

# Casual (Thinking) Day Has Gone Too Far

## Critical Theories Criticized

§1 Openness to new approaches is an aspect of the humanities and philosophy especially. It is part of their scientific ethos. One might, however, have the impression that the open-mindedness of the humanities has gone too far, looking at the developments both at universities and their new 'disciplines' and fields of 'study' as well as listening to 'analysis' in the media.

As the standards of argumentative quality are softer in the humanities the approaches possible to take into account is proportionally broader than in the harder sciences. Thus, postmodern and all types of 'critical' theories may be considered, and their world view pondered as an option to see society – or the human condition in general. The same holds even for openly chauvinistic world views, which need not only ethical rejection, but scientific refutation.

§2 In this way texts are read and distributed in academic contexts. This typically leads to misapprehensions:

- a) that the texts are of academic quality comparable to the established theories;
- b) that the texts express acceptable views to take in an academic or political debate;
- c) that the epistemic and scientific standards of these texts are acceptable extensions or alternatives to existing standards.

Such misapprehensions can be dispelled in a thorough consideration and analysis of such texts, but people already (politically) invested in their world view might not wait for nor participate in such debates.

Therefore, the mere inclusion of such texts in the debate can foster their credibility in the eyes of the already inclined followers.

Given the ethos of free debate and non-exclusion of opinions and theories this cannot be helped.

Liberalism of debates faces the shortcoming of being exploited in procuring a forum while being rejected

as a way to arrive at an argued evaluation of alternative theories. This one-sided exploitation of a liberal scientific attitude in the humanities marks the ideologues of such world views: they demand inclusion into the realm of acceptable views, but reject at the same time criticism that their view is false or below acceptable argumentative standards.

§3 All this applies to the development of identitarian 'critical' theories in the 2000s. based on a liberal consideration of postmodern and 'critical' thought in the 1980s and 1990s.

These 'theories' give their followers a sense of empowerment, and thus will not be abandoned by simply recognizing the better argument against them. As many of their followers lack the scientific education or the nerve for thorough theoretical examination and debate criticism is rejected by a politicized epistemology rejecting universal standards and corroboration or refutation of theories.

Argument ends here – or can only point to the performative inconsistencies and anti-rational element of such attitudes. Academic discussion – and possible rejection – of such theories proves to be powerless in the face of the social and political forces carrying these views.

Academic open-mindedness as scientific ethos cannot be abandoned, but academic insights in the failures of such world views can be part of or be used in political campaigns against the anti-rational and anti-democratic elements of those theories. Academic criticism has already been helpless against, but still has been part of the rejection of Social-Darwinism and racist world views.

Given the dominance or great influence of such identitarian or 'critical' views in the public (be it in the media, schools, companies and political organizations) academic debates face a dilemma:

- a) a discussion of such views is called for as they have to be criticized given their social repercussions, but
- b) discussing them might be misapprehended as admitting their value as theories.

A class, thus, should focus on 'critical debate of' such a theory, instead of just reading and distributing the world view. One might place the criticism in a political campaign against anti-liberal views, but omission of academic debate and criticism may foster the misapprehension that such views have not been considered and found wanting.

§4 The methods of these 'critical' theories have been criticized by many people many times, so to keep it short: their main shortcomings are their incoherent attitudes to truth and language.

Generically these theories state that opinions and theories should not be taken at face value but are an expression only of underlying basic structures (be they economic or racial or ...), so the claim to neutral (scientific or rational) method and access to truth is rejected – landing us in relativism. This relativism not only comes with the paradigmatic performative inconsistencies of relativism turned on itself, but in 'critical' theories combines itself with the elitist claim that the theorists have a privileged access to objectivity (because of their class membership, skin colour, sexual orientation, etc.). This combination of identitarian attitudes and epistemic privilege based on these identities results in their authoritarian character immunizing themselves from criticism.

Generically these theories take a constructivist attitude to categories and claim that local and cultural differences in language determines our picture of reality, where language at the same time is a means off exercising power. The later claim is part of the package of views on truth, and again self-undermining. The claims of language-based relativism have been refuted by linguistics several times over. Even with respect to gendered or un-gendered language their claim to its social impact in discrimination and political world views – even if sounding plausible to many people – lacks empirical confirmation. Language politics are no substitute for social reforms, although the later may be more challenging.

Language employed in false statements has to be corrected, just as science rejects constant employment of inappropriate categories to types of objects. This uncontroversial method of correction of language use is generalized in 'critical' theories to the untenable position that neutral categorization is impossible, notwithstanding claiming at the same time that the categories of 'critical' theories apply. The 'critical' theories are generically stated in an ill-defined jargon that is vague enough to cover supposedly enough of society and at the same time deflect strict criteria of proper employment of terms.

In the open-minded debates of the humanities and philosophy these shortcomings may be accepted for the sake of the argument or to see where such an approach may lead and what one might learn from it. It might open a perspective, even if a proper scientific or argued treatment of the topics is needed to corroborate the ideas floated. The situation with 'critical' theories today, however, shows: Casual (Thinking) Day Has Gone Too Far.

§5 A place between the chairs is reserved for those liberals who at the same time reject both the authoritarian streak of the 'critical' theories as well as the complacent uncritical practices of mainstream sciences and social arrangements. Universalism of reason (be it in science, be it in ethics) belongs to the core of enlightened liberalism and should not fall victim to political activism or abstinence. Universal standards of science (answering to the difference between 'softer' and 'harder' sciences) and of reason (say, in reasonable debate) have to be defended, even if life contains more than science and reason.

The 'critical' theories demand more protection of the environment, better measures against negative discrimination (because of skin colour, region of origin, sexual orientation etc.), and a better realization of human rights (say, of refugees), against them being too neglected in current society. Criticizing their one-sidedness (focusing on rights of their respective identity group), anti-democratic potential and lack of theoretical quality may be understood by the proponents and adherents of existing arrangements as supporting the *status quo*.

Again, this cannot be helped as the suppression of such criticism for political purposes violates the ethos of debate in pursuing a proper theory of society. Non-simplified points of view and fine-grained analysis will always be pushed easily to the side lines.

As universalists argue for universal, neutral and disinterested debates and standards of criticism they cannot abstain from their principles for the sake of preferred political allies or publicity. A consistent universalism has to stick to its ethos and aims at integrating ever more participants into a rational debate.