

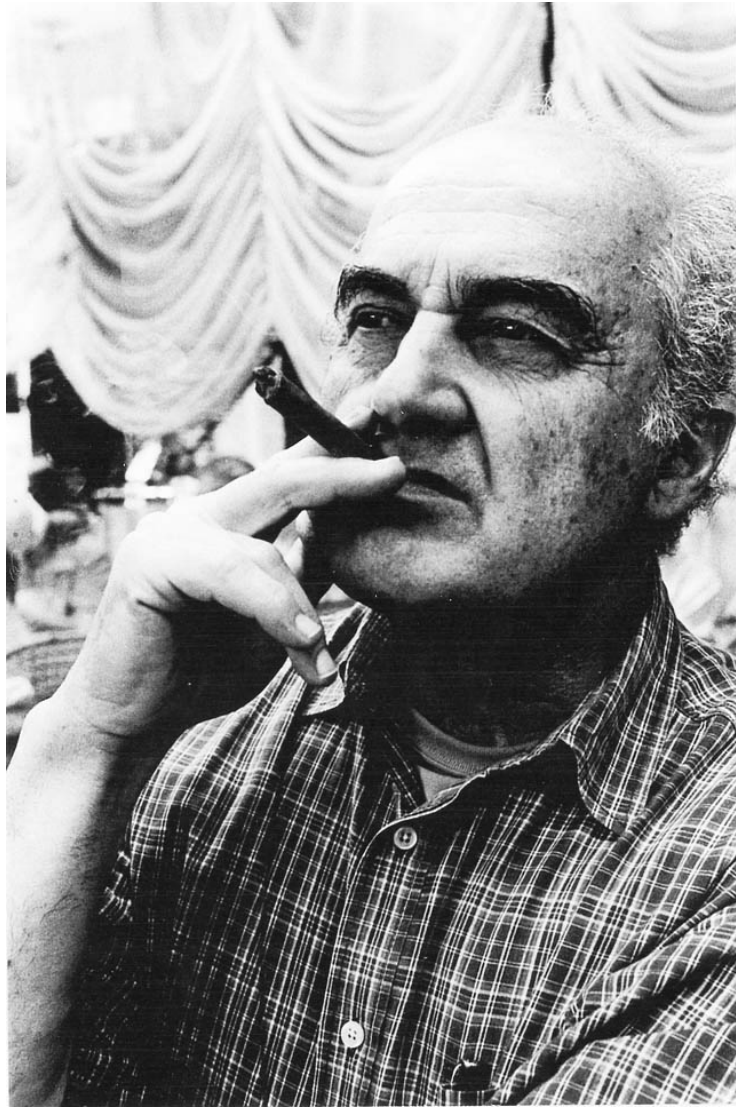
ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Just in Time for Summer: *Winter Letters*

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2005

GRANITE STATE NEWS

SECTION B, PAGE 11



PHILIPPE FRESKO - COURTESY PHOTO

GEORGES KASSABGI of Wolfeboro is the author of *Winter Letters: Seeds for a Philosophical Debate on the Reality of Human Nature and Behavior*. The book is available at the Country Bookseller in Wolfeboro.

By SARAH ANDERSON
Contributing Writer
WOLFEBORO —
“This is not a novel. It’s a different beast,” said local author Georges Kassabgi in a recent interview about his book *Winter Letters: Seeds for a Philosophical Debate on the Reality of Human Nature and Behavior*. He said that 90 percent of the text is nonfiction and he does not consider it autobiographical.

When asked how he would describe his book, Kassabgi said that the first question addressed in the book is the following: “To take the human body and soul as the “starting point” for a theoretical development is the main cause for so many philosophical and religious theories. From Confucius to Buddha; from Plato to our modern philosophers and social scientists; from paganism to monotheism: each theory has an undeniable validity. But do these often conflicting perspectives help us

understand nature?” he asked.

“How can the complexity in and around us be explained when we take the human body and soul as the starting point? Why do we turn our back on twenty billion years of history?” he asked.

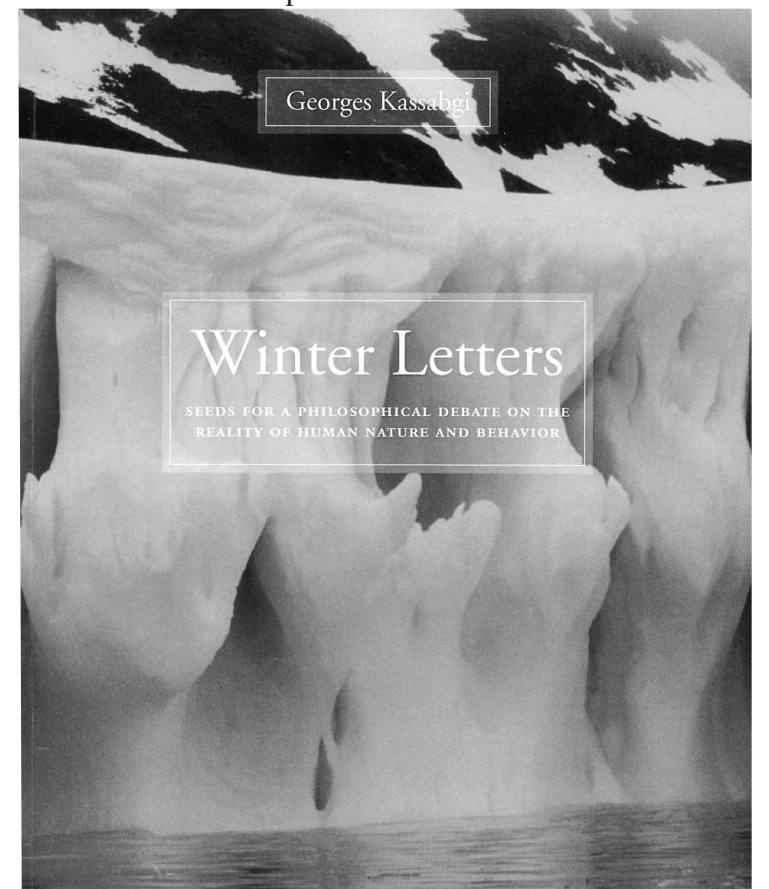
Kassabgi considers *Winter Letters* “a radically different approach to understanding the reality of human nature and behavior.” In the book, Kassabgi “searches his own past for events that had a lasting impact and from that discovers a starting point for humanity much further back – back at the very beginning.” Kassabgi invites readers to “sit at the center of a spiral that originates way before matter, movement, and change gave rise to the first sign of life.”

He said it is not a book of solutions. Rather, it is about taking another road toward the goal of understanding. When asked what inspired this

book, he said, “life events.” He described the “winter” in the book’s title as his “life’s winter, a season in life.” He said, “It’s like writing letters to the readers.” He also said there is a contradiction between the title and sub-title, “there are the essay-like sections requiring attention, and then there are snapshots

of personal life, allegories, poetry, photos and cartoons that are normally associated with relaxed reading.”

However each reader chooses to define the genre of the book, the most frequent comment among all initial readers has been, “It makes me think.” He stressed that while it should stimulate readers to reread



philosophy books with a new perspective, *Winter Letters* is not “another philosophical treatise.”

Kassabgi said that almost everything that has been written starts with what we see and we then look backward.

“The scientific person talks about the mind and then genes.” In other words, starting now and going backward in time.

Kassabgi’s goal is not to start where we are today and look backward, but to try to “imagine yourself at the beginning and move forward.”

He said that taking an earlier starting point in evolutionary time, that is: atoms and all “primal forces,” offers more of an “invariable foundation than genes or the mind or the body and soul.” He said the approach with the earlier starting point is presented

in the book as one of the “seeds,” but there is no plant yet.

Kassabgi spoke about the particular nature of spirituality.

“If you have a strong belief, it’s serenity,” he said. “The spiritual life is simpler.”

Although he believes religion is “certainly an important development,” he has never considered himself a religious person.

“I will not question the existence of something that exists, but we can take a different approach. We have many, many problems and they may be related to the way we look at things,” he said.

Kassabgi has been a full-time resident of Wolfeboro since 1978 and he is “always traveling.” It took him a total of five years to finish *Winter Letters*.

Even before high school, an adult in his family called Kassabgi “the philosopher” because he asked many questions. Then, his colleagues began saying it.

Kassabgi studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, worked as an electronics research engineer and later as an advisor to large and small corporations in many countries. He was granted five U.S. patents while working with General Electric and has lectured at Babson College on entrepreneurship.

He was interested in writing as a teenager but his interest was “brushed aside for other life priorities.” When he retired from full-time business engagements in 1996, he started his writing project at MIT’s Humanistic Studies Department, with courses in Darwin, Rhetoric, Lin-

guistics, and Advanced Essay Writing. Then between 1996 and 1999, he wrote “The Legacy,” a book of three essays on certain management challenges that are rarely considered by management gurus.

“I lived through the research. I was a living part of the research,” he said about the process of writing that book.

“My wish is to reach people I do not know,” said Kassabgi about *Winter Letters*.

Kassabgi said that he saw writing as a way of building conversation.

“Good conversation is hard to find. People talk, talk, and talk. But too often, it comes down to opinions...people like to dump opinions.”

He continued, saying that very few things in life are clear and “you have to

work to find them.” He said he cannot do that alone and he wants to do it with others. He said the main message is “We need to think before jumping on one theory.”

Kassabgi invites readers to have an open-ended dialogue with him. He said that eventually, criticism and questions from differing standpoints might spur him to work on a third and more detailed edition of the book.

A point Kassabgi said he is trying to make in *Winter Letters* is that throughout life, we all meet thousands of people, places, animals, objects, but very few are really important. In this book, he tries to present the important ones.

In a poem that opens the first chapter, Kassabgi writes, “things and lives come to us then go to

many we owe . . . others we may forget/a few we want never to meet again/but some beloved and always alive/confide an enduring presence/we embrace especially after they die.”

“In a different way, all of these events have their importance including my relationship with trees and cats,” said Kassabgi.

Speaking about the structure of the book, Kassabgi explained that Book One is chronological, while Book Two begins with the presentation of the seeds followed by three essays that give the reader a chance to try to understand the seeds.

Winter Letters connects the basic phenomena of science and humanity—right from the very start . . . from the center of the spiral and moving forward.