

ARTICLE

Critique of critical thinking. Cartography of contemporary positions regarding critique and some theoretical and clinical orientations on the subject

Crítica del pensamiento crítico. Cartografía de posicionamientos contemporáneos a propósito de la crítica y algunas orientaciones teóricas y clínicas en la materia

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Abstract

The article discusses contemporary positions around the notion of critique, questioning both the schemes that comprise it in binary terms -positive acceptance of critique postulated by progressive positions versus negative acceptance of criticism assumed from conservative positions- as well as the neoliberal version of critique. The latter formulates some objections and proposes necessary changes under the essential condition of contributing to the

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reproduction of the global system. Both the positive and negative meanings of critique are subsumed by this neoliberal version, in which self-proclaimed 'realist', 'constructive' and 'modern' dominate contemporary discourse. The overlaps between these meanings of critique are multiple, going beyond the disciplinary and professional framework in which they are enunciated. In this sense, three theses are proposed on the question of contemporary critique: i) there is no critique in general, indeterminate, without precise orientation, without explicit or implicit social commitment, without theoretical framework or ideological positioning; ii) all critical meanings mobilize subjective logics which are, at the same time, irreducible; and iii) the binomial "necessary objectivity / impossible neutrality" plays a determining role in the different meanings, in their internal dynamics, in their alliances and in their divergences, and also in adhesions and rejections. Finally, a reflection is offered on the safeguards that critical thinking should satisfy in order to continue its task and face, with some success, the challenges of the contemporary moment.

Resumen

El artículo discute posicionamientos contemporáneos en torno a la noción de crítica, cuestionando tanto los esquemas que la comprenden en términos binarios –acepción positiva de la crítica postulada por posiciones progresistas versus acepción negativa de la crítica asumida desde posiciones conservadoras– como aquella versión neoliberal de la crítica. Esta última formula algunos reparos y propone cambios necesarios bajo la condición esencial de contribuir a la reproducción del sistema global. Tanto la acepción positiva como la acepción negativa de la crítica son subsumidas por esta versión neoliberal, la cual, autoproclamada 'realista', 'constructiva' y 'moderna', domina el discurso contemporáneo. Las imbricaciones entre estas acepciones de la crítica son múltiples, desbordando el marco disciplinario y profesional en el que se enuncian. En este sentido, se proponen tres tesis sobre la cuestión de la crítica contemporánea: i) no existe la crítica en general, indeterminada, sin orientación precisa, sin compromiso social explícito o implícito, sin referencial teórico ni posicionamiento ideológico; ii) todas las acepciones críticas movilizan lógicas subjetivas las cuales son al mismo tiempo irreductibles; y iii) el binomio "objetividad necesaria/neutralidad imposible" juega un rol determinante en las diferentes acepciones, en sus dinámicas internas, en sus alianzas y en sus divergencias, e igualmente en las adhesiones y rechazos. Finalmente, se ofrece una reflexión sobre los resguardos que el pensamiento crítico debiera satisfacer para proseguir su tarea y enfrentar, con algún éxito, los desafíos del momento contemporáneo.

Palabras clave:
Crítica; ideología;
subjetividad;
objetividad;
neutralidad



Introduction

"Critical", "critical thinking", "critical movement": usual formulas in different domains of experience and knowledge. Endowed with a positive aura in social work and in the social and human sciences, these formulas usually arouse immediate adherence. They function as banners of recognition. Their presence in a discourse indicates divergences of form or substance with respect to other discourses, laws, institutions and practices. In partial or complete opposition to the existing state of affairs, critical discourse does not claim to be neutral. It affirms a more or less explicit commitment in relation to ideals of progress; it advocates rectifications of greater or lesser importance to what exists. Its adherents usually serve in political or cultural groups, publications and progressive institutions, or in a personal but no less committed capacity.

A typical scenario that is not, however, unique. Several others are possible, also very widespread. Above all, the strictly opposite scenario: critical positions arouse strong reluctance and rejection in the conservative media. Synonymous with destabilization, if not destruction of ancestral values and customary practices, they are reproached for their lack of creative capacity, their ignorance and underestimation of the concrete imperatives of the social, literary, union or political sector in which they operate. A notable exception: when it comes to denouncing adverse positions, especially progressive ones, in order to reveal undercurrents, inconsistencies and errors. In this case, the critique is continuous, bitter, exalted. It is affirmed that the critical modalities deployed in front of them are nourished by social resentment, typical of losers, and even the doubtful mental health of those who make it a system. On the contrary, those who practice a measured and circumspect use of criticism are supposed to be calm, unassuming, which does not prevent some virtuous anger when their ideals are misrepresented.

On the one hand, an eminently positive sense of criticism, progressive, left. On the other, a radically negative, conservative, right-wing meaning. It is a term-to-term confrontation. It is usual for the positive meaning to denounce the caricatural representation of critique by the negative meaning, which, in turn, highlights the partisan impregnations to which her opponent yields and from which she considers herself exempt. Typical figures characterize each meaning. In one case, critical disassembly, a procedure that the positive meaning uses in order to reveal the interested maneuvers of the opposing field. In the other case, the ideological imprint, that concealment of reality from which criticism conceived as a systematically positive value suffers. It is usually confronted with truth, science, honest research, the right measure and other principles defined as indisputable, which of course every individual or civilized group respects. On more than one occasion, the first letter of the cited



principles is a capital letter, a linguistic resource that underlines their intangible majesty.

The binary scheme -positive vs. negative meaning of critique- corresponds to a persistent reality, modulated according to disciplinary fields and political situations. It is found everywhere. To the point that, if progressive positions assume the positive meaning and conservative positions the negative meaning, it can also be argued, conversely, that the criticism accepted or rejected indicates the progressive or conservative character of a position. This scheme has a real defining power. Its terms function as a line of demarcation.

However, as in any binary scheme, polarity excludes nuances, interpenetrations, and intersections between its different elements. Therefore, it excludes the original combinations. This is what happens with a relatively recent position that, from the union and political dominance, is gradually installed in the social, health and educational fields. It is not impossible for it to progressively become the hegemonic position in these fields, taking into account the clever ideological and political camouflage that it entails.

This new stance ingeniously rescues the positive meaning of criticism by opposing it to this meaning, that is, to its origins. A sort of return to sender, so to speak. We are in the presence of a meaning in its positive way, but a radical difference, devoid of budgets and progressive objectives. Perfectly contemporary, this new look position emerges within the framework of neoliberalism today triumphant in multiple spheres of individual and collective existence. It is the neoliberal version of the critique or, if you prefer, the neoliberal critique of the existing world, insatiable and always dissatisfied with the still incomplete implantation of neoliberalism in this or that sector.

It is no longer a question, as in the usual negative option, of rejecting criticism or stigmatizing its systematic use. On the contrary, the criticism is clearly and emphatically affirmed - as the exclusive attribute of the once negative but finally modernized option, if not uninhibited. Such is true criticism, criticism worthy of its name, which at the same time confirms the excesses of others and designs viable paths of renewal. It is precisely here to forge constructive critique. Ad hoc formula, typical of this position, underlines how far critique is acceptable and when it becomes harmful. Its constructive character attenuates its critical status. This beneficial critique for the global system or for the social or cultural sphere in which it intervenes formulates some objections and proposes necessary changes -without ceasing to contribute, an essential condition, to the reproduction of said system. Therefore, if its dominance is in danger, it can pass tactical alliances with extreme positions with which it does not necessarily coincide but are useful to it - a common phenomenon in the political domain.



Freed from its immobility of yesteryear, the negative meaning transformed by the neoliberal machinery has become a self-proclaimed realistic option, as if it had gone through a facelift. It thus hopes to blur the rather dark and obscurantist notoriety that the negative meaning has in certain spaces. It hopes at the same time to overcome the supposedly inauthentic and gratuitous criticism practiced by the positive and progressive sense. Today, it continues to predominate in all kinds of antiquated positions, incapable of modernization, recalcitrant to any profound modification, to any effective progress. This is illustrated by this third meaning, a good part of the workers' unions and parties that call themselves progressive, both clinging like leeches to old apocalyptic myths, and even revolutionary ones. The positive meaning is part of the same decline and generates identical disappointments. In short, from now on the era of realistic, constructive, modern criticism extends. A new world, a new critique is underway. Higher business schools, among other institutions, usually transmit this type of discourse. Mutation -some say revolution- celebrated by vast cohorts of writers, teachers, essayists, journalists, in numerous countries. His motto is that critical thinking is no longer a monopoly of positive meaning and, in politics, of progressive currents. Therefore, a choice must be made between optimization (neoliberal) and stagnation (progressive).

What can be deduced from this quick overview, but hopefully eloquent enough, regarding critique?

Its complexity, undoubtedly. Each meaning, which we have mentioned in the singular, actually includes multiple internal varieties. They are all plural and disparate. Each one names a group. The singular makes it possible to isolate the common denominator(s), undoubtedly indispensable, actually scattered in heterogeneous declines.

Pointing out such heterogeneity is a useful score against dogmatic uses that imagine both admitted critique or disqualified critique as the archetype of all possible critique. Complexity, too, because all the meanings evoked are socially situated, articulated to certain worldviews, to certain doctrines regarding economic inequalities and ideological and political differences, to conceptions regarding gender specificities. Neither option is reduced to the mere professional framework. Its defenders and followers can ignore it, and even become disinterested in what they classify as a context outside of critique. But it is rare that his detractors succumb to such naivety; on the contrary, they tend to insist again and again on this strategic dimension, both professional and extra-professional. How to ignore it, indeed. In force in the field of social work, the different options also intervene in union and political action, within disciplines such as epistemology, pedagogy, philosophy. They practice social science assiduously. Its integration into common sense, typical of the middle classes, reinforces



the obvious and natural appearance of the negative option and tends to discredit the positive option. As for the realistic version, we know that it occupies a growing space in managerial discourses, the demands of unions and employer pressure groups, self-designated publications as moderate, a good part of journalistic networks, cultural campaigns in the direction of the popular classes.

It can then be deduced that, in terms of critique, contemporary options are ordered with respect to neoliberalism: for, against, in association -none without it. This determining parameter, implicit or explicit, facilitates the expansion of negative and realistic meanings and accentuates the antiquated and utopian character of the positive meaning. Such is the socio-historical condition thanks to which, regardless of their internal qualities and flaws, certain meanings prosper, and others become bogged down, must be rebuilt and restored in terms of guidelines and procedures. The intelligence, the expertise, the cultural capital of its defenders and attackers are not at stake, because we are not in the presence of a vague context that would magically stop at the threshold of this or that meaning. Said socio-historical parameter constitutes a condition of existence or, on the contrary, a weighty obstacle. Inexhaustible source of inspiration or ever-alert censorship.

Let us reaffirm then that all meanings go beyond the professional and disciplinary framework in which they are enunciated. Such is the reason for their eventual convergences and their frank oppositions. It is also for this reason that its defense or its rejection give rise to consistent polemics, censorship and large-scale mobilizations, conscious and unconscious adhesions and discrepancies on the part of the human subjects that carry them. The different meanings operate on a specific object -critique- which is also a pretext to address other, more general problems. Its *modus operandi* on its notorious objects suggest the alliances and oppositions likely to unfold in other spaces, on other objects.

Consequently, perceiving them as purely intellectual squabbles or mere personal points of view implies ignoring that they are socio-historical positions in art, social work and political action. The more you take them literally, the less the rich dimensions that each carries appear. And less is it understood that they provoke arduous controversies, impressive affinities, powerful disagreements.

Three theses on the question of contemporary critique

LAAt this point, we would like to submit three theses on the question of contemporary critique for the reader's consideration. Further discussions should correct this initial outline.



Thesis 1. There is no critique in general, indeterminate, without precise orientation, without explicit or implicit social commitment, without theoretical framework or ideological positioning. It is not a question of any kind of ought to be, of a desirable state or simply possible (there should be no indeterminate critique, let's avoid it, etc.). This first thesis confirms a real state, an unavoidable situation: in fact, such a criticism does not exist, nor can it exist.

Indeed, no meaning is exercised outside of concrete social history, but in a space framed by specific forces and circumstances, crossed by questions and problems that each option deals with, in its own way. This is valid for yesterday, for today, and most likely for tomorrow. Exercising a meaning -positive, negative, realistic- consists of arguing, supporting or challenging, in taking sides based on certain theoretical and ideological references. Condition sine qua non to account for the forms and contents of each meaning, the allies and adversaries that are requested or could be requested, the objectives that are pursued and the particular position that defines each one.

It is then clear that, whatever the position on critique, it does not stand by itself, stating it does not automatically make it intelligible, let alone justify it. Criticism works by delegation. Defending it, rejecting it or inventing an unprecedented formula implies confirming or questioning the theoretical and ideological references that this criticism represents. It is not essential that adherents and opponents are aware of this objective data, ultimately impossible to avoid: critique is a link in a chain that extends here and beyond it. Supporting or rejecting critique -in reality, a particular critical modality, endowed with specific contents and objectives- is an act in itself, a defined operation and is also, at the same time, indissolubly, a symptom to be deciphered.

Criticism travels solely and exclusively through meanings, declensions, interpretations. It is inexorably inscribed in a particular position: critique means a certain critique. Therefore, saying "critical", "critical thinking", "critical will" and other formulas of the same caliber are equivalent to saying little and implying a lot, probably too much: opening doors to all kinds of misunderstandings.

Thesis 2. All critical meanings mobilize subjective logics which are, at the same time, irreducible. Double thesis, dialectic. Whatever the meanings, they assume individuals and human groups that carry them out or challenge them, that associate or exclude each other and even dispute in the name of this or that theoretical-practical position regarding critique. Starting from this necessary human presence, as in any other domain, questions of status and social prestige, collaboration and competence, are put into play as well as intimate elements, narcissisms and their inexorable hurts, preferences and significant grudges in the history of the subjects: the theme of the



critique serves as a support or excuse in order to express -sublimate- or decant imaginary configurations, old frustrations and anxious loves that do not necessarily concern it, but serve as an outlet for them. In summary, the affable, hostile or indifferent reception of the critique, as well as its institutional and social paths, are related to personal interests of all kinds, with ethical positions of all colors, not always exemplary, for the rest.

Taking this subjective variable into account, identifying the direction that it prints in the elaboration of a meaning, the ingredients that it accentuates or on the contrary discards, helps to unravel absurd situations at first sight and apparently irrational arguments. Taking into account the subjective variable constitutes an irreplaceable contribution to the rarely linear logic of a system.

Complementary benefit: said variable indicates that none of the three meanings embodies a self-propelled entelechy, operating in a closed circuit. They are not mummified entities but living evolutionary formats. The passions they arouse do not present an exclusively intellectual or solely political aspect. Women and men manipulate them, get fired up by them, agitate them, agree to pay dearly to make them succeed. Capital reserve, however: it is impossible to establish a psychic typology or, even more far-fetched attempt, a psychic causality of the different critical meanings on pain of succumbing to psychologism, that theology that causes social configurations to derive from subjective desires converted into predestined recipients of those settings. Now, if human subjects intervene in the approval and rebound of critical positions, if indeed they are essential to the existence of each and every one of them, in no case does their presence justify why this. In this sense Hamlet is never far away: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy (Shakespeare, (1975 [1603])). In other words, the subjective variable becomes theological variation when it pretends to explain and explain itself without any external resource, when this partial explanation is supposed to be omni-explanatory, the foundation of things and beings, the human world is abandoned in search of some celestial nimbus.

It's about nothing less but also nothing else, that of an important, significant dimension, and above all not unique dimension. Nothing to do with a sovereign cause or with an essential purpose. Abusive extrapolations, such as psychologism, can be overcome when attention is paid to the singularity of situations, a singularity that includes at the same time that it exceeds individuals and collectivities; because there are also institutions of all kinds, relations of power and subordination, economic mechanisms. Proceed on a case-by-case basis, examining what is at stake each time and how this game is actually played out. If the subjective variable can clarify certain situations, it can also throw a thick smokescreen over them.



In any case, let us discard the hypothesis of a subjective intrusion into the objective mechanics of critical meanings. Instead of intrusion, articulation, hinge, joint. Nothing more superfluous than to insist on eradicating subjective logic. Nothing more interesting than working thanks to and despite them. It is then clear that no sanitary cordon is capable of transforming subjective problems and social configurations into impermeable worlds. It is, however, possible that an epistemological cord prevents us from embroiling these elements in a kind of undifferentiated magma.

Let us enter the second phase of our dialectical thesis, a corollary of the preceding one. Postulate: once a text is produced, its author becomes one more reader of such a text. A reader who joins all the others, without particular privilege. A reader who may be too much when he insists on the subjective conditions, intentions, pleasures and displacements of his production, on what he wanted to express, what he would like to be understood from the writing -to the detriment of the theoretical and political dimensions, that is, of the records objectives of the particular contents, of the scope and limits of the text. Under these conditions, questioning the result (architecture and logic of the critical meaning) is frequently perceived as a questioning of the honesty of the producer(s), such a narcissistic wound inflicted on their omnipotence— as if the essential thing consisted of not getting to the point. The same thing happens with the distinction "authentic criticism / false criticism", self-justification of the realistic option, perfectly useless to think about the internal and external dynamics of the options. That is why reasoned debate is a rather rare event and the parade of parallel opinions such a normal ritual.

In short, critical meanings are not subsumed in individual or collective subjectivity. Their arguments, positions, allies and adversaries, theoretical and ideological references, their goals, mobilize eminently conceptual, social, economic, corporate, and of course political perspectives. They are animated by objective logics, at least trans-subjective. As such, they function beyond the consent of individuals and groups. They obey intrinsic mechanisms, causalities and limitations. They display rationales that individuals and groups can celebrate, ignore, or misrepresent without affecting their workings - unless, of course, they penetrate into those workings and work on them accordingly. In this sense, critical meanings are comparable to bodies that, taking into account the law of gravity, fall towards the center of the Earth with or without the agreement of the subjects involved in this fall. However, since there is no fatality, the fall of the bodies as well as the critical meanings admit alternatives, exceptions, minor or major modifications.

Operational consequence: when discussing the different critical positions, careful attention should be paid to the possible confusion of levels and the amalgamation of



records. Consider then that the objections, replies and other attacks that one receives can represent signs, marks, indications to be reworked. If our adversaries are not always right, they are always right in any case. In a word, depsychologization work is a highly sensitive task for health. It is often fruitful to replace narcissistic excitements with some ethical clarification. The quality, relevance and even effectiveness of each of the critical meanings are at stake.

Thesis 3. The binomial “necessary objectivity / impossible neutrality” plays a determining role in the different meanings, in their internal dynamics, in their alliances and in their divergences, and also in the adhesions and rejections of individuals and groups in their respect. The dissemination or censorship of these meanings is closely correlated with this binomial. Agreeing on a strategic position opens the way for a series of advantageous elucidations.

Let's start by evoking the problem that this binomial allows us to elaborate. It is, in effect, a classic of epistemology, social sciences, law, professional practices in social work (diagnoses, in particular) and its clinical analysis (the so-called “supervision”) and discussions of common sense.

What is it about? The title-topic of this article (“critique of critical thought”) could be extended indefinitely: “critique of critique of critical thought”, and so on ad infinitum. Endless duplication. How far can we go and how do we know that we are successful? On what does this criticism of the criticism take support and how can we be sure that a new criticism will not be necessary? Let us remember in this regard that, in his youthful writings, Karl Marx (2006 [1844]) subjects the position of the so-called young Hegelians to an irony as ruthless as it is correct. In order to establish the criticism of any system on a definitive basis, they invent “critical critique”, which is supposed to go beyond the limits of simple criticism. Ingenious ruse, Marx points out, who wonders, however, who and how guarantees such criticism squared. Why not continue the cloning? Many other authors, before and after Marx, are confronted with this really arduous problem. Not just authors, really. All sorts of court instances operating in various domains (legal, professional, etc.) are requested in order to state the last, definitive, authentic and true word in an existing or likely litigation, establishing lines of conduct and possible concessions. Will the word thus obtained be objective and / or neutral? For their part, the courts know that far from setting the perennial rules of the binomial “objectivity / non-neutrality”, they actually outline provisional and relatively admissible commitments.

A hard problem indeed. Above all, because of the general understanding that permeates it. Indeed, it is assumed that “objectivity” and “neutrality” go hand in hand, the presence



of the first implies the presence of the second and vice versa. Non-neutrality is then synonymous with non-objectivity, and vice versa. Reason why the negative meaning simultaneously denounces the non-neutrality and the deficient objectivity, if not null, of the positive meaning: it presupposes that each of these factors explains the other. For this reason, it tends to dispense with a precise definition of one factor and therefore the other.

This current interpretation is not, however, the only possible one. Not especially the most fruitful. The synonymy “objectivity = neutrality” unnecessarily complicates the problem and ends up making it insoluble. Another approach is possible, according to the following work scheme (Karsz, 2011 and 2017).

Let us consider objectivity and non-neutrality in terms of specific and therefore structurally plural effects, dependent on two regimes that are also specific and structurally different. These are not interchangeable synonyms. Their respective compositions, their objects and their objectives differ completely and totally. Fundamental data of the interpretation that we propose here.

Objectivity belongs to the regime of knowledge, of argumentation. His training mobilizes notions and concepts, theoretical and methodological rigor, logical requirement, empirical demonstration. Its aim brings together reflections, analysis, debates. The error is familiar, at least partial rectification as a necessary and usual mechanism. It aims at knowledge, the peak moment in a process of production of relative and progressive definitions, in the course of which the doubt changes its aspect and content several times, while its function as a stimulating sting persists indefinitely. Objectivity is the possible effect of meanings, insofar as they reason their use of critique, justify the need or, on the contrary, its theoretical and practical inefficiency, the discursive techniques they deploy, their rhetoric and key-terms, and of course his way of countering his adversaries. In short: the objectivity is comparable to the Dutch polders, portions of the mainland reclaimed from the sea that need constant consolidation in order not to disappear.

Neutrality harbors a myriad of components, from subjective beliefs and passions to social commitment, from sublimation to militancy, from union interests to ethical positions, from indifference to accountability in the face of the future of the world. It also includes “class instinct”, Lenin's metaphor for the typical and unmistakable repercussions induced by the socio-economic and political position on the attitudes, affections and thoughts of the individuals and groups occupying such a position. For their part, individuals and groups usually experience these repercussions in terms of spontaneous results of their free will, natural and necessary (inexplicable) corollaries of life in society.



Insofar as each and every one of the aforementioned components privileges certain elements, positions, objectives, and excludes others, insofar as they promote certain positions against others, neutrality always consists, in fact, of a non-neutrality.

Two examples. An act of institutional foundation (National Constitution, regulation of a social service or a social policy guideline) proclaims religious neutrality: it is actually a manifestly non-neutral position regarding the relationship of religions with the state apparatus, its presence in social relations, its non-mandatory nature in the celebration of marriages and births, in obtaining aid. Religious structures tend to be extremely concerned about this non-neutrality that, taking sides against the religious monopoly of civil life, try to contain the non-neutrality of said structures. Another example, ethical positions. Contrary to what spiritualism claims, the strength of these positions comes from their non-neutralities, from the fact that they do not exist in the air but in the heart of history, in the commitments contracted in favor of certain social forces against others.

To reproach a meaning for not being neutral is to reproach it for existing. Its relevance, the reason for its existence, the milestone that a meaning represents in a debate lies precisely in its non-neutrality. Size precision: neutrality and its absence are never at stake. It is always, solely and exclusively, the forms, the contents, the scope, the values actually adopted or rejected, the references that are specifically appreciated or undermined, the positions that are actually promulgated or -on the contrary- discarded. Sense, then, of the negative meaning when it emphasizes the non-neutrality of the positive meaning: whatever the topic addressed, it is indisputable that it enunciates oriented, interested, partisan perspectives. Indubitable assertion. Irremediably erroneous assertion when it supposes that a meaning could or should be neutral, which allows this negative meaning to ignore its own commitments and partialities, its inscription in a historically connoted theoretical and ideological problem, its socially saturated ties with certain points of view, the controversies which he takes part in and is party to. In short, the positive meaning is not neutral only with respect to the non-neutrality of the negative meaning. The meanings do not differ because some would be neutral and others little or nothing, but because their respective non-neutralities are not of the same ilk, because they pursue increasingly singular goals. Without forgetting the fatal habit that stigmatizes practices, discourses and configurations whose non-neutrality ostensibly diverges from those not recognized as such, given their dominant character and their universal appearance.

With greater or less regularity, all the meanings use one of the registers to diminish or to praise the opposite register. Let them be two cases of figure, opposite and complementary. Case 1: the non-neutrality of a meaning automatically diminishes, and even invalidates the cognitive performance of said meaning, the relevance of its



statements, the rigor and scope of its analyses. The meaning that suffers from such an axiological failure suffers from serious difficulties in thinking correctly. Case 2: on the contrary, thanks to its non-neutrality, a meaning arrives without any major obstacle to objectively reason the criticism and to issue an adequate position on the matter - a position in which each, in its own way, can adopt the three meanings.

However, with non-neutrality, compromises and positions of critical meanings do not at all dispense with examining their eventual objectivity in the most detailed and rigorous way possible. Little or nothing can be said about this objectivity without going into the heart of the analyses, the text and the backroom of the arguments, in the body of epistemological and clinical debates. In other words, tourism allows only visiting but not knowing a country, even less inhabiting it, feeling and accompanying its palpitations.

Determining fact: non-neutrality can represent an obstacle or, on the contrary, an opening, it can hinder little or a lot the production of knowledge or, on the contrary, greatly facilitate it. The current representations are tributaries of a partial and partial vision in this regard. In this perspective, neutrality and non-neutrality represent value judgments, the first eminently correct and the second naturally harmful. These representations are incapable of capturing them as nothing less and nothing more than as existing realities, as configurations of fact, neither good nor bad, susceptible to various declines. When it comes to ideologies, the quintessential prototype of non-neutrality, current representations imagine them as solely anti-scientific devices, prisoners of blind militancies, and not also - more than once, en masse - as anticipations and capital companions of scientific work, as designs of new and welcoming modalities of individual and collective existence. Relegated to the unilateral role of inveterate adversaries, it is practically impossible to perceive that ideologies constitute precious, often essential allies. This difficulty does not reside in the theme of ideology but in its current, ordinary or allegedly scientific approach ².

Let's keep going. Indispensable objectivity, impossible neutrality: these scores highlight the characteristics of both settings, and consequently what can be required or set aside in their respect. Configurations that, as we see, are considered successively, each one in its own right. But that is not how they appear and function in different meanings. Their crossovers, influences, and overlaps are reciprocal and constant; their facilitating or, on the contrary, hindering roles are exercised without fainting, continuously, mutually. Each prospers or recedes thanks to and against the opposite configuration. Neither is sheltered from the other. They are specific, not waterproof.

² Frequenting the writings of Louis Althusser (1970) is precious to rectify these theoretical misunderstandings and their practical, clinical, and political impasses.

We are in the presence of a dosage - a dosage of one and the other - and not of a dilemma. Unlike a simple opposition, if not simplistic, and that in this title presents a reality that is more than improbable, the dosing values the interrelations, interpenetrations and influences of two effectively specific poles despite and thanks to the opposite pole. The dilemma is static, defined once and for all. The dosage is dynamic, changing, evolutionary. Dialectical principle par excellence.

Dosage implies that both configurations operate in positive, negative and realistic meanings, each time with particular content. In this regard, we advocate exercising a kind of indulgent prejudice, according to which the most irritating and dogmatic of meanings means something, presents a thesis to be closely examined; the party will does not completely suffocate the rational project nor does it necessarily inspire an ideological and fair political stance. Slipping between the lines, deciphering what does not appear in the text but what it says, is part of the reading work. Dig up the sayings and interdictions of each configuration, detail the dosage, the combination, the reciprocal fertilization, the intervention of each configuration thanks to the other, despite and against it, its contribution to the reproduction of the meaning considered and the elucidations of the real that it provides. It is about practicing a rigorous deconstruction of the meaning considered, in order to consolidate its weak points or, depending on the case, optimize the exit prospects. This means resorting to one or the other of the three meanings, since no point of view is stated here or beyond confrontations and alliances.

The result of such an undertaking, which in fact cannot be carried out in a single day, is a final radical displacement of the problem from which we started. This seeks absolute certainty, definitely indisputable, the origin of all origin. Its links with religious issues can easily be identified. In turn, abandoning said problematic implies posing the problem on a new basis - it implies modifying the terms of the problem. We have already advanced some elements: what matters first and foremost is the concrete game between effects of objectivity and effects of non-neutrality, their uninterrupted interpenetrations regarding a given theme at a given moment in human history. An essential point: objectivity and non-neutrality exist only within social history. They are evolutionary, obviously debatable and therefore indefinitely improvable, on condition of accumulating sufficient arguments and empirical evidence. Its guarantee lies, not in a celestial afterlife, a disciplinary committee or a principle transfigured into a statue, but in an incessant work of demonstration-rectification and in the advances thus induced.

Of course, we admit that this path does not lead to the absolute origin, to the guarantee of guarantees, for one and only one reason: such an origin is part of a theological fable outside of which it makes no sense. Let's abandon the "absolute / relative" dichotomy in favor of the work of the concept (Hegel, 2017 [1807]) and its endless rectifications.

How do these observations work for each of the three meanings?

In the negative sense, the argumentation usually concentrates on some phrases and propositions that, reiterated like archetypes, rarely tolerate questions and discussions. The contempt for systematic critique, as well as the conservative defense of the existing, consume a lot of time and energy. This does not prevent it from working. On the contrary, it assures him a comfortable space in the perimeter of hegemonic ideologies, which, like a background fabric, attribute to this meaning a golden obviousness. Reason why any demand for justification becomes a priori suspected of a crime of lese majesty. Dismissed from cultivating conceptual rigor, this meaning runs up against little resistance, not despite the common places that it conveys, but thanks to and based on them.

The realistic meaning presents a similar operation. Although it suffers, like the previous meaning, from conceptual insolvency, the favorable reception it reserves for critique, a certain critique, its claim for a healthy and constructive critique that never precisely defines, gives it an aura of subtlety, insight, and above all a finally elusive presence. Often, the positive meaning fails to grasp this position that is both an accomplice (in appearance) and an adversary (in fact). That is why some of its variants affirm their full and complete neutrality without perceiving the contradiction which they incur, or they approach these issues with strong hesitations, swings and indisputable discomfort.

The same occurs in the case of the positive meaning. To found, to consolidate, to develop that thinking against the current of the dominant certainties of the so called "critical thinking", requires tenacious efforts as well as obstinate resistance against the onslaught determined to contain it, if not to destroy it. Its adherents may be tempted to withdraw into belief and abandon, a little or a lot, the record of deliberation, if not explicitly and deliberately, at least in fact. Its main care is to convince the already convinced. Some use the names of the founding fathers and their once-important contributions as a protective shield or magic potion. A terrible negligence thus appears in the open: the updating of the references and the readjustment of the arguments constitute a pure and simple demand for survival. Not obvious, of course. They suppose fidelity and innovation, iron principles and ductile strategies, tradition and rupture: not one or the other, but both at the same time - under penalty of becoming a museum piece.

The difficulty of confronting the unprecedented forms of anti-critique and assent to the reigning order weakens the positive meaning, especially in the face of its realistic opponent. This thorny situation leads to positions similar to those of the preceding meanings: ritualization of the arguments, sacralization of the precursor teachers and



parents, ad libitum repetition of the founding gestures, idioms and semantic contractions. Or, an alternative complicit in the heart of the same problem; some believe that denying the referential founders is enough to automatically change their position. They forget that saying otherwise is often the same as saying the same in reverse, usually less well. In all cases, an unequivocal symptom manifests itself: the strong reluctance to learn from one's mistakes and to take advantage of objections that come from outside. The adversaries do not stop denouncing this phantom of "besieged fortress" which in fact functions as the contribution of the positive sense to the sabotage of their own position. A way of remembering that dogmatism, in effect, is not just someone else's scourge.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the positive meaning is undoubtedly the most stressed of the three, the one that needs care, because of the external pressures that it constantly faces and its repeated internal constraints.

This double causality explains that, to continue its task today, to face with any success the challenges of modern times, the so-called "critical thinking" must satisfy certain precautions. The operation already carried out by the negative meaning when he invents his realistic version.

The first of these precautions may seem banal, if not superfluous. Indeed, throughout this article we have emphasized the fact that a thought is not critical because it claims this epithet or because its opponents attribute it to it. The positive or negative, exalting or pejorative appeal of said adjective mobilizes complex and ramified problems, independent of the good or less good will of one or more individuals and groups. A self-proclaimed critical thinking can gradually become "realistic", if not reactionary: not because it is a victim of circumstances, but because circumstances help it develop some of its inner tendencies. Proclaiming over and over your deep critical commitment does not prevent you from lending your assistance to what you hate, it does not prevent you from being a consenting victim.

The second collection is a consequence of the first. Since critical thinking cannot be limited to mere statements, its validity today passes through its performative capacity, its explanatory power, its work on the empirical, if not domestic tests of its assertions, its abandonment of all demonization of efficacy, of the efficiency of the protocols and other formalities that it is important mainly to deconstruct and secondarily to denounce. More than an academic cliché or a teacher's tic, argumentation as rigorous as possible avoids yielding to the realistic meaning the monopoly of creation, of discovery, of the new.



The third collection, **last but not least**, concerns the use of the classics and other founding fathers and, therefore, of the theoretical and ideological references. A radical choice is imposed. Whether it is a proven track record once and for all, because in fact what has been built in the past is of excellent workmanship and has opened up new and promising perspectives, in which case it is intended that its contemporary invocation alone validates the analyses that are practiced and the postures that are adopted. A certain dexterity in the manipulation of important terms corroborates this rest of the warrior. It is enough then to sing a thought that is supposed to be critical today because it was so emphatically yesterday. It is, however, highly improbable that the virtues of the present automatically derive from the merits of the past.

Let us be, and we now approach a position irreducible to the preceding one, the founding fathers and the classical references are effectively inescapable, neither replaceable nor submissive to any fashion. They are also not negotiable according to the convenience of the moment. They are inescapable to the extent that they are repeatedly updated, enduringly contemporary, and lastingly current. The classics are great because they didn't just live yesterday. That is why it is important to remove them from the reverential pantheon in order to insert them into life and its furious contemporary upheavals.

A re-founding is probably in progress. Beyond the great phrases that sound so good and say so little, critical thinking, a device for interrogating evidence that does not resign itself to the world as it is, an indispensable connector for being able to breathe, needs to prove that reasoned critique constitutes an offensive and effective resource, unlike uncritical thinking, lazy thinking that thinks as little as possible and with a maximum of misunderstandings.

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