

DFG Research Training Group "Self-Making. Practices of Subjectivation."

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Critique of Practice – Practice of Critique

From a praxeological point of view, subjects are constituted in the accomplishment of practices. Thus, on this view, critique can be conceived as a specific transformative practice of extant practices. It intervenes in and disrupts the current workings of practices in order to divert, re-synchronize, or even stop them. Therefore, moments of pause, deviance, and reconfiguration lend themselves to critique. Although the specific practice form of critique can seem to be a meta- or para-practice, it is always innately part of the iterative course of practices. Thus, critique does not possess a practice external status; the specific reflexivity of critical practice does not contradict its mundanity and ubiquity. Certain branches of praxeology even go so far as to view critique as a fundamental characteristic of all practice. Deviance in the repetition, which practices exhibit following previous practices, is then viewed as the momentary spark of critique. Such a conception of critique as an unspecific property of practices can, in turn, be subject to critique. If critique is inherently part of all practice, what kind of critique conception applies to practices?

Etymologically, being able to distinguish (*krínein*) is the basis of critique. Properties are elevated to criteria (*kritérion*) enabling the perceptibility of constructed differences. Accomplished distinguishing is the prerequisite of critique. It makes distinctions between ideologies and groups of people, localizing itself within these distinctions. Thus, critique is involved in the self-making of subjects. If, in general, distinguishing acts draw social-ontologically powerful lines of demarcation (e.g., female/male), then critical distinguishing has the potential to subvert, revise, and surpass accepted distinction patterns. In modernity, "critical masses" have time and again expressed their discrimination or exclusion due to established lines of distinction. Thus, practices of critique imply the revision and re-evaluation of accepted distinctions. More often than not, distinctions subject to critique, which continue to be deemed anachronistic, live on as nevertheless enduring distinctions in an "undead" existence with consequences appearing to be less relevant and, thus, underestimated. Thus, in critique's blind spot they will, on occasion, regain their impact until ultimately yet again becoming the subject of widespread critique. This observation does not only hold for ontological, but also for specific cultural (east/west, black/white), political (right/left, conservative/liberal), social (middle-class/proletariat), and aesthetic (serious/light, high/subculture) distinctions and their respective mutual correlations.

Diagnostically, critique is oftentimes tied to crises (*krísis*). This corresponds with both the etymology and the semantic ambiguity of the adjectival expression "critical," which can refer to crisis or to critique. Practices of critique can be (contemporary) historically

identified and their prerequisites, processuality, and impact can be scrutinized. What are the cultural and historical prerequisites of critiquing society or systems? What course do practices of critique take and what quality do they exhibit (e.g., escalation, extension, evaluation)? How does critique impact practices? And, which practices are deemed to be critique, and when? To what extent do terms and concepts of critique and crises overlap?

As a transformational force, critique plays a decisive part in the forming of self. The everyday utilization of critique leads individuals to a more focused and renewed positioning and contouring of the self. Thus, critique can, e.g., become a profession dealing primarily with content and objects, but which at the same time is always located in a contemporary historical sphere of critique, searching there for a recognizable/acceptable position. In this context, the critical evaluation of professional critique as it can be found in journalistic publication media would be of interest. Here, the subject of inquiry would be the (pre-)conditions, successions, and results of critique: What is deemed criticizable and worthy of critique? Which forms of resistance does critique build up and which does it tear down? What is the implicit relationship in which the critic finds themselves with regard to their subject and other (intellectual) critique forms? Which text practices are identified as critical and what defines the high art of critique (*kritikē tékhnē*)?

In recent times in cultural historical contexts, a *post*-critical era has been proclaimed. This is regarded as a resigned reaction to a sociopolitical cycle of intellectual critique in the 20th century, which is seen to have on occasion advanced to a critical philosophy leaving no moral-political position as viable in its wake. The simple aversion to all things critical expressed in post-critical practices could in this sense be seen as a symptom of moral indifference displacing a period of critical zeal. Accordingly, inquiry could be made historically into phenomena of homogenization or, rather, the dissolution and marginalization of ethical-critical evaluation practices. And, more generally, the questions could be investigated: what form does the dynamic of critical dissent and “uncritical” affirmation in specific epochs take? To what extent can periods be defined or characterized by such cycles or fluctuations of critique? What critique would a praxeological micro-history level at such forms of space-time typification?

Last, but not least, the lecture series wishes to take a critical look at scientific practices and, more precisely, subject praxeological research to methodological (self-)critique. The basis for such critique of practice theoretical practice can both be developed from the intrinsic logic of the practice being scrutinized as the object of inquiry or from the “practically remote” concerns of abstract theorizing. Thus, one could inquire: Where are the blind spots of research emphatically tied to empirical research whose perspective switches between a theatrical bird’s eye view and a participant’s perspective on the ground? To what extent are observations of such research approaches, their intrinsic ties to empirical objects notwithstanding, conditioned by theoretical concepts – even those hovering in the background? Which subject position does a practice theoretical researcher take in an (inter-)disciplinary field? What form does practice theoretical self-reflection take in situ and in the moment? And, how can a methodological critique transform praxeology – or perhaps even nullify it?