

ON DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN CRITICISM AND CRITIQUE IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORICAL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract- The correspondence and contrast between the concepts of criticism and critique is used to illuminate four contexts where they are problematically and unreflectively associated: 1. Normative or social contexts often mask the true relationship between social control through the use of criticism, and a reflective praxis which questions the authority of cultural status quo through critique. 2. The inertia of history presents to us the hermeneutic challenge of confronting the tradition and attaining an 'effective historical consciousness' through engaging in the dialectic of all authentic dialogue. This engagement assumes the risk of the loss of self in the face of the other, whether or not that otherness is a real human being, a text, or a part of the cultural tradition or history. 3. Further, the presence of an apparently unquestioned tradition in the realm of myth adds to the sense that things are only the way they should be, and not merely what they can or must be. Critique exposes the differences between blanket assumptions regarding the human condition and the stalwart support mere criticism gives to our common expectations. 4. As such, critique participates in an active ethics and is indeed a fundamental element for the work of ethics in the world.

Keywords: hermeneutics, critique, criticism, history, myth, norms.

Introduction

'Everyone's a critic'. How often we hear this pliant whenever there is resistance to the commentaries of others, whether or not they are objectively fair or just. And even here, who are we to say this or that sense of things is the right one, the fair and the just? The conflation of engaging in criticism and engaging in critique is the result of both not knowing what is reasonable to expect from others, and feeling that these perhaps same others expect unreasonable things from oneself. At the same time, criticism lacks historical consciousness, and springs from sources generally judged to be negative, like *ressentiment* or *schadenfreude*, malicious existential envy and the taking of pleasure at another's suffering, respectively. Really, these two ethical concepts are two sides of the same critical coin. We certainly must travel far to encounter a fellow human who seems to be above these feelings in all quarters of his or her life. We also rarely meet someone, and perhaps rarely feel this way about ourselves, who seems aloof to the potential unfairness of others, or yet who asks only of others the absolute just, or of only that which they would have these others ask of them. Because we often find ourselves in situations where we are quite rationally sure we are being treated unjustly, and just as surely think that others of less merit than ourselves are getting all the breaks - the old ditty 'rain falls on the just, and on the unjust fella. but more upon the just, 'cos the unjust stole the just's umbrella', speaks to this angst - we are very willing, often over

rather petty matters, to engage in calling someone down under the guise of defending ourselves. That is why, at some time or other, everyone is indeed a critic.

The Problem in its Normative Contexts

The conflation between these two concepts merits some patient dissection. It seems clear to us that criticism is not only easier to accomplish and that it occurs more often in the day to day, but that it brings some satisfaction, *schadenfreude* perhaps, that makes it a little addictive. The fulfillment of engaging in critique seems to be of a more esoteric and philosophical species, not the kind of thing we normally want to practice day in and day out. The main problem with criticism is that it is not what it appears to be. Not only does it rationalize ulterior motives, it justifies the idea that we can have such motives and not feel that we have to expose them to others. Criticism engages a new but inauthentic take on ethics, one in which we extend the normative notions of what may be left unsaid, thereby also extending the space of our own private doings at the expense of others. Further to this, and perhaps paradoxically, criticizing others is also an attempt, often surreptitious at first, to bring them into conformity with how we think the world should work and look. What I see in others is what I choose not to see in myself. What I imagine I want to see in others is what I imagine myself to already be. There are enough of us engaging in this kind of misrecognition of both ourselves and others that it takes on a form of general social control. Like rule

following, criticism attempts to recreate the situations where people conform to our imagined ideals, or remind them that such ideals exist and that they are currently straying from them, and at their own risk. We are all potential 'rule enforcers', as the American sociologist Howard Becker has aptly named this role, and aside from gossip, criticism in our sense is a prime vehicle for controlling the social scene.

We semi-consciously and 'voluntaristically' aid larger social structures in maintaining social order by engaging in criticism without reflection. We instill the expectations of 'the rules' in others even when we imagine ourselves to be transcending those rules. Taylor suggests that large scale historical social reform aimed at reorganizing the ways in which persons think about their social life and how they interact within it have important common features: they are active and interventionist, attempt uniformity amongst a populace through homogenization and they are rationalizing [cf. 9, 86]. I want to point out that the same processes are at hand in much more personal and individuated spaces of social action. Whenever we give into unreflective action of this sort, criticizing others' for their very being perhaps, our attempts at making them conform to some other manner of being themselves take on the guise of generalities. This is so because we do not know much about the one we are directed against. Write more largely, this same process occurs in warfare, where 'the enemy' is hardly human at all, or if so, an insult to the better humanity which we alone, or with our allies, represent. We know little about them, but criticism never needs to know, as it already imagines that through making a sardonic comment or by becoming the executioner, it has all of the relevant knowledge at its disposal.

Obviously, and perhaps equally so, we ourselves are not at all immune from the criticism of others. Perhaps we have strayed from the social norms - even, unfortunately, by reflection and the practice of critique, say - and must be brought back into line by the tenor of the society at large, or its institutions. 'Getting along' is of the utmost importance, and given the conflict between persons and cultures in the world today, to be indicted as being 'part of the problem' seems a serious charge indeed. We engage large scale social institutions in the fight against not only authentic critique, but too malicious forms of 'uncritique', like criticism in certain social contexts that seems to most others to be out of line. We also must try to manage our own cultural biases in an increasingly diverse social world: "The mass media today are expected to perform ten-minute miracles of social introductions between people from a variety of ways of life and background. The entertainment fields serve the audience less and less as an escape from daily life, more and more as a continuous sugar-coated lecture on how to get along with the 'others'." [7, 160] Whether in visual or print media, the general message of popular culture is that the norms of the day - set up by no one in particular, and signifying no apparently specific ideals nor further suggesting an ethics - are to be upheld by becoming a member of someone else's 'generalized

other', a sociological term invented by American social philosopher George Herbert Mead to designate the inchoate and non-empirical idea we have of society at large. Not real persons, mind you, but simply other people whom we imagine to have internalized their free and voluntaristic support of the social fabric as it appears to be woven through all of us. What we are able to further is a kind of continuity of criticism directed at those who would disturb society at its best, the criminal, the psychotic, the deviant, who either through hyperbolically observing some of our social ideals - self-centredness and greed or even altruism and charity depending on the context - or through inattention to the most basic of social needs - the addict or the libertine perhaps - tear up the warp and weft of the tapestry of sociality. We have no doubt become much more subtle and complex in our scripting of the loyalty to mundane sociality and its attention to criticism. Riesman mentions soon after similar observations that fantasy and science fiction were at the time the only realistic portrayals of a more whole humanity. The striking use of allegory in these genres mimics that of ancient and Shakespearean literature. It may well be exactly the same situation in media today, where the scripts and plots of popular science fiction sagas like 'Star Trek' often seem to take the viewer a little ways beyond the casual and predictable affirmation of social norms as they are imagined to be. These kinds of contrivances may be on the way to critique, because they push the consumer to engage in real reflection about *how* one lives, and why one feels one must do so in this or that manner. This stance is quite different than merely understanding oneself to be juxtaposed with another as a kind of object or even altered version of oneself:

Reflection, as the capacity to take up a certain distance towards oneself, is not the same as a relation of opposition towards an object. Reflection is rather brought into play in such a way that it accompanies the lived performance of a task. This is our real freedom, which enables choices and decisions to be made even as we participate in the performance of life itself. [4, 53].

The distancing of critique calls one out of one's willing and often unreflective action in the world of others, and calls the world into question as merely a world of altered selves. The radicality of otherness is presented to oneself in a new way, and we open the door to experiencing the world as a living and thoroughly diverse undertaking. 'Performing one's life' of course can also mean that we merely play out socially scripted role behaviors, but it can also mean that we play these roles consciously and reflectively, and at least pause, from time to time, to imagine how we might do things differently, and how others might be if they would step into the 'role' of the reflective practitioner of living.

Yet authentic critique often can begin not in some philosophical ivory tower but in the very guttural and emotional quality of feeling the tension and anxiety of one's everyday life. Perhaps this is the space from which the most stringent critiques in fact emanate. A classic example of the link between mundane frustration and

incipient social critique occurs in Mills' description of retail sales, hardly dissimilar to our present version of the service industry in all of its guises:

Salesgirls often attempt identification with customers but often are frustrated. One must say 'attempt' identification because: (1) Most customers are strangers, so that contact is brief. (2) Class differences are frequently accentuated by the sharp and depressing contrast between home and store, customer, or commodity. 'You work among lovely things which you can't afford to buy, you see prosperous, comfortable people who can buy it. When you go home with your low pay you do not feel genteel or anything but humiliated. You either half starve on your own or go home to mama, as I do, to be supported'. (3) Being 'at their service', 'waiting on them', is not conducive to easy and gratifying identification. [6, 174].

Yet frustration at the unfairness of the contrasts which are part of capitalism as we know it today is not enough to engage in critique, although it can point us in that direction. As well, critique of this Marxian sort is but one of the vectors of living the reflective life and avoiding the disingenuousness or mere criticism.

We may well be aware of the disjunction which permeates the material relations of society, what Marx and Engels called 'alienated consciousness' born for them in the different relations to the means of production. From Riesman to Taylor, there is a strong current in post-war social critique that suggests we more or less simply turn ourselves away from the spaces of these tensions into alternate lives and worlds made more real through enhanced technology in the service of entertainment. Some of the sacrifices people may imagine having to do with the less devout bonds of community and fidelity, loyalty and trustworthiness, but that is probably an artefact of historical reportage, where the farther one recedes on the horizon of that which is chronologically and sometimes materially past, the more likely one is to encounter only records of the elite strata of society, and thus have little enough idea how most people lived, let alone what they thought about. Acknowledging this is usually accomplished by focussing the sometimes contrary lenses of either nostalgia or criticism on the recent past. The 'Leave it to Beaver' era of the post-war baby boom is a favorite, though in actual fact diffuse, target:

In a way, the costs may be hidden by the fact that we are especially indignant, even today, about some of the restrictions and oppressions of the 50s: women confined to the home, children being forced into moulds in school. We feel these things should never occur again. Whereas the costs, like the unravelling of social connections in the ghettos, or the way so many of us 'channel-surf' through life, come across either as bearable, or perhaps simply 'systemic', and thus to be borne regardless. [9, 480].

There is both nostalgia and criticism here, and in an odd way, they open one door to a more radical and authentic critique of both these shallow and politically convenient other elements. When criticism is of the *auld lang syne* sort, it tends to link social variables which are either

disparate and unrelated, or related only indirectly, in the service of at least the intimations that 'maybe things were better off before' this or that social change occurred. At the same time, this intimation remains at the level of a sub-text, because we cannot truly prove that such and such changed this or that, but only that we have observed the presence of one thing and the absence or transformation of the next. Older people notoriously feel saddened and alienated by this, and younger people, mostly unwittingly, may be seen to exploit it and enjoy their elders' premature passing on. This simple feeling of being divorced from what one took as one's wider home, the world as we have known it, accrues to it the new and disconcerting feeling of being a guest, with our presence being regarded as sometimes unwelcome and even annoying, in a new home made by and for others. The world becomes as we *had* known it, and we cannot fully know the new world in the same way.

This shift produces a number of new rhetorical strategies to cope or to rationalize it. The most stringent of these attempts to actually either reverse the clock, pushing back to the world as was known (sometimes seen as 'conservative'), or in its 'progressive' version, attempts to push yet further to a more just future, of which the new world is seen as merely a partial form:

You might think that before they denounce unwelcome research findings, major corporations would devote their considerable resources to checking out the safety of the products they propose to manufacture. And if they missed something, if independent scientists suggest a hazard, why would the companies protest? Would they rather kill people than lose profits? If, in an uncertain world, an error must be made, shouldn't it be biased toward protecting customers and the public? And, incidentally, what do these cases say about the ability of the free enterprise system to police itself? Aren't these instances where at least some government intrusion is in the public interest? [8, 217].

How many rhetorical naiveties can be mustered in the pretense that we are surprised or even at all skeptical of how such a system actually works? Why would large and powerful interest groups be interested in interests other than their own? Do governments even represent persons in a more ethical manner than do some corporations? And just what is the 'public interest', anyway? In capital, we are well aware that profits before people rules the day. But it is not quite as simple as even that. Some people do benefit immensely from profit-making activities, though relatively few. Even the most reflective and outspoken critic of the 'bourgeois mode of production' stated baldly that it was by far the most liberating form of stratified society in history, mainly due to increased chances of social mobility, which were nil in previous forms of social organization and subsistence like agrarian societies. On top of this, because everything can be bought and sold in capitalism, everyone's talent is potentially a commodity and thus is potentially valuable, though in practice Marx realized that there was quite a narrow strip of talent that was actually

of interest at any one time. This 'alienation from human potential', or from our 'species-being', was of utmost importance to his theory of consciousness and to his understanding of the relations of production.

Thus for real critique, the social situation at once appears complex and divergent. We must compare our woes with not only the general human suffering, but with the burdens of history, without regard to whether or not those burdens may be said to have been ideologically overcome. Our notion of authority in general is permeated with the combination that criticism should be directed both at the apparent margins of capital, but also at the scions of wealth and power. Both those who pretend to authority through institutional status, or those who have authoritative positions because of their own experience and knowledge through living and thinking are subjected to unreflective criticism sometimes rhetorically masked as feigned naivety:

This situation is [in] evidence precisely at the level of intelligence which finds it difficult to submit to medical authority. Whether in the form of insight or of a blind lack of insight, reflection here does not involve the free turning of attention towards oneself. Rather it remains permanently under the pressure of suffering, of the will to life, of the fixation on work, profession, prestige, or whatever. [4, 55].

The fact that we are most often directed by the duress of either social life or of human life itself is not necessarily fatal to thought, but it does impress upon us another obligation to thinking, that of taking into account our true motives. To ask myself, 'what exactly am I doing, or desiring, in this situation?' is the kind of question that lends itself to regress. With each response, with each layer of consciousness that is peeled away and which thus exposes another, I can ask the same question, and then without even coming to complete certainty, respond yet again with 'is this really the case?'. This is another reason why critique, as opposed to criticism, can appear so difficult to us. This is not to say that our intents are hidden away in some alternate language of the unconscious, to be revealed only by the dialogue of dreaming, say, or some waking *faux pas*. The life of the mind is not limited to only anxiety or desire. Taking stock in a conscious way is the accounting of thought, and not the metaphor of what had been unthought. That transparency in human relations is a kind of comfortable myth we tell ourselves is not merely a convenient fact to keep social scientists (and psychotherapists) employed, though it also this performs this function: "Of course nothing in human life is ever really self-evident; where it so appears it is because perceptions have been narrowed by cultural conditioning." [7, 11]. Yet at the same time we cannot step outside of ourselves in some meta-cultural manner. Even if we often feel that we are being forced to do something which, or be someone who, is not part of who we think we are or whom we would rather be, most of this pressure comes not from a patently and suddenly exogenous source. We have internalized our cultural conditioning, and made it part of us. We had submitted to it as youngsters, but we now

are ourselves part of its reaffirmation and maintenance in the wider world. We even proselytize it globally, though most of us passively do so through our consumptive practices. So it is not that we are ranged over against some other set of forces, other to the self. What we ourselves are is also the home of both unthought and criticism. This is why criticism is most often directed against others, rather than coming home to ourselves. When we are self-critical, we often find that we are feigning critique in order to accomplish some other end. Yet even feigned critique can be a passage to the real thing. If you consider how I might conspire to make myself look other than I actually am, or at least, usually am, such a process requires some reflective thought. This thinking may not go far enough, as it has been hijacked by some other passion or intent than self-understanding for its own sake, but its activity reveals the ability to parse, plan and undertake a reflective process. It also exposes further the point regarding social conditioning. Even with vulgar or local intent, we overcome this sense of the 'prison of society' regularly. We may even feel as cousins of the criminal if we engage regularly in social sabotage. Even so, it is clear that

Authority is certainly not external compulsion, but rather that which has thoroughly permeated common customs, common practices, legislation, revolutions, and so forth and managed to resist the destructive force of criticism in such a way that it has ultimately been accepted by all the members of a society. [2, 85].

Here, 'criticism' is used in the way we have been using the term 'critique', as a reflective mode of being thoughtful about the world and oneself in it. The norms that go unquestioned in this way have always the potential to set themselves up as dogma, even nature, and cast their imposing edifices up on any human horizon. The theme of resistance, and even revolution itself in the face of dogma or fascism, is a popular entertainment commodity. 'Human freedom', however we may care to define it, is by its very invocation a phrase that connotes a 'brand' of life to be consumed as well as an ideal to be defended. Gadamer further reminds us that "Anyone who is tempted to play on the institutional force of their authority rather than on genuine argument is always in danger of speaking in an authoritarian as opposed to an authoritative manner." [4, 124].

The Problem as the Inertia of History

This clears the space for a further distinction to be made between critique and criticism. The former always is ensconced within the dialogue and dialectic of argument, which may be questioned and discussed in reference to not only history, both to history in general but that of critique in particular, as well as to with reference to one's own position in history. The latter often gives into the temptation of backing itself up with only the rule of what is encoded in law or even the quasi-legal apparatus that all rationalized organizations - governments, corporations, educational systems etc. - supply themselves with. Such resistance as there may be in

these contexts is most often negatively sanctioned.

That we mostly do not take up the resistance of critique in these areas of life speaks not so much to our own fragile bravery, but rather to the powerful forces that can be enlisted in defense of political, corporate, or bureaucratic interest. Aside from the fetish of efficiency, the bottom line, and social order, there is the further embankment of general societal distrust of the whistleblower in any walk of life. Whatever their source, we in our personal lives have some of the trappings of institutional structure, though writ small. In this sense, we are wary of the person to whom 'nothing is sacred', the rebel or social critic, for example, or for that matter, perhaps the social scientist. The normative code of our society is not merely convenient for 'getting along with the others', but also provides a comforting hostel to which we can return after our own private misdemeanors:

So the 'code fetishism', or nomolatri, of modern liberal society is potentially very damaging. It tends to forget the background which makes sense of any code: the variety of goods which the rules and norms are meant to realize, and it tends to make us insensitive, even blind, to the vertical dimension. It also encourages a 'one size fits all' approach: a rule is a rule. One might even say that modern nomolatri dumbs us down, morally and spiritually. [9, 707].

It should not come as a surprise that criticism is itself addicted to the adoration of a code. The rules of this code follow the fashion of what certain social locations imagine is a righteous calling to critique, but due to precisely the effort to adhere to both a code and to remain within the peer group such a movement contrives to create, critique is soon abandoned for something more shallow. However radical the origin of the movement, once it becomes defined as indeed a 'group', it betrays its own margins in much the same way it had accused the wider society of forsaking itself. This is to say that criticism also enjoys a doctrine, whereas critique never lets itself be boosted up onto a new pedestal. We must return to Weber's understanding of the 'routinization' of charisma, whether it be of a movement or more importantly, its ideas, to afford an explanation of why there is so often this sudden regression to the very thing that was abhorred.

It may well be a resonance of this historical dynamic that plays itself out in the personal shift from the radical alertness that at first proposes critique, to the convenient institution of new rules to follow and also thus new groups of people to follow these rules. It should be clear that the essence of criticism is in the preservation of privilege, whether of material relations of your position, or of your ideas, or of your social status etc. Critique, by contrast, objectively questions all positions and creates a standpoint which is in fact quite new to any of them, including the space where the critique begins. Critique employs both dialogue - in its ability to learn from other positions - and dialectic, in its ability to engage each of these in a focused and critical manner. Criticism can accomplish neither due to its unreflective loyalty to its

own position. When this is coupled by the often mixed competencies of its arguments, and the conflicting ideals of its ethics, the result is merely another interested but hypocritical voice in the chorus of unthought that dominates our current public debates.

This discussion, though apparently public, does not really speak for society as a whole. As Gadamer says, *...one must do more than advance the public discussion. One must also do something oneself; and indeed one is already doing something [right or wrong]. Praxis, however, means to act, and that starts with an alert consciousness. Conscious action is more than just something. A human being is one who controls himself or herself. This involves, self-control, self-testing, and setting an example. [3, 82].*

Evaluating oneself in a critical manner, without unnecessary derogation, and without the trappings of a shallow criticism borrowed from the fashion or media standards of the day - 'how do I look? Am I too fat?' etc. - need not be Augustinian in its scope to be effective. Such an effect auto-critique has is the realization of character. This is not the kind of character we are supposed to admire in novels concerning morality, but the awareness that our character is both human and must needs become humane. We set examples with everything we do, especially if we are in charge of children. So doing and being are here set up in contraposition. The 'mode of being neighborly', for instance, is a manner of living which is not mere lifestyle, and yet is not entirely conscious of itself in that its apparently most gracious acts are spontaneous and uncalculated, like the immediate response of the 'good samaritan'. Merely 'doing something', as in the above quote, is what we do most of the time. Rendering spontaneous aid in a sudden crisis may mark the heroic character in our humanity with some definition, but it is a rare event when compared with all of the action we must take in life that requires us to be alert and engage in self-critique. Thinking before doing, or as part of our doing, is part of the ongoing process of all forms of critique. Yet critique also must not carry itself into the abstract at the expense of its reference, the world as it is, lest it become beholden to desire and uncritical wish-fulfillment. Speaking of Lessing to this regard, Arendt tell us that "His attitude toward the world was neither positive nor negative, but radically critical and, in respect to the public realm of his time, completely revolutionary. But it was also an attitude that remained indebted to the world, never left the solid ground of the world, and never went to the extreme of sentimental utopianism." [1, 5]. Critique abandons its service to the wider community and humankind as a whole when it finds itself enthralled to either personal or even local feelings of want or desire.

The Problem as a Function of Moral Narrative

At its source, the demand for critique emanates from ethics. In the same way, the source of the demand for silence is most often found where critique would expose injustice and inhumanity. Such a relationship is, however, often masked by utility, and even perhaps

surprisingly, other human feelings that we generally associate with awe, wonder, curiosity, and even bravery. The use value of modern knowledge often insulates it against critique. Yet at the same time, the wonders revealed by the combination of scientific acumen and technological prosthesis leave us in silent awe. This feeling is necessary for mortal beings who confront a seemingly infinite universe, and reminds us of our humanity in a way few other situations can match. Yet such wonder can be addicting. We may attempt to place ourselves in such a situation again and again, without regard to other human costs, or the always questionable distribution of resources in modern global capital: "In truth, modern science represents an impressive embodiment of critical freedom that is to be marvelled at. But we should also be aware of the human demand that is placed on all those who personally participate in this authority: the demand for self-discipline and self-criticism, and this is an ethical demand." [4, 122]. Knowledge is always, from the beginning, human knowledge of ourselves within the cosmos. We cannot pretend that there is something called 'knowledge for its own sake'. Rather, knowledge is always 'knowledge for something'. This is reflected in some of our oldest mythic narratives that speak of the birth of human knowledge. In Genesis, of course, we are told that the enlightenment regarding the human condition - the beginning of the truly human endeavor of cultural adaptation, survival, and gradual and halting growth in both our knowledge and our character - has everything to do with not a 'tree of knowledge', but a the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil'. Right from the earliest accounts we have the sense that to know something as humans is to also participate in the value of its knowledge. Knowing, for us, means also valuing. Knowledge itself has a value of some kind, and can immediately be used to act in the world. Given this, it very much matters just what kind of 'something' knowledge is to be used for, and perhaps more importantly, it also matters very much the source of its valuation. Although the modern mind may scoff at the mythic proportions of the narratives of human cosmogony, it in fact is clear that all possibility of authentic critique stems from the valuation of knowledge. We must think ourselves through sometimes the most petty situations, as well as ponder and puzzle our way around those more profound. We do this within the knowledge of the immanence of death in life, and we live on only in so far as we are ignorant of the exact timing of that mortality, rehearsing at various levels the final curtain call through the diverse farewells of social life. The unadulterated joy in the garden, akin to the non-responsibility of childhood, suddenly and radically gives way to the heavy obligation of the world as it is, adulthood instead of childhood, human union instead of divine communion, and work or die rather than a leisured immortality. Nietzsche comments on this transition in his epigram 'you who have said yes to one joy, do you not know that you have thus said yes to all sorrows as well?'. Whereas we are aware of the growth - personal, scientific, ethical and spiritual - needed to become fully

human and thence to become humane, myths which associate living and dying as one thing annul the necessary tension involved in having to *learn something* and *value something* in the time allotted. The awareness of one's own finitude, of which Gadamer makes a primary characteristic of human maturity, gives the principle for the value of living on in general, as well as the ability to understand the value of human knowledge in whatever particular incidence it may arise and be used. Feigning ignorance of this fundamental bond is to ignore uncritically the human condition not only as it is, but is to imagine that one is aloof to 'all of the sorrow' and indeed, much of the joy as well, that animates what it means to be human in the world.

Yet it is not only scientific and historical knowledge and its evaluation and use that are to be critiqued. The rather different species of knowledge that comes from faith is also not to be held apart from its place in the human condition, and not to be valued uncritically or to become the home of mere criticism of others: "None of us stands at the point of view of the universal. Our attachment to our own faith cannot come from a universal survey of all others from which we conclude that this is the right one. It can only come from our sense of its inner spiritual power, chastened by the challenge which we will have had to meet from other faiths." [9, 680]. And not only is this kind of knowledge given perspective on itself from other forms of knowledge that may have the same aspirations and modes of valuation in them, but also that of rational and scientific knowing, ethical experience through living, and the power of aesthetic experience all come into play. Indeed, all of us must become as lay philosophers, for it is that kind of universal perspective which emanates from life itself that is ultimately both at stake and necessary in understanding such a stake. As Grondin iterates, "...the question of philosophy, how is truth possible, can be raised with regard to all possible truths, but philosophy must ask in the same breath how these various truths relate to each other. Thus its activity is necessarily *systematic*." [5, 65; italics the text's].

The various modes of knowing the human condition then are in the service of the same kind of truth, the truth about being human. This is not an ultimate truth, and neither is it objective. But at the same time it is not pure subjectivity. Human truths are constructed through socialization and the maintenance of social reality, change over time in all of their venues, and thus can be changed at any particular time and place. Even so, they are massively real to us, and the knowledge that the human situation can be changed radically and suddenly does not necessarily detract from their power. Yet it is only when we give into their reality as indeed ultimate and immutable that we lose sight of their true character. Human truths are profound precisely because they are mutable and subject to critique. It is an impressive feat that our species has been able to accomplish what we have, and what we are, with no access to the objective truth of things. Such a vision cannot exist for finite beings, whether or not it exists in a separate ontological status somewhere in the wider cosmos, with a God

perhaps, or with a more evolved form of life in general. That we can know the cosmos in a relatively ordered manner and explore our 'nature' within it remains the most important feature of our existence. To lose this ability by either engaging in mere criticism or by excerpting ourselves from the confrontation with tradition - knowledge and truth as it has been known to us both as persons and as the diversity of cultures within a species - is to effectively lose our humanity. That it is understandable how we might be tempted to turn away from such a task, given what is produced by such critique and confrontation, is also part of the self-understanding of the human project. The awe and wonder we feel within our knowledge of the cosmos, and which sometimes can distract us from the task of both critique and justice, is paired with a concern and even an anxiousness with regard to the fragile nature of human knowledge and being:

The anthropological basis of anxiety testifies to a specifically human characteristic, that is, that a person has a distance from their own self. Heidegger saw in this the inauthenticity of an existence permanently absorbed in life, and contrasted it with an authentic existence which is prepared to face anxiety. But this inauthenticity also belongs to human nature. ([4, 157].

Criticism is part of the turning inward of living. One becomes 'absorbed' right at this point. The attention we project on the other and the attempt we make to make that person into a kind of denied self, a surrogate for our lack of self-reflection, and an expectation that even after the withering storm of insult, that this other can still serve us in our lack of self-understanding, is certainly both arrogant and uncritical. But further to this, such an engagement of criticism allays the anxiety that must accompany all true risking of what we are. To know an other as a truly different human being, rather than as a guise of ourselves or some other more material servant, is to consistently and constantly risk the self. We have been changed by the encounter with the other - they too have changed in some way but we may not necessarily be aware of the precise implications of this for the other - and thus our return is never prodigal. Rather, and perhaps this is the most pressing characteristic of this kind of anxiety, what we encounter in our changed self is yet another otherness. This time, however, we must call this otherness our own and inhabit it.

So it is understandable, given the radicality of not merely the other to self as it stands, but the strangeness of 'returning' to a place where in fact one has not yet, until that moment, ever been, that we shy away from really placing ourselves in the hands of otherness. Yet in spite of both these trepidations - their inauthenticity, as Gadamer suggested, is also very much a part of us and thus cannot itself be disdained in any petty way - and as well in spite of overcoming them, there is a part of us that can become resilient and open to otherness both within and without ourselves. What we can call humaneness is the result of the dialogue with the other to self, and the dialectic of risk and return that characterizes all authentic encounters in these spheres. Our ancestors knew its

import, and

By that they meant something which was the very height of humanness because it was valid without being objective. It is precisely what Kant and Jaspers mean by Humanitat, the valid personality which, once acquired, never leaves a man, even though all other gifts of body and mind may succumb to the destructiveness of time. Humanitas is never acquired in solitude and never by giving one's work to the public. It can be achieved only by one who has thrown his life and his person into the 'venture into the public realm' - in the course of which he risks revealing something which is not 'subjective' and which for that very reason he can neither recognize nor control. [This] becomes a gift to mankind. [1, 73-4].

A full humanity, with its ethical aspect as humaneness, is possible if we give ourselves without reserve to that space where the distinction between our private understanding of the world we have created for ourselves and the world as it is, populated by radical alters to self and to the private, mingles and becomes indistinct. It is only through the journey with the other that we come home to what we are now. What we have been is transformed by what the other may be.

Conclusion: The Problem as an Ethics

This is yet another reason why critique is practiced in the full presence of risk, as it calls into question our very existence. Only through doing so is it able to be radical in its questioning of the world, for we are indeed part of that very world which is to be questioned in this manner. Human beings cannot exempt themselves from living in the world. All criticism can do is to objectify the world of negative desire while at the same time suppressing the self's true relationship with the world as it is. We disdain the other because they do not measure up to some desired image of the self and we do so specifically in order to exempt the self from reflective query. Objectification - the treating of the other as if he or she were only a thing or a projection of an aspect of what is thing-like in ourselves - allows us to object to the idea that the other is in fact another human being, We can also object to the knowledge that in order to get on with life, we often have to change ourselves. The world does not wait for us, and will move on without us if we remain unchanged by its wonder and its mystery. Criticism can delay what is inevitable for all thinking beings, and sometimes it can provide an addict within which one can hide from the world. Ultimately, however, mere criticism has no power over the other. The other is not changed by our negative desires and must in turn be forced to object to them. We in turn are stagnated by such a practice, as the objection of the other comes back to us with the message that the other resists our very attempts at objectification, and thus the vicious circle continues. This false dialectic takes place between persons as it occurs between cultures or nations. The end result of long term criticism without reflection is often the sense that we must kill the other to have our desire come true in the world, thereby depriving ourselves, the others and the world of a full humanity.

Critique, rather, avoids all of these problems by including within its ambit the self which is to be changed. Dialogue opens up the spirit of reflective risk with the trust that the other will be ready to embark on the life-changing course of encounter with another and the confrontation with tradition. Dialectic results from the sheer otherness that is presented to both parties by one another's presence in the world. Finally, the new knowledge of what all this means to both of us becomes itself an object for further exploration and reflection: "For the world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse" [1, 24].

This discourse is the embodiment of the dual character of critique. Dialogue and dialectic are necessary partners. It is also the reflection of the dual direction of critique. Both self and other are to be questioned by history and the world, what human knowledge has been and what it is today, and both at the same time question each other and themselves. We have already seen that criticism attempts to control the other by forcing him to conform to our ideals or desires in the world. It also controls the self by forcing it to remain static in the face of a diverse and changing world. Yet its most important facade lies in its ability to pretend that we know the outcomes of our engagement with the other and with the world, that we can predict with utter facility and facileness what will occur when we pass our judgements. That alone puts criticism out of court, because it is all about conserving ourselves against all forms of risk and otherness. It is precisely because we do not and cannot know the results of interaction with the world in the ongoing lives of human beings that we are to gain knowledge. This is the 'reward', if you will, for the risk of losing what has passed for prior knowledge:

We are in fact all thinking, and feeling out of backgrounds and frameworks which we do not fully understand. To ascribe total personal responsibility to us for these is to want to leap out of the human condition. At the same time, no background leaves us utterly without room for movement and change. The realities of human life are messier than is dreamed of either by dogmatic rationalists, or in the manichean rigidities of embattled orthodoxy. [9, 387].

No doubt we are all, sometime or often, scared of change in general, let alone changes with intimately personal implications. The most radical changes in human life call forth the most stress and danger from within us. It is no surprise to recall that the most stressful situations, where people report the most anxiety and where they retreat most fully from the course of life and the movement of the world, are when we lose a loved one, especially a partner or spouse, and then, secondly, when we lose the means of subsistence, our jobs or vocations. This makes complete sense to us because we realize that in both of these losses the bonds to the two most important aspects of human life are fundamentally broken. In the one we lose community, and in the second we lose physicality. The former gives us our human

spirit, while the latter provides the healthy space where such a spirit may reside and grow. To place these at sudden risk through critique is not to extinguish them, but rather to help them both in that very and necessary growth. Critique is not abandonment but its very opposite. We appropriately must wince at forms of life which make real the immanence of death. Yet critique represent such an immanence metaphorically - we do know that we are about to lose something of ourselves, but we are ready to do so. We are never truly ready to lose community and to lose the means of subsistence and health. Yet even here, most persons bounce back from such losses in a way that is uniquely human and perhaps shows us at our most courageous and noble. In the face of sudden death and loss, human life goes on and the knowledge of this keeps us going. We also, in the midst of realizing changes and new knowledge, are apprised of the ongoing fact that the world, so imposing and forceful and apparently larger than life, is indeed amenable to positive change and to questioning. The world is our world after all, even if it be not entirely our own.

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