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TOUCHINESS AND CRITICISM. ON THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHICAL CRITICISM IN CULTURE AND EDUCATION*

Abstract. In this article, I am discussing the social phenomenon of touchiness (excessive sensitivity to differences of opinion and lifestyle) as a result of the polarization of discourse in contemporary Western culture. This polarization and the resulting touchiness are partly an effect of media, but the later also reflects structural problems of cultures and social practices. The problems arise from the dense network of potentially conflicting values. I am discussing some diagnoses of this phenomenon and some purported philosophical remedies including departure from the language of values and abandoning the idea of a strong subject of action and beliefs. I am criticizing these solutions and I am proposing the idea of radical criticism instead. I am presenting the idea about established theories of philosophical criticism, including those by Horkheimer, Spaemann, Habermas. I am also presenting a practical application of the idea of radical criticism in education: promoting philosophical inquiry in the classroom.

Keywords: criticism; values; modern subject; irony; touchiness; education

1. Introduction. 2. Touchiness and discourse of values. 3. Vision of the weak subject. 4. Radical criticism. 5. Conclusions: Criticism in schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

In diverse societies, where the rights of individuals are not respected, all speech is subject to violence. In diverse societies that respect the rights of individuals and minorities, although there is freedom of expression, it does not necessarily increase acceptance of diversity of opinion. The

old censorship is being replaced by touchiness. Tolerance, which is protected by law, does not prevent irritation and aversion. The problem is political and legal in nature, as the various subjects – individuals and groups – are increasingly demanding the presence of their values and beliefs in the public space, encountering quiet and dispersed but nevertheless strong resistance. This also applies to the school. It has to face the clash of the traditional mission of the school as an intergenerational transfer of knowledge and culture with the avalanche of sensitive topics related to differences in world views and morals when the very discussion is annoying for the participants. At present, it is not only religion, ethics or sex education that contain such topics. They also appear in history and biology, and the list will probably continue to grow.

Sensitive content makes communication impossible, because the very fact of communicating one's own beliefs or values evokes negative feelings in others, from irritation and resentment to actively manifested disgust or hostility. In these deliberations, I will refer to the recent diagnosis of the problem presented by Eberhard Straub[1] who claims that the difficulties of modern social communication are the result of a discourse of values which, unfortunately, has replaced the former reference to dignity. According to Straub, values are something that is not only appreciated but also possessed, shared, defended, undermined, violated, etc. Seemingly, the same applies to dignity, however, Straub considered dignity to be as inherent as one's own body – the ultimate strengthening of dignity leads to the person and his or her characteristics and actions. Meanwhile, there is something external to our relationship to values – they are acquired by an act similar to appropriation or by establishing a claim. The conflicts that arise here resemble other conflicts caused by ownership relations. As in the realm of ownership, it is difficult to appeal to one's values without affecting the values of others. Thus, the fear, lack of trust and touchiness that characterise modern social communication cannot be avoided.

Another way to reduce touchiness is to weaken the power of beliefs and build the identity of the subjects without resorting to

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1   E. Straub, *Von Tyrraney der Werte*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2010.

strong beliefs and axiological attitudes. At the same time, this demand leads to a reduction in the rational assumptions of discourse. However, this solution is too costly in normative terms. Without the concept of a strong subject, it is very difficult to defend the concept of responsibility and thus to justify any norms.

I will critically evaluate both of these proposals later in the article. I intend to defend another solution, the core of which is not to weaken subjectivity and rationality but, on the contrary, to deepen and strengthen them. A radical critical attitude seems to increase touchiness in the short term, however, it weakens it and improves communication in the long term. I will try to justify my arguments in a philosophical way, and to support it with my experience of conducting philosophy classes in school, at an early stage of education. If the touchiness related to the world-view and axiological issues cannot be resolved, consequences will have to be borne in the form of disappearance from education, and perhaps from the public sphere in general, of the matters that are important to man. This would not only be a loss to education and culture but would also lead to socially dangerous phenomena – the creation of substitute fields of conflict and aggression.

2. TOUCHINESS AND DISCOURSE OF VALUES

When Deborah Tannen published her book *The Argument Culture*[2] years ago, she was worried about the antagonisation of public discourse fuelled by the media – dramatising, maximising differences, polarisation. According to this author, organising public discussions involving stark opponents has become a constant media custom, imitated increasingly more often in everyday customs. In her opinion, this has a destructive impact on the quality of dialogue and perception of reality. The real structure of the world does not support the polarised discourse in the least. The latter is part of the social game of power and influence. In this game, logic is used seemingly

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2 D. Tannen, *Cywilizacja kłótni. Jak powstrzymać amerykańską wojnę na słowa*, transl. P. Budkiewicz, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2003.

and vaguely – the logical principles called for organising one's own beliefs using correct reasoning become a tool for mechanical production and equally mechanical attribution of beliefs. People act as if beliefs can be created from other beliefs (in the role of arguments or counter-arguments) and principles of logic. However, beliefs are not created in this way. They are based on a multi-level cognitive and emotional structure that has to be involved in every serious discussion. The inclination to debate flattens these levels and the associated communication styles. On the one hand, these practices are a symptom of a crisis of speech, experience and communication, but on the other hand, they deepen this crisis.

Polarisation gives rise to aggression, which is clearly noticeable. Increasing touchiness is a less frequently observed disorder of discourse. As the subtle, content-rich base of our beliefs is increasingly obscured by polarising practices, we do not know how deep the differences between us and other people reach. When this ignorance is combined with a low level of trust, it creates the suspicion that the differences go very deep, to the point that conversation or cooperation becomes completely impossible. This is an *a priori* suspicion – it cannot be empirically substantiated or rejected. Suspicion, and subsequent touchiness, are not founded on facts but despite the facts. Touchiness occurs at the very beginning of communication and has an avalanche effect: (1) the differences between its participants are automatically maximised; (2) the views are identified with the disposition to act and begin to give rise to fear; (3) logical differences take on existential features; (4) discussions begin to include slippery slope arguments; (5) finally, the innocence of speech itself is questioned, because the difference between speech and action dissolves – speech is treated as an act that is not in the interest of speech itself (communication, expression, truth) but always in the interest of the speaker.

Obviously, we know that these dependencies often occur. For example, contemporary analyses of the speech act, showing the implicatures contained in utterances, instruct us about the rich structure of action hidden in speech. However, the effect of touchiness consists in the appearance of all these dependencies in a reflection-proof

entanglement. Reducing speech to action and the interest of the speaker is not a scientific statement based on empirical or analytical evidence but a certain attitude – a culture of suspicion and guilt.

In the aforementioned book, which style and message lie halfway between philosophical analysis and committed journalism, Eberhard Straub argues that this profound pathology of communication is due to a discourse of values that, in modern times, gradually replaced the former reference to dignity. According to Straub, it is impossible to invoke one's values and not to infringe on the values of others, whereas such correlation does not occur in the case of dignity. Thus, the fear, lack of trust and touchiness that characterise modern social communication cannot be avoided in a discourse of values. Although Straub does not write about touchiness separately, his criticism applies to the subject under discussion herein: Utterances cause irritation just by the very fact that they express the values recognised by the speaker. Recognition of value implies the possibility of judgement, just as possession of a weapon implies the possibility of its use. This is also how value-oriented speakers treat their statements. It is difficult to indicate the value you accept without also indicating the value you do not accept. However, there are always some supporters of the latter. There is again an analogy with ownership: in a highly organised civilisation, it is difficult to find an object or a piece of space that belongs to nobody – almost everyone can be assigned a certain line leading to ownership or claim.

Another negative consequence is the sheer density of the field of value. The value determines the class of objects falling under this value. There cannot exist an object that, by definition, alone has a certain value. It may happen, for example, that there is only one honest man left in the world. That does not mean, however, that the class of honest people consists of one person for it also includes given, future and possible honest persons. Objects belonging to a class determined by value shall also have properties that include them in other axiological classes. When the axiological structure is rich, axiological contradictions are more likely to arise – the subject is assessed favourably in one reference system and unfavourably in another, and these systems are not mutually exclusive.

It is impossible to narrow down the affirmation of values to yourself. If I recognise a value, I always do so with a claim about other people: I assume that they share this value with me. However, if that is the case, the person who does not affirm the same value makes opposite claims. Namely, that I should not recognise the value that I recognise. The disparity automatically becomes an antagonism. The only solution would be to recognise that everyone has their own values, but then the reasons for recognising, defending, arguing in their favour would be invalidated. To live in society, we need to have a community of values and, at the same time, we need relativisation that allows for the divergence of personal values. No rational procedure seems to exist to maintain this kind of balance. It would require a kind of restrictive hermeneutics, which seems difficult to achieve, as shown by the modern history of the principle of tolerance. After centuries of discussion, it is still unclear what specific actions or attitudes are the best way to implement this principle: patience, ignorance, recognition, respect, acceptance, affirmation? Tolerance is gradually becoming a principle full of contradictions and, despite its noble origins, it is not very helpful in establishing the aforementioned balance today.

Values have an impact on preferences that is not subject to reasonable control. The correlation is seemingly very simple: I prefer A to B, because the value of A is higher in my hierarchy of values (I value A more than B). However, numerous experimental studies show that our preference systems are very susceptible to disorders. We often change our preferences before we act and we do so as a result of insignificant impulses. In one of the experiments,[3] the subjects were to decide how much they would have to be paid to agree to listen to a very unpleasant sound prepared by the experimenter for some time. But first, a sample valuation of 300 seconds of listening to this sound was prepared. This was done in a completely arbitrary manner, the price was set separately for each subject with

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3   D. Ariely, G. Loewenstein, D. Prelec, *Tom Sewyer and the Construction of Value,* in: *The Construction of Preference,* eds. P. Slovic, S. Liechtenstein, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006, 261.

the use of their identity card number. This arbitrariness was known to the subjects. Each person was then asked to provide the amount for which he or she would agree to listen to this sound for a given time. It turns out that the subjects with lower numbers generated from their document numbers decided to listen to the same portion of sound for lower pay. This experiment exhibits a phenomenon that can also be observed "with the naked eye": the appearance of a new value, even if only hypothetical (without strong reasons for affirmation), is sufficient to change the force of upholding other values.

To sum up: According to Straub, the language of values has emerged with capitalism. *Being* someone (related to dignity) has been replaced by having value. Conflicts inevitably arise when beliefs are expressed in the language of values. According to Straub, the language of dignity does not have this flaw. Dignity is equally divided among people. Personal dignity is not the subject of a universal claim (it cannot be satisfied at someone else's expense) and therefore does not cause conflict. Instead of debating the superiority of some values over others, dignity discourse leads to the imperative of self-perfection.

While agreeing with Straub on the negative features of axiological discourse, I do not believe that the alternative of dignity is a remedy. Firstly, it is irrational. Dignity is so heterogeneous that you cannot count on it as a predictor of behaviour. In other words, when it comes to the generation of preferences, dignity is even less credible than values. There is no telling what a person guided by a sense of dignity will choose in a given situation. Secondly, dignity needs to be justified and then the reference to values reappears.

3. VISION OF THE WEAK SUBJECT

Another strategy for reducing touchiness is to weaken the concept of the subject. It is no longer a question of *what* is the cause of irritation and lack of trust, but of *who* is experiencing these feelings. When an individual has a weak self-concept (of being an "incomplete" belief holder, performer, etc.) the clash of subjective claims does not occur. These clashes are an expression of the impasse, of

the lack of manoeuvre in the social game; the point is, therefore, for the participants in the discourse to always have a possibility to make a move. The way to implement this strategy is through a specifically understood sceptical attitude. It has been thoroughly described in Szymon Wróbel's latest book *Retroactive Readings*. The author begins with a philosophical criticism of attitudes oriented towards subject identity and universal principles. He summarises these critical results as follows: "I think that the freedom of the thinker, i.e. the suspensory sceptic, is, above all, the freedom resulting from liberating oneself from the obsession of ultimate legitimacy. The mission of such legitimation was taken on by philosophy and then sociology for fear of scepticism, which it considered intellectually and morally unacceptable. For a sceptic, to think means to use the resources of the concepts of philosophy itself, psychoanalysis, art and colloquial thinking, with the freedom liberated by the recognition of various already known ways of thinking. To think means to avoid the blind alleys of discourses 'closed' to their own notions, that is to say dogmatic and alluring with absolutism of their constructional claims. For the sceptic, philosophy and history, psychoanalysis and art do not seek knowledge, they are merely the practice of intelligent, thinking life, and thus an activity of life itself, not its transcendent product"[4].

The attitude described by the Author consists of: scepticism understood as an aversion to dogmatism, resignation from the strong conditions of identity with which the traditional concept of the subject was associated, freedom to use reason, i.e. the ability to change rules and the conceptual apparatus, sensitivity to context, resignation from a certain part of the traditional normative discourse in favour of psychoanalytic discourse, irony and discursive displacement that allows to avoid blind alleys of cognition and communication and to satisfy the awareness of one's own limitations, and finally empathy which is a better guide in solving problems than rules. This is a rad-

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4 S. Wróbel, *Lektury retroaktywne. Rodowody współczesnej myśli filozoficznej*, Wydawnictwo Universitas, Kraków 2014, 34.

ical and comprehensive programme. In a way, Szymon Wróbel dots the i's by clearly and practically formulating the consequences of over a hundred years old odyssey of a critical mind. However, some of the components of his diagnosis and formulas are questionable:

(1) While the efforts of a sceptic may be motivated by an aversion to dogmatism, this aversion is not the essence of a sceptical attitude. Scepticism stems rather from accepting the otherwise unwanted uncertainty of cognition. The sceptic is not trying to convince us that the quest for knowledge is wrong but to show that it is ineffective. Scepticism is based on a certain accidental truth, not an essential one. Considering any accidental truth as the norm is perilous. A sceptic would be a bad advisor (harmful hardliner) in a world where human cognitive abilities would dramatically improve.

(2) The weakening of the principle of the subject's identity leaves other people's claims unanswered, suspended in a kind of moral vacuum without responsibility; this is a world in which all the participants in the communication are inflicting blows, but no one is suffering because of them. In practical terms, it is an effective but morally empty solution.

(3) Any attempt to replace normative language with descriptive language is based on strong assumptions, mostly scientifically based, although there was no shortage of spiritualistic versions of this reduction, for example in the doctrine of predestination or some currents of gnosticism. These assumptions themselves contain strong normative assumptions which remain undisclosed and thus incomprehensible. It is no different with psychoanalysis. Norms are indeed difficult to understand and justify, but their non-normative interpretations do not represent any progress – they only seemingly increase the ability to understand and guide oneself.

(4) The demand for freedom to use reason aptly indicates the danger that the subject of cognition is somehow held hostage to their knowledge; they are not able to take effectively into account what they do not know or are not sure. This leads to

the following paradox: (a) you should rely solely on what you know, consciously ignoring the limitations of your knowledge; (b) when you ignore the limitations of knowledge, you do not know what is known and what is unknown. Acceptance of paradox leads to irrationality.

(5) The irony is an extremely important tool of the human mind, however, it contributes to the better constitution of the subject only when it takes the form of self-irony. The latter presupposes sophisticated self-knowledge and cannot be reduced to some form of discourse or a decision to adopt a certain attitude. Despite the similarity of the name, irony and self-irony are distant human faculties. The former often occurs without the latter.

(6) Discursive displacements are a function of freedom and irony. However, it is important to point out that make them out of necessity – to escape from aporia. This compulsion should not be elevated to the status of a rule. The problem of contemporary criticism of subjectivity is that they expect us to choose, in an unforced way, what for centuries has only been chosen out of unfortunate necessity, as a forced deviation from an ideal. Such a defensive strategy of the mind should not be elevated to the status of a positive rule, even if there is no prospect of removing the conditions that enforce this defensive strategy. Conditions under which human communication takes place require many "survival strategies", but to consider them as a normal human condition would mean radically forgetting their fundamental inadequacy.

This review of doubts about the spirit of contemporary criticism of strong, rational subjectivity is cursory out of necessity, and may itself raise doubts. However, these considerations do not concern the whole extent of the dispute, but merely one problem: touchiness. I am searching for cultural, discursive and, in the long term, pedagogical measures that would allow this property or attitude to be kept within an acceptable framework. From this point of view, both the postulate to radically reduce value-based discourse and strategies to weaken claims related to rational subjectivity are not convincing. The valid critical core they contain serves other purpos-

es well, by being an important contribution to in the philosophical discussion, but the threat that speech poses to itself – so evident in the phenomenon of touchiness – remains unchanged.

4. RADICAL CRITICISM

It is impossible to remove touchiness by criticising normative concepts and by relaxing the requirements of rationality. My proposal is exactly the opposite: the criteria of rationality must be strengthened with the use of rigorous criticism. Only a radical critical attitude can preserve the normative sense of culture and, at the same time, get us out of the trap of increasing touchiness. This is because the criticism advocated here is positive and aims to reveal the foundations of the beliefs and attitudes of all the participants in the communication, and thus promotes the formation of a critical community. This criticism is not aimed at establishing and maximising the dissent. On the other hand, it has certain normative effects, does not reduce requirements but raises them with regard to the participants in the communication.

Philosophy has a special role in the formation of criticism understood in this way, as the essence of philosophy is a critical mission. Philosophical criticism is directed at many of the properties of society and culture and the practices that result from them, but always with a critical reference to itself – to the foundations of its own criticism. Due to this characteristic, it cannot be reduced to other critical acts and attitudes: political, civil, artistic, religious. Only philosophy is a critique of its own critique – when other disciplines do it, they become a philosophy[5].

Today, after a wave of critical philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century and in the first decades after the Second World War, philosophy is experiencing an unprecedented crisis in this most important mission. Complicated and subtle as never before, philosophy

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5   The following comments on the critical mission of philosophy are a concise summary of the reasoning presented in: R. Piłat, *Filozofia jako radykalna krytyka*, in: *Filozofia 2.0*, ed. M. Soin, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2015.

seems to provide ever weaker critical impulses and little nourishment for intelligent self-management. The mental achievements of philosophy do not increase the critical potential of culture, remaining within what Gaston Bachelard called the philosophy of philosophers[6]. Under these circumstances, it is worth rethinking those philosophical concepts that were particularly explicit in formulating the call for criticism. Below are three critical ideas in the most synthetic formulations, with reservations as to their legitimacy and effectiveness.

Max Horkheimer's position: As is known, the critique was the central idea of the Frankfurt School. According to Horkheimer, "the real social function of philosophy lies in its criticism of what is prevalent .... The chief aim of such criticism is to prevent mankind from losing itself in those ideas and activities which the existing organization of society instils into its members. ... In the past century of European history, it has been shown conclusively that, despite a semblance of security, man has not been able to arrange his life in accordance with his conceptions of humanity. There is a gulf between the ideas by which men judge themselves and the world on the one hand, and the social reality which they reproduce through their actions on the other hand"[7].

However, despite Horkheimer's clear reservations that distance his approach from sociologism, the latter is clearly marked in his concept and restricts it. It does not allow the metaphorical statement "making the world rational" to be developed and filled with content. In Marxism, which Horkheimer draws from, the autonomy of reason and the fact that it can be brought into the world are limited by a basic dogmatic assumption: The path to the broadest possible basis for our views must not go beyond the class interest but, on the contrary, is closely linked to the class interest of the proletariat.

Robert Spaemann's position: This philosopher insists that criticism must have a basis and that it is not self-evident even when it opposes

6 G. Bachelard, *Filozofia, która mówi nie. Esej o filozofii nowego ducha w nauce*, transl. J. Budzyk, Wydawnictwo Słowo/obraz/terytoria, Gdańsk 2000, 14.

7 M. Horkheimer, *Społeczna funkcja filozofii*, in: Idem, *Społeczna funkcja filozofii. Wybór pism*, ed. R. Rudziński, PIW, Warszawa 1987, 235, 239.

obvious evil. When proposing changes in any field: science, art, institutions one must be ready to demonstrate the normative basis of the proposal. If I understand Spaemann correctly, these normative grounds for criticism itself come down to the question about the subject: Who will a person subjected to these changes become? It is not the characteristics of events and objects that are the basis for norms, but the subject's place in the world – a successful struggle against the contradictions that this place produces and reveals.

However, this position raises doubts. Spaemann argues as follows: First, there must be a justified desire for rational thinking and similarly the desire for fairness, followed by critical social discourse. This desire for rationality is a reminder of Horkheimer's intention to make the world rational. In both cases, there is a metaphorical reference to an enigmatic subject that occupies a privileged, eccentric position in reality and has access to as if from outside. However, the actions of this subject, and even the very expression of desires, including the desire to live rationally, are carried out within social practices. A rational entity is therefore doomed to pretend its own transcendence or, to put it more sharply, to unacceptable hypocrisy.

Jürgen Habermas' position: The German philosopher is aware of the paradox that good, legitimate critique must make many factual assumptions to which it devotes much (and sometimes all) of its criticism. Not only philosophy, but the whole culture suffers from a disease of uncritical criticism. Paradoxically, today the criticism comes mainly from dogmatists, or even fundamentalists, as they have the easiest way of formulating allegations – they use the universal language of accusation. A philosophical critic is in a different position. He is radical not in the sharpness of his judgments, as a fundamentalist, but in the depth of criticism itself. This depth comes from the effort to reverse the line of criticism, to relate the criticism to the critical subject itself. The critical attitude is constantly reviewed here, through assessing the contribution of the critical act to the disclosure of the ultimate normative basis of human subjectivity. Habermas formulates a concept that meets the need to fund such a critical and self-critical subject. His view is based on

communication. Whatever we have to say about ourselves, the world, and even the communication itself, must first be established as communicative action. Our opinions have binding content if they are addressed to and understood by other reasonable actors and become a premise for their own utterances. From this perspective, Habermas formulates some concrete and important criticisms: (1) lifeworld has been colonised by economics and bureaucracy; (2) the meaning expressed in language is increasingly being instrumentalised – it is more linked to the social functions of speech than to what it refers to; (3) "distorted communication takes the form of a detachment of meaning from legitimacy, speaking from the action, meaning from intention"[8]. Habermas' positive idea is to rationalise the lifeworld instead of colonising it[9]. The basic instrument of this rationalisation is to take care of the quality of communication – correcting its distortions. The critical effort of philosophy is, therefore, to be directed towards communication[10], and through it, towards other areas of life: moral attitudes, political choices, institutional solutions.

However, the Habermas proposal has serious limitations: (1) Axel Honneth claimed that by focusing on communication, or speech, Habermas remains blind to the suffering and injustices that are not expressed in speech[11]; (2) Habermas' rationalistic assumptions are strong, which means that the poetic language remains beyond the reach of analysis, contrary to the obvious intuition that it was often the carrier of the deepest criticism; (3) the Habermas' method requires appealing to an ideal model of communication – it is not only unrealistic by definition, but leads to aporia since it must be an object of desire (only then can it be the basis for criticism), and this desire would have to be tantamount to a desire for a specific end of the story;

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8   A. Dupeyrix, *Zrozumieć Habermasa*, transl. M. N. Wróblewska, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2013, 198.

9   Ibid, 197.

10 See: J. Habermas, *Zur Architektonik der Discursdifferenzierung*, in: *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2005, 89.

11 I quote this objection after Dupeyrix, *Zrozumieć Habermasa*, op. cit., 132-138.

(4) Habermas' critical strategy reveals, according to Judith Butler[12], hidden authoritarianism, because the critic is completely outside of the criticised relations and phenomena – uncritical about himself.

I have presented three selected views on the critical function of philosophy. Their common flaw is that they confuse critical thought itself with its applications. It can be agreed that criticism is to bring order and improve ideas (Horkheimer), but that does not mean that criticism is an analysis of ideas. It can be agreed that critique aims to strengthen sagaciousness and fairness and that it must be justified itself (Spaemann), but that does not mean that criticism is an improvement on justification. Finally, one can agree that improving communication is the key to many positive social and moral changes (Habermas), but this does not mean that criticism comes down to improving communication. In my opinion, the critical attitude relates primarily to the relationship with oneself and not to the world in which negative phenomena are perceived. Criticism cannot be confused with protesting against evil to resist injustice, irrationality, hypocrisy and so on. It is not necessary to be critical in the radical sense presented here; it is enough to be intelligent and sensitive. A critic in the colloquial sense is very often extremely uncritical, which is easy to see nowadays, after a century filled with doctrines that are right in their opposition, but at the same time are ideological and extremely unreasonable. Contemporary protest and emancipation movements, from transhumanism to religious fundamentalism, are also often directed towards the right external goals – they recognise the negative phenomena correctly, but remain completely uncritical themselves. They can justify their positions by referring to the evil in the world, but they do not see that their statements are rooted in a normative background that needs to be revealed and rethought. It is most often the case that the critic and the one being criticised share most of the assumptions about a just world, yet a disagreement arises whose source remains unknown and is most often replaced by a mythological image of the opponent.

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12 See: J. Butler, *What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue*, Transversal 5(2001), (http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/butler/en/), [accessed on: 09/2016].

The real criticism is to reveal the source of one's own attitude in radical reflection. A critical person aims to reveal that part of their own image of the world which is the deepest source of commitment they can understand. However, it is not enough to reveal the source – one still has to ask whether the implementation of this commitment makes this person better. Naturally, talking about self-improvement also involves normative assumptions and there is always the danger that the same system of ideas that defines what we aspire to will also define the aspiring one – we then become indistinguishable from our beliefs and values, falling into all the aporias mentioned earlier. Criticism is precisely a defence against this kind of aporia. It accomplishes that through understanding and revealing the gap between the perfectionist ideal of oneself and the means at one's disposal to realise that ideal. We do not become better at pursuing our desires and beliefs, but at criticising them. Detecting and understanding this difference is what I call radical criticism. I will stress once again how different this concept is from the colloquial concept of criticism: it is not about disagreeing with something by virtue of one's beliefs, values or interests, but about putting those beliefs, values and interests – the basis of the expressed discord – to the test. In this sense, the subject of criticism is not the beliefs with which we disagree or the values that we do not recognise, but precisely, or perhaps above all, those beliefs and values that we hold and recognise. From the point of view of radical criticism, the difference between consent and disagreement, leaning towards something and resistance, is of little importance.

Radical criticism is not about being right. It is closer to the ideal of self-management. The latter is not about ordering and disciplining one's own actions, but about guiding one's own perfectionist dynamics through the thoughtful use of one's own resources. This sense of criticism was expressed in Kant's idea of enlightenment. It means achieving the ability to guide oneself, which was what Kant called maturity.

According to Kant, the reason must stand before its own tribunal in order to justify its claims. However, this raises the question: what is a tribunal? It cannot be described as a mere rejection of what is not accepted. After rejection, there is always some positive content

emerging which must be understood; moreover, rejection itself is an act with some positive content. Both of these contents are easily overlooked by the critical mind. It is presented in an interesting manner in Philip Quadrio's study on Rousseau's and Kant's idea of. As is known, Jacques Rousseau criticised the scientific mind, accusing the sciences and arts of merely obscuring human enslavement without freeing from it[13]. But his idea of emancipation includes a distinction between natural freedom and the freedom that must be achieved[14]. Although man has become homeless, banished out of nature by rationalism, only the reason can help him to return to his place[15]. Kant put it more bluntly. For him, critique other than the strictly rational one would be an attempt at emancipation without a sense of equity.

However, this raises the following question: Does radical criticism alone – this tribunal of reason – have its own basis? It seems that Kant saw this basis in a transcendental analysis – in revealing what he called a transcendental illusion[16]. The latter consists of not recognising that questions are asked that cannot be answered. For Kant, emancipation (newly gained freedom) means not to succumb to an illusion that leaves a man stranded by suggesting unrealistic goals. However, many contemporary philosophers would not accept this version of critical reason. According to Michel Foucault, there are two versions of Kant's critique: the first is included in his book *Critique of Pure Reason* and the second in the essay *What is Enlightenment*. In the former, Kant seeks a transcendental basis for criticism, while in the latter, he relies rather on a certain ethos, namely the effort of emancipation. Although Quadrio doubts whether this is a good interpretation since Kant's project of transcendental basis and emancipatory project are closely linked, this is where we can leave the historical dispute aside. It is important to consider how strong the conditions must be for

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13 P. A. Quadrio, *Rousseau, Kant and Philosophical Auto-Criticism: The Practical ends of Critical Thinking*, in: K. de Boer, R. Sinderegger, *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, Macmillian, Palgrave 2012, 51.

14 Ibid, 54.

15 Ibid, 58.

16 Ibid, 62.

this emancipation ethos to be an emancipation rather than an illusion. This is where I see the benefit of my thesis of radical criticism: emancipation is justified by referring to the improvement of man by the power of radical reflection, not vice versa. Improvement does not happen when emancipation occurs, but vice versa: emancipation occurs only when it meets the condition of improvement.

The idea of radical criticism presented above seems to me to be a sufficient response to the problem of touchiness. The aporia of touchiness means that the greater subtlety (specific density) of culture and the greater extent of personal rights lead to touchiness that is destructive to communication – systems of beliefs and values are interconnected and these relationships are known to their holders. They know that the differences of opinions reach deep, to the very basis of identity, and suspect that they go too deep to find a discursive solution for them. Radical criticism casts doubt on this suspicious depth. At the same time, it reveals a much greater degree of agreement between the opposing beliefs and values than sensitive participants in the communication can admit. This does not mean that we are in the possession of a set of critical philosophical tools waiting to be used. As I have already mentioned, philosophical criticism, in its desire for primariness and radicalism, must first and foremost criticise itself. Many contemporary philosophers call themselves critical, but this self-classification must be verified each time. Criticism is not yet a philosophical criticism, and many contemporary views are only critical in the colloquial sense, not in the philosophical sense of the word.

5. CONCLUSIONS: CRITICISM IN SCHOOLS

Having outlined a vision of radical criticism as a remedy for communication permeated by lack of trust and touchiness, I want to reflect on the practical consequences of this idea in the field of education. If radical criticism is not to remain merely a theoretical possibility, the scope and tools of its application must be indicated. This scope is education, and the proposed tool is philosophical inquiry understood as an integral part of the educational process. Nowa-

days, the idea of philosophical inquiries at school is fairly known. It had more than one source, however, at this point, I want to refer to the specific programme presented almost half a century ago by the American philosopher Matthew Lipman, who died in 2010. The idea emerged under the name *Philosophy for Children*, but developing it in the Polish environment gave it a more flexible framework and a separate methodology. The essence remains the same: to trigger a process of critical thinking that also makes a cooperative sense. That does not lead to antagonisation, but to the disclosure of the cognitive resources of the participants in the dialogue, which in turn strengthens the means of solving problems and, consequently, the sense of community. The author of the programme used the term "community of inquiry" in this context. Many years of experience in implementing the programme in Poland lead to the conclusion that a community of this kind is achievable, and criticism is its most important component. Lipman's original method of conducting classes is quite restrictive: it consists of collecting questions and conducting discussions using statements starting with "I agree because ...", "I disagree because ...". Its advantage is that arguments also need to be made in the case of consent, not just disagreement; exactly as I have advocated by formulating the philosophical ideal of radical criticism above.

Developing criticism is an extensive task, as can be seen in the following list of standards that have emerged from school practice and indicate the specific skills needed to create a critical attitude. The guiding principle of a critical discussion is that the degree of recognition of a belief must not be higher than the degree of its justification. To be able to observe this principle, the following skills have to be mastered[17]:

(1)   Ability to assess your own degree of conviction. This implies, among other things: (a) the ability to imagine what actions is our conviction obliging us to take and whether we can take

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17   Summaried follow: *Model Minimum Kompetencji Myślowych*, collective publication prepared by the team: Stowarzyszenia Edukacji Filozoficznej PHRONESIS, in the frame of the project: PO KL 09.02-30-365/10 *Pozwolić uczniom myśleć* [*Let students think*], co-financed by the European Union under the European Social Fund.

these actions; (b) the ability to imagine what other (alternative) beliefs one could have in a given situation; (c) the ability to assess how many other beliefs are logically connected to a given belief.

(2)   Understanding the non-absoluteness and volatility of your own beliefs.

(3)   Not to associate one's own dignity with the veracity of one's beliefs; to accept imperfection and openness to new beliefs. The attachment to one's own views is understandable as they are often an important part of one's identity. However, the best way to maintain this relationship is to improve one's own beliefs, not to cling to them.

(4)   Ability to devise alternatives to your own views. The willingness to adopt different beliefs and to test them is a fundamental instrument for developing knowledge.

(5)   Ability to identify irrational, superstitious, prejudice-based beliefs and resist irrational impulses.

(6)   Ability to combine logical-semantic competence with communication skills.

(7)   To recognise that opposing views, troublesome counter-arguments or inquisitive, critical questions ultimately benefit each person involved in communication.

(8)   Awareness of one's own ignorance. The general awareness that *human* knowledge is imperfect is not enough – almost everyone admits this. What is needed is to see one's *own* ignorance here and now, to point out exactly the area that it concerns and to creatively look for ways to remove it.

In the school environment, criticism raises concerns, because the word "criticism" is generally understood in a colloquial sense of disagreement, objection, dispute. The concept of criticism that I defended in this article has a positive sense. Moreover, it is useful both in situations of consent and disagreement. In essence, it comes down to certain positive and valuable mental and communication skills and the will to apply them. Such criticism comes quite naturally with the acquisition of language and communication skills, therefore there are

practically no age limits when it comes to its improvement. Critical inquiries can be carried out with primary school children as well as with high school students. The dominance of encyclopaedic knowledge in school causes critical skills to be perceived as an obstacle, as they are associated with mental chaos and wasting efforts invested in acquiring knowledge. Meanwhile, critical thinking is not about undermining cognitive efforts and creating chaos, but about revealing the rational basis of our beliefs, values and attitudes. At the same time, experience has shown that criticism understood in this way has a real civilising effect, curbs touchiness and opens the way for the school to treat sensitive world-view subjects seriously and without fear. In the absence of criticism, a vicious circle is created: touchiness leads to avoidance of some types of discussion, and avoidance leads to ignorance and suspicion, which further increases touchiness.

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