

## Contributions of critical thinking as a form of participation and political deliberation

### Внески критичного мислення як форми участі та політичної дискусії

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#### Abstract

Critical thinking is an attribute of consciousness that can be manifested in all human activities where it is required, as a condition of possibility, in the use of critical reason and deliberation. Consequently, it is in the domains of politics that critical thinking is used more frequently, to discuss the scope and concrete significance of the discourses and practices that, from the exercise of public powers, are deployed on intelligent citizenship and with the minimum necessary of information for peer deliberation. The objective of this article is to deconstruct the most common contributions of critical thinking as a form of participation and political deliberation. Methodologically it is a research of documentary design developed in the coordinates of the philosophical essay, next to the Latin American philosopher and the revision of the most popular political theory. Among the main findings, the idea that critical thinking is not the exclusive patrimony of certain self-defined political and ideological tendencies as progressive in the region stands out. It is concluded that, this way of thinking is uncomfortable per se for all the paradigms that serve as the basis for the status quo, in politics and society.

**Keywords:** critical thinking in Latin America, political participation, critical reason and instrumental reason, rational deliberation, political epistemology

#### Анотація

Критичне мислення - це атрибут свідомості, який може виявлятися у всіх видах діяльності людини, де це вимагається, як умова можливості, у використанні критичного розуму та роздумів. Отже, саме у сферах політики критичне мислення використовується найчастіше, щоб обговорити масштаби та конкретну значимість дискурсів та практик, які від здійснення державних повноважень розгортаються на інтелектуальне громадянство та з мінімумом необхідної інформації для колегіального обговорення. Мета цієї статті - деконструувати найпоширеніші внески критичного мислення як форми участі та політичної дискусії. Методологічно це дослідження на основі документів, розроблене в координатах філософського есе, близького до латиноамериканської філософії і перегляд найпопулярнішої політичної теорії. Серед основних висновків виділяється думка, що критичне мислення не є винятковим надбанням певних самовизначених політичних та ідеологічних тенденцій, як прогресивних, в регіоні. Зроблено висновок, що такий спосіб мислення самий по собі незручний для всіх парадигм, які слугують основою для статус-кво в політиці та суспільстві.

**Ключові слова:** критичне мислення в Латинській Америці, політична участь, критичний розум та інструментальний розум, раціональне обговорення, політична гносеологія

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## Introduction

The notion of critical thinking acquires various ideo-political denotations and connotations that depend on discourse and context where it is used as a deliberative tool. However, everything indicates that it is an attribute of human consciousness that manifests itself, in one way or another, in all the activities that demand, as a condition of its possibility, the use of critical reason and consequent deliberation, preferably among equal subjects, as it is known that in vertical relationships that tend to relegate some people for others to a position of supposed inferiority, criticism is obliterated beforehand, or at least reduced to its minimum expression.

In the words of (Palacios, Álvarez, Moreira, & Morán, 2017: 196):

Critical thinking is a type of reasoning that could be defined in different ways, but most of them always have some relation to the act of questioning or valuing. The etymology of the word criticism comes from the Greek word κρισις (kri), which implies establishing a judgment or making a decision. For this reason, when talking about critical thinking, in general terms, it makes reference to questioning and assessment exercises, which finally allow to express a judgment or a position regarding a fact, phenomenon or idea.

In this way, critical thinking investigations are common in areas as diverse as: political science, philosophy, social psychology, business administration and political leadership, among many others. In all cases, this way of thinking is meant in its functionality to question certain problematic realities in particular, or more general abstract situations as paradigms that serve as the basis to the scientific, political or epistemological order at a given historical moment, to expose the arguments and the asymmetric power relations, which hinder the harmonious development of the human person to benefit elites to the detriment of ordinary people. Trendily, the counterhegemonic discourse that serves as a vehicle for critical thinking, is accompanied by proposals, simple or complex, abstract or concrete to formulate orders or alternative paradigms to the dominant ones, but it does not necessarily have to be this way,

since every well-reasoned criticism is enough by itself

From our perspective, critical thinking emerges much more in the domains of intelligent and informed citizenship, in this case about political issues of general interest. This is like that, for at least two reasons, first, criticism without an argumentative basis or made it without solid empirical evidence that supports it, is not really a manifestation of critical thinking, but an act of deliberative irresponsibility that does not deserve an answer. Second, critical thinking as any form of intellection is produced from the basic knowledge of reality, situation or idea that comes to be refuted, by a rational political subject willing to contribute to the development of communicative actions, of this condition is given precisely according to (Habermas, 2000), its validity and feasibility.

The objective of this article is to deconstruct the most common contributions of critical thinking, as a form of participation and political deliberation. It is about investigating what it implies for a social actor or political subject to think critically, by reviewing different theoretical and legal developments, which have been propping up dialectically in the West, since the advent of the philosophical program of political modernity, a culture of critical thinking that subsumes to different notions such as: freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, autonomy of the person, rights of resistance to oppression and free development of personality.

Theoretical references in historical perspective  
Critical thinking is synthesized in a way of being in the world that maintains a prudential distance with all forms of power that produce and reproduce in its course of time the political, economic, scientific and religious orders. According to (Foucault, 1980) these orders are institutionalized giving content and form to the material and symbolic spaces in which societies settle, under the aegis of certain types of authority, which beyond the clearly democratic mood of some countries nowadays, they always resist systematic criticism to obstruct change. From what is inferred that, the order, in all its manifestations, resists the criticism that bets to

the change to promote to improve continuous in the relations of knowledge and power.

For the mentioned reasons, critical thinking has always been the referring that identifies relevant personalities in the world of philosophy, politics and culture since immemorial times. According to (Mina, 2012), Greek philosophy was already characterized by the critical spirit sponsored by a humanistic formation that encouraged young people to think for themselves as a condition of possibility to be critical of the fundamentals that order knowledge and society, based on supposed unquestionable and immutable truths that often oppose to the progress. Proof of this assertion is in devices such as Socratic maieutics. In this ancient context, (Mina, 2012) assumes that critical thinking was the consequence of love for deeper knowledge among philosophers such as Socrates, Diogenes, Plato and Aristotle.

With the end of the classical Greco-Roman civilization and the advent in Europe of the so-called middle age, millennium characterized by the hegemony of Christianity in general and the Catholic church in particular, free thinking is proscribed, while imposing itself on the societies of the moment a dogmatic and theological thinking style contrary to the questioning of the established order. It was in the wake of the renaissance when some critical thinking practices are taken back close to the anthropocentrism and logo-centrism of later modernity, such as the cultivation of the arts, the study of rhetoric and literature.

In the classic work on the sources of Renaissance thought of (Kristeller, 1979), it is concluded that the humanists produced a vast body of research on the Greek and Latin authors of antiquity, which had a direct result in the repositioning of man as a leading subject of his history, contrary to the theocentric providentialism of religion, a situation that otherwise claims history and philosophy as a privileged way of knowing the world based on critical judgment.

It would not be, however, until the century of lights when theoretical developments about thinking critically reached their moment of political fullness. In this scenario of transition, critical reason erodes the foundations of monarchical absolutism, based on divine law

and the stately society of the old regime that guaranteed at all times the predominant character of the aristocracy over the entire societal body. In the words of (Ferrater, 2004), the illustration characterizes the progressive intellectual and political tendencies of the 18th century which, beyond their differences, coincided in their optimism for the reason as the cornerstone of the improvement of the human condition and as a tool for the development of a political system (liberal state / secular state) delimited from religious obscurantism.

It is at this moment, where the role of a rational citizen is committed, able to modernize their world based on rational principles supported by science and philosophy, suitable to revolutionize the natural and cultural world of people within the framework of an unlimited dynamic of progress. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, after the end of the two world wars, this critical thinking scheme that served as the basis for modernity entered into crisis, giving way to other forms of critical thinking.

In the words of (González, 2002), the critical theory of society formulated by the Frankfurt School, which was used for its development, both of a revisionist Marxism and of psychoanalysis, highlights the dialectic of illustration as a way of thinking, but from the critical questioning of it. The fundamental question they asked at the time was: How was it possible that in a world governed by reason and critical thinking, two world wars have also been driven by totalitarian states such as the Nazi and the Stalinist USSR?

To answer these questions, most of the Frankfurters, with the exception of (Habermas, 1999), ended up stating that the philosophical program of modernity failed flatly on its attempt to contain the forces of irrationality. For this reason, in the opinion of (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1998) it was appropriate for the critical theory of society to reformulate the main ideals of enlightenment that consist in the promotion of freedom, equity and social justice to strip them of the intrusion of an instrumental rationality at the service of the productive forces of the great capital, without any concern for human dignity or for the environmental impact of the relations of production brought to its maximum expression

by the consumer society, which staged to a one-dimensional man, alienated from all criticism.

Another important contribution to contemporary social theory that drives critical thinking practices, not only in the production of knowledge, but fundamentally as a tool for participation and political deliberation in today's world, is in postpositivist, feminist and postmodern tendencies. For (Losada & Casas, 2008), these trends generated at the same time research programs that gave visibility to the experiences of resistance of subordinate groups such as women, migrants, homosexuals, workers and peasants, among others, while producing theories to boost the development of their legitimate political struggles content to their empowerment and dignification in front of the hegemonic powers.

### Methodology

Epistemologically we defend a constructivist conception of scientific knowledge that, in the words of (Ortiz, 2015) and (Barrera, 2010), this is expressed in the subjective as a process of construction of multidimensional knowledge from the particular way in which each person perceives, organizes and gives meaning to the own reality. Process that, in turn, is conditioned by the activity of the central nervous system, which aims to build a coherent interpretative model that gives meaning and uniqueness to the worlds of life. In the objective, the constructivism postulates that the social reality is the result of the intersubjective articulation of the different particular realities that are produced from the psychological capacities of each one, within the framework of certain sociocultural conditions that vary dynamically over time and the space.

When we involve this paradigm in interdisciplinary research on the phenomenon of power and, particularly, on high-point issues such as: critical thinking and political participation / deliberation, a cognitive space is revealed and this values equally the conditions, the symbolic dimension of knowledge and ways of thinking, intimately related to social representations or collective imaginary and; the material dimension or objectivity of reality, which accounts for the concrete effects that the exercise of criticality

has on power in its different expressions and modalities. All of which ends by structure a field of research that is defined as political epistemology, in which all the sciences and disciplines that are interested in the study of the power to reveal, in their own way, the conditions and circumstances that in theory and reality allow the exercise and relational development, as a primary device of social control.

On the other hand, the design of documentary research provided, through the archiving of written documentary sources, in the form of scientific articles and high impact academic texts, the critical apparatus for the organization, categorization and interpretation of the texts available to us present in the bibliography. As (Gómez, 2011) said, the goal of this form of research commonly inserts in the phenomenological and hermeneutic coordinates of qualitative type, although it also works in quantitative works, is to produce an intertextual dialogue to understand in depth the arguments of the authors addressed and, likewise, contribute to the production of new or renewed knowledge that combines what the theory says with the author's reasoned opinion.

Specifically, this research was carried out in three differential moments: first, a set of biblio-hemerographic materials was collected that directly contributed to the scope and current situation of the problem; Then, a selection was made based on criteria such as: their originality, argumentative clarity and their contributions to the deepening of the topic. Second, it was proceeded to interpret and reconstruct the weekly ideas of the resulting anthology, by combining three levels of reading: a) reading between the lines, which consisted of detecting the implicit, contradictions and ideological or epistemological positions of the authors; b) reading on lines, to assess the illocutive force of the author and the final communicative intention of his work and; c) normal or line reading, designed to understand precisely the literal meaning of the text addressed (Sánchez, 2011).

Finally, in the third moment the writing was prepared under the discursive coordinates of the Latin American philosophical who has been able to criticize the negative imprint of the material and symbolic order built in the

region, resulting, according to (Dussel, 2001), a modernity focused on very limited spaces of society for the exclusive benefit of power elites, who naturalize or make invisible the situations of poverty and exclusion suffered by social groups and do not tolerate criticism of their practices and conceptions of the world. In essence it is about a discursive genre, which vindicates speculation in matters of political philosophy, but it uses historical and theoretical evidence to formulate its judgments and assessments of reality. However, they should remember that this philosophical tradition has been very little self-critical and has degenerated, in some cases, into the rhetorical heritage of radical and authoritarian governments of the extreme left.

### **Critical thinking and freedom of expression in the legal field**

According to (Capote, 2018, p. 204), "law is a discipline in which critical thinking must be an essential tool, in order to develop standards that are really fair and to apply them equitably." In fact, the legal sciences start from an interpretation of reality, based on verifiable facts, on which the norm is constituted. The sense of justice comes from this rational perception of reality, which aims to establish a marked balance by equity and social consensus.

Consequently, critical thinking, being present in the legal field, contributes to the construction of regulatory bodies that respond to the requirements of society. For this, the expansion of the criticism is not possible without previously establishing the conditions for its concretion. In this regard, the National Constituent Assembly of Colombia in 1991 was a propitious scenario for the deliberation, the debate of ideas, the presentation of divergent perspectives on the moment and the historical evolution of the country, which not only defined a Political Constitution, but there were essential agreements for the social pact, which are still valid today.

In this way, critical thinking at the legal level, requires for its expansion a democratic culture that promotes tolerance, political debate and social consensus. Hence, the categorization of crimes of opinion is not only contrary to the principle of freedom, but also close to critical thinking. In this regard, the Inter-American

Court of Human Rights, in a ruling dated May 2, 2008, held that "only the facts, and not the opinions, are susceptible to trials of truthfulness or falsehood" (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2013), which indicated that free thought, the freedom of the individual as a thinking subject, should not be annulled for reasons associated with the ideas or beliefs (ideology) that are professed. This principle is in accordance with democracy, a political system that favors the development of critical thinking, to accommodate freedom, dissent and tolerance. Indeed, democracy is also "a series of procedures for communication, to argue, dialogue, debate, and make decisions, to resolve the inevitable conflicts arising from coexistence" (Santisteban, 2004, p. 7).

That is why the highest courts in Latin America have recognized the importance of the right to freedom of thought and expression in their respective legal systems (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2013), which strengthens democracy and therefore, critical thinking is promoted. In the case of Colombia, the Constitutional Court in multiple decisions has claimed freedom of expression within the framework prescribed by the 1991 Constitution. Thus, in a ruling of May 22, 2007, the Court sets forth its arguments in favor of the promotion and defense of freedom of expression:

"The main justification for lending to freedom of expression a central position within contemporary constitutional regimes is that, through their protection, representative democracy, citizen participation and self-government by each nation are facilitated. This argument emphasizes that communication and the free flow of information, opinions and ideas in society is an essential element of the democratic and representative government scheme, which is why freedom of expression, by allowing an open and vigorous debate on public affairs, fulfills a central political function" (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2013, p. 9).

Consequently, critical thinking is inherent in an order of freedom, where the central condition of the individual in society is recognized, an ideal that is progressively expanding in a globalized world, where despite the current latent social inequality, there is a

greater legal awareness and policy on the importance of guaranteeing the free realization of the individual, from which the expansion of critical thinking derives.

### **Globalization and contributions of critical thinking as a form of participation and political deliberation**

In the context of globalization, (Bourdieu, 2005) warns about the policy of depoliticization that characterizes this system, which results in demobilization and demoralization of the dominated. The characteristic styles of resistance to this scheme of domination in the contemporary world, are embodied by social movements, understood as “collective actions that articulate preferences of important social conglomerates in the search for the change of certain social structuring schemes” (Salamanca, 1998, p. 326).

Depoliticization in the globalized world is a strategy that pursues the demobilization of social movements. This purpose is specified when social actors lose their struggle north, that means, they cease to perceive the relevant nature of that for which a change is required. In this sense, the dispossession of this broad vision of those who embody a social movement, speaks of the absence or set aside of critical thinking.

In fact, critical thinking is necessary for any social actor to be clear about the purpose and real reason of their struggle. Hence, it is necessary, the insertion of researchers, intellectuals or knowledge actors, in the definition of ideals, the model of society that is intended to be reached through collective action. The critical sense that these thinkers introduce in their reflections, which in the end becomes in an ideological approach, constitutes the basis on which the criticality of the social collective will be articulated.

However, (De Sousa Santos, 2009) remarks that this intellectual mediation runs the risk of assuming a role that does not belong to it, since the criteria of the elites, in this intellectual case, is reduced and fruitless if it does not transcend towards a collective aware action. In this way, the *raison d'être* of intellectual mediation consists in opening the doors to the emergence of new collective subjectivities,

that is, a shared vision of change at the scale of the established order.

Without criticism, in political terms, social conglomerates do not go beyond being only automaton groups, without awareness in respect of why of the demand for change. Certainly, here lies the intent of the contemporary order in the globalized world, where the neutral or indifferent condition of the citizen is valued, compared to the critical and active attitude of the latter that becomes critical.

### **Analysis and discussion of results**

Critical thinking is not the exclusive patrimony of a particular social movement or any political group, either left-leaning or right-wing. In reality, criticality can be present in any political project, as long as reason is given as a central condition for improvement an unique thinking, an ideology that leads to fanaticism, closing the doors to intersubjective dialogue, pluralism and achievement of agreements based on arguments, key purposes of a democratic system (Pérez-Estévez, 2012).

However, even at this initial stage of the 21st century, the absence of a systematic and integral critical thinking is noted (Gambina, 2009), which nurtures the political actions of citizens, social movements, party groups, syndicalist organizations and others deliberative spaces, in which collective action for social change is gestated.

Indeed, social change constitutes the central problem of critical thinking in a collective dimension (Stolongo & Delgado, 2006); its approach requires the adoption of a plural reason, detached from ideological fanaticism that subordinates the integrity of the individual to the supreme interest of totalitarian systems (for example, communism and neoliberalism). Hence the importance of forming, in a context of freedom and breadth, the criticality for political participation.

Certainly, critical thinking is brewing in a moment of reflexivity, but it is not limited to this, because it must lead to praxis grounds. In this way, its development combines theory and praxis or political action (Cebotarev, 2003). That is why it is not enough to train citizens to develop a critical reading of their social reality,

but this formation of a political nature must lead to democratic rationality.

The adoption of this rationality from critical thinking leads to linking the criticality of the individual with their socio-historical context. The Critical Theory provided by the Frankfurt School, and in particular by Max Horkheimer, who has highlighted the origin or primary link between theory-praxis, with the socio-historical framework from which both arise. Thus, from the theoretical point of view, "conceptual organizations, or systematizations of knowledge, sciences, have been and are constituted in relation to the changing process of social life" (Osorio, 2007, p. 105).

Also with regard to praxis, it is in the socio-historical context where the identity roots and cultural coordinates that make sense to a town project, can be located, which must arise from shared agreements and not from impositions. Hence, it is valid and necessary to speak of a Latin American critical thinking (Esquivel, 2017), based on dialogue and the political-ideological mixture, that is, an inclusive and plural thought, which does not reduce to the limited coordinates of an ideology.

### Conclusions

Democracy is the natural space of critical thinking. In it, the individual - and beyond, the social movements - find the basic conditions for the development of criticality: freedom (recognition in the legal plane of freedom of thought and expression), and the possibility of dissenting in order to seek social change. In this sense, critical thinking is not the exclusive patrimony of a progressive or conservative ideology, but of every person and social group that, in a context of democratic exercise, think about the established order and its transformation.

Totalitarian systems repress critical thinking, and although they do not cancel it due to the resistance of some dissenting voices, they prevent it from becoming generalized in the population. The change or conformation of an order of justice, equality and participation, aspiration present in the critical vision of society, is replaced in totalitarianism (either from the right or from the left) by an ideology of control, where freedom is curtailed, to sow in the population the belief in a non-existent

functional order, when in reality it is devoid of a minimum of rationality.

Democratic systems, in contrast to totalitarian systems, promote freedom of expression and recognize the right of citizens to think differently from what is considered normal in society. In this way, critical thinking does not represent a threat to democracy, but is part of it; while for totalitarianism, it is simply subversive and dangerous.

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