceptance of, and conformity to, the latest fad; and 3) amusement. The result of all three is the transference of the locus of agency to commodities. In other words, the commodity becomes the agent, the active principle that will bring us acceptance, belonging, love, meaning and fulfillment. We then become only the passive recipient of the value of the commodity. In this way, we come to think that, if we only have this item, if we only purchase that thing, then we will start moving down the road to the good life. Instead of perceiving ourselves as the primary active shapers of our own minds and lives, the basic rhetoric of consumerism consists in the attempt to persuade us that commodities—products"—will do the work of shaping a good life for us.

A primary carrier of consumer rhetoric is advertising. The average American is bombarded with hundreds of consumer advertisements every week—billboards, TV ads, radio ads, telemarketing calls—and pounds of "junk mail" end up in our mailboxes every year.[11] Wrinkled faces and bodies are airbrushed into unblemished perfection on shiny magazine covers. The official, professional industry of advertising spends *billions* a year on researching how they can psychologically convince us that the latest commodity will fulfill our deepest longings, that the new car will bring us friendship, that the latest technologies will somehow satisfy the needs of the heart, that a cosmetic item will make our lover want us once again.[12] Although most consumers surely see right through this kind of fallacious reasoning, it remains true that we are deeply influenced by the values and thinking patterns of consumerism. Most of these patterns of consumer thought and action are antithetical to critical thought and action.

In this way, consumerism contributes to a culture of thought in which patient, intentional, thorough, careful thinking and reflection is overridden by superficial "fast thought" (the mental analogue of fast-food) and mindless consumption; it also contributes to a devaluation of the life of the mind while engendering an excessive preoccupation with commodities, body-image, status and labels, and uncritical group conformity to media ideals. The rise of "conspicuous consumption", as Thorstein Veblen[13] brilliantly put it, otherwise known simply as "keeping up with the Jones's", has added to these uncritical patterns of thought and action.

Throughout our journey in critical thinking, we must often stop and ponder the influence and effects of the internal and external barriers to critical thinking. We must pause and frequently ask these questions: "What is happening in my mind such that rational thinking and decision making are being blocked?" "What environmental factors influenced me in the past, or continue to influence me in the present, to think irrationally about that problem, argument or topic?" "What can I now do to change and improve my

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[11] Killborne argues that "the average American is exposed to at least three thousand ads every day and will spend three years of his or her life watching television" and that "advertising makes up about 70 percent of our newspapers and 40 percent of our mail." ("Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel", Jean Kilbourne; Touchstone Books; NY, NY, 1999, pp. 58-59).

[12] For a strong series of arguments and substantial support for these claims, see "Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel", Jean Kilbourne (Touchstone Books; NY, NY, 1999).

[13] See his book, "The Theory of the Leisure Class."

thinking about myself, my life, this problem, topic or argument?" This kind of introspection, self-review and willingness to self-correct are distinguishing features of critical thinkers—people who know they could be wrong, who are willing to analyze and face objections to their own views, and most importantly, who are willing to change and correct their own positions and thinking patterns.

Throughout this book, we will be working on both the deconstructive and constructive levels. The first two chapters are about you, the reader. These chapters aim at getting the reader to explore and investigate what is perhaps the most interesting thing to study, yourself—your own views, habits, beliefs and values. These chapters plunge us into self-reflection about our own thinking. The goal: to increase our awareness about both the positive and negative aspects of our own thinking.

The next few chapters discuss how to reason logically and more objectively. The chapters on analysis, evaluation, argumentation and persuasion aim at getting us to become more self-aware and more reliable thinkers and writers. The chapter on fallacies (errors in reasoning) not only discusses the errors, but also the underlying psychological mechanisms that are often hidden beneath them. Such psychological mechanisms are detected only when we are self-aware and they get improved upon only when we are willing to self-correct.

The last part of the book contains essays for analysis and evaluation. The essays contain arguments that should serve as good raw material for the application of lessons found in previous chapters, thereby reinforcing previous learning. Hopefully, readers will find the essays to be accessible, concise, and insightful. Most importantly, by exploring various issues and topics that are interesting and relevant, readers may find that the essays help them exercise their sense of wonder, curiosity and native affection for deep thinking.

Introducing CT as an "Art" Through the Etymology of the Word "Critical"

The word critical comes from the Greek word **krinos**. The word *krinos* meant "to sift through" and "to judge." Moreover, this word was related to two other Greek words: **krinon**, meaning "crisis", and **kriterion**, meaning "standard." In this section, critical thinking shall be introduced as an art, using the various roots of the word "critical." An art is contrasted with a science, in that an art involves crafting something through the use of fine skills and judgments. The "framing" of critical thinking as an *art* therefore coheres nicely with the previous existential framing, since what we seek to "craft" is a way of thinking and being that is autonomous, open and objective; *a way of life* that uses reliable reason to pilot the mind towards wisdom, understanding, knowledge and fairness.

CT as the Art of Good Judgment

Let's take a look at the **first etymological relationship**. The word critical is related to **judgment**. As noted earlier, it is important that we do not draw the wrong inference concerning the role of judgment in critical thinking. It does not imply being *"judgmental"*, in terms of the common usage of this word. Once again, being judgmental in the sense of always finding-fault, always blaming and "negatively critiquing" people is not what critical thinking is about. So what has the word "judgment" to do with the

proper understanding of *critical thinking*? Here is the answer: Critical thinking works with what you already do on a daily basis. It works with who you already are. You are already an "everyday judge." We all are. Think about the tremendous role the process of making judgments plays in our lives. Throughout the day, we are always judging. While out

> ### Critical Judgment As "Blind" Weighing
>
> A classic symbol of justice is a blindfolded woman holding a measuring scale. How is the balance and blindness related to characteristics possessed by a good judge? By the way, why do you think the classical symbol of justice is female?

shopping: "I don't need this"; "This looks like a reasonable buy"; "That is something I do not now need"; "That ad makes this product too good to be true, so it is probably not true." While at school: "This is a difficult logic problem"; "That seems like something I need to further investigate before I believe it"; "That sounds true—I guess I can accept it as true for now, until further evidence comes in." While at work: "Wow, I really do need a new job"; "True enough—the supervisor did handle the problem in a fair way"; "My co-worker was mistreated and those customers were wrong." Think about this for a minute. Add your own examples.

Again, we are all judges. This is an inescapable fact about being human. But here we are not merely concerned with stating facts. One of the concerns of critical thinking is to take what we already are, to take up this fact about human nature, and transfigure it. Our goal: *To become good judges*; and, in our better moments, on our more inspiring days, to become the *best judges* we can possibly be. Indeed, one may correctly "frame" critical thinking as the "art of good judgment"—meaning, ***the fine art of objective and fair judgment***.

The question I would like you to consider at this point is this: What makes for a good judge? Do not focus on particular judges, such as, umpires in a baseball game, culinary experts at a baking contest, Olympic ice-skating judges, or a judge in a courtroom. Rather, consider here the more general question of what makes for a good judge within any context. In other words, consider and articulate the characteristics that *any kind* of judge must possess in order to be a "good judge." Name at least two characteristics:

1) _____
2) _____

CT as the Art of Coping Well with Crises

Now let's turn to the **second etymological relationship**. That the word critical is etymologically related to **crisis** implies that one typically becomes "critical" when one is shaken, jolted and rocketed from the surface; disturbed, that is, from ordinary custom and routine consciousness by a *crisis event*, and thereby plunged into the deep, into a "critical stance." Think about this for a minute. Why is it so common that crisis produces critical consciousness? Go ahead and speculate on this issue.

Unfortunately, many of us do not start really critically thinking about things like our health, our future, our relationships, our environment, or the overall meaning and purpose of our lives until we reach a point of collapse or calamity. For many, we only start to critically think about things when we have to, when there is a breakdown within ourselves, our relations to others, or in our relationship with objects or the environment.

So what is it that aborts mindlessness and gives birth to mindfulness? The answer is at least twofold: the breakdown of mindless habit and mindless assumption.

Now let us make an important distinction: It would be inaccurate to say that all "habit" is "inappropriate" or "bad." Of course, habits can be bad—there are "bad habits"; but, there are also "good habits." For example, the habit of brushing one's teeth at night and flossing, or the habit of washing one's hands before eating, are good habits. Such habits are often passed down through childhood training, and good ones like these are themselves originally derived from the well of critical thinking (both of these now widespread habits were once not habits, and much critical thinking was used to develop modern notions of hygiene that underlie such good habits).

Thus, the problem is not habit *per se*, but rather, **mindless habit.** The hardened shell of mindless habit may make us so accustomed to ways of thinking that we simply refuse to entertain other, different ways of viewing the world. It may inhibit us from making reasonable changes in our lives. Mindless habit may isolate us from facing an ever changing and diverse world. Refusing to think about things and explore them in new and different ways, and resisting challenge to and change of belief, are powerful obstacles to the art of sound judgment and rational decision making.[14]

The same goes for assumptions—not all of them are unwarranted. Indeed, we could not function very effectively if we did not make various warranted assumptions (think of all the pragmatic, warranted assumptions you make about yourself, others, nature and objects on a daily basis).

Let's briefly explore this notion of **warranted assumption** versus **unwarranted assumption**. An assumption possesses warrant if it is backed by logic or sound experiential or empirical justification (i.e., "supporting evidence"); it lacks warrant if it is not backed by such evidence and rests instead on non-rational or irrational grounds.

A serious problem we face in modern Western, fast-paced industrial societies is that many assumptions we make on a daily basis have a very short-term orientation and aim—like "minimum wage", the work they do is simply to get us through the day. Consider the eating habits of many people. Think of the extent to which we mistreat our own bodies with insubstantial, unhealthy food. Many of us eat cheap fast-food, for example, assuming we got a "great deal" today, without taking into account the cost that all the double-cheeseburgers may exact from us in twenty years. We drive our new cars and run our factories assuming we are constantly "making progress", without taking into account the long-term, currently "invisible" damage being done to ourselves and the environment. As long as we keep surviving, and as long as our corner of the world is running without glitches, and the fine grease of custom keeps the wheels of that metaphorical machine called "society" running along smoothly, critical thinking tends not to arise.

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[14] Once again, readers are urged to consult Dorner's book, "The Logic of Failure", for experimental support of the claims made in this page and the next page.

When we let mindless assumptions and habits dominate our lives, we tend to critically think only *after* a crisis arises. Our problem is that we often wait for the system to "crash" before we start to critically reflect upon our individual and collective habits and practices.

Consider some examples that directly apply to students. Some students do not critically think about their vocation, about what school they are going to transfer to, about how they are going to get the funds to transfer, until the crisis event: *graduation*. How do we respond to the crises? We have a couple of options: think critically about our condition and create an action plan, or just panic ("flee"); or just assume "things will somehow work out" (more "fleeing"). When the panic becomes too much to handle, some simply engage in denial or intentional avoidance. Surely such evasions, in such situations, are not methods used by critical thinkers.

Concerning personal relationships, human beings may not critically think about what kept a personal relationship strong in the beginning of a relationship. After the honeymoon, people should think about what nurtured the honeymoon-halo, what kept it radiant. Without such critical reflection, we will not come to understand how we can nourish the light of love; and, we may not even be aware, in the present, of things we are doing that are diminishing the glow of that halo. Relationships, like so many things in life, will break down if they are not fed and nurtured, and given tune-ups and up-grades. We shouldn't always wait for "the wheel" to squeak before we oil it, for it may fall apart before the oil hits the wheel. Good pilots think in advance, check their wheels and keep such mechanisms well-lubricated, instead of waiting for crisis to shock them into thinking.

On a global inter-societal level, humans should further ponder the short-term and long-term implications of present practices and worldviews. Hopefully, we will not begin to engage in global critical thinking and critical dialogue only after, in Hegel's words, "the curtain of dusk has fallen."[15] For instance, many thinkers and writers are currently warning us about global dangers (e.g., global climate change, water pollution, ecosystem disruptions, human overpopulation, the rise of religious violence, etc.) that have their origin and perpetuation in traditional habits and uncritical assumptions about nature, self, others and human progress. Again, a common response to such warnings is to not think about fixing something if it is not loudly making noise and vigorously "squeaking." A better approach, a more critical approach, is this: Are the wheels really squeaking? Is there something we can do before the wheels breakdown? Are there genuine individual and global crises brewing about us, right beneath the nose of "common sense", "habit" and "custom"?

One of the great strengths of our species is our ability to maintain consistent habitual patterns of behavior that keep the wheels of society smoothly rolling without causing too much social friction. This we should acknowledge. Another great strength of ours is our extreme optimism about our powers and about future progress. However, if we do not place some critical checks on both of these strengths, they may actually end up being one of our greatest weaknesses. Mindless habit and excessive optimism, in the form of wishful thinking especially, has caused some planes to crash in flames.

As critical thinkers, we are asked to step back and reflect upon our fundamental habits and assumptions. We are asked to become somewhat skeptical about our

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[15] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* , "Preface."

sometimes naïve optimism. We are asked to acknowledge problems in various domains (e.g., problems in arguments, claims, evaluation and analysis, ethics and in modern political systems) so as to make us sensitive to the detection and identification of further problems. We are asked to analyze and evaluate things, openly and objectively, before they reach a crisis point and collapse stage. This means that as critical thinkers we are asked to develop a heightened level of awareness about ourselves, others, and our world. Second, we are asked in critical thinking to guide our imagination with reason so as to face and consider risk; to engage, that is, in *objective risk assessment*. After doing so, we have reason guide our imagination to think up and ponder objective, feasible solutions to problems. Hopefully, doing this will help us build the reliable and mindful thinking habits of critical thinkers while diminishing the sway of the unreliable habits of uncritical thinking.

CT as the Art of Measured Thinking

Finally, let us move on to the **third etymological relation**. The word critical is also related to the Greek word **criterion**, meaning standard, or "measure." I use the translation *measure* to play-off of its double-meaning: a) "measured" meaning balanced and not distorted (neither exaggerated nor diminished); and b) "measured" as in weighed against some objective criterion.

Additionally, there is an important historical connection at work here. A central endeavor of ancient Greek philosophy was the search to find a measure by which one could judge plausible theories from implausible theories, strong beliefs from weak beliefs, sound judgments from unsound judgments, and valid arguments from invalid arguments. The guiding idea was to find some measure of belief, some compass, other than the traditional measures used by most people—appeals to enthusiasm, appeals to authority and appeals to the crowd. Was there a better way to pilot the mind? That was the question which sent many a philosopher off into intellectual travels.

We have, in the academic spheres of the Western world, arrived at some consensus regarding the nature of this better compass. There are criteria that have been established to be rational and reliable measures; criteria that guides good, reasoned-out thinking—critical thinking. I am sure you have already unearthed some of these criteria while you thought through the question of what makes a judge a *good judge*. We will consider such criteria in detail as we move through this book.

To sum up: On an experiential level, critical thinking is a kind of awakening, in which one's thoughts, beliefs, and reasons for believing, are brought into the light of conscious awareness. It is a turning; a turning from the obscurity of prejudice and provincialism toward reasoned, critical belief; a turning from Egosphere and Ethnosphere to the Logosphere. For some, the turning is experienced only briefly, during times of crises. For others, the turning is a life-long endeavor that never ends. Learning how to be the best thinker and judge one can possibly be is a journey whose ultimate destination cannot be reached, since at any given point in our lives, we will always be fallible, we will always make mistakes, and we will always have room to become better thinkers.

Some Misconceptions about Critical Thinking

Critical thinking *does not* entail self-absorption or isolation from other people. It *does not* entail that we seek to keep other people from "influencing" us. It also *does not* entail the belief that, somehow, we are completely "self-made" and that we can create our own worldviews from scratch. As for critical thinking in general, it *does not* entail that we become carping, judgmental jerks who are always negative and nit-picky.

Indeed, the opposite is the case: As noted earlier, critical autonomy entails that we *actively seek* to overcome our own ignorance, errors, and intellectual limits by engaging others in civil and respectful, *critical dialogue*. The ideal of critical autonomy acknowledges that others influence us greatly, and that most of our beliefs are uncritically accepted and absorbed by us through enculturation and mental osmosis. That is why those who seek critical autonomy know that there is much work to do. They know that we need to reflect upon and critically evaluate the contents of our mind by truly hearing-out opposing standpoints and different voices. They understand that we humans—especially in childhood and adolescence—uncritically absorb and accept many untruths, prejudices and unreasonable beliefs; and, that as mature, thinking adults, we should *actively seek* more rational belief structures via rational investigation and critical dialogue *with others*. Ideally, such active, rational investigation, critical dialogue and review would occur, not only with peers, but with non-peers as well. In other words, we should actively seek to review, examine and test our beliefs *not only with those who share similar worldviews, but also, with those who do not share similar worldviews.*

One last misconception that we shall address here is this: that critical thinking is about becoming a rude, arrogant, condescending and carping intellectual snob. This is incorrect. Critical thinking is fundamentally about becoming a good judge, but this does not imply being a *judgmental jerk*. "Being judgmental" in the sense of always "finding-fault", "always blaming" and "negatively critiquing" people is not what critical thinking is about. "Judgmental" people, in the sense in which this word is commonly used, are often quite partial, biased and locked-in to an incomplete and fixed standpoint; hence, they may refuse to look at an issue or argument from another point of view. Not being receptive to the voices of others, and not being empathic listeners and objective thinkers who seek to first authentically comprehend something before they judge it, and not appealing to standards of fairness and logic in order to arrive at a good judgment, such people are the opposite of critical thinkers—they are uncritical thinkers, providing uncritical judgments.

Unfortunately, there are some who, after training in critical thinking, become "judgmental" intellectual bullies and snobs. This is not the intended effect of critical thinking, but rather, a misuse of it. People who use their vocabulary and mental skills to abuse, humiliate and degrade others do not seek clarification, knowledge and truth; and, they do not seek to help others grow in understanding and wisdom; rather, they seek to make themselves feel better by putting others down. This kind of person does not objectively consider and try to work out important issues; rather, this kind of person *probably has issues that they need to consider and work out.*

Finally, we earlier addressed the problem of primal reactive emotion as a barrier to critical thinking. Some students draw the inference that, since primal reactive emotion is counter to critical thinking, that all emotion hinders and blocks critical thinking. This is

a faulty inference. The correct inference to draw *is not* that emotions should play no role in our reasoning. Indeed, the opposite is the case, for emotions and feelings carry with them cognitive information about ourselves, the environment, and the conditions of others. Such information should not be denied or avoided, but rather, rationally filtered and utilized for the sake of identifying problems, understanding problems, and solving problems.[16]

For instance, a mild manifestation of such primal emotions, such as fear, may get us to focus on, and reflect upon, important decision making factors, such as the risk and painful consequences involved in some courses of action. While some emotions, such as fear, may help us focus on and attend to important variables, extreme, primal manifestations of such emotions tend to plunge us into primitive, unreflective and unreliable responses. The problem then, is not emotion *per se*; rather, the problem consists in the primal manifestation of such emotion as a psychological force that *overrides* deliberate, rational analyses and rational responses. Thus, instead of aiming at the extirpation of emotion, we should seek to rationally channel and discipline emotion, while reflecting on and evaluating the meaning and importance of emotion in our lives.[17]

Consider how being able to sense and experience emotion is fundamentally important in terms of helping us reason about, and perceive, moral phenomena involving suffering, trauma, oppression and cruelty. It is hard to imagine how we would even perceive injustice and wrongdoing if we did not experience, sense or sympathize with the unwarranted suffering that is the consequence of unjust and wrongful acts. Being able to imaginatively identify and sympathize with the suffering of other people is central in overcoming *perspectival ignorance* and arriving at *deep understanding* of moral problems and dilemmas.

Consider another emotion that plays a key role in our moral lives—the emotion known as indignation, a kind of righteous anger. Indignation is often an objectively sound emotional response to a rational, cognitive judgment regarding actual wrongdoing. For example, imagine a student becoming indignant because he is told he received a poor grade on a creative essay exam because he is Irish, he used examples from Celtic culture, and in short, he is told by an exam administrator, "Irish people simply can't do well on British entry exams—because they are Irish." Imagine there was nothing in the directions of the creative essay that prohibited the use of Celtic culture. The only real problem here is the prejudice of the British administrator.

Now let's consider a different example. Imagine a student, in a New York High School, in 2013, after seeing the poor grade he earned (and he knows he rightfully earned it), becomes angry simply because he sees "a female" who sits next to him get a better grade--he is angry only because she is female and did better than he did. In one case, we have indignation; in the other, unwarranted anger. I think such examples show that anger itself is not the problem, but rather, what the cognitive bases for the anger is, together with how we respond to the experience of anger.

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[16] My argument here draws heavily from various strands of modern feminist epistemology. I also draw heavily from the ideas of Antonio Demasio. See his wonderful book, "Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain" (Penguin Books: NY, NY, 1994).

[17] For a brilliant, comprehensive overview and argument regarding this point, see Martha Nussbaum's "The Therapy of Desire" (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1994).

Critical Thinking: A Handbook on How to Reliably Pilot Your Own Mind

Consider also the important role of emotion with respect to **aesthetic experience**. If one does not cognitively apprehend and feel beauty and delight, and if one has not cultivated the ability to do so, one would not perceive aesthetic features of the world and of human artifacts. Being able to correctly perceive and understand a painting, a dance, a theatrical performance, a comedy, a tragedy, a poem or a piece of music depends precisely on the capacity to experience feeling and emotion. The same can be said for both the beautiful and sublime aspects of the cosmos which we can perceive in natural phenomena not created by human beings.

The Benefits of Critical Thinking

There are two general benefits that you should earn from understanding and applying critical thinking in your life. Let's begin with the first.

1) PERSONAL SUCCESS. Personal success can be understood on two levels: *intra*personal success (e.g., success in coping with yourself, who you are, and your own issues and anxieties), and *inter*personal success (e.g., success as a friend, as a significant other, as a parent, as a co-worker, and as a fellow human being). In this section, I present the argument that *critical autonomy* is the foundation of both types of success.

I would now like to present some arguments regarding why self-awareness, critical reflection and the intentional shaping of our minds is crucial for living a good life.[18] Stepping-up to a mindful existence, and owning-up to ourselves, instead of faking to be someone we are not, will mean we will most likely lead a more fulfilling life; a consciously and reflectively chosen life; a life that is not based on coercion, mindless conformity, irrational compulsion, fatalistic cynicism and self-deception. Sculpting a mindful existence that we can honestly, freely and self-consciously affirm involves addressing the following types of questions:

1) What do I really want out of life? Who do I want to be?
2) Given the kind of person I am, and want to be, what are my needs?
3) Given my personal identity, and the life-story I want to live out and realize, what sorts of people do I really want in my life-world?
4) What role did other writers--culture, parents, authority figures, advertisers, peers—play in creating my life story? What narrative passages, themes and elements that were given me via these sources should I keep, and which should I delete, or re-write?
5) What aspects of my identity are rooted in reliable and rational thinking patterns, and which are rooted in unreliable patterns and fallacy?

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[18] It is interesting to note that the psychologists Bernard Schwartz and John V. Flowers claim that the "fundamental error" of psychotherapists is their inability or refusal to reflect upon and become aware of their own limitations. So not only is self-awareness profoundly important in our journey towards existential success, it is also profoundly important--indeed, it is of primary importance--for the current cultural experts who aim at succeeding at helping us succeed. See Bernard Schwartz and John V. Flowers, "How to Fail as a Therapist" (Impact Publishers; Atascadero California, 2006, p. 4, & p. 62).