

**Merab Mamardashvili's
Philosophy of Consciousness**

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**Consciousness is a paradox to which one
can never grow accustomed.**

M. Mamardashvili

Preface

The germ of the idea for this book is a direct consequence of several talks with American colleagues and philosophers during the academic year of 2009-2010. During my time as a Fulbright scholar I was privileged enough to have had some wonderfully enlightening discussions with both professors and students at Clark University on the philosophy of consciousness in the United States and Russia. My American colleagues invariably inquired as to which philosophical theories and approaches were most popular in Russia and how interested we Russians were in the philosophy of consciousness. As I became increasingly fascinated with the most influential philosophers and theories among American scholars investigating consciousness, I realized that there persisted an asymmetry of knowledge between our countries.¹ Russian philosophers linked to the

¹ Thus in the USA there are few books on Mamardashvili, this book's protagonist. Strictly speaking they are almost absent. As far as I can see, there was only one article published, including generalized material of an interview with the philosopher. It was a work published by American philosopher and doctor Bernard Murchland on the basis of his interviews with Mamardashvili in his last year (*The Mind of Mamardashvili*. Interview by Bernard Murchland. Ohio, 1991 by Kettering Foundation, 24 p.). In spite of usage of the word Mind in the title of this extremely interesting work it is

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problems of consciousness remained grossly unknown to the Western reader, due in no small part to a lack of available translations. After repeated attempts to bridge this gap through dialogue with my American counterparts, one of my friends, Professor Werner J. Kriegstein, could not but comment: “One day, Diana, you will write a book about those nearly forgotten philosophers you hold so dear to your heart. We Americans are always curious; but the Russian language remains an intimidating obstacle. So hopefully you can cross it for us and translate it into English!”

As flattering as it was to hear those words, the task at hand seemed exceptionally complex. At length, however, I found a translator, and with my friend’s words in mind I no longer had any excuses to procrastinate. Then there was another problem: which Russian philosopher should I choose? Despite the myriad possibilities, my choice was ultimately an easy one. The idea to devote this book to Merab Mamardashvili (1930-1990) was self-evident: Mamardashvili’s philosophy is very close to my own, and his theory of consciousness served as a source of inspiration and an important philosophical lodestar throughout my work. Mamardashvili’s philosophy appeared in the Soviet era of Russian philosophy when most of our authors and concepts were prohibited from

almost fully devoted to Mamardashvili’s social and political views; only delicately touching on philosophical problems of consciousness.

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exercising anything resembling freedom of thought. Yet it was precisely during this difficult time that Mamardashvili created his highly original and unusual theory of consciousness which, in addition to its systemic completeness, furnished its readers with an example of philosophy free of ideology and cliché. To the Russian reader, Mamardashvili's name signifies liberated and honest creative work, to wit, the possibility to think and speak freely.

Although precisely these qualities were desired of Soviet scientists and philosophers, their existence was regrettably rare. Mamardashvili never taught philosophy; rather, he tried to serve as an example of how to be a whole and harmonious person. In some ways, it was important for him to say that no scientific knowledge would teach you the correct way of living in the world, or ever furnish you with the recipe for a noble life. Therefore, in his view, he who managed to live suitably, freely and with great self-awareness would obtain profounder wisdom than those who devoted themselves fully to philosophy. This last circumstance settled my choice: I opted to profile a philosopher who was distinguished and appreciated in Russia, as well as a thinker who gave his people a bit more than abstract philosophical ideas and theories. And Merab Mamardashvili gave a considerable amount to all that had the chance of interacting with him.

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Compiled by Ralph Dumain**

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