

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION?

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Abstract

A review of recent literature advocating critical thinking as a necessary response to 'globalization', gives no clear picture of what critical thinking is. Drawing on Kant and Hermeneutics, this paper proposes a critical definition of critical thinking as an understanding of its subject-matter which questions itself, and a characterization of critical thinking as the tension of standing within the subject-matter while holding it at a distance. Considered against a backdrop of concerns about 'globalization', critical thinking is seen, not only as an intellectual method, but also as an existential engagement of the world.

Text

According to the editors of *Manusya*, many believe that for Asian countries to 'survive in the contemporary globalized economy', the educational systems must produce graduates who are capable of critical thinking and of thinking for themselves. There is concern, however, that Asian cultures may be inhospitable to critical thinking, possibly due to the 'very high esteem' in which teachers

are held.² At the same time, according to Stephen Brookfield (1991:3), many journals in the United States 'call for the development of critical thinkers as a national priority'. Critical thinking is seen as 'Key to economic resurgence in the face of crippling foreign trade competition'. Of course, in Asia, the globalized economy is conceived primarily as Western, while the foreign trade that many Americans see as crippling is primarily from Asia. There is at least a little irony in these mirrored challenges to think critically. A review of recent literature, however, including a plethora of books on how to think critically, yields no very clear picture of what critical thinking is. It would seem to include a jumble of qualities such as deliberate clarity (Deistler), to creativity with skepticism (Brookfield:7-9), and commitment (Perry Waddle, Forward to Deistler:iii). But even if we could construct a coherent list of qualities from the literature, such a list would not be a definition. The purpose of the present paper, therefore, is to propose a more critical definition and characterization.

We take as a starting point one problem that critical thinking is supposed to address. That is the problem of coming to understand phenomena that we do not yet understand, for example, globalization. We take Kant as an exemplar and look for clues in the related discipline of literary criticism, and from Heidegger's comments on both. It should be kept in mind that our intention is not to elucidate Kant or Heidegger, but to elucidate critical thinking. We therefore consider

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only limited parts of their thought and draw implications that may diverge from their central concerns.

The literature as a whole more or less agrees that critical thinking includes questioning (e.g. Brookfield:7;Deistler: 53). We therefore take as guiding questions, 'What is the question?' and 'To what is the question addressed?' We then take a brief look at the cultural issue, and ask, 'Who questions?'

The Problem

How do we come to understand something that we do not already know? That is to say, something which is not an instance of known types nor yet an extension of known laws and principles, albeit applied to new facts, but rather something of which we do not yet know even the laws and principles.

This is a fundamental problem in all social, economic, and political thinking in the postmodern era. Not only does the historical process *per se* bring change, but also the confluence of very different cultures creates genuinely new situations that we do not even know *how* to understand. Moreover, the incipient merging of multiple histories into one world history, radically and continually changes them all so that principles of understanding seem to become obsolete almost as soon as they are established.³

That the confusion is universal is suggested by the longstanding miscalculations of international investors leading up to the economic collapse of 1997, and the continuing miscalculations of the IMF managers. Globalization, in other words, is not Westernization, nor even Modern-

ization, but the emergence of a history that we do not yet understand.

There is an analogous problem in the interpretation of literature, or any art form, where the work may express genuinely new insights or where the work comes from unfamiliar, perhaps ancient cultures. Such works cannot be interpreted as illustrations of existing knowledge; neither can they be interpreted in terms of existing principles. The task is to articulate what is original (which does not mean 'new' or 'different'), to understand the work on its own terms. The attempt to do so is criticism, or hermeneutics. Heidegger (1967:120) has pointed out a relationship between critical thinking and criticism, and suggests a relationship between Kant's critical method and the art criticism of his day. Kant hints also at a connection to literary criticism while asserting that his

³Theories of social inequality, for example, become inadequate in the face of migration and in the spread of cash economies. Theories of migration, in turn become inadequate as people respond in unforeseen ways to opportunities and pressures generated by international evolution, but also, as migrants respond in unexpected ways to their new cultural surroundings, thus altering the economies and cultures of their host cities (c.f. Figueroa:7ff). At the same time, theories formulated to understand and to combat inequality, e.g. exclusion theory in South America (Figueroa:3-23), have been understood in another culture, in Asia, in ways that reinforce inequality (Phongpaichit:4). Alternatively, such modernist concepts as equality and rights, assimilated into communal cultures are often transformed to mean having a (any) place in the social hierarchy (personal conversations in Thailand).

'critique' goes beyond it (1958:Axii).⁴ In any case, there are analogies between hermeneutics and Kant's critique which may help us to understand critical thinking in general.

To interpret the work on 'its own terms' sounds at first like approaching it objectively, as it is 'in itself', but objectivity means to see in a standard way, as everyone sees: it excludes the original. That is especially so when we remember that literature comes alive only for the readers. 'In itself', literature is only strings of words, and attempts at objective interpretation tend to devolve into such procedures as textual analysis (Palmer:5), which, though important, miss the meaning of the work. With that, they miss the work's 'own terms' by which it could be interpreted. The principles of interpretation then, must be drawn from the work itself. To do that, of course, one must first understand it. To interpret the work, then, it would appear that one must already have interpreted it. Works of literature, in other words are self-referential, they mean themselves, and if the meanings come alive for the reader, what they mean involves the work itself, i.e., as a whole. This is often explained, in a rough and ready way, in terms of the whole and its parts: in order to understand the whole one must understand the parts, but in order to understand the parts one must understand the whole. This is the famous

'hermeneutic circle'. The meaning of the work as a whole, in turn, resides in larger contextual wholes and in trying to understand any particular work, the critic looks also at the general cultural milieu in which the work has, or had, its meaning. Criticism, then, comes also to include social and historical criticism. At each level, the problem of understanding the phenomena on their own terms reappears; I do not know what those terms are without understanding the phenomena, but understanding the phenomena depends on first knowing their terms. We never arrive, then, at an independent set of principles or formulae for definitive interpretation (Palmer:183).

The circularity of interpretation is overcome when the critic forsakes his 'objective', 'disinterested' perspective and stands, as it were, within the work (cf. Palmer:228). That, in turn, requires significant preparation, studying the work and its contexts, becoming familiar. From the achieved stance within the work, interpretation becomes a kind of self-expression that articulates the meaningful structure of that stance, what the work is for the critic. This means, however that, just as we never arrive at independent, universal principles, there is no hope of a definitive interpretation of any particular work (Palmer:183). That implies, too, that the critic changes the work itself. He does not, of course, rewrite the text (except inasmuch as interpretations affect translations). But he rewrites the way it is read, and to that extent the interpretation of a work is an interpretation also of itself.

The lack of objective standards, however, exposes the critic to the dangers

⁴Due to the existence of multiple editions of Kemp's translation of *Critique of Pure Reason*, with different paginations, I will refer to the page numbers of the German editions embedded in Kemp's translation. 'A' indicates the first edition of the *Critique*, 'B' the second edition.

of subjectivity. On the one hand he may project his own preconceptions into the work, on the other, he may become an enthusiast of the work, missing its imperfections, its inner conflicts, etc. In either case he has lost his perspective, and indeed, the two cases may amount to the same thing—he is perhaps ‘enthusiastic’ about his own reflection in the work. What is required is that the critic, in expressing what the work is for him, elucidates not his own subjectivity, but precisely the work itself. That is to say, the work as it is for him. For this, he must keep the work at a ‘distance’.

Criticism, then, requires, on the one hand, the freedom to ‘enter into’ the work and, on the other, discipline and rigor in the critic himself in holding the work at a ‘distance’. One important way of achieving both freedom and rigor is through questioning: What does the work mean? Will it bear this interpretation? The point is to stay with the questions, in such a way as to be questioned by the work and by its contexts. That is not merely to know what the questions are, but literally to be questioned. We must remember too, that the critic works within a tradition of criticism, with a culture and language of his own, a standpoint. What the work is for the critic may be personal, but it is not private and arbitrary, its meaning is also for the traditions and culture in which the critic lives and works. (cf. Palmer:182)

Criticism, in short, is never the neutral application of formulae, but an existential and historical act of engagement. Literary interpretation and the attempt to understand globalization, are instances of the general problem of coming to un-

derstand what we do not already know. Critical thinking as a general method of addressing that problem, has at least this much in common with literary criticism: It is the attempt to understand its subject-matter on its own terms.⁵ That means, not to take events as instances of what is already known, nor to assume the applicability of previously known laws and principles, nor to project one’s own biases into them, but rather to enter into them, in the spirit of disciplined questioning. Like criticism, critical thinking may impact the subject-matter itself. One does not simply discover something about the economy, one’s discoveries also imply actions, which, in turn change the very situation to which they were a response. But the act of questioning itself may usher in fundamental change as well. For example, the economic collapse of 1929, in The United States, brought into question the presuppositions of previous economic policy. The recognition of the question, and taking it up as a question to be asked, opened the door for moderately socialist reforms and Roosevelt’s New Deal. Or to put it dif-

⁵‘Subject matter’ is ambiguous in that it can mean either the body of knowledge about a range of phenomena, or the phenomena themselves. This ambiguity is especially interesting in such areas as culture and history, where the knowledge is an integral part of the phenomena. History is not just the happening, but also the telling of the happening and the interpretation of the telling; and the telling and interpretation are themselves historical phenomena. Through out, I mean ‘subject-matter’, hyphenated, in both senses, that which is studied, interpreted, etc. and the body of knowledge, literature, etc. that has come from such study and interpretation.

ferently, the economic collapse of 1929, and that of 1997, are questions put to the peoples of America, and of Asia, by the course of history. 'Recovery' depends on the recognition and interpretation of that question, and that is critical thinking.

Objectivity and Subjectivity

We should make explicit, before proceeding, the problems of objectivity and subjectivity in attempts to understand human phenomena (cf. also, Palmer:223ff). Objectivity avoids subjective bias by excluding the investigator from the investigated. It endeavors to see just what everyone would see who likewise removes himself from the subject-matter and uses the same equipment and rules of evidence. Things are thus seen in their generality and repeatability, excluding the specific and unique. This standpoint is enormously effective in the physical sciences. When it comes to observing human meanings, however, that 'equipment' and those 'rules' are cultural styles, and the investigator and his culture are participants in the phenomena under investigation. Objectivity's exclusion of the investigator and his culture is then an attempted exclusion of features of the subject-matter. Rather it is a denial of those features, a pretense. But also, human meanings are not objective entities to be observed, but meanings-for-humans, i.e. they obtain for persons, not for 'everyone'. In excluding himself, the investigator bars himself from apprehending the meanings of his subject-matter and can only interpret by applying pre-conceived principles or canons of interpretation. Objectivity, in other words, is a mode of

projection. In applying the objective principles and ideals of American democracy, for example, U. S. officials from the mid-1950's on missed, not the objective events, but the meanings of the conflict in Vietnam, with disastrous results.

Subjectivity, on the other hand, simply and naively projects personal and cultural biases, desires, feelings, etc. into the subject-matter. The nearby stranger may be seen as a dangerous barbarian, the distant one as a noble savage. Some Americans supported the Vietnam War out of blind patriotism and a lingering irrational fear of Asians, while some opposed it out of romantic notions of gentle Asians suffering Western brutality. For both, there were meanings in the Vietnam conflict, but those meanings had little to do with Vietnam.

Kant's Critical Method

Kant may especially be credited with developing critique as a rigorous philosophical method beyond the criticism of art and literature. Faced with contradictions in emergent⁶ modernism, he questioned the world, or rather, he questioned 'pure reason' in its activity of knowing the world, as to the possibility of those contradictions. Hume had shown that on

⁶Throughout I use 'emergent' in a metaphorical sense taken from chemistry where phenomena which result from the combination of prior phenomena, may have 'emergent' characteristics quite different from those of the prior phenomena. In the metaphor, I also intend to convey the dynamic sense of 'emerging'.

the bases of radical empiricism, we can have no knowledge of causation. Physical science, then, would seem to have been made impossible by its own method. Newton, however, had already not only demonstrated that science was possible, he had made it actual: the law of universal gravitation was not a guess, even if (after Hume) no one could say why it was certain. At the same time, the view of nature as a realm of universal causation contradicted the moral sense of human freedom.

How is it, Kant asked, that finite human understanding is able to move from empirical data to principles and laws that transcend the data? More fundamentally, how do we know that it does? Moreover, given that those laws and principles include universal causation, how is it that we are free? Kant did not just make up these questions, they were, again, already implicit in the emergent modern worldview.

Kant did not seek resolution in the usual sense. He did not attempt to refute either Hume or the certainty of scientific knowledge. Neither did he attempt to concoct a speculative theory that would explain away the contradictions. Rather, he sharpened the contradictions, hoping not to explain but to elucidate, and thence to uncover the structures of reason (in its activity of knowing the world) that contained them. But since the known principles of understanding lead to contradiction, he had to find a way of approaching reason (in its activity of knowing the world) on its own, so far unknown, terms, in order to discover the appropriate principles of understanding. Kant's way of approach was critique,

an inquiry into 'the possibility, the principles and the extent' of reason knowing the world (Kant, 1958:Axii). In the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant spoke of uncovering the 'articulations' and 'structures' in their 'natural combination' (1950:11). Commenting on Kant's method, Heidegger (1967:120-121) says that like art criticism, critique seeks not facts but principles, and that Kant extends and develops this to mean the delimitation of the decisive and specific in the subject-matter, the exhibition of its inner construction and sketching the outline of the whole. This agrees with Kant himself (1958:Bxii).

Pure reason (in its activity of knowing the world) was Kant's subject-matter. But a similar approach may be applied to other areas, as the connection to art criticism suggests, and we may characterize critical thinking as an adaptation of Kant's method to any appropriate subject-matter. The purpose of critical thinking, in short, is not to explain, justify, or refute, but to uncover. Again, like literary criticism, it looks for its principles within the subject-matter itself. This is suggested in an image that Kant uses. He felt that his work was like providing 'principles of navigation drawn from a knowledge of the globe...' (1950:11). But a knowledge of the globe could only be obtained by venturing into the unknown, with the very real possibility of never finding the way back. Now, articulating the subject-matter in both its inner construction and in the outline of the whole, while drawing the principles of articulation from the subject-matter itself, means that critical thinking places itself squarely within the paradox that in

order to understand the whole we must first understand the parts and vice versa. That brings us back to the hermeneutic circle, and it is here that one comes face to face with his own ignorance, that one is lost and does not know how to proceed. For that very reason he can only take his clues from the subject-matter, and it is here that fruitful questions can be formulated (cf. Gadamer's view in Palmer:199). It is in the tension of this paradox that critical thinking may begin to understand what it previously did not. But in order to critique something one must first understand it, and that means, not only to think certain thoughts, but also to see the world in a certain way, or even to be in it in a certain way (Palmer:131). To understand Hume, say, I have to think and feel like Hume so that the world is for me as it was for him; I have to 'stand under' and 'within' that view of reality. The difficulty is that in the process, I tend to come to agree with Hume, I loose my perspective. That is to say that I slip, perhaps imperceptibly, from consideration and evaluation into enthusiasm and apologetics. I lose my 'distance'. That was part of Kant's problem, to adopt alternative views, but in such a way that he did not loose his footing, his perspective. But what could such a footing be if not some preconceived position? That was not only a methodological problem, but also the crux of the original problem: is there a footing between these positions? We may say that Kant sought a footing in the contradictions themselves and asked: Where am I standing? Reading the Critique of Pure Reason, one gets the feeling of a man who has thrown himself into the breach in order to discover its inner contours. I want to say that he leaped into the chasm with the

question: is it bottomless?

Kant maintained his critical perspective by remaining within the question, both in the sense of continuing to ask it, not settling for premature answers, and of continuing to be questioned by it, allowing the question both to elaborate and to deepen itself.

In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant established the impossibility of answering questions concerning such things as God and freedom by the use of theoretical reason, even though we cannot be cured of asking them. In the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant is concerned to establish the binding universality of moral law. That, however, requires human freedom, the reality of which, according to Kant himself, cannot be theoretically affirmed. The insight by which he is nevertheless able to affirm it tends to be overwhelmed by the force of his moral reasoning; however, that insight bears upon our present inquiry. These questions are legitimately addressed, he says, by 'practical' reason, that is, reason which is effective in the world. Freedom is revealed and known in the exercise of practical reason, without its thereby becoming a theoretical concept. (1956:4) We know ourselves as ourselves, i.e. as noumena, not theoretically, but in action (1956:101). Nevertheless, 'Pure reason is practical of itself alone...' (1956:32). In other words, action is itself a mode of thinking, and thinking is a mode of action. Or, in Kant's terms: theoretical reason seeks to understand its object, practical reason seeks to make its object real. Both are 'pure reason.' (1956:92)

Critical Thinking as a Procedure

As a procedure, we can characterize critical thinking as a style of questioning. There must, however, be something to question and the critical thinker conducts preliminary research in order to approach an understanding of the subject-matter. When the understanding has reached an adequate formulation: 'It is like this,' critical thinking proper can begin with the question: 'Is it?'

The question, 'Is it like this?', asks after the meaning of 'this', i.e. the internal and external relations of signification and intention, rather than the compositional relations from which the understanding may have been derived. For Kant, scientific determinism means that we are not free (Are we not?), the experience of morality means that we are free (Are we?), the contradiction means... But that is the new question, 'What does the contradiction mean?'

It may be objected that this is asking after the meaning of what is already understood, that the critical thinker is only articulating what she already knows. Heidegger himself says as much (1967:75), and indeed, in this respect, critical thinking resembles analysis, it lays bare what one already knows. To lay bare what is already known is to bring it into play, to make it accessible for use and for further criticism. Every shopkeeper knows already the law of supply and demand. But it can only be applied to economic policy when that knowledge has been made explicit, or laid bare. Moreover, as in mathematics, analytic advances may be real advances. Logically, $x^m x^n = x^{m+n}$ may resemble 'The

bachelor is a man,' yet it opens up whole new fields of possibility.

But critical thinking goes radically beyond logical analysis. Often it opens up essential questions that research and thinking per se, i.e. theoretical reason, cannot address. In these cases the importance of critical thinking is in having made the questions explicit. In evaluating candidates in a parliamentary election, for example, one may question the meaning of elections, whether their significance is moral, practical, propagandistic, etc. The answer may well affect one's political loyalties, and yet the question can only be answered by personal choices how to take elections. It is to address these kinds of question that Kant wrote the Critique of Practical Reason. The meaning of the contradiction between determinism and freedom is: 'Act!' Again, we think with our actions, even as dressmakers or potters think with their hands. Neither may it be too much to say that dressmakers and potters sometimes think critically with their hands.

An implication of practical reason and of thinking with our hands, is the possibility for analysis to move freely into the world of its subject-matter where empty speculation may be shown up for what it is (c.f. Kant, 1956:3). The barrier (not the distinction) between theoretical and practical reason, thought and action, thought and being, falls. We are able literally to think ourselves into the subject-matter, and to question our way through it. If critical thinking is analysis, in the general sense of making explicit what is already understood, then we have to say that the understanding that is being ana-

lyzed extends itself ahead of the analysis, and that what is 'already understood' includes potentially all that can be understood. Yet though the self-extension of understanding is the basis of the possibility of the extension of positive knowledge, it brings with it the danger of losing perspective. On the one hand, as thought extends itself beyond immediate experience, it opens the door to unwarranted speculation. Critical thought protects itself by asking at every advance, 'Is it like this?' On the other hand, in thinking ourselves into the subject-matter, we risk becoming part of it, losing the 'distance' from which we are able to examine it. In coming to understand Hume theoretically, I tend to come to agree with him; but in terms of practical reason, I think/act into events, and I tend to come to accept the actual sequence of events and their, perhaps poorly conceived, structures as natural and necessary. The shopkeeper may take capitalism for granted, with no articulate awareness of its dynamics. Thus, though he is locally shrewd, he may continue to support 'pro-business' policies, say de-regulation, even as they help the super-market chains to put him out of business.

Again, distance is maintained by continual questioning, the more radically so, the more one's thinking is actively involved in affairs. In this, critical thinking resembles objectivity, which continually asks, 'would everyone see it this way?' The critical question, however, is concerned with the meaning, and meanings are hidden from 'everyone'.

We have not yet explicitly considered the question, 'To what is the question

addressed?' and what immediately follows, 'From what perspective is the question asked?' Surely, the question is aimed at the subject-matter itself. In light of the dangers of subjectivity and the need to maintain 'distance', the question, surely, must be put disinterestedly and without preconceptions. We have spoken of 'thinking into', of 'standing within' and of questioning what is already understood, but in order to understand what is we must examine it; we look at it, describe it, take it apart and put it back together, noting the parts and their interconnections. This seems obvious at the stage of preliminary research, but also at the critical stage where we ask, 'Is it like this?', we must 'suspend judgment', being careful not to project our expectations, biases, and agendas into the subject-matter.

But what if what is is inextricably bound up with the examination of it? What if one of its 'parts' turns out to be the investigator herself, together with her expectations, biases, and agendas? What if my relation to the thing, together with our relation to it, my relation to us, etc. is indispensably (if not exclusively) constitutive of the thing itself? If that is the case, then the independence of being and thought is compromised, and the suspension of judgment is literally impossible. Whether or not this is ultimately so, for human phenomena something of the sort is undeniable. For social, political, and economic thinking, our understanding of the situation directly translates into action which alters the process, but also our understanding is based in a tradition of thinking, of cultural judgments, in terms of which we understand and without which we could not even formulate

questions; and those traditions and judgments are part of the subject-matter. The study of history, for example, has a history, is a moment of the history that it studies, and indeed 'writes' that very history. The instability of the postmodern situation forces us to take notice of this compromise: the confluence of different ways of construing reality, is very much like the confrontation of different realities.

But the confluence of cultures is already a new culture and a new history. We are never confronted only with alternate realities, but also with the confused and unstable reality emergent from that confrontation, and that immediately and already also includes us. Concretely, Modern/Western economic and political forms grafted onto other cultures are no longer Modern/Western forms, and the failure to recognize this is a factor in the re-curent economic and political crises throughout the third-world. Successful grafting, on the other hand, for example in Japan, has profoundly modified the grafted forms (Hsu:357-386). What we noted at first as the originality and incomprehensibility of the postmodern situation, then, is inseparable from its humanity; its incomprehensibility consists just in the fact that it is continually remade by our own actions.

That pure reason (in its activity of knowing the world) is, from one side, constitutive of the world, was Kant's central insight, but the universal structures of reason, the architectonic, by which he accounted for and guaranteed the stability of the world, are no longer apparent. He did not, moreover, notice the communal aspects of consciousness, the

'we', which as culture, supplies a kind of local architectonic. We are faced rather with multiple realities, hence truths, which depend on their social and cultural contexts. 'Pure reason' might then be understood as 'human consciousness', and human truths may be self-referential, meaningful in terms of their coherence within a particular culture, with no mediating or higher standard. The confrontation of competing truths, in fact, calls them all into question, and alters the realities within which the truths are true. But since that confrontation is itself a context, it gives those truths new meanings even as it questions them. We are left with little alternative but to explore the emergent situation itself, on its own terms, even as those terms transform themselves. The suspension of judgment now seems, not only to be literally impossible, but perhaps even a bad faith denial of our own implication in the situation.

But if our investigation of the world is (partly) constitutive of that world itself, then, as Kant showed, the world is accessible to thought; and if Kant's architectonic is removed, as the postmodern situation urges upon us, then the world is even more radically accessible. This amounts to a radicalization of what we said about practical reason. Thinking thinks itself into the world, the barrier between them falls and their independence is compromised; or, if you prefer, the distinction between world and thought is muddled. Of course we do not mean that the world is whatever we want to be. We constitute a world on the basis of a cultural and personal history and in a social-historical moment, we do so communally, and the world so constituted

is constituted from a world which is always stubbornly already there—and from which we ourselves emerge. Still, the world is my/our engagement with it (and I/we are it's engagement with me/us).

But that brings us once more back to the hermeneutic circle, this is criticism, it is questioning, and it is in questioning ourselves that the world is accessible. In some sense, then, to think critically is to ask ourselves, 'Is it as we understand it to be?' (c.f. Brookfield:6) Or even, to the extent that we are inseparable from the subject-matter, 'Are we as we understand ourselves to be?' If pure reason is glossed as human consciousness as we have suggested, then what Kant questioned, his subject-matter was not only pure reason in its activity of knowing the world, but himself in the world. I doubt that Kant would have been entirely comfortable with that characterization, but he did virtually equate critique with a disciplined pursuit of self-knowledge (1958:Axi, Axii). Heidegger, similarly, emphasizes the inwardness of the asking (1949b:351-2). Given what we have said here, together with Heidegger's insistence that being human is always being-in-the-world, it should be clear that this is not a question of self-image or of psychology; it is neither introspection nor an inquiry into the objective constitution of human beings as such. Questions of economic policy remain questions of economic policy, only it is we who are the economy in action and who have thought ourselves into an understanding of economic processes. Questioning myself means questioning the world and vice versa. Self-discovery, inwardness, then does not preclude,

but rather requires, research of external sources. Instead of saying that we question ourselves, then, we will say, 'Critical thinking is thinking that questions itself.'

To the extent that all this is so, there is ultimately no disinterested enquiry. As in literary criticism, we always work from a personal and cultural basis of expectations, styles, presuppositions: a standpoint. In the absence of any independent basis of truth it cannot be otherwise, and the suspension of judgment, taken literally, amounts to denial. But this is just the reappearance of the problem of objectivity; it misses the personal, hence, meaning. The 'suspension of judgment' is not nonsense, however, but rather legitimately intends the transcendence of subjectivity. For critical thinking, subjectivity, along with objectivity is transcended by the question, or, as Heidegger says, holding out in the questionable (1967:67). But genuinely to question is also an openness to being wrong. We might begin, for example, with the position that greed is the root cause of war and poverty. To begin at that position is to ask, 'Is it?', to submit ourselves to questioning and the possibility of having to acknowledge ignorance. The openness to being wrong is then the proper meaning of 'suspension of judgment'.

The dangers of subjectivity and objectivity, suggest that the preliminary research should be done in such a way as to prepare the critical question. In order genuinely to ask, the understanding must already be genuine. In other words the 'circle' appears simultaneously with the first look at the subject-matter, with the first question, 'What is this?' Even while

one is learning only the standard interpretations, the process must be one of learning the subject-matter not of learning how to talk about it. The critical approach is to enter into and to participate in the subject-matter in such a way that that entering and participating question themselves, thus revealing the structures and purposes of the entering and participating, and hence the meanings in the subject-matter itself. But it is this same self-questioning which guards against the dangers of enthusiasm and projection. In other words, the question at once corrects and reveals. In other words, there is no pre-critical research, the critical question is asked with the first opening of the first book.

The Critical Perspective

But we can be more explicit about the perspective from which the question is asked. We have spoken both of 'standing within' and of 'distance'. By 'standing within' I mean that one is familiar with the subject-matter to the point of taking it as her own, of seeing the world in this way, at least provisionally. In critiquing Marxism, one must be able to think like a Marxist, and not 'in order to refute', but genuinely. By 'distance' I mean that one stands apart from the subject-matter, in order to look at it and to inquire into it 'disinterestedly' as into an independent being. In order to critique Marxism, one must, at least provisionally, not be a Marxist. The critical perspective is both simultaneously: Standing-within-at-a-distance. This perspective is analogous to 'aesthetic distance' in theater. One must be far enough away from the stage to see the effect of the whole. Only from sufficient

distance can one see the play and become engrossed in it. However, the play is not only a visual phenomenon to be passively taken in; in order to 'see' the effect of the whole, one must at the same time be engrossed in it.

For critical thinking, I mean by 'distance' an intellectual and phenomenological distance, one is not taken in by the arguments, or by the necessity of the actual. One rather 'takes in' the whole in its meaning and holds it down for examination, one stays aloof so as not to get lost in the details or swept away by actual events, and holds out in the possibility that it might be otherwise. Yet, one cannot 'take it in' in its meaning without also moving within it and being moved by it. The disinterest by which meanings can be evaluated, depends upon the interest for which the meanings come to life, and interest is a quality of standing-within. Standing-within-at-a-distance is not a balance: in just so far but no farther, just enough interest but not too much. It is the inner tension of being fully in and fully out. That tension is made possible by the reflexive structure of thought, thought is aware of itself as it thinks of something else, and that self-awareness can become articulate. As thought thinks itself into the subject-matter, the articulate self-awareness of that thought keeps a 'distance', surveying the whole on a higher level. This tension between standing-within and standing-at-a-distance, I shall call the breach. How is the breach effected? Simply, by the critical question. Indeed the breach is the understanding, firmly grounded in its subject-matter (standing-within), which questions itself (at-a-distance). It is the contour of the question and the open-

ness to being wrong. Critical thinking is thought that enters into the self-referential structure of human meanings, refusing to collapse into either agreement/disagreement on the one hand, or neutral evaluation on the other. It is self-referential in the mode of holding apart the terms of reference.⁷ (c.f. Palmer:150ff, and Heidegger, 1961:36-37)

The Question

Critical thinking as thinking which questions itself is radical both in the sense of going to the root and in the sense of refusing to be harnessed. Thought whose very structure is a question to itself, cannot but plunge more and more deeply towards its own roots, which means, because it is thinking the subject-matter, also towards the roots of that subject-matter. Working through the Critique of Pure Reason we see Kant continually raising more fundamental questions, addressed to the answers to the previous questions, uncovering deeper and deeper structures, as he writes in Critique of Judgment, '...as deep down as the foundation.' (1968, 4) Similarly, critical enquiry into the 'globalized economy' will end in exploring the underpinnings of

economy itself, even as they change. But in pursuing its subject-matter to the roots it is likely that conventional understandings will be called into question, and the process is merciless. Kant again: 'Nothing... may be exempted from this searching examination.... Reason depends on this freedom for its very existence.' (1958, B766;c.f. also Brookfield:6) That means that critical thinking requires moral courage, since one's personal convictions are put up for question, but also physical courage, since the certainties of one's own culture and traditions come inevitably up for question. One risks discovering that he, and possibly his entire culture has been living an illusion, that he and his parents have suffered and rejoiced over phantasms; Socrates was not the last thinker to die for asking too many questions. Nevertheless, critique must be pursued, '...no matter what prized and cherished dreams may have to be disowned.' (Kant, 1958, Axiii) Indeed, one way that questions are formulated is to look for contradictions (Kant, 1958, Axii). But when we remember that critical thought uncovers questions that can only be answered by choice, and that it is 'practical', we open up the likelihood of radically different alternatives and challenges to the current system and to the plans of the state. Thinking about the economy, some critical thinkers are sure to advocate a return to subsistence agriculture, others socialism, and so on.

What is the question? It is the question: 'Is it like this?' or the equivalent question, 'What does this mean?', addressed to every affirmation, 'It is like this.' It is the question that the subject-matter asks of the understanding and that the under-

⁷A suggestion: subjectivity might now be reinterpreted as the collapse of the *breach* into the 'standing-within' where the meanings come alive, but only in relation to itself. Objectivity, in turn, would be the severance of the *breach* into an infinite, alienating 'distance', from which the meanings are dead. However, that infinitely distant thought is also thought which 'stands-within' itself. The structure of some forms of speculation may be an infinitely distant subjectivity.

standing takes as its own. When we remember the involvement of the understanding with the subject-matter, and the self-referential structures of both, it becomes clear that the question asked of the subject-matter and the question asked by it, converge. When we have thought ourselves sufficiently into the subject-matter, 'Is it and what does it mean?' may take the form of a question about the meaning of our own actions; the question, moreover, arises just where the situation presents us with problems. From a critical perspective, the economic crisis is a question, and the question is not, 'How do we return to prosperity?' but, 'What are we doing and why?'

Who Asks the Question: the Cultural Issue

Do Asian cultures discourage critical thinking? Here, we can only suggest an approach.

If we accept that thinking includes involvement in its subject-matter, and that the standing-within structure of critical thinking includes effective involvement in the sense of practical reason, then critical thinking is not an intellectual technique only, but also a mode of being in and toward the world. Where the subject-matter is something like the globalized economy, which is more of an historical upheaval than a settled fact, critical thinking is a mode of being in and toward the historical moment. As such, it cannot be specific to any culture, but is rather an engagement of culture. Taking the structural view presented here, criticism may appear whenever people engage the historical moment creatively, whether that takes the form of protest-

ing government policy, of communities insisting on environmental standards for industry or in writing poetry. The key, of course, is the structure of the engagement. To be critical, the activity can be neither a retreat into local custom nor an enthusiastic embrace of whatever is perceived to be the dominant culture. To think and act critically means to stand creatively within the tensions among one's own culture, the other cultures and the emergent culture of the tensions, it means effecting the breach within the historical situation.

Isn't this going too far? Surely individuals think, not protest groups or communities. Doesn't critical thinking include thinking for oneself?

This goes to the heart of the cultural issue. It may not be a question of whether respect for the teacher discourages critical thinking, so much as whether communal, as opposed to individualistic cultures do so. Is the one who thinks necessarily an individual?

In the first place, in spite of the Western ideology that, properly speaking, only individuals think (Fromm:152ff), groups do think, for example in planning sessions, or in technical design sessions. Even Janis, whose work on 'groupthink' details how group thinking can go wrong, maintains that groups often think well (Janis:12).

In the second place, if thinking includes involvement with the world, especially as 'standing-within', then thinking happens with and also is an involvement with others. All thinking is, in some sense, conversation(cf.Heidegger 1949a:277ff),

and it happens within the multi-layered tensions among persons and community, etc.

So what do we mean by 'think for yourself'? One way that the phrase is used is in response to state propaganda and advertising. The modern state generally tries to preempt the role of local community, to appropriate communal affinity and loyalty for itself. This is done with the use of the symbols and jargon of peoplehood, unity, democracy, with festivals, flags, anthems, etc. To the extent that the state is successful, there is a flattening out as the hierarchies of intermediate communal structures are replaced by direct relations between the people and the machinery of the state, and that is individualizing. 'The people' becomes a mass, a collection of individuals, isolated from each other but related to the same object, rather than communities of persons in mutual relationships. This is alienation, which, as has been frequently noted, leads to widespread anomie. The state now insinuates itself into the psychological vacuum, framing its dictates as the 'voice of the people', presenting itself as the 'ultimate parent', and so forth.

However, it is neither a parent nor the people, but a surrogate whose dictates displace the thinking of the people precisely by pretending to be the thinking of the people. In this context, 'Think for yourself,' is a reaction to the alien force of the state, a call to recover genuine thinking.

In local community, on the other hand, there may be a genuine thinking of the people. Even if openly questioning

teachers and parents is prohibited, one is present to teachers and parents, and by that presence, participates in the thinking process. Besides, one may expect someday to be a parent or a teacher. Where the state has appropriated the symbols and jargon of community, however, resistance to the alien force of the state cuts against community as well, and 'think for yourself' thus accelerates the process of massification. Thinking thus confined to individuals becomes politically irrelevant, being reduced to the abstract unit of the secret, i.e. rigorously individual, ballot.

There was an analogous process in the hippy movement in the United States. The hippies were self-proclaimed non-conformists. Critics complained that the hippies conformed to each other, but the criticism missed the point. What the hippies meant by 'non-conformity' was resistance to the dictates of the state and to corporations. It was the non-conformity of communities to 'the system', not of individuals to each other and they understood themselves as an attempt to recover community. The individualist ideology associated with 'non-conformity', however, helped, willy-nilly, to break up their communal efforts and to drive them back into the very system that their non-conformity was meant to reject.

Similarly, 'Think for yourself,' means 'resist alien authority', e.g. the state and advertising, not teachers and parents. It might well include communal thinking, complete with internally authoritarian structures. Indeed it might, to the extent that thinking is a communal activity, mean to revive, or to create, communal structures in opposition to the dictates

of the state, or indeed to the demands of the 'globalized economy'. Lacking an ideology of community, however, efforts to encourage people to think critically and for themselves, seem subversive to local communal cultures, if not to the stated goals of an intentionally Westernizing state.

Of this suggestion, one must now ask: 'Is it like this?'

Conclusion

Critical thinking is not an answer engine but a creative mode of engaging the world. To think critically about globalization is to elucidate it by questioning it and being questioned by it, it is to participate in the process. In this sense the initial quotes are not incorrect. But critical thinking is free and can neither be harnessed nor limited in scope. To encourage it is also to encourage literature, art, science, statesmanship, it is to encourage genuine creativity. Critical thinking, moreover, may not be appropriate in every case. Our approach to Kant, for example, has not been critical, but impressionistic, since our focus was on critical thinking, rather than on Kant. Neither are economic calculations critical, although miscalculations might be based on misunderstandings of the historical moment that could be corrected by critical thinking.

Globalization does not necessarily mean Westernization, individualization, massification, etc. there are other possibilities still open—Confucianism, which is enjoying a renewed interest both in the East and in the West, comes to mind. Critical thought may well take as its theme, not how to grab world markets,

but how to become a people and to create a history: how can we become ourselves on the stage of world history upon which we, perhaps nakedly, find ourselves? Critically to take that as a theme is actively to make it so. To fail to do so is to acquiesce in the future that happens to us.

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