

*In this age of fake news and alternative facts, learning to think more critically is the first step of diminishing the personal effects of a society in chaos. "Loosing" our minds to free our inborn intellectual capacity is the final goal and that process is in this book.*

## **"Loosing" Your Mind: Liberating Your Intellect for Critical Thinking**

By Robert DeFilippis

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The background of the cover is a dark blue, textured surface. A large, light blue silhouette of a human head in profile, facing right, is the central focus. Inside the head, several interlocking gears are visible. A monarch butterfly with orange and black wings is positioned in the center of the head, appearing to fly through the gears. The title text is overlaid on the top half of the head silhouette.

# “Loosing” Your Mind

Liberating Your Intellect  
for Critical Thinking

Robert DeFilippis

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## **Preface**

### **The Crisis of Truth**

“It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society.”

- Jiddu Krishnamurti

Is ours a profoundly sick society, and are we well-adjusted to it? Here’s my challenge to you: read this preface, and you decide.

#### **Society’s sickness.**

The phenomenon of the free-floating truth we see in fake news and alternative facts is just a symptom of a profoundly sick society. The complexity of our society’s sicknesses goes much deeper. “As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.” Our country’s twig was bent from its birth in genocidal violence that eliminated whole nations of other human beings and took their lands; it’s enslavement of others to build a foundation of wealth for their “owners”; the continuation of that enslavement with the abuse of laws even after their emancipation; labor laws that prohibit collective bargaining and continue to support labor theft and the growing inequities in the distribution of the nation’s wealth causing seventy percent of our neighbors to suffer continual economic distress.<sup>1</sup>

The last 40 years of austerity programs and tax cuts have deteriorated the government’s institutional infrastructure. This deterioration resulted from a failed economic policy that reduced the wealthy’s taxes and promised their wealth would “trickle-down.”

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<sup>1</sup> Five percent of the U.S. households own 35 percent of the nation’s wealth. Twenty five percent of households own 32 percent of total wealth. The remaining 70 percent of households suffer economic distress.

Those who suffer most are convinced to be the avid supporters of the causal policies with propaganda blaming their problems on the *other* political party—always on the other party.

We are a nation that has been at war 227 out of 244 years – 93 percent of the time since our founding in 1776.<sup>1</sup> Our military is a major complex, not merely a defense establishment. An enormous killing machine, it consumes over half our national budget. The guns and munitions industry makes billions of dollars selling us fear. It’s no wonder we have over 300 million guns in our hands, and many of us feel the need to carry one with us.

All this is sad enough, but our sickness has created national schizophrenia. We are divided into two opposing factions, each with starkly different utopian dreams of the “*shining city on the hill*”—a psychic continuation of a Civil War where over 600,000 of us died. All this said, we still do not recognize the sources of this sickness. The evidence? As I write this book, “President Donald Trump has instructed federal government agencies to halt racial sensitivity training with a White House memo that condemned such initiatives as contrary to the nation’s “fundamental beliefs.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Our adjustment.**

The majority of us are “well-adjusted” by the *cognitive device*<sup>2</sup> known as *presentism*, “the uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes.” Why wouldn’t we be? We are awash in meaningless and superficial slogans. They are designed to keep us in a trance-like illusion. Creating and acting out a public persona is sufficient to demonstrate loyalty to country—no need for critical thinking or analysis of the issues we face. For instance, we’re seen as loyal Americans if we display the national flag, repeat vague slogans like “support our troops,” and participate in ritualized behaviors like standing with our hats off and hands over our hearts for the national anthem.

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<sup>2</sup> Cognitive device is a thinking tool in this case its purpose is to reconcile an external reality with an internal simulation in our minds.

As children, before we had the cognitive capacity to understand what we're doing, we were taught to pledge allegiance to a flag that has waved over some of the worst inequities in human history. As adults, if we refuse to pledge allegiance as a sign of protest to those inequities, we are denounced, shunned, and in some severe instances, our careers are "canceled." We're propagandized into not noticing the inherent ineptitude of both political parties and their failure to implement and sustain a functioning representative democracy. Many of us recognize our present status as a *failed state*—a political body that has disintegrated to a point where the basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government no longer function properly. A state can also fail if the government loses its legitimacy even if it performs its functions properly. For example, one party has been in power for 12 of the last 20 years and has only won a single election by the popular vote. The antiquated Electoral College, a remnant of the antebellum period, is the deciding body and has overruled the popular votes in all those other instances. This process has resulted in a government controlled by a party that does not represent the majority.

We're divided and distracted by a for-profit press. It has carved us into demographic groups and shapes the news to confirm each group's differing values, respectively. Hidden in plain view is the fact that when either party governs, they add more wealth to the coffers of the already obscenely rich who own them. Their wealth in itself isn't the problem. The problem is, the government supported laws that favor the wealthy over the ordinary wage earners, so wealth keeps getting swept up to the already rich at the expense of the already poor.

We are regularly propagandized with how the party in power needs to be ousted, and the other party needs to take over to fix the mess they both created. Occasionally a political candidate will campaign as an outsider to fix the mess he helped create as an incumbent. Is it any wonder? Congress usually has an approval rating between nine and 15 percent, and we re-elect incumbents 90 percent of the time. Even though the two political parties claim to be



different, we don’t notice that both parties facilitate society’s sickness.

## **Two emerging forces.**

Two opposing forces have emerged to “cure our sickness.” Both ignore the fact that a cure must integrate both sides’ views to have any chance of lasting effect. Both make the current situation worse. They are the extreme right, a re-emergence of the newest form of white supremacy reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan. We see it in the display of Confederate Flags and a belief system of perverted Christian principles called White Christian Nationalism. It is fascism wrapped in an American flag, a flag being flown in the company of Nazi swastikas, seeming to confirm this group’s apparent ideological confusion.

And on the extreme left, there is a radical form of Marxism disguised as social justice carried on by SJW’s (Social Justice Warriors) who are “woke.”<sup>3</sup> The latest cohort of members disrupts voices that offer a differing opinion. They’re turning universities into “safe spaces” where professors must now issue “content warnings (sometimes called “content notices” or “trigger warnings”), to warn them of any new ideas they might find disturbing. They boycott and disrupt “called-out people” and try to thrust them out of social or professional circles using social media or the mainstream press. (You can find an excellent example of this extreme by searching the term, “Evergreen State College Racism Protests.”)

While cures for a profoundly sick society require different thought methods, these extremists sound like their final solutions to these social problems are removing the old and installing their own power structures made up of their ideological cohorts. With absolute power in their hands, both the extremes of the right and the left have shown historically they are capable of forms of tyranny that cost millions of people their lives.

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<sup>3</sup> The “Urban Dictionary defines ‘woke’ as being aware and knowing what’s going on in the community. It also mentions its specific ties to racism and social injustice.”

## **Solutions.**

For a solution to be useful to us as individuals, it needs to be within our power. But there exist forces working against our society's ability to solve our problems. They are related to the same cause—the insatiable need for money and the power to influence our economic system to have more money. It's the same underlying motivation that spurred us to steal indigenous people's lands, wipe out entire civilizations, and enslave millions of other human beings. Today this insatiable need for money shows up in the vast data collection and tech marketing industries where “our attention” is the product being sold to advertisers.

For instance, social media sites use potent algorithms to collect details on every individual move we make, then classify us, and then promote news, advertising, political spin, etc., with pinpoint accuracy. The end result is they make more money than any other industry in history, and we see vastly different representations of our society's issues. This process exacerbates the divisiveness caused by fake news and alternative facts. It gives each of us a separate and often quite different set of “facts,” consequently, how can we ever reach an agreement on what is true?

The second issue is the lack of a working representative democracy that I mentioned above. The maximum power we have is to vote for a person we think will represent the interests of the people who elect them. Ours has failed. Corporate lobbyists write our laws, a revolving door of ex-corporate executives now inhabits the highest levels of government, and the campaign process has turned into an auction of politicians. Yet, the more destructive factor we are now experiencing is related to the first issue. The social media information industry is feeding us conflicting information with pinpoint accuracy. This misinformation is tailored to what we already believe and prohibits healthy dialog in the public sphere. Instead, we are convinced we are absolutely correct in our views with no reason to consider another person's perspective. This distraction has allowed wealthy donors and large corporations to capture and own the government.

The third problem is that the “permanent lie” has found root and is flourishing. From Chris Hedges’ latest book, *America, The Farewell Tour*, “What we see today is the “permanent lie.” It is different from the falsehoods and half-truths uttered by previous politicians. Theirs were “political lies” designed to manipulate but not cancel out reality entirely. The permanent lie is not remotely connected to any reality. Much like Disney’s Magic Kingdom, permanent lies are intended to represent no reality outside their imaginary boundaries, simulations themselves. This phenomenon is described by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s concept of a fourth stage simulation, “the appearance of truth based on a simulation of a reality that doesn’t exist.”

For example, as I write this book, the election of an American president is underway. One candidate began spreading the permanent lie that the “news media is fake” and “voter fraud” would cost him the presidency. The election is over; he lost, and he continues to insist the election was a fraud. There is no evidence for his claim. He persists and refuses to concede the election by admitting the truth. In the process, he has convinced a large portion of the voting public that his permanent lies are true. For them, his lies have replaced reality, so they base their truth on his permanent lies. This example perfectly demonstrates the power of permanent lies.

As in the above example, a permanent lie is perpetuated even when evidence discredits it. Those who speak the truth in contradiction to the permanent lie are attacked as liars, irredeemable pessimists, naysayers, haters, even traitors. The refusal of evidence by believers in the face of permanent lies is participation in a kind of “collective psychosis.” Hannah Arendt wrote about the ultimate effect of permanent lies in her first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.<sup>3</sup>

“The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lie will now be accepted as truth and truth be defamed as a lie, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world — and the category of truth versus falsehood is among the mental means to this end — is being destroyed.”

So, a large portion of Americans live in simulations of truth created by permanent lies. They are being convinced to cancel out

what's really happening and replace it with simulations designed to convince them to live in a reality that doesn't exist. We are seeing the results of following Breitbart News' former executive Steve Bannon's<sup>4</sup> approach to political domination, "flood the media with shit." (direct quote)

"Vox writer Dave Roberts calls this an 'epistemic crisis.' The foundation for shared truth, he argues, has collapsed.<sup>4</sup> I agree with that, but I'd frame the problem a little differently. We're in an age of "truth" based on simulations created by permanent lies instead of reality, lies based on an agenda of power and control of government by people who say they hate government.

For instance:

- Tax decreases sold as help for the working family (truth based on simulation,) which hasn't happened but has helped the already wealthy keep even more money. (truth based on reality).
- The ACA (Obamacare) is failing. (truth based on simulation) The ACA covers millions of Americans effectively. (truth based on reality)
- Promise a new healthcare insurance plan for four years that will provide lower premiums, guaranteed pre-existing coverage, and no lifetime maximums. (truth based on simulation) There is no such plan four years later. (truth based on reality)
- Claim non-existent plans as though they are real. For instance, a border wall will stem the tide of immigrants from the south. (truth based on simulation). Illegal immigration comes mainly from people overstaying their visas. (truth based on reality)
- Immigrants are the cause of intractable social problems in our society. (truth based on simulation) Immigrants cause far fewer social problems than current residents. (truth based on reality)
- Radical right groups are not terrorists. The real terrorists are on the radical left and from the Mideast. (truth based on simulation) The

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Kevin Bannon is an American media executive, political strategist, former investment banker, and the former executive chairman of Breitbart News

FBI declares radical right-wing extremists to be terrorist organizations. (truth based on reality)

The result? An American president tells over twenty-one thousand verified lies and never responds to any request for evidence for false claims, and maintains the support of almost fifty percent of our voting public. These are just a few examples of what adds up to a profoundly sick society.

So, what can we do? What is a solution for those of us who feel (and are) helpless to change the primary causes in our profoundly sick society?

Dr. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and holocaust survivor, gave us a clue in his historically famous book, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning: An Autobiography*. In this book, he proposes that the main route to lasting mental health is to find meaning in one’s life. A prisoner in a Nazi labor camp, he observed that those who could find and cling to meaning in their lives tended to survive. Those who did not, perished. He identified what he called “The last of the human freedoms: to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way. And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you become the plaything to circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity...”

While this seems relatively straightforward, it is far more complex. To maintain a mentally healthy state amid society’s sickness implies we reach and maintain a state of personal balance. It is a psycho-emotional grounding that is a fixed data point from which we can determine what constitutes meaning for us and how we achieve it. Here’s the challenging part: we all already have a personal fixed data point, but it has been influenced by this profound sickness in our society and was before you knew what was happening. You inherited it from previous generations who raised you to adulthood. You unconsciously reinforced it with every experience you’ve ever had.

And it is utterly invisible to you because it exists in the unconscious parts of your psyche, which constitute about 95 percent of your thinking processes. This unconscious 95 percent of your psyche is the target of the book.

If you've read this far, I hope you can see my purpose is not a political rant about which party or politician is better. Instead, I hope to give you the tools to think more critically and protect your mental health in a time of chaotic change. Our sick society will evolve into whatever it does, but we can all ground ourselves such that we are prepared to handle whatever comes with peace and composure. This personal balance is in our hands.

### **Deciding.**

It's time to decide. I gave you the challenge at the beginning of this preface. Having read this far, you decide. Is ours a profoundly sick society? If your answer is no, you may not need to read further. But if you think it might be sick, read on.

Robert De Filippis



## **Introduction**

### **Our problem-solving problem.**

“If you choose to not deal with an issue, then you give up your right of control over the issue, and it will select the path of least resistance.”

— Susan Del Gatto

Americans don't seem to be good problem solvers until problems reach a crisis stage. Until then, we let our problems take the path of least resistance, as Ms. Del Gatto writes in the quote. Many of the more serious problems eventually reach the crisis stage, then our focus is on immediate symptomatic relief. We often feel satisfied if we can “fix the blame” and not “fix the problem.” When this happens, the causes just recede into the background and simmer until they erupt again.

Effective problem analysis must precede efforts to solve problems if there are going to be lasting solutions. Problem-solving starts with defining the “object with the defect” and the “defect on the object.” Otherwise, we risk wasting our efforts trying to fix the wrong object, the wrong defect, or both.

In preparing to do critical thinking, the “objects with the defects” are our psyches. The “defects on the object” are all the conceptual errors and misperceptions in our unconscious minds. The idea that our psyches are filled with conceptual errors and misperceptions may seem difficult to accept, and that's understandable. It's not mandatory to believe. As Morpheus tells Neo in *The Matrix*, “You take the blue pill...the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe.”<sup>5</sup>

But you can't learn critical thinking because you won't distinguish the objective facts from the conceptual errors and misperceptions that reside in your unconscious psyche.

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<sup>5</sup> The theories of French social theorist Jean Baudrillard influenced the movie, “*The Matrix*.”



Assuming you’ve decided to accept the proposition that your psyche is as full of the conceptual errors and misperceptions as is everyone’s, the next question is, how did it all get there? It came from America’s historical and familial narratives within which you grew to adulthood. The sickness I explained in the preface about this country’s origins continues to affect our national narrative. If you cannot withstand a critical look at the illness in our national and your familial narratives, don’t attempt critical thinking. Critical thinking has a prerequisite stage. It is the stage within which you learn the fine art and discipline of arguing with yourself. Unless you are successful in this stage, you will not have access to the full use of your inborn intellectual capacity. Arguing with yourself begins the process of liberating your intellect from the bindings that previous generations of people have placed on it.

To be specific, we need to argue with our automatic first responses to external stimuli as they flood our attention. Our “tip of the tongue” reflexive thoughts often come from the shadow side of our unconscious psyches. We all know the feeling of saying or thinking something we didn’t want to say or think. In the popular vernacular, we must “stop and reflect” to allow a second thought to emerge and take the time to consider its validity. Because with practice, that second thought can come from intellectual consideration and not from our unconscious psyche’s conceptual errors and misperceptions. The ability to liberate and use your intellectual capacity to develop and engage in that second thought is the focus of this book.

In the full text, we begin to explore two theories as a mechanism for understanding our authentic selves because they combine to form our personalities. These two theories, the external social and internal biological structures, make us who we are. They are transparent to us until their effects show up in our thinking and behaviors. Examining these two theories will allow us to understand the origins of our conscious thinking and actions. There is an important caveat here; there is no all-encompassing theory or system

that answers all questions, solves all problems, and explains all behaviors.

We then explore a history of the primary philosophers that shaped Western thinking from the pre-Socratic era until today. Principles from these historical sources serve as the foundation of the narratives that form our current presuppositions. Consequently, our reconciliation task is to appropriate or strengthen those principles that serve us today and replace those that don't. Throughout this book, you will have opportunities to reflect on the sources or origins of the principles and conventions that make up your ontology; this is your underlying unconscious theory of the nature of being. This theory shapes your understanding of who you are and how the world works. By doing this analysis, you begin the journey to a grounded place for your authentic self to dwell and critical thinking to start. But first, you must "loose" the bindings of your mind.

As we begin the deep dive, we'll shine a spotlight into the darkness of our unconscious thinking processes. Hopefully, we'll pierce that darkness and get a better view of the path. Although we know what parts of our brains are active when we think, we have no idea how our brains create consciousness. It's a unique attribute of sentient organisms and isn't duplicated in machines. So, we can relax. Human-like robots aren't about to take over, even though we've made great strides with supercomputers and Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems in general.

## **Choosing**

We'll explore how we live life with our mind buffered by our unconscious presuppositions, as most of us do. These presuppositions will come to light in our beliefs, whether they are factual or not. If our minds remain buffered, we will never become critical thinkers because these presuppositions, right or wrong, won't change. The philosophical foundation from which these presuppositions emerge is transparent and powerfully pervasive. It influences how we see the world, what we value, and what information we confirm and disconfirm. It is the source of meaning in our lives. True or not, our

beliefs provide the buffering to sustain the balance in our current world view. If we are somehow immune to the chaos and change that makes up modern life, we don't need to release the bindings on our minds. But I don't know of anyone who lives a life this sheltered.

Sometimes, like the personal crisis I experienced and describe later in this book, the universe won't let us find comfort in what we've always taken for granted. It is that precise time that presents us the opportunity to grow by re-examining everything we've thought to be true all our lives. We have the power of choice we're being invited to make by the crises in our lives, or we can retreat into the comfort of a view of the world that makes us obsolete while the world travels on without us.

This critical choice is ours to make. Like all choices, there are consequences. In this case, the consequence of choosing not to loosen the bindings on our buffered minds is a barrier to critical thinking. By choosing not to, we forfeit a good deal of our inborn intellectual capacity. This choice usually happens because we are “certain” of our beliefs.

## **Certainty**

Next, we explore the illusion of certainty as a barrier to learning more about the world in which we live. Until we agree to question our certainty, we are captured and trapped in a subconscious worldview created by someone else and given to us unnoticed as children. That's the beginning, and then we interpret our life experiences in ways to confirm our worldview and our self-image. To grow in the use of our intellectual capacity, we need to recognize the futility of our search for certainty. Realize that our worldview is just another view and not the world as it actually is. When we do, we can become different observers of our world and open whole new areas of investigation.

Our circumstances may not change, but we will see them as though with new eyes and become new observers. When we become new observers by questioning our pre-existing beliefs, we start to acknowledge what we don't know. Then we can begin to see simple

faith in the unknowable as a resource for new questions. When we do, we open to the examination of the origins of our beliefs. We can then re-address original questions, like who are we? What is our purpose?

## **Language**

Then we begin a journey into what German philosopher Martin Heidegger called our house of being, language. The very essence of being human, our unique languaging processes separate us from all the other animals on the planet. Some animals do have the most rudimentary kinds of language, but as we will see, we are different because we create our identities and realities within which we live with language.

Language is the most useful cognitive faculty for negotiating and enhancing our connections with the world because it acts as our user interface. We use it to create our inside world of experience and interpret our outside world of interactions. It is with language that we create our identities and live in society with others. We require language for complete human consciousness. And language is necessary to interpret our perceptions and make sense of our interpretations. In other words, language is the most effective method for stimulating our central nervous system to produce meaningful subjective experience. We are born “wired” for it with a universal grammatical bio-program. It is the most powerful tool we have at our disposal.

## **Language acts**

In the following chapter, we examine the language acts. These are the specific linguistic moves we make to co-create ourselves, our reality, and coordinate our actions with others. Language has allowed us to dominate all the species on our planet with few exceptions. We have used it to develop science and philosophy, the two great lenses we use to examine and explain our reality. On a more subtle level, we will see we not only examine and explain with language, but we also create reality.

## **Generative language**

Following that, we start an even more in-depth examination of the specific linguistic acts that co-create our reality. These are the declarative acts that create our identity and our reality. They precede the performative acts and create the ethos that influences our actions.

We’ll examine how the act of declaration can produce good and bad results that seem impossible when we make them. For example, President John F. Kennedy declared we’d go to the moon in ten years, and we did. It was within the space of that declaration that we created the technology to get there. On the other hand, the Challenger management team declared the spacecraft would fly over the engineers’ objections, and people died.

Declarations are powerful, powerfully good, or bad, but powerful, nonetheless.

Language acts are just a part of our linguistic power to communicate and generate reality. Another crucial part of our thinking process is listening. Listening means listening to our internal and external conversations. It is with listening that we stay in contact with our internal monolog and our experience of external reality. It’s not a stretch to posit that the buffered person hears but doesn’t listen to both. We will examine the difference between hearing and listening because it is vital to understand how our cognitive limitations are shaped by old beliefs built on transparent presuppositions.

## **Listening**

Going on, we will discuss how learning to listen will help us stay connected and keep adding more resolution to our mind’s model of reality. We will see how what we often think is listening is a distraction from what is being said. Our self and social perceptions are created and maintained in our social system’s language, i.e., our culture’s meanings. Therefore, our primary objective is to listen deeply and untangle “language games,” which philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called frames of meaning. By paying attention to these frames or games, we recognize the context that gives meaning to our

conversations. Language games can be disrupters or helpers as we learn to think for ourselves while listening to others. In the process of more mindful listening, we may clarify our self and social views of the world and maybe even get a glimpse of their structures. Then we are enabled to know what we are preserving in our unconscious minds. Then, we can better understand how listening and identifying language games can enhance the application of our intellectual capacity.

## **Argument**

Next, we examine the power and reason of a well-positioned argument. We will discuss how Dr. Jordan Peterson's 8th Rule of Life: "Tell the truth – or, at least, don't lie," applies to our internal monolog as much as our external conversations. Most of us break this significant rule, even to ourselves. As we saw earlier, telling yourself the truth entails a significant argument with your natural cognitive process that preserves and protects your perspective. So, telling the truth and not lying starts with resisting your natural internal urge to shape what you say and think to fit your existing self-image and worldview. To ground yourself on that stable platform of the authentic self requires you not lie to yourself. Lying will always affect your internal sense of well-being. Eventually, others will sense that internal conflict, and this will affect their opinions of you. Are you a person who can't be trusted?

## **Social constructions**

Following that, we examine the power of social constructions, which are all human in origin. They are so powerful we often mistake them for objective reality. And they are often built on insufficient knowledge or erroneous assumptions. Critical thinking requires more porous social constructions built upon more unifying sources of knowledge. They must produce an investigation that includes empirical evidence and subjective experience. This broader range of knowledge would produce a more substantial, more inclusive social

construction to provide for the individual's well-being, the entire human race, and life on our planet. In other words, we need another look, not only at what we know but how we know what we know.

As Dr. Jordan Peterson wrote, “We all have the entire world (mind-mapped) incorrectly, in many cases, in very low resolution, in others. But there is real comfort in the sense of the completion of that representation. To encounter something new is first to encounter the depth and danger of your current and oft-invisible ignorance, to shake and tremble in the face of the newly revealed complexity of territory under your map, and to experience trepidation, even exhaustion, at the depth and difficulty of the task at hand.” (Jordan Peterson, Ph.D.)

### **Scientific and religious social constructions**

We then examine the knowledge we derive from science and religion as separate lenses on reality but don't ridicule either one. In this book, I don't offer any new doctrinal truths from either system. New and changing circumstances will hopefully shape new interpretations that integrate rather than separate. As we go forward toward “loosing” our mental bindings, new interpretations will seem bizarre from both a scientific and religious point-of-view. We examine how we can learn more by examining both.

We'll review why we should at first consider them without judgment as to their validity. Because the criteria for our judgments are at the core of the barriers to asking the new questions we must ask to explore new territory. If we insist new knowledge meets our current thinking criteria, we will never break out of the hermeneutical circle. The hermeneutical circle refers to how one's understanding of the text as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts, and one's understanding of each individual part by reference to the whole.

Neither the whole text nor any individual part can be entirely and comprehensively understood without reference to each other, and hence, it is a circle. Much like the logic we find at the primary level of our universe, this is a universe of pure probabilities. Breaking out of hermeneutical circles of materialist science and religious

fundamentalism is essential to exploring new possibilities with critical thinking.

There are deep and abiding truths that seem to lie outside our human capacity to comprehend consciously. Yet, our vague sense of those truths stimulates our curiosity. Our failure to make this deep inquiry has resulted in a religious perversion and a pernicious dogmatism that threatens new questions.

We examine how we can break this cycle by questioning our old beliefs and beginning a new quest? When we do, we are opening our minds to “thoughtfully consider the events and problems that come into the range of our experience.” This thoughtful questioning is the first concrete step in critical thinking and entails arguing with ourselves.

## **Logic**

We go on to examine how logic can fail us. We will question the logic in our socially constructed reality to develop new interpretations. We will examine how all words are metaphors and serve as representations of something in our collective experience, including illogical assumptions and logical fallacies. Our language is filled with these assumptions and fallacies in the presuppositions that affect our society’s narratives. We absorb them unconsciously as we acculturate into our early lives. As we will see, our words co-create and change reality by the declarations we make and the action language we use in our personally created reality.

The first and most crucial step in critical thinking is acknowledging that history has filled the core of our familial and nation’s narrative with logical fallacies. As a result, Western civilization’s prevailing philosophical foundation limits our understanding of the universe’s most basic level. When we examine this foundation more closely, we will see that our logic creates the illusion of separation, infecting humanity, and severely damaging us and the planet. It cannot but affect every one of us who has matured in “the West.”



By changing this dangerous trajectory, we will reunite and reconnect our minds’ simulations with objective reality. Then we will see ourselves and our planet as whole and connected to create sustainable societies. We will examine how logic can lead us to the wrong conclusions with confidence and how that confidence is not guaranteed to represent the truth accurately.

## **Stories**

We then examine how stories were the communication method in illiterate societies since the beginning of human consciousness. Today, a large portion of humanity is still illiterate. So today and for all history, we have used stories to teach and inform. In this chapter, we examine our need for and the power of our stories. We’ll see that our stories contain heuristics, those shorthand methods of thinking that evolved through time. We sometimes call these shorthand methods “commonsense.”

We depend on our stories for the certainty we need to make quick decisions, even though they often only seem certain because of their longevity and coherency. They also affect our futures and are transparent until they fail. Their longevity and coherence create this illusion of certainty. They possess self-referential integrity by justifying themselves with other stories about themselves. We find that integrity to be safe and dependable until our stories’ limited scope no longer answers our questions. Upon a more in-depth examination, we also find they often conflict with other stories we believe. Even though most of us find the comfort and assurances we need, our stories will never give us certainty.

Discovering the logic at the subatomic level of the universe, specifically, our power to influence it has offered us an opportunity to create new stories: New ways of understanding our role in the co-creation of the reality we mistakenly think we passively observe. We end this segment with the question, “who will write those stories in a way that they don’t conflict? Religion or Science? Maybe both?” If you don’t take the time to find your authentic self, i.e., examine what you believe, to what story will you belong?

## **Challenges to our stories**

Here, we will examine the challenges to our stories and see how porous and inconsistent they are. People like Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Charles Darwin, and many lesser-known others have changed human stories' directions to benefit humankind. In this regard, science has done a better job of explaining how some of the universe functions. Because the scientific method promotes discovery, it is open to new information, even though we cannot depend on it to explain everything. Religion has been attempting to explain the wisdom that gives meaning to the universe. In its purest forms, it succeeded reasonably well until humans used it to promote other agendas. It can become a tool in the hands of evil people, a dangerous situation, because of its power to promote fear and control through threats of punishment.

## **Cognitive maps**

In this segment, we examine that feature of our conscious minds called cognitive maps. Cognitive maps are internal representations built on our interpretations of our limited perceptions of external reality. They are the invisible building blocks of our stories. Much like when we appreciate a beautiful building, we don't notice each brick; our stories consist of cognitive maps that build them. We will see that the process of conscious thought "is the manipulation of our internal cognitive maps of external reality."

Critical thinking opportunities start when we realize those maps contain all the unconscious presuppositions built on questionable logic resulting in our beliefs. Our mind's internal simulations of reality might be off-kilter until we check and balance those unconscious historical presuppositions with our lived experience

Absolute faith in the belief systems of science and religion stops us from doing this. We love our answers. Religious truth is grounded in re-interpreted and revised, incomplete models of reality created in a time of significant scientific and philosophical ignorance.

Science treats subjective experience with suspicion and claims that only valid answers are supported by empirical evidence—only if such proof can be reproduced repeatedly.

Neither model is whole and complete. Acknowledging the truth of Semanticist Korzybski’s proposition, the map is not the territory; we need new maps! This book lays out the reasons to re-explore the original territory as though with new eyes through critical thinking, resulting in enhancing our cognitive maps.

## **Reconstructing**

Here, we will examine the reconstruction of cognitive maps that start with a look at what we consider the “truth” about science and religion. We keep in mind, an underlying unconscious philosophical foundation shapes all our cognitive processes. It contains the core elements of both the scientific and the religious aspects of the prevailing Western philosophical worldview as interpreted by and in your familial and social class’s narratives.

We and the reality we co-create cannot be examined, understood, and explained separately from our human capacities’ limitations to experience that reality. We cannot transcend our subjectivity. We cannot stand aside and make objective observations about our cosmos without affecting it. We have scientifically proven we are inextricably intertwined. Being intertwined with the universe makes us co-creators. There is a mechanism at work behind this fact that we will explore. Some explain it with religion. Others explain it with science. Whichever it is, it is incomplete, as will our ongoing examinations be.

Our ontologies and epistemologies shape our incomplete understanding of our universe’s fundamental nature and functioning.<sup>6</sup> This understanding is the foundation of our maps of reality. Society may need to reach a critical mass of higher consciousness before it wakes up to this need. But you don’t have to wait. You can start today.

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<sup>6</sup> Epistemology is the philosophical study of the sources and validity of knowledge.

## **Morality**

This chapter examines how we cannot merely agree our actions are morally justified just because we base them on religious convictions. But there are moral absolutes if we at least agree the goal of human morality must be the flourishing of humankind. Unfortunately, we do not all agree on this goal. One of the reasons is we disagree on what “human flourishing” means. Is it grounded in this life in the natural world, or an afterlife in a supernatural world?

Once again, we are back to a question of fundamental philosophical beliefs. One simple, and admittedly not complete answer is:

- Look to science to tell us what facts are right or wrong.
- Look to religion to tell us what actions are good or evil.

These two simple sentences are not a deep dive into moral philosophy. Still, this distinction can serve as a first step toward organizing our questions into rough categories that can help us think a little more critically as we move forward.

## **Questions for critical thinking**

In this chapter, we examine what we need to question when we begin thinking more critically. In summary, the most dangerous attack on critical thinking today comes from religious fundamentalism, a pernicious form of ignorance claiming a higher moral ground but betraying every true religious principle. Going back to the essential elements upon which religion has evolved, as a reminder, Sam Harris offers a compelling argument in his book, *The Moral Landscape*. This purpose should be the only sustainable morality: “that of human flourishing.” (Harris 2010)

As we saw in the last chapter, this implies if we are to flourish, we need a healthy ecology within which to do so. If we agree to this morality, we need to agree on what constitutes human progress, in the

present, or a possible afterlife. To answer this question, we need to examine the errors, or misjudgments, found in religious systems based on three philosophical positions mentioned at the beginning: (1) the philosophical foundation of flawed and separate humans, (2) the cosmology of a dual and separate universe—natural and supernatural realms, and (3) the rejection of critical factual analysis in favor of blind faith in mostly unsubstantiated beliefs.

### **A different observation**

In this chapter, we take a peek at an interpretation of our world that might loosen bindings that keep your mind in its various traps. The reality that appears to us is highly influenced by what we already believe, and among other causes like heuristic thinking, gives rise to what we call commonsense. Commonsense is only an assortment of thin slices of what we perceive to be external reality. And we call it common because we believe others see it the same way. It is filled with logical fallacies. The vast differences between the actual functions of the universe and our commonsense experience of it should cause us to question the very foundations of our worldview. To do this, we must stop and reflect on the automatic thoughts and reflexive emotions that happen in response to the stimulus created by life’s chaotic nature. When we do, we can begin the process of critical thinking, reclaiming a sizeable unused portion of our intellectual capacity.

### **Gaps**

We then examine the knowledge gaps in science and religion and hopefully offer some useful insights. In summary, science honors empirical evidence and suspects subjectivity. Religions generally ignore empirical evidence and honor subjectivity. Ninety-six percent of the universe remains a mystery even to science. A more practical search strategy should include both the lenses of objective analysis and subjective experience to understand the mystery. While objective

analysis can describe and explain the human body's components, it cannot fully explain the resulting emergent property we call life.

Subjective experience is part of that emergent property called life. It all happens in the physical world, so our physics laws should consider subjective experience as a legitimate target of inquiry and knowledge source. Until more recently, science has not. To be complete, the investigation of subjective experience, specifically the effects of conscious observation on objective reality, must be a part of our explorations of the whole of life and the universe.

So, while we struggle to figure out the natural world, we are left to speculate about what we have considered supernatural. The limitation is us; our limited ability to experience anything outside of the classical level—our earthly experiences shaped by our evolution. Our physiology limits our experience (i.e., it is embodied). Our reasoning is limited to this embodiment. We simply cannot explain what falls outside of our human theory-dependent models of reality. We do not know what lies deeper and beyond. In this regard, religion claims to explain what science cannot. And for believers, that is sufficient.

Finally, we are left with nothing but faith. If we are to take the first step of critical thinking, we must replace our illusion of the certainty of our worldview with questions. Questions grounded in faith: Faith that says, if we keep investigating, we will eventually be rewarded for our efforts. There are much deeper unconscious mysteries to be questioned. There are many more profound mysteries in the universe to be discovered. The epistemology we choose to challenge our buffered minds by finding their contradictions is our choice. I propose we use both our objective investigation and our subjective experiences with a great deal of discernment. Because in the end, external reality will validate or invalidate our decisions as it did to me in my moments of personal crisis described in the book.

## **Faith and religion**

In this section, we examine the interaction of faith with religion. In summary, to believe in most religions requires a belief in

a divine or supreme being or beings. From the “God is in everything” of pantheism to the “many Gods of the Hindus” to the “single God of monotheism,” they all attempt to define and describe the divine in their ways—characterizations of living beings, usually containing a human form. However, they are incomplete and fail to comprehend entirely and explain the whole mystery of our existence, purpose, or meaning. “Nietzsche's insight — and the most limiting — was that there does not exist any perspective external to or higher than that our human consciousness can conceive. There cannot exist any privileged viewpoint, any abstraction or force outside the world as we know it; there is nothing beyond (materialistic) reality, beyond life itself, nothing "above"; there is no transcendence, nothing metaphysical.” (Neel 2014)

Nietzsche argued, “there are no facts, only interpretations,” and these interpretations are based purely on human theories limited to the human experience. In other words, we are human beings, trapped in human thinking, attempting to understand and explain what is ultimately unknowable by limited human consciousness. Contrary to his claims, religions are a natural outgrowth of faith, indicating there is something other than natural laws at work. In effect, religions are artifacts of our human efforts to explain the unknowable. We are trying to connect to what we know exists in a different way of knowing—trying to grasp what we cannot understand at a human level. In effect, religion attempts to reconnect us and keep us connected to the conceptualized unknowable we call God. We cannot transcend our human sensory experiences, so we contaminate this divine concept with human frailties. As author John Caputo, in his book, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct*, writes, and I paraphrase, God save me from god. I pray the unnamable incomprehensible God to save me from the nameable god of contaminated human imagination, the idol we call god.

There is logic to the order in the universe. A profound intelligence is at work interacting with us, and us with it, every moment of our lives. As science is now proving, we are co-creators in the context of an ongoing unfolding universe. This intelligence suggests to me a universal purpose. As this book progresses, we

examine the propositions that allow us to see ourselves and the universe from a different perspective—as participants in the magic of life and not as passive victims

### **Objective vs. subjective reality**

Next, we examine if there is an objective meaning to human life. Do we create it as our consciousness proves to be the vehicle to the continuity of co-creation, comprehension, and the ongoing unfolding of reality? Consciousness is our ground of being. We are individual artists. Objective reality is our canvas. We are co-creating shared reality as we live our lives. When we stop searching because we think we've arrived at *The Truth*, we stop painting on the canvas of human experience. When we maintain a stubborn and blind faith in our beliefs, our art project is not finished. It is simply abandoned. And with that goes the possibility of critical thinking and access to our inborn cognitive capacity.

This is why we need to question and consider examining the old and reconciliation of a new and different philosophical foundation; consider a new and different epistemology, a new way of knowing that opens us to become new observers. We cannot develop that kind of knowledge within the limitations of our current epistemological bias for empirical evidence or superstitious beliefs alone. Our subjective experiences co-create reality. And reality is an open manuscript of short stories just waiting for the next author's entry.

### **Summary.**

I hope this introduction gave you a sense of the range of topics that constitute the targeted "objects with the defects." While I can make that claim about my defects with a good deal of certitude, only you can decide which defects you need to address in your philosophical foundation.

I give a full account of those defects in my life and my journey of my reconciliation process in the full text. Today, I look back at 50

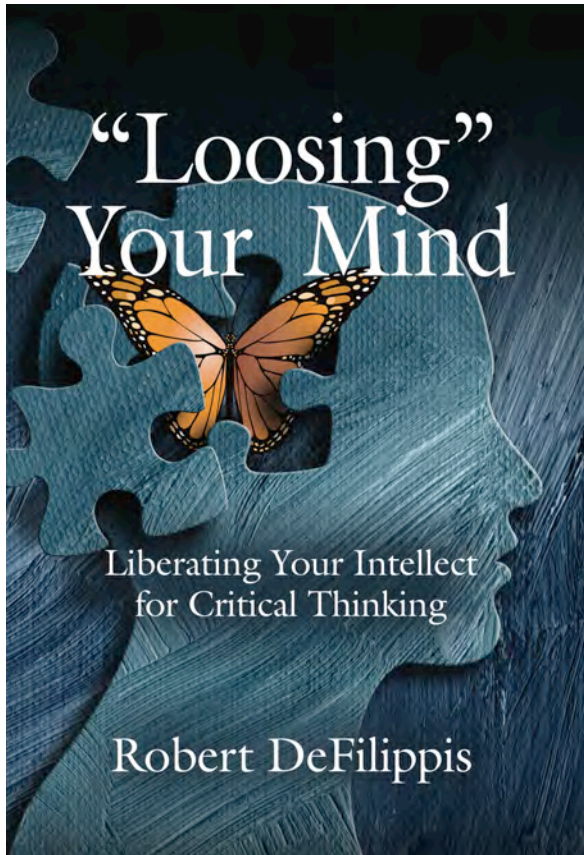


years of work to arrive at a point where I have a clear picture of where my reflexive responses originate. Now I can see the options I have to choose a second thought, another more reasoned response that reflects my lived experience today.

Finally, I'm ready to be a critical thinker. Although I often fall into being emotionally triggered by a negative stimulus and respond reflexively, I know when I'm doing it. Much like knowing the difference between right and wrong doesn't guarantee my good behavior, knowing when I'm reacting rather than reflecting doesn't guarantee critical thinking. It is and will remain a challenge, but at least I know the nature of the beast. Now all I need to do is cage it.

I hope you've found value in this introduction and want to delve deeper into the unconscious reservoir of your presuppositions, biases, and beliefs. If you do, you will release a portion of your inborn intellectual capacity you could only have imagined.

Robert DeFilippis



*In this age of fake news and alternative facts, learning to think more critically is the first step of diminishing the personal effects of a society in chaos. "Loosing" our minds to free our inborn intellectual capacity is the final goal and that process is in this book.*

## **"Loosing" Your Mind: Liberating Your Intellect for Critical Thinking**

By Robert DeFilippis

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