



## 2.3 Home sapiens – “wise person”

Evidence from visual representations and other archaeological records shows that thinking in humans began to rapidly develop from about 70,000 years ago. The scholar, Yuval Harari (2014, 23), has labelled this development a ‘cognitive revolution’ based on ‘new ways of thinking and communication’ which enabled us (named *Homo Sapiens* – ‘wise person’), to become the dominant hominid species.

The precise forms of thinking practiced by our hominid ancestors may be lost to the mists of time, but we certainly have plenty of evidence of our ability to prevail over other species competing with us in evolutionary struggles, and much of this can be put down to our relatively sophisticated critical thinking or problem-solving abilities.

Unsurprisingly, forms of thinking reflect the cultures in which they are practiced. Just as human forms of thinking define us as a species among others species, specific forms of thinking in different cultures help define the social forms and practices of those cultures. Among scholars there is much debate as to what extent forms of thinking (especially logic) are universally valid – or, only work within specific cultural contexts.

### 2.3.1 Thinking and cultural variation

Many aspects of critical thinking outlined in this programme are derived from a tradition of thinking about thinking which goes back to the cultures of the ancient Greeks. In the West, the ancient Greek philosopher, Thales, initiated one of the first systematic attempts to understand reality by reference to reasoning (*logos*) – using evidence and arguments, rather than relying on mythology, belief and religion (*mythos*).

In non-Western traditions, critical thinking has also been around for a long time. In this programme, a few examples of these alternative ways of critical thinking will be briefly referred to. This will give us a taste of what it feels like to think in a counter-intuitive way, or to ‘think outside the box’. The assumption behind this cliché is clear: our thinking is both shaped and constrained by the community in which we live, and is sometimes also stifled by stubbornly held attitudes and counterproductive habits of mind.

There is much evidence that the practices of critical thinking can vary significantly from culture to culture. For instance, scholars debate whether a form of logic used by the Azande people in the Sudan allows for a kind of reasoning which is very different from the Western, Aristotelean logic based on the principle of ‘non-contradiction’ (Triplett, 1988). From the point of view of the latter, the Azandean logic appears contradictory, but to its community, it makes perfect sense.

Some ancient Chinese thinkers used seemingly paradoxical statements such as ‘a white horse is not a horse’ (Fung, 1966, p.77) to draw attention to the problem of representation in language and to emphasize the difference sense that arises between a name and the actuality of that which is named.

One form of logic developed in ancient India required a minimal five-part argument structure to demonstrate the truth of a conclusion, as opposed to the minimal three-part version given in ancient Greek logic, and which is now generally accepted as a way of constructing a valid deductive argument. (Basham, 1954, cited in Lannoy, 1974).