What is Critique?
Critical Turns in the Age of Criticism

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Abstract:

Since the Enlightenment, critique has played an overarching role in how Western society understands itself and its basic institutions. However, opinions differ widely concerning the understanding and evaluation of critique. To understand such differences and clarify a viable understanding of critique, the article turns to Kant's critical philosophy, inaugurating the "age of criticism". While generalizing and making critique unavoidable, Kant coins an unambiguously positive understanding of critique as an affirmative, immanent activity. Not only does this positive conception prevail in the critique of pure and practical reason and the critique of judgment; these modalities of critique set the agenda for three major strands of critique in contemporary thought, culminating in among others Husserl, Popper, Habermas, Honneth, and Foucault. Critique affirms and challenges cognition and its rationality, formulates ethical ideals that regulate social interaction, and further articulates normative guidelines underway in the ongoing experimentations of a post-natural history of human nature.

In contradistinction to esoteric Platonic theory, philosophy at the threshold of modernity becomes closely linked to an outward-looking critique that examines and pictures what human forms of life are in the process of making of themselves and challenges them, by reflecting upon what they can and what they should make of themselves. As a very widely diffused practice, however, critique may also become a self-affirming overarching end in itself.

Key words: Affirmative critique, judgment, distinction, practice, philosophy, reason, Enlightenment, Man, anthropology, Kant, Heidegger, Habermas, Foucault, Schlegel, Plato

Critique in the Age of Criticism

In the foreword to the 1781 version of *Critique of Pure Reason*, the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant characterizes his own time as the 'age of criticism'.

Indeed, critique is characterised as that, "*to which everything must be subjected*" (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 13). While religion may often call upon its sanctity, just as governmental legislation upon authority, to avoid the challenges that arise in critique, phenomena that seek to elude criticism must, according to Kant, awaken legitimate misgivings of not being able to resist critique. For this reason, "*they become the subjects of just suspicion, and cannot lay claim to high esteem, which reason accords only to that which has stood the test of a free and public examination*" (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 13).

Just as Kant thought of his time, we still seem – at least in Western societies – to live in an age characterised by critique. Since the Enlightenment, critique belongs to the "*fundamental capacities of our cultural identity and self-understanding*" (Gasché, 2007, p. 12) or "*to the foundation of our cultural self-conception*" (Röttgers, 1975, p. 1). Critique has been crucial for the identity and self-understanding of modernity (Kolb, 1986; Touraine, 1995), as well as for private and public modern life (Koopman, 2010; Taylor, 2003; Habermas, 1987, p. 40). The critical approach is essential for critical theory (Cook, 2013; Butler, 2012; Celikates, 2009a; Jaeggi & Wesche, 2009; Honneth, 1994; McCarthy, 1978; Callinicos, 2006), critical thinking (Horkheimer & Schmidt, 1968), and literary criticism (Johnson, 1981; Jameson, 2008). As shall be made clear, critique has also been widely influential beyond this scope, in particular for modern science, and for art in seeking to oppose what is taken for granted. It is therefore of consequence for the understanding and articulation of a number of discussions and issues of major importance to examine and discuss the omnipresent notion of critique, and how it is susceptible to several interpretations.

In this article, I shall begin by unfolding how critique currently plays an incontrovertible and overarching role in how Western society understands itself. It is not only essential when we relate to others and ourselves. Indeed, as suggested in Kant's bicentennial work, it played a vital role for a long time. The diffusion and integration of critique in our social fabric is visible in the understanding that criticism can be applied to every dimension of society. Indeed, critique has become social criticism, in the sense that it is virtually ubiquitous and an incontrovertible part of the social fabric. I will likewise suggest that, as a result of this, critique also risks becoming increasingly vague and ambiguous, whereby it may become a liability and a caricature of itself. If societal practices become increasingly self-reflective and self-critical, it also becomes difficult to distinguish the features and strengths of critique as a specific and constructive activity. Thus, the state of criticism in its own age has become critical. It is this nebulous nature that makes critique itself the object of criticism. As the state of critique becomes critical with the age of criticism, the question becomes a matter of urgency: "*What is it to offer a critique?*" (Butler, 2003, p. 304)

In order to contribute to clarifying the ever present, but also somewhat confusing relation to critique, i.e. defining and clarifying its ambiguity, it may be worth emphasising the point in history where critique becomes essential for how reason, thought, and the human are conceived. Following a short overview of development in the early concept of critique, I will return to the decisive moment where Kant points out critique as a defining feature. Returning to examine the constitution of critique, in what was a defining moment for Western thought and culture, seems inevitable, if one wants to understand and discuss the concept in its role as an over-arching and indispensable, yet also somewhat problematic contemporary idea and a practice.

At the specific point in time where critique becomes a defining feature for Western thought, culture, and society, the groundwork is laid for a generalized conception of critique according to which it is a specific, but still first and foremost immanent and affirmative activity. The primary aim of the article is to demonstrate this and articulate the contours of an understanding of critique as a basically attentive, appreciative, and confirmatory activity. An accurate comprehension of this landmark idea of critique may serve as an important signpost. Since critique, conceived in this exemplary manner, contributed decisively to constituting today's wide and unsurveyable world in which it plays a major, yet also somewhat imprecise role, an articulation of this constitutive notion of critique may allow one to find one's bearings in the present complex landscape. In addition, an affirmative notion of critique may serve as an exemplar and indicate an alternative when critique threatens to lose its outline or deteriorate into a purely negative activity. A secondary ambition of the article is to show that the conception of critique as a mostly negative and destructive aim in itself – and the critique of critique for becoming a travesty of itself – is only possible with the generalization of critique, inaugurating the age of Enlightenment.

In a close reading of Kant's three major critical oeuvres, I shall articulate the salient features of the various types of critique. In extension, the article shows how the distinct forms of critique outlined by Kant have subsequently left their mark on and been further developed by three major strands of Western critical thought. At closer inspection, however, Kant's conceptions of critique and the ensuing traditions are not only to be distinguished from one another; all cases relate equally to each other and come together in understanding critique as being basically immanent and affirmative, rather than negative.

A subsequent section shows how Heidegger underlines the affirmative character of critique in Kant's work, even as it demonstrates how Schlegel elucidated crucial traits of this affirmative stance in the wake of the Kantian turn. According to Schlegel, the true critique characterizes the object in the light of what it seems on the verge of presenting and realizing.

The article moves on by demonstrating that critique, for Kant and Schlegel, is not primarily a negative effort to identify mistakes and limitations, but instead an endeavour to examine something important that presents itself and that we are part of in order to examine what we are in the process of committing ourselves to. As a consequence of this approach, critical judgment in Kant, Schlegel, and subsequent thinkers in this tradition does not respect the well-established dichotomy between is and ought, but affirms the impact of normative measures as the *conditio sine qua non* for critique. In the centre of critique we therefore find the virtual, rather than the factual and the counter-factual. With the generalization of criticism, philosophy becomes closely tied to critique in this sense.

The ensuing two sections of the article add to and provide further evidence for the basic argument for an affirmative turn with modern critical theory. They make clear that the modern critical turn may, at first glance and somewhat surprisingly, be perceived as affirmative in various respects, also when compared to previous pre-critical philosophies. When philosophy essentially becomes critical, there occurs a reversal of the original reactive inward turn that constitutes Platonic philosophy, as is demonstrated in the next section. As a consequence, philosophy now appears called forth by an immanent tendency to critical self-problematization and -transgression in various fields of experience. Subsequently, a section demonstrates how critical philosophy ties in with pragmatic

anthropology, understood as a critical and affirmative reflection on human existence. Pragmatic anthropology takes an experience of the human as a situated and examines what humans can make of themselves in extension with what they have already made of themselves.

The final section returns to the virtues and vices of critique in the age of criticism and gives an outline of the critical approach as practiced in the article. Thus, the article gives the outline of a positive yet pluri-valued conception and application of critique that avoids adopting a stance, in which critique is perceived as a negative and derogatory evaluation, in which the critic mainly affirms himself in a general dissociation from the world he evaluates. Critique is also, and essentially, an affirmation. The question is: of what?

The Ambiguous Incontrovertibility of Critique

Modern, Western democracies have often defined themselves in distinction from totalitarianism, because critique is possible in this particular setting, but also because critique is a core task and makes up an important commitment (Arendt & Canovan, 1998; Arendt, 1951). The willingness to subject other views to critical testing is not only assumed in the political system and public debate. The possibility of critique and commitment to criticise is installed as an essential component in many societal institutions.

Modern, Western science rests very much upon Pierre Bayle's conception of a republic of letters, "*in which each every single member is sovereign and must be able to justify himself in front of every other member*", since "*one does not present anything without proof*" and "*acts as both witness and prosecutor*" (Bayle, 1720, p. 812).

Despite major educational reforms such as the European Bologna Process that transforms the architecture of higher education curricula by focusing on learning outcomes, it seems – when studying various ministerial decrees and curricula across the educational system – that the traditional core educational goal to generate a critical and reflective students is still somewhat in place. In certain respects, this requirement may have become less accentuated, but there is still a focus on the self-critical and self-evaluating student (Popkewitz, 2008; Krejsler, 2006), all the while educational and research institutions are themselves subject to ongoing critical evaluations.

In spite of contemporary attacks, nobody could imagine literary institutions or even literature in general without critical review and its related institutions. While it could be said that authors must be willing to subject their work to criticism, authors and publishers even insist that also the establishment of literary criticism must be subject to various kinds of criticism. The question is not whether critique is to take place, but what to understand by critique.

In Western society, ongoing and sturdy criticism is therefore a basic principle and continuous commitment. It is, at the same time, at the centre of our self-articulation. This concern both determines who we are or I am and is involved in understanding others and ourselves. It also determines what we want to be and what we reject. The relationship to critique involves the modern, Western conception of self. As an employee, as a citizen and as a member of civil society, I am myself at stake in this conception of myself as a modern self that must establish a critical relationship to myself (Raffnsøe, 2010).

The Dissemination of Critique in Practice

The continued and dominant presence of critique as a decisive and determining factor in the political and public sphere, in education, science and literature as well as in personal articulation and self-understanding indicates that critique has become a persistent and unremitting critical issue for contemporary forms of professional, collective and personal practice in general. In fact, the ubiquity of critique has not only altered the very idea and conception of practice; it has equally profoundly impacted and remodelled the very character of and practice of practice; and this happened to such an extent that a reconsideration of the critical stance to existing practice is necessitated.

Until the advent of modern times, it seemed reasonable and fair to assert, justify and accept established forms of practice and given procedures by referring to the fact that what we usually do or tend to do is simply what has so far appeared to be the best, most well-founded and time-honoured way to proceed within the given context. In among others the inherited institutions of common hereditary and customary law, the theory of law and theory of the state (Raffnsøe, 2002a-c; Raffnsøe, 2002d, p. 104-146; Raffnsøe, 2003, p. 1-27), human practice was previously conceived and accepted as a well-established and well-earned way to proceed within an existing larger framework or order.

In the age of criticism, however, any recurrence to already established and well-honoured practice has become highly problematic and may tend to be counterproductive or even self-refuting. A clinical psychologist or a medical practitioner trying to justify a new standard or experimental treatment on the grounds of his or her own personal experience rather than proven scientific knowledge that has passed the critical test is already in a tight corner. Instead of being conceived as stable and unchanging, as natural and inevitable, practice is today perceived as changing, challenging and self-challenging (Hamel, 2007; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Drucker, 2007; Senge, 1990; Schumpeter, 2000; Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2013; Bloch, 1959).

With the propagation and dissemination of criticism, the basic make up of human practice has thus been dramatically affected. In the critical age, the various forms of practice have become part and parcel of the "*modern process of relentless socio-cultural transformation*" (Nissen & Staunæs, 2017, forthcoming). Hit by and faced with an ongoing decisive crisis that may be possibly fatal but also potentially productive (Koselleck, 1973), practice seems to continuously reach and be forced to overcome a significant historic turning point where judgment is pronounced on the hitherto adopted lines of action (Röttgers, 1975; Raffnsøe, 2015a, p. 332). As a consequence, the various forms of human practice only become acceptable and reputable to the extent that they take on a self-problematizing and self-critical form.

As it is also prominent in the politics of New Public Management (Pollitt, Christopher, Bouckaert & Geert, 2011; Christensen, 2013; Gunter, 2016), alleged policies of necessity are today above all formulated in terms of the unavoidability of critically examining and reforming existing practices in order to be able to measure up to a future that is still arriving, wherefore it can only be apprehended and responded adequately to through critical discernment and anticipation (Raffnsøe & Staunæs, 2014).

While practice becomes inoculated with critical self-examination and thus has come to be perceived as a site of an ongoing crisis in the form of a critical self-distantiation, the established relationship between theory and practice, practice and practice studies, is equally affected. On closer inspection, the critical turn in practice (Schön, 2008; Argyris, 1993;

Thompson & Thompson, 2008; Argyris & Schön, 1974) queries received ideas "*emphasizing practice* as opposed to *theory*" (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. ix, italicized by the authors). According to this opposition, action in the conduct of everyday life and professional practice tends to be perceived as fundamentally and uncritically unaware of its basic character and presuppositions. By contrast, it is a basic task for the researcher to maintain a critical distance, permitting the scientist to uncover and expose the basic hidden presuppositions governing practice.

The perceived distance to uncritical practice has permitted traditional psychology to conceive of itself as critical from its early beginnings, in the sense that it is a science that uncovers previously undiscovered basic components and epistemic and ontological foundations of human behaviour (Wundt, 1883b; Wundt, 1883a; James, 1890/2010b; James, 1890/2010a). Equally, subsequent generations in mainstream psychology have criticized previous assumptions in order to establish more adequate scientific foundations (Skinner, 1974).

In turn, the ambition to maintain a critical stance toward previous scientific practice has allowed important strands of critical psychology to emerge and constitute themselves in terms of a "*re-foundationalist critique*" (Stenner, 2007, p. 45), aiming to establish more adequate scientific foundations (Brown & Stenner 2009, p. 20), now by adding a political, ideological and social critique to their epistemic critique of previous positions (Holzkamp, 1983; Tolman & Maiers, 1991; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997). Further critical distantiation has led to non-foundational critiques of earlier psychology (Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 2001), psychologies without foundations (Brown & Stenner 2009) and post-psychology (Nissen, Staunæs & Bank, 2016; Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2016; Staunæs & Juelskjær, 2016).

The ongoing movement of critical distantiation resulting in critical psychology, psychologies without foundations and post-psychologies (Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2016) has certainly blazed new trails and led to new crucial insights. For example, critical psychology has managed to debunk ideological elements in existing social and scientific practice, to expose concealed social, cultural and personal issues, and to propose valid theoretical alternatives to mainstream theory (Nissen, 2008, p. 50-51). Equally, post-psychological researchers have articulated how post-psychologies are not only assisting new educational standards and reforming subjectivities but are also affected by these settings (Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2016). Nonetheless, the ongoing critical approach to previous practice certainly also faces new challenges with the propagation of critique in the age of criticism. If collective and personal, scientific and professional practice has always already become self-consciously self-critical and overtly self-transformative (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer & Thaning, 2016b), the very idea of being critical by dissociating oneself from previous uncritical ways of behaving and thinking demands to be rethought.

In particular, the traditional critical ways of articulating scientific progress and innovation, as they have been moulded and handed over since early Enlightenment, become overtly problematic within the present self-consciously critical setting. If given assumptions and established procedures are over and over again seen as preliminary and under critical revision, it must seem misleading to perceive science and research as progressing through all-encompassing "*Copernican Revolutions*" (Kuhn, 2003), critically rejecting what was hitherto taken for granted to such a degree that they lead to new paradigmatic foundations and make us "*wish to say*" that after the critical turns we "*live in a different world*" (Kuhn & Hacking, 2012, p. 117; Raffnsøe, 2015b).

In prolongation of the propagation of critique, it thus becomes a pressing issue to conceive of alternative critical approaches to the ones practiced hitherto. For example, researchers within the psychological field have recently voiced the need to develop critical stances permitting to move beyond judging (Juelskjær & Staunæs, 2016) and to avoid taking either a purely negative and cynical standpoint or a position that simply naively and innocently reconfirms the practice of existing practices (Nissen, 2013). Consequently, the age of criticism raises the question how to develop and articulate an adequate stance in theory and practice with regard to forms of practice that are always already critical and self-critical.

The Caricature of Critique

Simultaneously however, there seems to be a certain fatigue and perplexity concerning this ever-present critique. Criticism constantly raises the question about how to relate to, live with, and bear the constant inquiry that one is subjected to. This issue is particularly acute for public institutions when they are monitored, evaluated, and accredited. It likewise applies to private companies and organizations, where an ongoing critique of existent production processes and kinds of labour have been installed as a necessary approach to optimising activities. Indeed, it is a part of improving the individual's effort (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Raffnsøe, 2010). This challenge confronts everybody from students to the unemployed over researchers to knowledge labourers, insofar as they are scrutinized and critically evaluated so as to initiate permanent self-evaluation in the modern auditsociety (Power, 1999).

In extension of critique becoming such an obvious, overriding, but also ambiguous norm, observers note that it may turn into its own caricature. Barbara Johnson makes the observation that the two words '*critical*' and '*difference*' "*both range from an objective, disinterested function of discrimination* ('distinction', 'careful and exact evaluation') *to an argumentative or agonistic function of condemnation* ('a disagreement or quarrel,' judging severely, censuring')" (Johnson, 1981, p. ix). There are reservations about critique being a negative, knee-jerk reaction, or habit, where the evaluator first and foremost confirms himself as an auspicious existence, all the while he risks destroying everything in his way. According to Raymond Williams' entry on 'Criticism', critique and criticism have acquired "*a predominant sense* (…) *of fault-finding*, [which refers to] *a habit,* (…) *which depends, fundamentally, on the abstraction of response from its real situation and circumstances*" (Williams, 1985, p. 84-86).

Taking the form of a generalized self-contained negative and derogatory attitude no matter the circumstances, critique may above all serve self-affirmation and self-interest. This attitude may become a launching pad and a safeguard for the literary critic or the investigative reporter, even as an iconoclastic avant-garde artist or art critic may use this readymade mold as stage setting and as a mask. Furthermore, it may at times seem to be a sufficiently wide-spread attitude to mark public opinion at large, to such an extent that the public sphere, instead of designating a space for rational discussion of public matters (Habermas, 1987), risks becoming a vehicle for display of suspicion and distrust.

A critical, negative theoretical self-affirmation also occurs when various strands of *Critical Management Studies* repeatedly celebrate themselves as a privileged, insightful, and penetrating academic position, which is better than existing managerial and organizational practices or mainstream theory (Chan & Garrick, 2002; Wray-Bliss, 2002; Hassard & Rowlinson, 2001; Fournier & Grey, 2000). Since Critical Management studies conceive

the order of organizational life as a regime that manages, controls, and "*produces submission and compliance*" (Jackson & Carter, 1998, p. 60) without reflection - generally bordering on a state of stupidity (Alvesson, Bridgman & Willmott, 2009) - such practices are rather disparaged *en bloch* (Raffnsøe, 2015b). Thus, the critic seems explicitly or implicitly to claim a privileged societal and epistemological position. Often, such a tradition may even come to believe that it has posited a critique merely by having pointed out a power relationship or having analysed certain uses of power.

Voiced in this manner, the critical approach borders on a generalized and self-affirming stance to the world. Approaching the object or the field of investigation from the outside and beyond, the critic here tends to look for evidence corroborating his own privileged insight, a position of superiority posited at the outset as the condition of possibility of the examination.

Concluding in its own supposable self-corroborating disappointment with the world, this hermeneutics of arrogance may be regarded a caricature and a distortion, but also one possible offshoot of critical position as it is voiced in what Ricoeur has termed 'the school of suspicion' (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 40). Understanding 'interpretation' and hermeneutics as essentially "*an exercise of suspicion*", this school may tend to approach the given according to "*the negative formula*" that existing truth should at least initially be perceived and understood as 'lie (mensonge)' that should be dismantled by "*the invention of an art of interpretation*" and "*a 'destructive' critique*" (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 40-41). Among the makers and 'masters' of this hermeneutics of suspicion and critique, Ricoeur lists Marx, Nietzsche and Freud (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 40-44) only to add Heidegger and Derrida (Ricoeur, 1975, p. 363). Insofar as exposing false consciousness and other forms of entrapment in systems of domination or dependence is an essential concern for later critical theory, its proponents may also be listed among the contributors to this school of critical hermeneutics (Habermas & Apel, 1980; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1992; Habermas, 1968). Despite the necessity of its critique, such critical hermeneutics may at times transform into a problematic habitual practice of criticism or a uniform posture of critical dogmatism (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003).

In short, critique has today not only become crucial and ubiquitous, but also somewhat problematic, and at times even devastating.

The Continued Commitment to Critique

Further problematizing the self-evident status of critique, the sociologist of knowledge and anthropologist Bruno Latour raises the question of whether or not critique "*has run out of steam*" (Latour, 2004), insofar as it seems an instrument that is no longer adequate in managing contemporary challenges. However, the mentioned difficulties or challenges do not lead to a simple rejection of the critical spirit, rather the challenge is to reactivate or renew the troubled modality of critique, through pointing out how "*critique has not been critical enough*" (Latour, 2004, p. 232). That critique is often difficult to practice and even verify, does therefore not imply that it must be left behind. Rather it must be taken up, improved, and re-operationalized in a more concrete format.

In so many words, critique still seems as decisive and incontrovertible as during the Enlightenment, all the while it seems more problematic and vague. It has become as much a problem that raises many new questions. How does one perform critique today? What are its formats? What is the truly critical attitude?

In an attempt to attain an overview of this abundance of critique and get past the widely disseminated negative and polemical critique, the rest of the article proceeds in the following way. After a short account of the prehistory of critique, it returns to and explicates the three basic modalities of critique that can be found since the inception of the concept as a general requirement with Kant. An interesting and challenging feature of the three modalities of critique that has been handed down is that critique is still viewed as an affirmative or positive activity. This however, does not prevent them from relating to each other in a critical and negative way.

The Prehistory of Critique

Before Kant generalised the term 'critique' and put it to use as an overall characterisation of his time, the concept denoted an important ability and then always as a competence, which related to, and entered as an important and yet limited element in a specific field.

In Greek antiquity the critical art [1]was very much viewed as the ability to distinguish, evaluate, and reach decisions. One important area was jurisprudence (Raffnsøe, 2002, p. 146-222). In this area critique denoted the ability to form judgement and arrive at a decision in a specific disputed judicial case.

In this way, the critical attitude distinguished itself from a contemplative and perceptive and intuitive theoretical attitude. However critique not only distinguished itself from theory in the judicial field, but also came to mean the ability of reaching a decision and laying out guidelines for future considerations, particularly in epistemological, political, and ethical controversies. In Plato's *Theaitetos*, Socrates is therefore able to emphasise how "*the most demanding and beautiful task*" for the philosophical midwife is to distinguish the true[2] from that which is not (Plato, 2006). In terms of medicine, the concept - along with the related term *krisis* – could denote the turning point in the progression of an illness. This would then be the point at which the decision between life and death was made, between improvement and deterioration. In general there was therefore a tendency to view *krisis* as the event (what happened), while *kritik* was the reaction (what could be done). During the time of Rome and Hellenism, *Kritikos* and *criticus* became increasingly about philological evaluation.

In the 15th and 16th century critique was taken up once again as an element in various areas. In philology, it denoted the scholar's cultivated ability to distinguish truth from falsehood in written sources handed down from previous ages. Later in this period, critique also came to be used in logic as the ability to analyse and evaluate that made the application of logic possible to begin with. In poetics it appeared as meaning the ability to develop value judgements when ranking certain works as better or worse than others, or in evaluating individual plays or novels.

Over the course of the 17th and 18th century the idea of critique was less and less embedded in various sub-fields and activities and was rather generalised, until it became an activity that could surface everywhere. The scope of application for critique was no longer merely logical judgements, aesthetics, or poetics. All kinds of knowledge - even issues

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[1] "Kritike techne"
[2] "Krinein to alethes"

pertaining more widely to state and society - must be established such that they could be subjected to critique.

The consequence of this can be found in what was a much read 'modern Glossary' developed by the English author Henry Fielding in the 1752-edition of his journal *The Covent Garden Journal*. Here, under the entry 'CRITIC', he ironically notes "*Like* Homo*, a name common to all human Race*" (Fielding, 1810, p. 36). Critique hereby seems to be something that characterizes Homo Sapiens in general. In correspondence with this, one finds the article 'Critique' from The French Encyclopedia, written by the historian Jean François Marmontel, which also characterises critique as an "*enlightened examination[3] and just evaluation*" that can be directed towards "*all products of human creativity*", "*an infinite area*'" (Diderot & Alembert, 1979).

However, the critical faculty could not just be chosen at random in an age which the contemporary Anglo-American propagandist Thomas Paine, a founding father of the United States of America, characterised as *The Age of Reason*. The touchstone for testing the purity or longevity of anything handed down or existing, was reason, a common sense with which - according to Descartes - men were equally endowed (Descartes & Gilson, 1962, p. 2).

The Generalization of Critique in Kant

Kant's Critical Self-Reflection in the Age of Criticism

While Kant, as mentioned, uses the term at the beginning of his critical philosophy to characterise not only the general and decisive crux, which reveals what is irrational in the given, but also to explicate what makes his own position unique, he also adds something completely new. The critical judgement of reason is generalised so that it is directed at all areas of existence, wherefore Kant also directs it at reason itself. Now reason must regain its own composure, as it moderates and limits itself.

Kant emphasises how critique must base itself on reason's universal judgments concerning its surroundings, but critique is likewise radicalised since he stresses the necessity of the critical judgment of reason being directed at the critical faculty - reason itself. Rational critique is therefore not only a decisive faculty, which allows one to distinguish substantiated cognition from what only seems to be valid knowledge. Rational critique must therefore become a form of 'self-examination'[4] and consequently self-critique (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 13).

Already in the first sentences of *The Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant points out that the very same human reason, which can form judgements about its surroundings has been "*burdened by questions which it cannot decline, as they are imposed upon it by its own nature*". These are issues that it cannot fully answer, since they transcend the own abilities of the mind, and yet cannot ignore (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 11).

This situation occurs when reason transcends the limits of what we as people can experience and therefore can attain knowledge about. Instead we enter upon a series of foundational, speculative and often contradictory assumptions. Kant gives the example of

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[3] "Examen éclairé"
[4] "Selbsterkenntnis"

when reason asks the following questions: Is the world finite or infinite? Is everything that happens determined by causality or does freedom play a role? Can we prove the existence of God? (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 409-19; Kant, 1781/1976, p. 427-39; p. 523-28).

If reason is unable to direct critique towards itself and its own attempts at knowledge - especially concerning areas that are not well founded – it risks entanglement in speculative dogma, where it confuses unfounded assumptions with insight into the basic constitution of the world. According to Kant, this has been the case for metaphysics and philosophy up till that time. Without sufficient self-critique, reason tends to become a tool in the hands of dogma which itself is 'despotic' (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 12) insofar as it, like an absolute power of state, requires obedience without the possibility of freely recognising its commands. In this case, reason becomes a faculty that strings us along with 'illusory knowledge' and therefore is not on par with its own more basic and refined time (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 13).

In extension of this, critique appears – in its judgement over and cleansing of pure reason – first and foremost as a negative faculty in Kant's work. It concerns training and regulating reason, when it – as a wild and untamed force of nature – tends towards "*transcending the limits of experience*" (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 29-30). Such a critical faculty is useful in force of its ability to point out limits that should not be transgressed, show us the necessity respecting the boundaries, and the unfortunate consequences of not following its guidance. In this sense, critique is a kind of negative limitation, since it indicates areas that one should keep within and indeed ensures that this advice is followed.

With Kant's conception of critique, it becomes clear how the will to know that attained a temporary peak in the Enlightenment, now comes to question and recognise the limits of itself as a vital internal question for rational cognition itself.

Differentiating Critique

According to Kant however, this negative limitation or boundary is also connected to positive features. This becomes apparent as soon as one realizes that the basic axioms followed by reason in its venture beyond boundaries do not entail an expansion, but rather a limitation of reason. In such a usage of reason, thinking takes an outset in what applies to sense cognition and expands this to apply beyond its own limits. Strictly speaking, reason hereby becomes a vehicle for the supremacy of the senses and experience over all other areas of existence (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 29-30). If reason does not recognise its own limitation, it can therefore not recognise its own positive side, whereby it comes to damage itself and its own reasonable functions.

As Kant sees it, the critique of reason is at once a limitation and an affirmation or strengthening of reason. In order to clarify this, he uses the following analogy. One might as well claim that the police – which for Kant had the 'merely' negative task to, "*bring an end to the violence which citizen has to apprehend from citizen*[5]" (Kant, 1981/1976, p. 30) – had no positive use. When the police limits individual activity, however, this is intimately connected with a positive benefit, namely establishing a boundary between the various members of the community, which makes it possible for each individual to follow his or

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[5] "Der Gewalttätigkeit welche Bürger von Bürgern zu besorgen haben, einen Riegel vorzuschieben."

her own goals in a sensible manner: "*so each and every one may pursue his vocation in peace and security*[6]", as Kant puts it the preface to the second edition (Kant, 1981/1976, p. 30). It is only through the negative limitation that the positive aims of some particular feature become possible.

In force of setting boundaries for speculative-dogmatic misuses of reason, critique allows us to follow and unfold another aspect of the self in a purer format. This is the "*pure (practical) use of reason*", the particularity of which the speculative reason threatens to displace, if it is allowed to extend itself without limit (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 29-30).

In this practical use of reason, knowledge of the empirical, positive and experiential is no longer the most important. Rather, reason is directed towards a new irreducible dimension. Since reason is free to relate specifically and practically, it emphasises another kind of truth, which cannot merely be founded upon what is given in experience. It is a kind of truth which has to do with a practical outset: reason begins to examine which basic principles a human rational being must model its will and actions upon, regardless of the actual, experiential reality it finds itself in.

In connection with practical reason - especially following *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysic(s) of Morals* - critique becomes a 'tribunal' or 'court' (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 13), which without prejudice submits "*what reason urgently recommends us*" (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 673) a judgement to decide to what degree and on what conditions it can apply as binding for practical action (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 99).

According to Kant, freedom is a decisive and necessary condition that we cannot avoid to presuppose and depend on (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 99). The critical examination determines that we can only understand our reason as having an effect and a practical impact on what we do and carry into effect to the extent that we take freedom for granted. Kant emphasises this when he underlines that: "*practical is anything that is possible through freedom*" (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 673). However, this freedom is not merely to be conceived as a '*brutish*' '*haphazardness*' where we are randomly determined by our sensual drives (Kant, 1976 IV, p. 675). As Kant sees it, it is first possible to speak of free will in the proper sense of the term when there is self-determination, i.e. where what is done, is done because of the motivations, that reason itself indicates. In this sense, critique of practical reason holds that practical action becomes practical in a commitment to something which is more remote and transcends sensual inclinations as a "*prescription that guides conduct*[7]" (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 675).

The effect of such moral precepts or maxims from something other and higher can, according to Kant, undeniably be found in our experience (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 675). Still, this recognition does not take the shape of affirming what actually happens, as is the case in the everyday positive knowledge, but of an assertion or statement that indicates, "*what should or must happen, even if it may never take place*" (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 675). In extension we can only cognise and experience practical reason in the shape of an activity in regard to us, not as a being in itself. In a practical context, reason appears not as a determination of conditions for what is, but as an indication of what ought to or should happen.

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[6] "Damit ein jeder seine Angelegenheit ruhig und sicher treiben können"
[7] "Vorschrift des Verhaltens"

Unlike what was the case in the critique of theoretical reason, practical reason does not need a critique of pure reason. As Kant explains in the preface to *The Critique of Practical Reason,* there was a need to criticise reason when it transgressed its own limitations in order to be able to affirm it. In regard to the critique of practical reason, critique no longer concerns pointing out the limits of reason, but of explicating and describing its influence. This is a positive issue of proving how the practical reason in and of itself contains an undeniable 'reality' as an 'event' (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 107). Pure practical reason has an irreducible reality, already in force of it directly affecting us. The aim is therefore not to remind us that thought must avoid unconfounded speculation and limit itself to investigate what we experience is the case. Instead, the critique of practical reason helps us distinguish and articulate an idea about what undeniably affects us, as it challenges what is immediately given.

The Various Meanings of Critique in Post-Kantian Thought

Kant's account concerning the modalities of critique is not only relevant for understanding his own authorship. At a time when critique has reached an overarching importance, he lays out the basis for a typology, which has far reaching consequences as he begins to distinguish two different modalities of critique described above. Kant opens a space, within which the following conceptions of critique seem to be situated. When critique after Kant attempts to map the reason of reason, it has moved along and expanded upon two basic routes that he, standing at the parting of the ways, pointed out as possible and desirable.

Critique as theoretical determination

An initial and core tradition in critique has – in extension of Kant's first critique - taken an outset in established forms of scientific knowledge that are perceived as exemplary cases of well-established rational and sound knowledge that one can rest on. The aim has been to bring these as witnesses before a critical tribunal in order to examine and determine what characterises and justifies them. In this particular tradition of critique, articulation of established knowledge and its rationality is connected with a limitation from various kinds of dogma or irrationality which merely pretend to be knowledge, but also a defence against faulty conception of what characterizes real knowledge.

Basic groundwork for this notion of critique was already laid before Kant. As modern sciences developed during the period from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, partly in opposition to inherited dogmas and knowledge, the requirement was set out for the practitioners to discern and justify how the new knowledge-making practices differed from the old (Koyré, 1988; Kuhn, 2003; Kuhn & Hacking 2012; Shapin, 1996; Raffnsøe, 2015b).

From Kant this critical orientation stretches over the post-Kantians, the positivism of August Comte (Comte & Littré, 2005), the empiricism of John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1886; Mill, 1878), partly Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (Husserl, 1980), through to the Vienna Circle and logical positivism as it is expressed by the physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach and the mathematical logician and philosopher Rudolph Carnap (Carnap, 1995), as well as the critical rationalism which is found with the philosopher of science Karl Popper (Popper, 1966a; Popper, 1968; Popper, 1966b). Likewise, we find central figures in the French epistemological tradition, such as the mathematician Gaston Bachelard (Bachelard,

1977; Canguilhem, 1971; Bachelard, 1975), the Russian-French philosopher of science Alexandre Koyré (Koyré & Redondi, 1986) and the French physicist and philosopher Georges Canguilhem (Canguilhem, 1971; Canguilhem, 1998; Canguilhem, 1966), just as core actors from structuralism, such as the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Saussure & Mauro, 1973) and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, contribute here. In general, this tradition includes most of the philosophy of science, which replaces philosophical epistemology after Kant.

Critique as Practical Articulation and Safeguarding

In a different path, which stretches from Kant's later critiques, distinguishing the boundary between what can be known with certainty and what cannot be known still plays an important role, but now in a new way. Here the issue is not primarily to demark the limit between true and false knowledge, but rather to go to the boundary of established knowledge in order to question what this knowledge has not taken into account. In this tradition there is an emphasis upon the practical dimension and on articulating this as an irreducible dimension over and against the theoretical. This critical tradition points towards how, and in regard to theoretical cognition, an ethical dimension is always already present, by asking what should happen to and with regard to what we already know, although it may never come to be. On the boundary of what we know and are sure of, this kind of critique also posits questions as to our existing polity and community.

The second main tradition of critique, in which one takes up a position on the edge of established knowledge and understanding, can itself be divided into two tracks, depending on the manner in which they articulate an irreducible dimension. While one track recurs to and advances an irreducible, homogenic, practical dimension, the other indicates a heterogenic and inconclusive normative dimension. The first track takes its outset in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic(s) of Morals* and *The Critique of Practical Reason,* which evolves into modern critical theory as it is monumentally formulated in the work of the German social theoretician Jürgen Habermas. At the centre of this effort we find an attempt to develop the hidden standards of critique, such that they take up a positive and verifiable format. Already in *Erkenntnis und Interesse,* Habermas is able to see the crisis of epistemology as stemming from a growing distinction between positive science and normative considerations after Kant (Habermas, 1968, p. 11-14). In his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Habermas seeks positive guidelines to be followed when formulating ethical imperatives (Habermas, 1981). The positive exposition of exemplary guidelines and the integrative dimension of normative claims to validity (Geltung) are crucial (Habermas, 1992) to such a critical project.

His heir within critical theory, Alex Honneth, stresses that for Habermas "*critique is only possible as immanent critique. As an object of critique, society must already comprise the reason[8], which can then serve as standard for the critique of societal circumstances[9]*", (Celikates 2009b, interview with Luc Boltanski and Axel Honneth 'Soziologie der Kritik oder Kritische Theorie', 90, in Jaeggi & Wesche 2009, p. 81-133). In extension of this, Honneth is still able to emphasise how "*the future of social philosophy today is dependent upon the ability to justify ethical judgment concerning the necessary conditions for a hu-*

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[8] "Jene Vernunft beeinhalten"
[9] "Als Standard der Kritik existierender gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse dienen kann"

man life well lived", all the while he presents the prehistory of founding such a critical theory, which begins with Rousseau and moves on through, Hegel, Marx, and Hannah Arendt, as well contemporary figures, such as Aristotelian moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum and Canadian social philosopher Charles Taylor (Honneth in Rasmussen, 1996, p. 393-94).

Critique as a Venture of Reflective Judgment

In the second main track and thus the third tradition, one likewise takes up a position at the edge of established knowledge by applying critical thought to open a practical dimension, in order to allow something different to have an effect upon the given. Unlike the first main track in this tradition, however, there is no ambition to retain a practical perspective by presenting explicit standards, rather there is the approach of pointing out overlooked or hidden aspects of reality, which challenges our knowledge about how we act as individuals or as communities. A primary representative of this tradition is the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault (cfr. Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, and Sørensen, 2016a, p. 18-20, p. 445-454). He is able to point out how he has worked on the formation of various kinds of knowledge and their implications (Foucault, 1994, p. 440-83). Unlike a traditional history of science, however, Foucault conducts such an examination to simultaneously thematise how these formats of knowledge and rationality – in addition to being binding and rational - are also the consequence of a *"fragile and precarious history"*, which is characterised by openings and ruptures (Foucault, 1994, p. 440-83). In this manner, critical thought is able to give an account of how a practical dimension is already present in what is being studied – initially in the shape of a freedom, which Kant gave as a prerequisite for this dimension to create new ways of relating.

Critique hereby becomes inherent and affirmative, since it takes an outset in a necessary rupture in the examined knowledge in order to confirm this movement. In force of actively pursuing this movement on its way and examining its further possible direction, critique transcends this movement from within. Through its confirmation of an ongoing historical movement, critique is able to actively seek out its boundary – not only boundaries that condition it, but also boundaries that it points towards. All the while Foucault determines critique as a certain kind of '*critical attitude*' (Foucault, 1990, p. 37), wherefore he can characterise this virtue or ethos as a '*limit attitude*' (Foucault, 1994, p. 574).

In one wants to open and affirm a practical dimension, it is insufficient to define freedom as openness, according to both Foucault and Kant. This merely allows for an indeterminacy, uncertainty, and possibly aestheticism. Foucault therefore also characterises the *"historical-critical work upon ourselves"* as '*experimental*', since it *"must on the one hand open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take"* (Foucault, 1994, p. 574; Foucault, 2003a, p. 54). In this regard, Foucault emphasises in 1984 how he allowed himself to be inspired *"by the very specific transformations that have proved to be possible for the last twenty years in a certain number of areas which concern our ways of being and thinking, relations to authority, relations between the sexes, the way in which we perceive insanity or illness"* (Foucault, 1994, p. 574; Foucault, 2003a, p. 54). Here one leaves behind the established grounds of validity, since one begins to consider ones own thought and being as an object of practical-ethical self-formation. Consequently, one begins to create and commit to new normative guidelines. Foucault can therefore also argue that the

critical attitude should "*move beyond the outside-inside alternative*" (Foucault, 1994, p. 574; Foucault, 2003a, p. 54) by beginning to perceive the limits of that which is well known and familiar as a threshold or transition to something new.

In sum, Foucault understands critique not only as connected to the question "*what, therefore, am I, I who belong to this humanity, perhaps to this piece of it, at this point in time, at this instant of humanity*" (Foucault, 1990, p. 46), but as equally linked to the "*historical-practical testing of the limits that we may be able to transcend*" and "*thus as a work on ourselves as free beings*" (Foucault, 2003a, p. 54). Suggesting consequently the "*art not to be governed quite so much*" as a "*first definition of critique*" (Foucault, 1990, p. 38), Foucault sees the critical '*attitude*' or '*virtue*' as a way to reassume the heritage of the Enlightenment, at least in so far as Kant determined this as a the urgent exhortation to seek to leave the easy, lazy and pusillanimous dependence on "*foreign guidance or government*[10]" and to "*have the courage to use your own understanding*" (Kant, 1783/1978, p. 53; cf. also Cook, 2013).

As Honneth, Foucault is able to list various contributors to this tradition. He points out how, from the Hegelian Left to the Frankfurt School, there has been a complete critique of positivism, objectivism, rationalization of *techne* and technicalization, a whole critique of the relationships between the fundamental project of science and techniques whose objective was to show the connections between science's naive presumptions, on one hand, and the forms of domination characteristic of contemporary society, on the other (Foucault, 1990, p. 42; Foucault, 2003a, p. 269). Foucault also points to Max Weber, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger as frontrunners in this tradition.

At closer inspection, however, one can see – already in Kant's third critique – an outline of this conception. In the introduction to *The Critique of Judgment* from 1790, Kant emphasises how his two previous critiques open up an '*immeasurable chasm*' (Kant, 1790/1978, p. 83) between the world as it appears in positive experience and the world as it appears in the practical uses of reason. If it is not possible to find a '*crossing*' or '*transition*' between these different worlds, it creates the problem that it is impossible to conceive how the ethical dimension applies to the positively cognised reality.

Kant seeks to bridge this gap by examining the perspectives on the world, where the person primarily relates to his own human mode of conception, while remaining open. In such cases one may experience discomfort, but also - sometimes – elation or happiness. Kant emphasises cases of experiencing art or nature, or his own experience of the French Revolution, as connected to these feelings. Kant interprets this happiness as expressing that the observer of these objects or events is pleased that there is an opening where the moral perspective can attain '*objective reality*' and therefore actually come to affect experience (Kant, 1790/1978, p. 233-34). With his critique of judgement, Kant seeks to give a positive account, development and judgement of how such human ways of conceiving and evaluating the world at the same time demonstrates how a moral dimension exerts an influence upon our existence. At the same time, such an ethical dimension cannot in these cases have a direct effect in the shape of moral requirements. They can only exert an influence in a preliminarily incomplete and indirect way, namely as they affect and make themselves felt in our ways of relating to each other and ourselves.

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[10] "Fremder Führung"

As is the case in Kant's third critique, the concern of critique is situated in the encounter between theory and practice and becomes a positive development of a normativity that one is in the process of developing and tries to approach. These are hereby norms which one must attempt to explore, develop and make felt without knowing them in their final or complete form.

In this manner, Kant in his critical philosophy manages to explore ideas of aesthetic and practical forms of critique in addition his previous presentation of the basic outlines of epistemic and moral forms of critique.

Critique as Affirmative Forestallment

In the context of a reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* published under the title *Die Frage nach dem Ding,* Heidegger heavily stresses the affirmative character of critique in Kant's work. Here, according to Heidegger, *"the sense of the term "critique" is so little negative that it means the most positive of the positive*[11], *the positing*[12] *of what must be established in advance in all positing*[13] *as what is determinative and decisive*[14]*"* (Heidegger, 1987, p. 93). Only in a derivative sense does critique acquire a negative meaning: Since such positing of what is decisive and determinative implies a *"separation, an emphasizing and lifting out of the special*[15]*"*, it carries with it *"a refutation of the usual and ordinary*[16]*"* (Heidegger, 1987, p. 93). Critique means *"to lift out that of a special sort*[17]*"*, *"to establish or designate what something tries to measure up to and should be measured by*[18]*"* (Heidegger, 1987, p. 93). According to Heidegger, this understanding of critique remains decisive for Kant's use of critique in all his major works.

In the wake of Kant's generalization of critique, the German poet, art-critic, and essayist Friedrich Schlegel voiced certain implications of the affirmative conception of immanent critique that is on its way in all three kinds of critique. According to Schlegel, *"the true assignment and the inner being of critique*[19]*"* is *"to characterize*[20]*"* that which is under consideration (Schlegel & Arndt, 2007, p. 161); and accordingly 'characterisation[21]' is to be considered the true *"work of art*[22]*"* of critique (Schlegel & Eichner, 1967, p. 253; Schlegel & Huyssen, 2005, p. 139).

Since the object investigated is imperfect and remains a fragment, however, the characterization must necessarily consider the work in relationship to its own perfection, which remains partly hidden, insofar as the work only manages to present and realize it imperfectly. As criticism approaches its own ideal of being a comprehensive and thorough

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[11] "Das Positivste des Positiven"
[12] "Setzung"
[13] "Setzung"
[14] "Als das Bestimmende und Entscheidende"
[15] "Absonderung und Heraushebung des Besonderen"
[16] "Zurückweisung des Gewöhnlichen und Ungemässen"
[17] "Das Besondere herausheben"
[18] "Festsetzung des Massgebenden"
[19] "Das eigentliche Geschäft und innere Wesen der Kritik"
[20] "Charakterisieren"
[21] "Charakteristik"
[22] "Kunstwerk"

characterization of the work in the fullest sense of the word, the need of critique to point beyond the work in its present state towards a fuller realization of itself manifests itself all the more conspicuously.

According to Schlegel, then, '*true critique*' must be understood as "*an author raised to the second power*[23]" (Schlegel, 1988, paragraph 35, p. 927). True critique works as a '*creator*[24]' (Schlegel & Eichner, 1967, paragraph 68, p. 155), re-creating and re-writing what it characterizes and evaluates in the light of what it already seems on the verge of realizing. Insofar as it spurs a drive to improve and perfect an impetus already in place in the evaluated, critique must also be considered a productive activity in the form of an intensification or a potentiation of what is already on its way (Raffnsøe, 2013a, p. 256).

In contradistinction to "*hypercritizism*[25], *which only attaches importance to criticism*[26] *and rejects all content and* (…) *sticks to Kant's method without adhering to his results and what he had in mind*[27]" (Schlegel & Arndt 2007, p. 64), true critique is first and foremost to be considered an affirmation, a '*visum and repertum*' (Schlegel & Huyssen, 2005, p. 139) of that which presents itself to the arbiter. Critique is not so much "*a commenting on an already present, completed literature that has finished flowering*[28]", but "*the organon of a literature that is yet to be perfected, formed, even has yet to begin*" (Schlegel & Arndt, 2007, p. 176). To re-affirm what is present, critique must also make a separation or distinguish between what is determinative or decisive and what can be left behind. By implication, then, critique also acquires a negative aspect and contains an element of distantiation. Still, even this negative aspect serves as an affirmation of what is already rampant in the evaluated.

What appears as crucial for and is affirmed in the critical judgment is not the factual or the counter-factual, but instead another very real and momentous aspect of the world: the virtual (Raffnsøe, 2013a, p. 249). The virtual is not simply to be conceived of as the possible, but as a level of existence that is already operative in the present as a force (virtus), making itself felt as something that acts in and through the given (Leibniz, 1898, p. 26-27; Deleuze, 1996; Deleuze, 1988). As critical performativity, the level of the virtual is continually effective in and through what is observable, as it causes the present to transcend itself and unfold in certain determinate directions and disposes us to act, think, anticipate, and experiment in certain new ways, calling for further exploration. What is affirmed in critical judgment is not what is already fully present and at hand (Heidegger, 1979, §43c), but something that is on its way and makes itself felt as it exercises a guiding or piloting role, affecting and working through what is presented.

Philosophy and Critique

Overall, it is obvious how all three types of critique take on a positive and affirmative character. A negative effort to distance and distinguish oneself from what is given or appears by identifying mistakes and limitations does not form the starting point for the

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[23] "Ein Autor in der 2t Potenz"
[24] "Urheber"
[25] "Hyperkritizism"
[26] "Das Kritizieren"
[27] "Seinen Geist"
[28] "Commentar einer schon vorhandenen, vollendeten, verblühten (…) Literatur"

critical endeavour; nor does critique seek to promote itself and distinguish itself by sub-suming what is already present under one's already given conceptions.

Instead critique centres upon an effort to handle and care for something, which is taken to be decisive, whether this is forming a scientific agenda, retaining necessary normative guidelines or a pragmatic and practical examination of what we can become as finite humans. The critical distinction and judgment is in all cases primarily a way of emphasising, shaping and unfolding a more differentiated understanding of something important that presents itself, often also by placing it in a larger context and in regard to its surroundings.

Thus the critical judgment takes an outset in and is based upon a certain openness in regard to surroundings. It does not function as a theoretical and distant determination of an object or a practice that is assessed from the outside, but as an attempt to form a relatively unprejudiced judgement that takes what is to be assessed as its starting point to determine what is at stake.

At closer inspection then, critical judgment in Kant, Schlegel, and their critical aftermath does not respect the is-ought dichotomy or *Hume's law,* stating that one cannot make normative judgements (about what ought to be) based on positive premises or suppositions (about what is) (Hume, Selby-Bigge & Nidditch, 1978, III, § 1), quite the contrary! Respecting *Hume's Guillotine* in so far as it recognizes that the step from what is the case to what ought or should be is never inferential, but experiential and reflective, critical thought, as it is present everywhere in the critical part of Kant's oeuvre of exceptional consequence for posterity, nevertheless constantly strives to bridge and traverse the gulf between 'is' and 'ought'. Neither does critical judgement rest on and affirm the absence of normativity and fundamental value freedom as the basis for sound judgement, experience, and recognition - quite the contrary! Instead critical judgment presupposes, testifies to, and affirms the constant impact of normative scales and measures as the *condition sine qua non* of critique and judgment, even when they are only presented incompletely or indirectly.

In contradistinction to a widespread tendency in modern avant-garde culture and critical theory to regard critique as a distantiation from what is already given, this conception of a generalized immanent critique resumes crucial elements of ancient Greek ideas of critique. Here the critical art (*kritike techne*) was primarily understood as the ability to discern (*ho kritikos*) what comes to the fore and is crucially at stake not only in the ongoing development of the physical body, but also in the body politics, especially at certain vital and ambiguous turning points (*krises*), in order to estimate and pass sentence on (*to krinein*) what asserts itself within this setting. In this sense, the art of critical distinction and judgment is closely related to the art of healing and consummation, but also approaches and forestalls the just and the juridical, ethics and politics as these considerations come forward before critique's court of justice.

With his dictum, placed in a footnote in the preface to the first edition of his first critique, that "*our time is the true age of criticism to which everything must be subjected*" (Kant, 1978/1976, p. 13), Kant affirms the generalization of critique that implies that every subject or concern must be able to appear and make itself heard as a case at the tribunal or court of critique; and in his critical philosophy, he confirms, unfolds and further articulates the consequences of the affirmation of the dissemination of critique.

With this generalization of critique, philosophy and critique become closely tied together, to the extent that critique is perceived as the most essential philosophical activity that lays

the groundwork for the philosophical '*edifice*[29]' in general (Kant, 1790/1978). Philosophy essentially becomes critical philosophy. Concomitantly, critique begins to be perceived as an activity and a faculty that no longer simply works under the auspices of other principles, in particular reason. As critique becomes all-encompassing and potentially all-including, this leads to the problem that the critical faculty can no longer resort to foreign principles, but at the end of the day is forced to establish its own principles and conceptualize itself as it goes along (Kant, 1790/1978, p. 75). "*The perplexity about a principle (Verlegenheit wegen eines Prinzips)*" (Kant, 1790/1978, p. 75) does not imply a complete absence of guiding principles, but leads to an ongoing search for the measures of critical judgment.

The Ubiquity of Affirmative Critique

A reversal of the inward turn that constituted Platonic philosophy is instigated with the dissemination of critique and perceptible in Kant's philosophy. According to "*the son of a noble and burly midwife*", Socrates, "*the most demanding and beautiful task*[30]" that sets the philosophical midwife apart from other midwifes and the rest of the world is a certain art and ability (*techne*), "*practiced upon men, not women*", by "*tending to their souls in labour not their bodies*" (Plato, 2005, p. 149a, p. 150b). Plato ascribes the view to Socrates that even more important than bringing ordinary children to the world is this art and ability to "*distinguish between what is true and what is not*[31]" that is characteristic of philosophy and enables to help bringing '*real children*' to the world and not '*mere images*' in order to turn to and concentrate exclusively on what is true and real (Plato, 2005, p. 150b). Based on the Platonic decision to turn one's back on the world - its doxa, deception, and disappointment – in order to face and take possession of a privileged, esoteric, dogmatic, scholastic, theoretical knowledge and its certitude, this withdrawn and introverted contemplation of the essential in itself remains an indispensable component of the traditional philosophical love of wisdom in the form of a will to know and a desire for truth from Antiquity (Aristotle, 1933) through the Middle Ages and early Modernity (Descartes & Gilson, 1962).

When critique is generalized and attains the status of a defining feature of philosophy, however, there occurs a reversal of this inwardly oriented reactive turn in the form of a more extrovert outward-oriented affirmative spiral. Taking the form of continued criticism, philosophy dissociates itself from the dogmatic slumber and the scandal of its ostensible contradiction with itself that marked previous philosophy and its withdrawal into itself as metaphysics and epistemology as a result of the Platonic Pyrrhonian victory (Cavell, 1988; Cavell, 1979). As critique attains its modern generalization with critical philosophy, critical philosophy "*is able to make claims that exceed the particular disciplinary domain of the philosophical*" (Butler, 2012, p. 11). In extension of this move, philosophy now becomes *incontournable* in a new disseminated form, insofar as it reappears as an inherent, possibly all-pervading immanent '*critical*' tendency to speculative self-transgression and self-problematization, which dawns within various other fields of experience. It seems essential and inevitable to examine, discern, estimate, and pass sen-

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[29] "Gebäude"
[30] "Megiston te kai kalliston ergon"
[31] "To krinein to alethes te kai me"

tence on what is at stake in theoretical fields of knowledge and science. This is also the case in practical-political interactions, and sensual-esthetical processes of value-creation and matters of taste, insofar as these fields always already seem to invoke the intervention of critical reflection on what is already at bay within these fields and where it might lead us (Raffnsøe, 2013b).

The Ubiquity of the Question and (Self-)Affirmation of the Human

Accordingly, each field in question is not to be considered a limited field of interest that could be maneuvered so as to be regarded and possessed in isolation; and this is not only due to the ubiquity of critical reflection in itself, as Kant makes clear in publications based on his teaching at the very end of his oeuvre. Prolonging discussions initiated in his first critique (Kant, 1781/1976, p. 677), Kant's *Logic* does not content itself with pointing out how each differentiated field is pervaded by and raises fundamental critical questions, such as '*What can I know?*', '*What must I do?*', and '*What can I hope for?*'; here Kant proceeds by stressing how each field and its related question points to, concerns itself with, and bears on the basic anthropological question: '*What is man?*' (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 447-48). Thus, with the distribution of critique in Kant, the question of the human, conceived as the origin of the critical faculty, becomes omnipresent as implicated in every other examination. Knowledge and reflection on the world is, in each and every instance, also to be understood as knowledge and reflection concerning the human.

At first glance, knowledge and reflection concerning human existence can, of course, be understood in the sense of an objective or subjective genitive - as either knowledge of man or as man's knowledge. In the first case, knowledge would also permit a utilization of man, while in the last case knowledge would be at man's disposal. As Kant makes clear though, the question '*What is man?*', in which all other basic questions seem to come together, is neither the question '*What is man as an object of knowledge?*', nor the question '*What is man as a free subject in possession of this knowledge?*'

At closer inspection, all other questions and examinations converge in, spill over into, and culminate in a more pragmatic practical examination that Kant takes great pains to complete at the end of his teaching career in his *Anthropology in pragmatischer Hinsicht*. Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view, and with a pragmatic point of view in view, focuses on what the human being "*as a free-acting being makes of himself or can and should make of himself*[32]" (Kant, 1798/1978, p. 399).

Conceived as a - crucial and critical - crib and topic for the critical faculty, human existence ultimately begins to make itself felt everywhere with the critical turn and the distribution of critique. What ultimately originates with pragmatic anthropology is neither man as a positively given entity, nor man as a free acting moral agent, neither man as an empirical being nor man as a rational creature. The starting point and subject for pragmatic anthropology is instead knowledge concerning an experience of various respects of the human, which prompts the pragmatic and practical questions: What is the human already

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[32] "Was er (der Mensch, S.R.), als freihandelndes Wesen, aus sich selber macht, oder machen kann und soll"

in the process of making of itself? What can and should it make of itself in continuation hereof?

In the wake of the dissemination of critique and the appearance of the anthropological question, the human being can thus begin to be conceived as a limited, open-ended experi-ence and question. With anthropology, Kant's tripartite critique terminates in the experi-experience and question of a human inhabitant of the world[33]. This being is part of the world, not only insofar as he or she is not only situated in a certain time and space and dwells in a certain part of the world, but also insofar as she or he is endowed with various predispositions for relating to the world (Kant, 1798/1978). Even though these propensi-ties are never fully present in themselves and in this sense belong to the realm of the unobservable, they can be actualized through critical examination, which is then affirmed and further developed.

With the general critical turn in Kant, critique and the human enter into a close mutual relationship, in which they continually invoke each other. On the one hand, human experi-ence calls for critical-affirmative discernment, judgment and reflection to guide and further develop it, rather than theoretical knowledge. Experiencing what they are in the process of making of themselves, the human inhabitants of this world become predisposed to ask for a critical practice that is able to heed, guard, and redirect their pragmatic prac-tice and assist them in examining and developing what they can make of themselves in extension of what they have already made of themselves. Insofar as they have, in this sense, already attempted to rise and set out on a journey without reaching the final destina-tion, these cosmopolites stand in need of further enlightenment as to assume co-authorship of and attain maturity on this journey both at an individual and collective level.

On the other hand, if it is to remain substantial and not a formal, vain and empty specula-tive exercise, critique must be articulated and learned in an attempt to clarify and further develop human experience as an experience of already existing human dispositions. Ac-cording to Kant, thought leaves the '*scholastic conception*[34]' of philosophy (as a 'system of philosophical cognitions and cognitions of reasons' in the service of human knowledge and reason as an end in itself behind) (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 446) to the extent that it be-comes knowledge concerning, entering into, and serving the larger context of human purposiveness and design. As it affirms, re-shapes, and sets new guidelines for the human mode of living, critical thought becomes philosophy in the true sense of the word (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 447). This is a '*philosophizing*' that brings a love of wisdom to expression over and above a love of knowledge; and, to be sure, philosophy in this worldly sense cannot be learned "*for the simple reason*" "*that it has not yet been done and presented*[35]" (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 448). Instead, philosophizing must be acquired "*through exercise*[36] *and one's own use of reason*[37]" (Kant, 1800/1978, p. 448). Kant certainly published his *Anthropology* as a culmination of his authorship, but he dedicated twenty-three years of his entire teaching career to doing anthropology, since "[*f*]*or Kant this was the best and most efficient way to teach students critical thinking*" (Wilson, 2006, p. 2).

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[33] "Weltbewohner"
[34] "Schulbegriff"
[35] "Nocht nicht gegeben"
[36] "Übung"
[37] "Selbsteigenen Gebrauch der Vernunft"

The Critical State of Critique

In the age of criticism, critique becomes an inescapable, ubiquitous, inherent part of practice, to which every human activity must be subjected, not only to avoid just suspicion of its not being able to resist critique, but also to be challenged and thereby rise to a fuller realization of the prospects it seems to hold out.

Within this context, critique is certainly not simply polemical fault-finding; neither is it just a useful activity or a way to eradicate errors, quite the contrary. With this approach, there may be found "*something in critique which resembles virtue*[38]" (Foucault, 1990, p. 36), not just because it can be conceived as an attitude or a habitus. Critique can here certainly be perceived as something akin to virtue, if one by virtue understands a practical, ethical attitude that suspends obedience to authority and general rules to focus on the cultivation of judiciousness and excellence with regard to the conduct of already existing dispositions and the challenges they present (Aristotle, 1994). Critique may even be perceived as the modern virtue par excellence, in an age that claims to be enlightened. Wherever and whenever transformation is conceived as a movement, in which humans are in the process of leaving their state of minority and acquire new dispositions, a critical intervention seems called for. This intervention is able to guide this activity "*in the name of an* (…) *emerging ground of truth and justice*" (Butler, 2003, 10). Conceived in this manner, critique becomes aesthetic, insofar as it involves the suspension of morals in the deontological sense of binding commandments. However, this aesthetic attitude remains ethical, insofar as the critical attitude involves an ongoing normative commitment, rather than a suspension of judgment. The critic does not simply say no to existing demands or suspend commitments to leave the normative behind and thereby set up a non-committed free space. Rather, the critic departs from existing grounds of validity to assess what she or he can make of herself and others at this instant of humanity. This is done to examine what he, she, and we are in the process of committing ourselves to. In this manner, critique may also be seen as a rise to the challenge of giving an account of oneself and becoming a responsible being (Butler, 2005).

With the *incontournability* or inevitability of critique for human practice in the age of criticism, however, there is also a possibility that critique issues an unconditional declaration of independence and thereby becomes an end in itself. In this case, critique may take the form of a ubiquitous, negative, and destructive self-affirming human activity.

Of course, Kant may be charged with the crime of promoting a negative and self-perpetuating notion of critique. One can certainly also argue the case that Kant's critique basically ends up laying the groundwork for an anthropocentric order that installs Man and male reason at the centre of the universe as a relatively unproblematized basic measure and norm (Braidotti, 2013, p. 171-72). This would posit philosophy as the sole legislator, even as his critical attitude aims at bracketing any power issues and discrediting any attempt to establish a counterculture, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Raffnsøe, 2016c, p. 23-25, p. 9-10 ; Raffnsøe, 2013, p. 37, p. 60-61). Such approaches could certainly also have proved instructive. Yet, when opting for these approaches without further ado, one risks falling prey to exactly the same kind of negative self-perpetuating and self-promoting kind of critique that one would like to see confirmed in Kant. Practiced without

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[38] "Qui s'apparente à la vertu"

further differentiation, critical attitudes of this kind often gain distinction, as they construe the target of critique as guided by guile or ill will, and the analyst as an innocent and persecuted victim surrounded by conspiracies (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003). In this article, I have adopted an approach differing from "*the very productive critical habits embodied in what Paul Ricoeur memorably called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" – widespread critical habits indeed, perhaps by now nearly synonymous with criticism itself*" (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003, p. 124). In the place of such critical habits, I have tried to practice a different critical stance, trusting the field investigated to contain something still of value and focusing on its ability to ameliorate and provide inspirational pleasure within the present context (Sedgwick & Frank, 2003). Consequently, I have tried to read Kant and the ensuing major critical traditions to discern, characterize, and intensify crucial traits that set and continue to set the agenda in ways that may prove astonishing and inspiring, and in this capacity serve to make amends for a certain bias that characterizes present conceptions and practices of critique.

For all the reasons given, it is misleading to consider criticism as an immediately useful activity that contributes universally to and improves its surroundings. Cavell has forcefully demonstrated how scepticism may re-appear as a forceful and uncanny inclination, even within the normal run of things. Especially if it becomes an imperative end in itself to confront and eliminate this disposition, the inclination may turn into an all-consuming challenge, impossible to do away with (Cavell, 1979; Cavell, 1988). Something similar can be said of its modern counterpart: '*critique*'. Criticism is certainly not an absolute or unambiguous value, a goal that must be pursued on its own conditions, but an activity that must be taken up judiciously, with an eye to and a sense of when to begin and when to stop.

Its force is found in the continuous self-critique, which does not imply that critique must be self-perpetuating, - quite the opposite. While critique may be ever-present, it can never become all-inclusive and all-powerful. Critique can become unavoidable, but is not thereby a position or a mode of existence which is prudent to remain in. To avoid the possibility of becoming its own caricature, critique must appear at its own court and remain critical of itself, but in the sense of self-moderation.

All this became obvious when critique took up its modern, all-encompassing, and self-directed format in Kant. Since then it has been necessary to retain a view to the critical position of critique in the age of criticism, also through self-criticism, at least if critique is to retain its position and not regress to critical dogmatism.

In Danish philosopher Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Post-script,* the fictional author *Climacus* compares himself to a number of his successful contemporaries. By building railways, presenting systematic surveys of existing knowledge, or groundbreaking discoveries, they were all benefactors of the age and had made names for themselves by making life easier and more reasonable, be it at a practical, theoretical, dogmatic, or even spiritual level. He set a different goal for himself: "*You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm, as the others, undertake to make something harder!*" (Kierkegaard, 1962b, p. 155). In this manner, Climacus set a particularly challenging human task for himself and others, i.e. to rise to the role of a philosophical '*gadfly*' (Plato & Fowler, 1990, p. 30e) and become an annoying, yet powerless and frail, social critic questioning what everybody else took for granted.

What Kierkegaard in the last analysis took from Socrates' questioning of received practice before the Platonic inward turn was above all its irony (Kierkegaard, 1962a, b). Contrary to received opinions of Socratic irony, the gadfly's irony for Kierkegaard did not primarily reside in Socrates' skill in talking ironically, a rhetorical technique that would permit him to critically distance himself from his interlocutors by saying the opposite of what he meant and thus by his feigned ignorance trick them into unwittingly revealing their own lack of knowledge.

On the contrary, Socratic irony was existential. It rested on an experience of irony that Socrates believed to share with his interlocutors. This was the experience that they were all pretentious beings, or beings that in and through their own practice put themselves forward in such a way that they made claims (Lear, 2011, p. 10). In doing what they were already doing, they were concomitantly always already making claims about what they were up to. When one puts oneself forward as a teacher, a medical practitioner or a philosopher, there is certain pretense in doing so; and the possibility of an inherent irony arises in so far as a gap may open between the pretense (or the aspiration) of one's practice, on the one hand, and one's actual practice, on the other hand.

Irony in this Socratic sense exploits this already existing ironic gap in existence. Instead of turning towards the world in an "*infinite absolute negativity*" and becoming alien to the world (Kierkegaard, 1962a, p. 274), Socratic irony turns toward existing forms of practice to examine what participants in these activities find themselves committing themselves to, maybe even without being fully aware of making this commitment. An investigation of what this pretense expresses instantiates when and how this practice falls short of its aspiration, to such a degree that maybe none of its practitioners may fully live up to its expectations (Lear, 2010, p. 22-25).

In this manner, Socratic irony turns towards practice '*from within*' in an affirmative, yet critical, disruptive and challenging way. Understood in this way, irony and critique are not to be seen as ways to withdraw from practice. Instead, they make a firm commitment to and participate actively and fully in practice. As a consequence, the ironists and the critics are not merely annoying and provocative gadflies, but already committed provocateurs or provocatrices acting out of duty who are willing to invest their own life in a battle for the '*would be directedness*' or the virtuality of practice. With a passionate and burning humanitarian enthusiasm, they undertake to make life harder and more challenging, rather than easier and more agreeable.

In his critical philosophy, Kant articulated three different kinds of affirmative critique that may still inspire in the age of criticism. As is evident in the lives of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, however, criticism is an activity that for even the most acute minds may turn into an all-destructive iconoclastic self-affirming end in itself. Critique in any form that it may take is thus an activity that must be taken up judiciously and practiced *with sophrosyne,* with healthy-mindedness and an eye on when to begin and when to finish, but also discretion as to its various forms.

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