



Introduction to the issue: *Critical thinking*

We live in the age of information. The amount of information is overwhelming and it expands more and more with every year. Naturally, not all information is important or worthy of our attention. We need the ability to evaluate and select useful information. This need is pressing also because we live in a socio-political reality where the truth is accompanied or even replaced by post-truth, alternative facts, fake news, propaganda or sheer manipulation. We should be aware of these epistemically and morally negative phenomena and try to defend ourselves against them. Critical thinking skills come in handy here. They are useful for everyone and turn out to be especially beneficial for students and researchers. Also, critical thinking may come to the aid of therapists, politicians or journalists, since it serves as a universal tool to all those who happen to face confusion, strong disagreement and social conflict, to all who are engaged in various forms of social communication. It is no wonder then that there are many models of critical thinking, many theories, concepts, and programs which may be successfully implemented in a specific context. Some of them will be discussed in this issue.

Critical thinking is useful in everyday life but it is also embedded in scientific and philosophical practice. Science is, by its very nature, critical in the sense that it must adhere to high methodological standards and substantive requirements. Moreover, scientific practice is a creative activity, for example in formulating hypotheses or combining already known methods. This requires vigilance and self-criticism. Criticism may also provoke some new solutions and bring about a genuine contribution to the field. The same refers to philosophy as a discipline. Critique often leads to verification of the assumptions, methods, conceptual apparatus or argumentative rigour. Criticism in philosophy, however, has a special status; it is usually a process of creative philosophizing which may consist, inter alia, in giving up some assumptions and adopting others, or in specifying and clarifying concepts, providing counter-arguments or revising them.

The author of the first article in this issue of *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal* presents a philosophical and logical model of critical thinking in higher education. In his paper, Andrzej Dąbrowski defends a slimmed-down version of critical thinking, that is one that emphasizes the role of analysis, evaluation and argumentation but does not embrace such issues as problem solving, decision making or creative thinking. Critical thinking takes place in various situations including the communication context, here regarded as the most important one. It may include scientific discussion, information and cognitive dialogue, deliberative dialogue, persuasive or negotiating dialogue. Each of these dialogical situations will require a slightly different type of analysis and argumentation.

The second paper, addressing the leading theme of the issue, presents a psycho-pedagogical model of critical thinking. Iwona Chaja-Chudyba opens with the question “why are we afraid of criticism?”, and discusses in detail a number of inhibitors, such as: 1) emotional and motivational barriers, 2) cognitive barriers, 3) personality barriers, 4) the external barriers of a given educational environment, 5) social, cultural, ideological and political barriers, 6) educational barriers. The typology and analysis of inhibitors of critical thinking are the result of the author’s empirical research within the field of psychology and pedagogy. This research also prompted the author to develop her own concept of constructive criticism as a separate form of thinking which combines both the logical and analytical, as well as the creative elements.

Martijn H. Demollin argues that correlations merely suggest the presence of a causal relation. To show this he juxtaposes authentic scientific discourse with popular science discourse. Then, with the help of a well-chosen example, the author shows that a strawman fallacy has been committed in popular scientific literature. Demollin persuasively introduces his own argumentative pattern for the argument from correlation to cause. He also formulates eight critical questions: 1) is there a positive or negative correlation between A and B? 2) is the correlation between A and B significant? 3) is the correlation between A and B not due to mere chance? 4) can we rule out that there is the third variable responsible for the observed correlation between A and B? 5) can we rule out that B causes A? 6) do premises provide an adequate substantiation of a causal relation from A to B? 7) do any exceptions to the causal relation apply, and if so, can they be clearly delineated as exceptions? 8) when a premise in the argument is missing, does this prevent a valid inference to a causal relation?

The next paper by Paweł Sikora points to the timeliness of Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy. Within the framework of the analytical philosophy of mind, an important discussion takes place today on the role of concepts and experience in cognition, about the existence of the conceptual and non-conceptual content of perception. Kant clearly poses this problem first when he asks whether the content of the perception is free from conceptual recognition, or is

it always already contained in a cognitive reference to it. Sikora considers which side of this debate would have been supported by Kant. In the author's opinion Kant is ultimately a conceptualist despite some non-conceptual themes. Sikora places Kant somewhere between strong conceptualism (in line with the interpretation of Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell and early Judson Brewer) and moderate non-conceptualism, not necessarily in Christopher A.B. Peacocke's style, but nevertheless quite an original one. In a broader context, this article can be treated as an example of a clash between classical arguments and some new ones within philosophical discourse.

Jakub Gomułka's article is a good example of critical thinking applied to the procedure of argumentation and some mathematical issues. The author presents three points of view, including Georg Cantor's, Ludwig Wittgenstein's and his own that he labels as quietist conventionalism. According to Cantor there are different actual infinities. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, rejects the very idea of actual infinity. His initial objections, formed in the late 1920s, were further enhanced several years later with the charge of the lack of application of Cantor's calculus. Gomułka distances himself from both of them. He claims that we can defend Cantor's theory and operate with certain mathematical techniques taking any assumptions we like as long as we restrain ourselves from ontologising them.

The main focus of Adriana Warmbier, the author of the sixth article in the topical section, is a reflection on the subjective ability to create various kinds of rules and norms ordering human action. This is a question of normativity posed by Kant and later taken up by others, including Christine Korsgaard. The latter seeks to consolidate normativity by recognizing two requirements relating to: 1) the Kantian thesis on the existence of a universal will and 2) accepting that this universal will is a law of self-constitution and as such constitutes a constitutive principle of a person's identity. Warmbier claims that the second requirement defended by Korsgaard, which in the author's intention is to supplement Kant's theory, is burdened with serious problems. This difficulty results from the limitations of the procedural concept of rationality which is to lead to the formulation of an unconditional moral norm.

The subsequent three papers are indirectly linked with the problem of critical thinking. Paweł Dybel discusses selected aspects of the history of psychoanalysis in Poland 1900–1939. He is specially interested in the interconnections between psychoanalysis and patriarchalism. The article questions the way in which Eli Zaretsky captures the role of Freud's psychoanalysis in transforming the self-knowledge of modern societies in his *Secrets of the soul*. According to Zaretsky, in Central European countries, Poland included, psychoanalysis then served in the democratization of social life and led to the destruction of the patriarchal order; while in Western countries it became medicated, becoming a tool of social control.

The next author, Przemysław Szczurek, presents a critical reconsideration of Yudhiṣṭhira, a protagonist of the ancient Indian epic *Mahābhārata*, who is referred to as an ideal ruler portrayed as a hero full of doubts and self-criticism as to his own status and duties. Szczurek develops his comparative interpretation on the basis of an intertextual analysis of both the Hindu and Buddhist sources.

The next paper deals with the aesthetics as a philosophy of art. Maria Popczyk's central problem is the body of the viewer juxtaposed with the image of the painting; both body and image are considered to be independent, which is a condition of any fully aesthetic experience. She demonstrates how, through phenomenology, pragmatism and the idea of incarnation, post-Kantian aesthetic may be extended.

The *Book symposium*, whose subject matter engages critical thinking in a socio-political context, with special focus on the current state of American democracy, comprises two articles. Anand Vaidya in his reaction paper presents some insightful comments on the recently published monograph *Political argument in a polarized age: reason and democratic life* (2020) by Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse. Vaidya poses some challenges which are subsequently addressed by Aikin and Talisse in their comprehensive response. The authors of the book believe that it is not argument as such which should bother us in contemporary politics. The problem lies in argument that really polarizes and does not allow us to see those with whom we deeply disagree as people who even have minds. For Aikin and Talisse, the key question is how we can engage in real disagreement in ways that give due respect to the political equality of others. The authors suggest that epistemology and critical thinking can be helpful in diagnosing political ignorance in a more nuanced manner. In other words, epistemology and critical thinking can make us better in our public engagements.

The column *Review papers and polemics* contains two review papers: one being a critique of the sociologization of culture authored by Janusz Krupiński, and another by Anna Szklarska who presents her detailed reflections on the recently published book, *Rewolucja Kartezjańska i inne eseje* [The Cartesian revolution and other essays] by the renowned Polish philosopher Paweł Kłoczowski.

The paper of Avani Sabade included in the column *Teaching philosophy* is another contribution to the leading theme of the issue. While referring to critical thinking Sabade uses the widely known literary figure of Sherlock Holmes. As she believes, this attractive fictional character may be instrumental in popularizing critical thinking among young people more effectively. The argument is that Sherlock Holmes' abilities, such as being observational, questioning, imaginative, inferential, experimenting, consulting, prone one to analysis, to judging, deciding but also not ignoring emotions. Holmes is also famous for and may promote such dispositions as attentiveness, the habit of inquiry,

self-confidence, courage, open-mindedness, a willingness to suspend judgment, trust in reason, seeking the truth. All the above mentioned characteristics largely overlap with the skills taught during classes on critical thinking. The author shows that Sherlock Holmes has all the abilities and dispositions selected by Robert H. Ennis except, perhaps, for the emotional abilities.

The issue also contains a Polish translation of a paper by Jacques Poulain, a contemporary French thinker, who raises a philosophical critique against globalization and terrorism. The final column includes two reviews of books now available in Polish editions: Andrzej Dąbrowski discusses Harvey Siegel's *Critical thinking and indoctrination*, and Andrzej Warmiński has reviewed Denis Dutton's *The art instinct*.

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