

HANS ALBERT'S VIEW ON TOTAL CRITICISM AND ITS PROBLEMATIC CONSEQUENCES

ADRIANA ANXHAKU

The Department of Philosophy, University of Tirana, the Faculty of Social Sciences,
Email: adriana.anxhaku@unitir.edu.al

SUMMARY

The effort of the representatives of Frankfurt School to erect a rational structure of the criticism towards the culture and the society of the time, which even nowadays operates in many aspects, has been criticized by Hans Albert, a representative of another kind of critical rationalism. As in our societies we often address to the critical thought, this article aims to confront not only two different ways of criticizing in philosophy, but also submit the constructive side which is often necessary to the critics of our societies, so as the struggle of ideas can lead neither to extreme relativism of our knowledge nor to passive despair, that our theories are nothing and that reforms can bring about no changes at all.

The criticism which causes a confronting situation of all against all and where every thinker becomes an inquisitor against the other calling him a heretic is problematic. The myth of total criticism derives from the myth of total reason. Accordingly, this paper aims to answer the modest question: How is it possible to make different spheres of life such as science, economics, politics and law open to criticism in a constructive manner?

Key words: Destructive criticism, constructive criticism, myth of total reason, reforms.

In our daily discussions and exchange of ideas, we often find ourselves in a situation of feeling dissatisfaction and insecurity caused by the all-round criticism spread in many spheres of our life. It is now quite common for an open society to criticize viewpoints, ideas, moral attitudes and behaviors and also certain actions and policies. Nevertheless, criticism does not always play an appropriate improving role of things, and it is often transformed, willingly or not, into an inquisition of different

thoughts, new alternatives, thus losing an important part of its regulating and improving role in the society. Criticism towards everything and on everyone without any criteria or methodological orienting principles, might distract the society and reduces its active force stimulating fear about the future and insecurity, and also suppresses people's thoughts and conceptions. Therefore, I will try to describe on this paper some of the philosophical criteria to distinguish between an operational and effective criticism and a radical, negative, destroyed one. For this reason, Hans Albert was reliable with his ideas as one of Karl Popper's successors. He forwarded these ideas in his well known article "Construction and Criticism,,".

Before mentioning some peculiarities of the criticism and its role, I have to say that criticism in its explicit concept, bears a certain kind of negativism and rejection, as it usually stands over a given positive action or knowledge. I think a rather good definition to this concept is given by Foucault who says: "Criticism exists solely in a relationship with something else from itself, it is a certain kind of instrument which serves to the future or the truth, trying to reject it. Therefore it resembles to the police control on a given sphere, but unable to exert the law on it. This fact makes it dependent on the positive demonstration of the sphere in question, be it philosophy, science, politics, moral, law, literature, etc., (Foucault, p.9).

In the sphere of knowledge, criticism is conditioned by the fact that how some statements and ideas might be supported and argued. It is known that dogmas and axiomatic knowledge enjoy a certain kind of immunity to criticism, because they basically serve to support our knowledge so as to be not subject to unlimited regress of knowledge. But criticism covers not only the sphere of knowledge. Kant expresses this idea in his short paper entitled: *What is illuminism (Was ist Aufklärung?)*, where he considers criticism, "...a method to think independently, and to use personal

reason by the man, without being obedient or subject to others,, (Kant, p.17). This conditions even the fact that when we talk about criticism here, we do not only take into consideration the process of knowledge but also that of human action, where a part fo knowledge is materialized or refuted.

In an attempt to criticize, two opposite tendencies are actually confronted: The tendency about the truth or better results of our actions drives us to put these processes subject to criticism. But on the other side, the need for security, drives us to make our criticism very careful and disabuse. For this matter, Albert writes: "On principle, every spacious point of our statements might be dogmatized and hardened in order to exist no criticism to the experience it demonstrates,, (Albert, p.21). Therefore, I have to specify much more the thesis of the civilizable criteria asking:

1. Why is it necessary to criticize a certain knowledge or action?

Popper considered the need of the knowledge to be refuted and not just legitimized, as very indispensable to the criticism (Popper, p. 428). But this refutation can not be made at random, or simply because someone likes it or not. Criticism is believable, when there exists the basis of the truth or right in itself, and is subject to some rational criteria of refutation (in the philosophical meaning of the word).

Since a part of criticism concerns the theoretical sphere, the problem of criticism on this aspect is conditioned by the matter: *what we expect from theories*, why they are civilizable. In case theories are used to describe, predict and improve our life, the interest about criticism towards them and the actions they guide, is great. Accordingly, a certain theoretical knowledge might be subject to double criticism, on one side to theoretical-methodological requests of the sphere, and on the other side to the degree of its fulfillment, or to adherence with real phenomena. Thus, making this sphere free from mistakes, illusions, deficiencies, forgetfulness, and even from traditional prejudices as well, is one of the necessities that brings criticism into the stage here.

Also, in our daily life we claim about established values of our statements and actions. Ethical systems are subject to criticism as well. It should be mentioned that in this case *criticism does not consist that much of finding the contradiction of statements* or principles with each-other, but uses as an assessment criterion the degree of fulfilling the human needs and demands, when moral requests of an established system, are applied. That is, how X requests of moral system influence the reduction of human sufferings and what

consequences they incur on people's life. Finding of common ethical basis of values plays the role of meta-ethical kind here, and helps to orient criticism on this sphere.

In both cases of spheres of thought and action, claims for validity can be achieved by confronting relevant knowledge and behaviors with arguments. These arguments which might seem convincing and prominent, in the light of new experience and information, become mistaken or inconsistent. This fact brings about the need for criticism and *review in the course of time* of old-time attitudes and theories, thus constituting another reason for criticism.

Generally criticism of action and especially that of political one, becomes more than ever necessary *when we have to face new problems*. That is, theories that we apply even if they are the best possible, are unlikely to predict consequences of all social processes, or even those natural ones. The need to solve problems is a whole organizing, creative, predicting and regulating process with all the relevant ways already known by human beings. But, criticism itself, becomes civilizable in case its motives make up criticism just for criticism, therefore I would like to concentrate on a rather extensive model, what Hans Albert calls "total criticism,,.

2. Some problems of total criticism

According to Albert, the concept "total criticism,, describes criticism of representatives of Frankfurt School, Horkheimer, Adorno up to Habermas. This criticism became total as it was erected over a concept and total conception of these representatives regarding the reason. In a few words, it means that they criticized everything and in general the society of that time, but being unable to offer concrete solutions and alternatives. This is how Albert describes this problem: "The dialectic cult of total reason, aims to go too far, to enable dealing with specific solutions. And since for it there is no solution to satisfy respective claims of this reason, it is suffice that this cult demonstrates as criticism, indirect meanings and metaphor instructions, etc,, (Albert, p.303).

I think that some Albert's ideas on total criticism, evidently simplified, might be valuable as a regulating model even for what is called „criticism“ in societies like ours, newly made-democratic ones. Obviously, the level of criticism in these societies is far from resembling Criticism of Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, I would draw some analogies on this aspect. I am not going to take into consideration the malevolent, destructive and threatening criticism. I am simply considering the fact that a part of people in this society

are interested in a criticism to improve things and their life, but they do not know how to do it.

Thus, criticism without specific rules of the game, which maintains you in an established positive sphere, and without offer of solutions, which already exists in Albania, was not imposed by Frankfurt School. It is more likely that this tendency for totalism of criticism, derived from careless use of free word, free from old censorship. Therefore, in many spheres of life, especially in media and politics, prevails such a criticism. Anyway, the variety of processes subject to criticism makes the claim for total criticism impossible or mistaken, because: First, criticism on the so called cases of *facts* changes from the criticism that might be used on cases of *values*. It seems that the relativism of criticism is concentrated on this last one. That's why criticism in the sphere of exact knowledge, is based much more on *explanatory* processes as a specific augmenting way of this knowledge. Meanwhile criticism in the human sphere, even under the influence of hermeneutic method, is based on *comprehensive* processes. So, the model used in different spheres of life regarding criticism, is not said to resemble the model of this criticism in science, or in politics, as it frequently happens. Each of these spheres offers specific paradigms of criticism, and not a certain criticism in every aspect following the same way. Moreover, there are different kinds of meanings in a society, such as the meaning of symbols, the meaning of expressions, the meaning based on theoretical knowledge, the meaning based on legitimizing human actions, etc. All these specify criticism and make its totalism impossible.

This totalism of criticism declines also because the subject "objective and well-known", of knowledge is now evidently inexistent. So, criticism is conditioned to a certain degree by the acquaintance and practice of a special group of people's life, relevant to the sphere under criticism and not to the man in general. For instance, it is relevant to the group of economists specialized in finance, to the group of politicians specialized in the country foreign policy etc...etc.. Each tendency to surpass this sphere and speak in general negatively, having no or too little knowledge regarding the target sphere for criticism, leads to useless consume of mind and energies in fruitless criticism. The best solution in this case, would precisely be the constructive criticism, to which I am trying to present some peculiarities.

3. Some peculiarities of a constructive criticism

Following what Albert points out that, "criticism should offer to any problems alternatives which reduce or side-line deficiencies of existing solutions," (Albert,

p.22), is reasonable that this quality should serve to distinguish between a deficient criticism and an improving one. Some other optional peculiarities might be:

a. Criticism should be solely exercised to those phenomena which depend somehow on human capacities.

b. Criticism should formulate applicable criteria. "It should rely, Albert writes-, on the acquaintance of real conditions and establishment of realizable goals and requests in a certain relevant sphere," (Albert, p.27).

c. There are cases when criticism derives from utopian basis. It is a true fact that as an inciter of thought, concretely in the political sphere, ideological one, etc., utopia is necessary, but to that degree it does not deny entirely and everything in the existing reality. The presence of a great utopian dose carries the danger of radicalizing solutions, as denial becomes unlimited, when it should have offered concrete political, individual or common actions to change the deficient problematic conditions.

d. Since alternatives for solving the problems in the social sphere might be much more than in the natural one, somehow independent of us, it is evident that criticism can not be exclusive. "Unique-comprehensibility is here a secondary virtue in the social sphere," –Albert says (ibid. p.358). For instance, claiming that politicians, who come into power, will solve all the problems. These results to be infantile partiality. It would rather help to soften somehow the misleading cacophony of criticism, make a clear and cut presentation why it would be different in case they came into power. The search for qualities of a constructive criticism doesn't go to say that our attitude to criticism should be that of a rigid dogmatism and of peace artificially stimulated in thoughts and action. No! The problem already solved by constructive criticism is that it becomes not merely a means to distinguish the differences between different thoughts, and to curse and persecute those who think differently. It is likely that according to our tradition of old system, the method of criticism is considered the same with the witches-hunting. Nowadays, it is in this way that criticism evolves even in some media, where just leaders' pathetic recessions are introduced, trite shouting's and euphemisms, jokes without appropriate concrete reasoning basis.

In conclusion, we might say that as a matter of fact, total criticism, utopian conception, radical alternatives and partiality in thoughts influence in certain situations and people much more than the effort to find a clear and rational solution to the problems. Anyway, it is

precisely where enthusiasm, indignation, or endless doubt about different things rule, that big frustration, uncertainties, disorientation and fear about the future prevail as well. Therefore, thoughts which drive that kind of criticism are deprived, as they destroy people's vital need to hope for a somehow stable future, and for which is being worked and invested.

LITERATURE

1. Albert, Hans: *Konstruktion und Kritik*, 2. Auflage,, Hofmann und Campe Verlag, Hamburg 1975.
2. Foucault, Michel: *Was ist Kritik*, Merve Verlag, Berlin 1992.
3. Kant, Immanuel: *Was ist Aufklärung*, 4. Auflage, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. Main, 1997.
4. Popper, Karl: *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Erkenntnistheorie*, 2. Auflage, J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Tübingen 1994.