

# Introduction

There has been much talk about “critical thinking” in recent years<sup>1</sup>, but the idea is old, at least as old as philosophy. It has, therefore, been treated before, and in different ways. Why should the time be ripe for a book which claims to give diverse theoretical perspectives on the idea of critical reasoning? How is such a project in any way new?

The theoretical answer to this question is that, if the relatively recent discovery of the historical nature of human understanding is real and not counterfeit, then each age must reconsider the issue of critical reasoning. For the Greeks, critical reasoning meant the active engagement in questioning their non-philosophical culture, the established, foundational, nonphilosophical beliefs of the various cities. Classical Greek philosophy began a tradition that may be properly said to include medieval philosophy insofar as the latter is parasitic, in its School Tradition of commentary upon Greek philosophy, upon the former. Early Modern philosophers questioned the Classical tradition of philosophy itself and accused its practitioners of merely accepting its fundamental concepts on the authority of Aristotle and his great Scholastic commentators. They cast doubt upon the

whole system of theoretical concepts through which philosophers for nearly two millennia had explained and viewed their world, and did so in the same way that the Greeks had questioned their nonphilosophic world. Thanks to work in this century by students of the history of science and philosophy, of phenomenology, and of hermeneutics, and because of efforts made to understand the concept of scientific revolution, we have come to appreciate how whole systems of science, or whole epochal traditions in philosophy, operate as systems of preestablished and unexamined assumptions. Within those systems or traditions, people think without necessarily questioning the assumptions themselves. In other words, the fundamental ideas of these systems or traditions typically are not themselves made thematic but through them everything else is brought into focus. That insight has led to the recognition that, if critical reasoning is to be possible, the basic assumptions of the systems or traditions within which we do science or philosophy must themselves be put to the test, in the same way that the Greeks questioned the beliefs of their nonphilosophical predecessors, and in the way the early Moderns doubted the Classical tradition in philosophy that had begun with the Greeks. Unless questioning is done at the radical level, Heidegger and others tell us, what goes by the name of "science" ends up being a kind of "tinkering within established procedures"—the activity Kuhn calls "normal science." Thus, critical reasoning is not simply the same for us as it was for the Greeks, it is both the same and different. It is the same in that it presupposes the examination of established beliefs. It is different in that the established beliefs that are to be questioned include the fundamental principles of the various traditions of philosophy and of the various paradigms of science—including our own. The difference makes a reconsideration of critical reasoning necessary for contemporary culture. This book brings together both theoretical papers and papers that one might call practice-oriented theory, all of which treat the meaning of critical reasoning in contemporary culture.

There is also a practical answer to the question about why this volume is needed. Many scholars have been focusing of late on practical educational reforms intended to teach critical reasoning. But no one volume has yet brought together a sampling of attitudes and proposals representing diverse contemporary theoretical views of critical reasoning. This volume does so by collecting a number of essays by scholars that have been focusing on the problem of critical reasoning and practical educational reform. But it is also an attempt to open that discussion up to a wider circle by including articles by scholars who in one way or another raise serious problems for theory of critical reasoning from perspectives quite alien to those of the educational theorists.

Why use the term *critical reasoning* rather than *critical thinking* in the title of the volume? First, the term *critical thinking* is often used as part of the name of a movement with many distinguished members, several of whom are contributors to this volume. But there are other contributors who have written for the volume who do not associate themselves with the so-called critical thinking movement but are nevertheless clearly interested in the problem of what makes up critical, rational thought. Second, because the idea of teaching critical thinking has recently become popular, many educators, not all with equal amounts of professional expertise, claim to teach and discuss critical thinking. Many reputable scholars have become wary of reform proposals that go under the name of critical thinking. Surely the critical thinking movement ought not be misjudged because some unworthy practitioners have associated themselves with it and engendered suspicions in the minds of some who are unfamiliar with the work of its most capable proponents. Yet since some writers have given whatever goes by the name a questionable reputation (as Socrates says of philosophy), it may be best to avoid the term, especially since there are suitable alternatives (as there are not in the case of philosophy). Third, one wonders how there could be such a thing as critical thinking that does not consist in

the process of reasoning. According to traditional Scholastic logic, reasoning is the orderly process by which the mind proceeds *ordinate et facilliter et sine errore* ("with order, ease, and correctness")<sup>2</sup> in propositional discourse or judgments. The term *critical* (from *krinein*, "to judge"), used in this logical sense, implies the making of unbiased—if not necessarily true, or at least probable—judgments. The term *thinking* implies the process of constructing connected patterns of judgments, or inferences; the process traditionally called "reasoning." For these three reasons, then, it seems advisable to use the term *critical reasoning* as more accurately descriptive than *critical thinking*.

There is also some need to explain the term *culture*. The term has a broad sociological significance: it means the beliefs and behavioral patterns of any group, widely or narrowly construed. In this sense, one might say that there is such a thing as a community of those engaged in the life of the intellect, and that, given the kinds of debates engaged in by that community, certain patterns of thinking, certain modes of criticism, certain intellectual perspectives, have developed that characterize our age—in the West, at least. Some call our contemporary intellectual culture "postmodern culture." If we are squeamish about this term because we do not see any significant novelty in postmodernism, but rather only the logical conclusions of the early modern project, we may prefer to speak of "later modern culture." In either case, contemporary Western intellectual culture can be associated with a certain range of theoretical as well as moral and political ideas that cannot help exerting an influence on the idea of critical reasoning. Thus, this book asks the question, "What is critical reasoning in the climate of contemporary intellectual culture with all that its theoretical, moral, and political attitudes entails?" Such an investigation properly belongs to a series on the philosophy of social science.

But this is a philosophical book with much emphasis on education. The term *culture* is therefore also used here in its stronger educational sense that is perhaps best reflected in the Greek term *paideia*, the Latin *cultura*, and the German *Bildung*. What

these terms intend is the formation of the soul of an individual in accordance with a particular view of a complete human life or a particular model of what a complete human being should be.<sup>3</sup> The essays in this volume engender questions about what that end, and the means to it, should be, at least in the context of the contemporary Western world.<sup>4</sup>

## Description of the Contents of This Volume

Common to all the contributors to this volume is a primarily speculative rather than merely practical approach to critical reasoning. Some papers might more properly be described as theory pure and simple; others, more as practice-oriented theory. In any case, any theoretical discussion of education and critical reasoning has a natural practical *telos*. Each essay attempts to develop a unified theoretical slant on critical reasoning. Each in some way proposes a position on the meaning, conditions, and goals of critical reasoning.

Part I deals with theories of critical reasoning and education, and is especially concerned with the problem of the relationship between critical reasoning skills and the learning of the content of the various disciplines. Part II focuses on various crucial theoretical problems at the heart of theory of critical reasoning.

### Part I: Theories of Critical Reasoning and Education

At least eight chapters deal in some way with the complex problem of the relationship between learning the content of disciplines or subject areas and learning critical reasoning abilities. There has been much debate on this issue, often construed as a debate on whether priority ought to be given in education to reasoning skills or to content. There are many ways of construing this content/skills relationship, as Robert H. Ennis writes in

chapter 1, "Conflicting Views on Teaching Critical Reasoning." Ennis organizes the various theoretical views taken by the participants in the debate and notes that specific kinds of research are required to test the claims of the proponents of the various views. He also indicates the still early stage of discussion of the problem and the need for much rigorous work to sort through the issues, in spite of the fact that educators have been taking positions and changing curricula accordingly for years. Ennis's chapter provides a fine introduction to the several chapters on this issue because he has succinctly organized the diverse theoretical views of the skills/content issue.

Ennis distinguishes several approaches to the teaching of critical thinking. The most prevalent, the "general" approach, is the attempt "to teach critical thinking abilities and dispositions separately from the presentation of the content of existing subject-matter offerings." The principles of reasoning critically are considered teachable apart from the teaching of the individual disciplines and transferable to these disciplines and to subjects that cross them. The best example of such an approach is the teaching of courses in critical thinking or informal logic. Other approaches to teaching critical reasoning deny that critical reasoning can be taught apart from "deep, thoughtful, well-understood subject-matter instruction." The infusion approach uses standard subject-matter content but makes the general principles of reasoning explicit as the appropriateness of teaching such principles arises in the course of teaching content. The immersion approach takes the position that students become critical reasoners in an area precisely by becoming "deeply immersed in the subject," and that it is not necessary to make general principles explicit. Finally, there is the mixed approach: "These distinctions, though conceptually clear, often reduce to continuums and have borderline cases in practice." Ennis distinguishes various theoretical versions of subject specificity, criticizes the idea by displaying crucial ambiguities in the idea of subject, and points in the direction of needed research to solve some of the

crucial problems still at issue, such as, the need for methods of testing that can compare one approach with another.

The section entitled "Theories that Emphasize Content" consists of chapters by authors who tend towards the content side of the skills/content dichotomy. John McPeck, in "Teaching Critical Reasoning Through the Disciplines: Content versus Process," defends the view that critical thinking is not the result of learning general skills, but the result of having a great deal of knowledge in the various subject areas. On Ennis' division, McPeck's view is part of the immersion school. McPeck has long been the nemesis of the members of the critical thinking movement, and rather lively exchanges have occurred between McPeck and prominent members of that movement, both in writing and at conferences.<sup>5</sup> McPeck wishes to "redirect attention away from generic *processes of reasoning*," which he claims the critical thinking movement and the various "thinking skills programs" emphasize, to "consider the proposition that the *content* of various subjects and/or problems determines (i.e., creates) the appropriate *process* of reasoning, and not vice versa." McPeck defends, from the point of view of Wittgenstein's epistemological discussion of the relationship between language and thought, what Hirsch defends from the point of view of his own hermeneutics. For both Hirsch and McPeck, the understanding of particular terms and propositions depends upon the broader understanding of a whole system of terms and propositions—a subject area, or a "form of life," or "language game," in Wittgenstein's terminology. Just as for Hirsch there is no such thing as general reading skill, but rather our reading skill in a particular area depends upon our having specific background knowledge in the area of the reading, so for McPeck, there is no such thing as general critical thinking skill, but rather our critical thinking in any discipline depends upon our having in-depth, specific, background knowledge of that discipline. "This is what renders a general thinking skills approach *implausible* from a theoretical point of view, and *ineffective* from a practical point of view." For

McPeck, critical thinking is a combination of adequate specific background knowledge in an area and the disposition "to engage in an activity or problem with *reflective skepticism*." Such reflective skepticism is possible only in and through immersion in the various disciplines.

The other paper in this section is Donald Lazere's "Cultural Literacy and Critical Literacy." Although Lazere is an acknowledged member of the political left, his view of critical literacy is dependent upon Hirsch's view of cultural literacy (usually associated with the political right).<sup>6</sup> For according to Lazere, "higher order" critical literacy skills depend upon the "lower order" cultural literacy demanded by Hirsch. Lazere accepts the view that participation in American life (i.e., empowerment) requires, as Hirsch suggests, a knowledge of a certain literate vocabulary, or a kind of repertoire of conceptual tools. Only with such a repertoire can the next step to critical literacy be taken. According to Lazere, cultural literacy consists in such things (without giving his full list) as the ability to unify our personal and academic experience; the ability to follow extended and abstract argument; the ability to engage in moral and aesthetic judgment; the ability to form open-minded, autonomous, sociopolitical opinions. A part of critical literacy upon which Lazere places some emphasis is political literacy. He makes a strong case for the necessity of this kind of political savvy in an age and culture in which the forms of manipulation are hidden, sophisticated, and pervasive. But basic cultural literacy is a necessary condition for critical literacy, which amounts to critical thinking. Lazere describes Richard W. Paul's strong-sense critical thinking (see chapter 7, by Paul in this volume) as an approach that "encourages students' attainment of autonomous thinking through skeptically questioning all inadequately substantiated claims and culturally conditioned assumptions. Strong-sense critical thinking is essentially rhetorical in its insistence that learning takes place most effectively through Socratic dialogue and debates between opposing viewpoints. Obviously the more of Hirsch's cultural literacy students possess,



the larger arsenal of information they will have for challenging claims and perceiving diverse viewpoints." Lazere's view is therefore an interesting version of the skills/content problem in that it crosses political ideologies: it requires education in traditional content for the very purpose of liberation.

The following section, "Theories that Emphasize Skills," deals with the other side of the skills/content division. Ralph H. Johnson argues, in "Critical Reasoning and Informal Logic," on behalf of informal logic as part of what, in an ideal academic situation, would be a whole system of attempts at teaching critical thinking. Johnson's view is that generic principles and reasoning skills can be taught, but not all the principles and skills that constitute critical thinking can be taught in a single course in informal logic. "To produce such an individual [the critical thinker], the support of the whole educational system is necessary. No one course at any level can do it." However, "preeminent among the skills in the cognitive repertoire of the critical thinker is the ability to appraise arguments. In helping to achieve this ability, informal logic enters the scene." In defending informal logic as the logic of argumentation, Johnson considers an argument to have two layers or "tiers" in its structure: a "premise-conclusion" part and "dialectical" part. He thus develops a two-tiered theory of argument analysis as necessary for the critical evaluation of arguments. The first tier consists in the usual structural analysis of arguments as found in standard informal logic texts. The second consists in a broader dialectical analysis which addresses alternative positions to the ones we hold, objections to our own arguments, and the wider implications of our arguments. Johnson's informal logic approach would probably be classified in Ennis' scheme as "general" (see chapter 1), although his demand for a systematic development of the curriculum in the direction of critical reasoning would render his overall approach "mixed." The description of his second tier of argument analysis also renders his position much broader than the more narrow approach of many informal logic texts.

Two of the principles Johnson mentions as structural criteria for arguments are that premises must be relevant to the conclusion and that premises must provide sufficient evidence for the conclusion. Harvey Siegel's essay, "Education and the Fostering of Rationality" may be said to be, among other things, the careful development of those two principles. "Critical thinking is thinking which adequately reflects relevant reasons; a critical thinker is one whose thinking is similarly reflective of reasons. We can say, in short, that a critical thinker is one who is *appropriately moved by reasons*." In Siegel's view, critical thinking is the ability to "assess the degree to which a reason supports or warrants a claim or judgment," and to conform our own beliefs, judgments, and actions to that assessment. Such ability implies an awareness of certain principles. Some of those principles are general and entirely subject-neutral (e.g., formal and informal principles of logic), some are subject-specific (e.g., knowing that yellow skin may be a sign of liver damage). "Critical thinking, consequently, is wrongly construed as entirely subject-neutral or entirely subject-specific." Clearly Siegel's view, in Ennis's scheme, is "mixed." In a particularly instructive example, he shows how critical thinking could be used as an educational ideal in science education. It would include not only a discussion of what relevant reasons in science are but a discussion of philosophy of science (such issues as alternative theories and hypotheses, the nature of verification, etc.). "In all curriculum areas, an education which fosters critical thinking in those areas emphasizes the nature and role of reasons, the active consideration of alternative theoretical and critical perspectives, and the philosophical issues and concerns studied by the philosophy of the relevant discipline," which "informs our understanding of the principles governing the evaluation of reasons in that area." Siegel's view may be understood as a blend of McPeck's view, that each discipline has its own epistemology which ought to be mastered to achieve critical thinking in that area, and the informal logic or "general" view. In effect Siegel is arguing for infusing across the curriculum some of the attitudes proper to philosophy as such. Siegel also ar-

gues that skills, while necessary for critical thinking, are not sufficient; they must be supplemented by what he calls the "critical spirit"—a complex of attitudes, dispositions, and character traits that include a respect for reasons and a desire to be guided by them. This aspect of critical thinking makes clear that critical thinking is not simply a matter of skills, but is rather an ideal of a certain sort of person.

Robert J. Sternberg's "Creativity, Critical Reasoning, and the Problem of Content-Oriented Education" (chapter 6), belongs in the same group as chapters 4 and 5. But his focus is not, strictly speaking, on critical as much as on creative reasoning. The article is of a piece with others in this group because Sternberg's general criticism of current educational practice is actually the same as that of many others in the critical thinking movement. It is also one that an informal logician—espousing the "general" approach described by Ennis—might make: over-emphasis upon the imparting of content has tended to stifle crucial skills or abilities to use and manipulate that content, and such skills are, in any case, more important than content. In Sternberg's case, the crucial ability is creativity, which, if not part of critical reasoning broadly construed, is surely complementary to critical reasoning. The ability to construct new criticisms of an old body of ideas and then to construct a new way of thinking about those ideas is an example of thought that is both critical and creative. It is characteristic of thinkers such as Galileo, who had to criticize the whole Classical tradition in natural science in order to, as it were, create a new set of basic concepts through which to view the world.

Sternberg's view of the content issue, contrary to McPeck's, is that the schools at all levels have been doing a fair job of imparting content, but have done "at least as much to undermine creativity as to foster it." He develops, within his six-facet theory of the origins of creative behavior, a theory of creativity as well as a critique of current school practices that inhibit the development of creativity. One of the key ideas behind Sternberg's approach is that intelligence consists, in part, in the ability to

define and redefine problems. (The example of Galileo is sufficient to fill this out, but Sternberg mentions others.) His criticism of the schools is that, "in order to redefine a problem, one has to have the option of defining a problem in the first place. Schools only rarely give students this luxury." Even when the advocates of thinking skills have successfully turned a curriculum from memorization to problem-solving, the structures set up for problem-solving often discourage rather than encourage creative thinking. Since "creative individuals are often most renowned not for their solving of problems but for their posing of the problems in the first place," textbooks, standardized tests, and school assignments designed to have students solve already structured problems rather than to structure and solve the problems themselves inhibit rather than encourage creative thinking. This approach, which advocates putting initiative in the hands of the student and rewarding creativity, is the basic theme of Sternberg's theory and of his critique of current educational practices.

The next section has the title "Beyond Skills and Content," because the authors of the papers in this chapter present a view of teaching critical thinking that transcends the skills/content dichotomy. They focus instead on worldviews, the very matrix within which logical skills and cultural knowledge operate. Richard W. Paul calls this approach "strong-sense critical thinking."

Paul has, for this volume, revised his seminal 1982 article on strong-sense critical reasoning. In its revised form, it now appears under the title, "Teaching Critical Reasoning in the Strong Sense: Getting Behind Worldviews" (chapter 7). His opening paragraph manifests his disagreement with McPeck. According to Paul, a general critical thinking course at a college or university is not only possible but necessary. "The intellectual needs that instruction in critical thinking is intended to fulfill are so central to education that they must be given serious attention and central focus in at least one foundational course." He later cites two letters from students complaining of the overemphasis upon memorization of content and relative neglect of reasoning skills

in their schooling experience. His view is not, however, that learning general principles of argument analysis is sufficient for critical thinking. Much to the contrary: such learning, he claims can make students less rather than more critical, more rather than less closed-minded, by teaching them how to defend their prejudices. By itself, the ability to understand and use informal and formal principles of argument analysis amounts to “weak-sense” critical thinking. “Strong-sense” critical thinking involves the attempt to see how our analysis of arguments is affected by our often unconscious worldviews and interests. The weakness of what Paul calls the “atomistic” approach to argument analysis (the approach of most formal and informal logic courses) is that it fails to consider the broader systematic views and interests that often unconsciously distort our argument analysis. There is a difference between the worldview we consciously assert and the (often unconscious) one that actually determines our beliefs and behavior. This latter worldview, with its connected interests, can distort our construction and analysis of arguments. “Strong-sense” critical thinking is the attempt to make this worldview explicit and to see how it operates in our argumentation. Paul argues the efficacy of using ethical issues as an exceptionally good means of teaching critical thinking. Ethical issues are multidimensional (i.e., they cross disciplines), involve interests and worldviews directly, and are most apt to open up the difference between the worldview that is presupposed by our behavior and the worldview we think we hold.

In “The Interpretive Focus: A Prerequisite for Critical Reasoning” (chapter 8), Lenore Langsdorf argues that there are interpretive skills needed to approach texts (written or oral) critically even before evaluation and logical analysis of specific arguments can begin. A fundamental shift in focus must first take place. The bringing about of this fundamental shift is what Langsdorf, following Paul, calls “strong-sense” critical thinking. She exemplifies the shift in focus by noting crucial differences between attitudes that operate in conversation and those that operate in

reading. In conversation, there are two elements: the living personal communicative event between two or more conversationalists, and the content of the conversation. Reading involves only the latter. In ordinary conversational discourse we attend to particular aspects of the event (such as the personality of our interlocutor and the circumstances of the conversation) as well as to content. On some occasions, we may be so taken up with the content of what the speaker is saying that we seem not to be paying attention to the other person. Our attention has shifted from the real conversational event to the content alone, to the "ideal object." A person who makes this shift is normally considered a bad conversationalist, or may be characterized as "absent-minded," so caught up with ideas as to seem out of touch, as it were. But this being "absent-minded" to the particular event, and attentive to the "ideal" object (the content), is precisely the kind of move that we need to make in order to adopt an interpretive perspective. The interpretive focus is the attitude necessary for critical reasoning to occur. Such a shift in focus is preliminary to the logical and evaluative activities that ought to follow our adopting the interpretive stance. Achieving this fundamental shift in focus is crucial to Langsdorf's understanding of "strong-sense" critical thinking. Her approach to critical thinking, like Paul's, would in Ennis's scheme, be considered "mixed." Like Paul, and unlike McPeck, Langsdorf believes that we need certain generic interpretive skills in order to be critical about texts and the arguments they contain. Thus, she directs attention to certain general reasoning skills that, she believes, need to be learned apart from and even prior to an in-depth immersion into the individual disciplines.

## Part II. Problems for Theory of Critical Reasoning

Each of the essays in Part II attempts a kind of Copernican revolution in the understanding of the problems attending critical

thinking. They focus upon topics normally considered peripheral (or not considered at all), and turn those topics into central issues affecting critical reasoning. The chapters focus on methodology, history, the unity of source for critical reasoning, and values.

The section entitled "The Problem of Methodology" contains two papers that critique the methodological framework within which critical reasoning is supposed to occur. In Gerald Graff's case, this framework is the organization of the place that has traditionally institutionalized critical reasoning: the university. Ralph Sleeper raises the question of conflicting ideas of rationality itself and what counts as knowledge within the framework of such ideas.

In "Taking Cover in Coverage: Critical Reasoning and the Conflict of Theories" (chapter 9), Graff suggests that the very administrative organization of departments in the university, and not individual teaching practices, has done the greatest harm to students' critical thinking abilities. Graff takes English departments as an example, although his criticisms are applicable across disciplines. He argues that debates between the adherents of the various literary theories such as "feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism, and the new historicism," as well as debates between those who advocate teaching only the traditional humanistic canon of Western classics and those who advocate including various minority or multicultural canons or the popular media, have been covered over by the administrative organization of departments in such a way that these debates themselves rarely intrude upon students. The debates rage at specialized conferences or in specialized journals, but hardly ever in the curriculum, the very heart of which should be the place of rational controversy and argument.

Graff uses the term "field-coverage" to describe the organizational structure of departments that has tended to prevent open debate. Departments divide up the disciplines into various systematic or historical areas or "fields" to be covered. Professors specialize in one or several areas, and the job of administration

is to ensure that the proper faculty are hired and the proper courses offered so as to cover the fields, and that students majoring in the area cover a sufficient portion of the various fields by taking courses. The creation of a different course offering for each different historical period or systematic topic ensures that the materials are duly covered. But this very compartmentalization discourages faculty holding different theories of literature and criticism from engaging in public argument over differences of principle. Such public argument, to which students should be privy and in which they should participate, ought to be the heart of university life and the arena in which the critical thinking abilities of students are whetted.

"The moral is that if the introduction of literary theory is to make a real difference in encouraging critical thinking in the average literature student, we must find some way to modify the field-coverage model. Otherwise, theory (and perhaps critical thinking itself) will be institutionalized as yet another field, equivalent to literary periods and genres—which is to say, it will become one more option that can safely be ignored. We will lose theory's potential for drawing the disconnected parts of the literature curriculum into relation and providing students with the context needed to develop their critical reasoning capacities." Graff's argument for critical thinking is that, "just as the best way to learn a foreign language is to live in the country in which the language is spoken, the best way to learn critical thinking is to be part of an intellectual community in which such thinking is being practiced (where there will probably be debate over which forms of thinking count as critical, or even as thinking, and which do not)." Thus critical thinking is best brought about by placing in the foreground the central intellectual conflicts of an age and engaging students in the debate over the issues. At present, those issues would include conflict over the canon, various literary theories, and various theories of rationality itself.

The title of Ralph Sleeper's chapter "Whose Reason? Which Canon? Critical Reasoning and Conflicting Ideas of Rationality"



(chapter 10), is a reference to Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* According to Sleeper, MacIntyre is looking, in this time of "the uncertain rationalities of the post-Enlightenment break-up of the tradition," for "an authoritative tradition of agreed-upon canons of rationality that can be counted on to be of use in resolving new problems and controversies as they arise in the ever-changing circumstances of this postmodern world." With this reference to MacIntyre's traditionalist argument serving as a backdrop, Sleeper goes on, citing Emerson and Dewey, to note the antitraditionalist, anti-authoritarian bent of American philosophy. He takes Dewey's criticism of the "epistemological industry" as the starting point for his critique of what he apparently considers the two most misguided camps of educational theorists: the "conservative right," which would include those who believe that "we are wallowing in a swamp of cultural illiteracy and moral relativism" (he later mentions Bloom, Hirsch, Bennett, and Chaney as sharing common ground); and the "conservative left," which would include those who reject the canonical content idea, but appeal to some form of "critical logic of analysis" or "critical reasoning" to "answer to the variety of our human needs in our morals as in our sciences." Sleeper's view is that both the traditionalists like Bloom and the adherents to the various forms of critical thinking start with an ideal of rationality, presupposed and unquestioned, as the end in view, and then proceed to propose a method to achieve the end. This, however, is the true "scandal to philosophy," institutionalized by philosophers since Descartes, who have started by arbitrarily choosing what they mean by legitimate concepts and then simply rejecting as meaningless anything that does not fit their definition. They start by demanding a certain kind of clarity for concepts to be accepted as genuine, and then exclude "all discourse involving the rough-and-ready concepts of natural language in use in the inductive inferences of the everyday world." Thus theology, metaphysics, and most forms of ethics are excluded as unscientific. Sleeper cites Dewey: "We take out of our

logical package what we have put into it, and then convert what we draw out to be a literal description of the actual world." Although he does not develop his own proposal at length, Sleeper's discussion suggests that rationality develops through the very process of inquiry (hence his references, at the beginning and end of his essay, to induction).

The section entitled "The Problem of History," raises questions concerning the influence of our own cultural history on interpretations of critical reasoning and its possibility. Stanley Rosen's chapter deals with the problem posed for critical reasoning by postmodernism. My own treats the problem posed for critical reasoning by the historical nature of the understanding.

As Paul's idea of "strong-sense" critical thinking is to make explicit our inexplicit but operative worldviews, Stanley Rosen's attempt in "Postmodernism and the Possibility of Critical Reasoning" is to point out to those who hold doctrines of critical thinking, as well as to those who reject the possibility of critical thinking as it is usually understood, that their views themselves presuppose a much broader scientific or philosophic worldview. He distinguishes between a commonly articulated worldview of our time, that of "postmodernism," with its assumption that both the philosophy of the Classical tradition as well as that of modernity have been overcome, and another worldview that, he claims, operates as the actual basis for our decisions, judgments, and actions. Rosen's attempt is to show that the operative worldview is that of modernity and that the so-called postmodern phenomenon is in fact just another version of that modern worldview. The threat to critical thinking from the postmodern critique is considerable. If that critique is right, the values of "clarity, rationality, and common sense" are actually "outmoded consequences of modernity, or even of metaphysics, or of the former, scientifically articulated, will to power." The proponents of the possibility of critical thinking must face up to the claims and critique of postmodernism, because if postmodernism is right, then philosophy, and with it critical thinking, is at an end. Rosen's paper confronts the postmodern phenomenon by show-

ing that the supporters of the idea of postmodernism have not understood their own worldview correctly. He holds that the worldview is really derivative from, not different from, that of modern philosophy. Rosen's question is fundamental: "In this essay, I am concerned with one question: is the thesis of the end of philosophy, and so of modernity, sound?" If the thesis is sound, there can be no critical thinking. If not, then those who claim that postmodernism is a novel phenomenon have failed to understand themselves and modernity, they have not achieved a critical distance from and understanding of their own worldview—a state of affairs which Paul, Langsdorf, and others demand of any critical thinker.

My own essay, "Critical Reasoning and History" (chapter 12), argues that, given the historical nature of the understanding (that is, the fact that ordinary consciousness always starts with a set of meanings determined by our culture and historical tradition), critical reasoning first and foremost consists in achieving standpoints from which to make thematic the presuppositions guiding our thought and creating our focus on the world. I exemplify the problem of historical prejudice by pointing out that even the best-educated people in the West tend to interpret morality and political events in the East by focusing on them through already uncritically accepted foundational Western beliefs. The idea that individualism, which Hegel calls "the pivot and center of the difference between antiquity and modern times," is one of the key elements of the worldview of the modern liberal West, functions as a key example in my argument. Individualism is so basic to our worldview that we no longer see it, although we see everything else through it. Hence all movements toward individualism in the East are considered progress towards the enlightened true view that lies at the basis of our political views. In the United States these are considered true in part because of the apparent success and stability of our government and society. But if critical reasoning includes freeing ourselves from intellectual prejudice, then this kind of thinking, laden with moral and political presuppositions, is far from critical. The difficulty is learning to

see, and thus in some measure freeing ourselves from, the prejudices of our worldview, our cultural history.

Since individualism, and much else of Western thought, has its origin in the arguments of great early modern philosophical writers, the premier way to free ourselves intellectually from such historical prejudices is to make them thematic by analyzing the original arguments that gave rise to them. Since these arguments occur in the great texts of the great modern authors, we must read their texts to uncover the now hidden origins of our own basic beliefs. Since those authors were rejecting a whole tradition, both in natural science and in morality and politics, in order to understand modern authors, we must also read the texts of the Classical tradition rejected by modernity. Only by understanding the worldview that modernity originally intended to demolish and for which it substituted new doctrines can we moderns adequately see the modern worldview for what it is, and consider it at a sufficient intellectual distance to criticize it rationally. The whole process of reconstituting the Classical tradition and our own foundations by reading great works becomes a kind of intellectual psychotherapy whereby we uncover the hidden origins of our intellectual prejudices. In some measure, we free ourselves from them by putting ourselves in a critical stance toward them. This freeing process is what makes critical reasoning possible. Only by the study of our own cultural history in foundational historical texts do we free ourselves from that history and thus achieve the standpoint of critical reasoning. "Critical reasoning is achieved in the interplay between the continually acquired content of our cultural history and the continual serious attempt to reach standpoints from which to focus upon and criticize our historically acquired prejudices. That serious, indispensable attempt is the careful study of foundational historical texts."

Two articles are contained in the next section, "The Problem of the Unity Source for Critical Reasoning." They argue from the perspectives of metaphysics and of theology, each of which has, in