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THE DEFICITS OF CRITICAL THINKING IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

VLADISLAV DUDINSKÝ and ANNA POLAČKOVÁ

Abstract: Recognizing plurality in all areas of life is associated with accepting individual freedom in all their manifestations, including independent thinking, action and creativity. At a practical level, the self-declared freedom of the "cogito" does not automatically lead to the realisation of "I am"; individual and independent thought is increasingly manifested in the form of a mass consciousness, in its "voluntary" subordination to the general standards of society. In turn, these determinants fundamentally shape the nature of contemporary education.

Key words: critical thinking; pluralism; sophism; postmodern thought.

Introduction

Pluralism of opinions—an essential characteristic of postmodern societies—appears to be a general ideological principle influencing and regulating relations in all spheres of social life. Postmodern discourse therefore encompasses ontological, gnoseological, political, economic, axiological, aesthetic and many other social dimensions, each with their own forms of expression. The common feature in each case is that pluralism not only presupposes but also legitimises the coexistence of various disparate elements appearing in the form of, for example, mutually irreducible substances or incommensurable normative orientations/claims.

This recognition of plurality in all areas of life leads to the affirmation of individual freedom, separate and special in all its manifestations, including independent thought, action, value systems and creativity. Today, it is largely taken for granted that pluralism is a constitutive principle of the democratic organization of society and a guarantee of democratic freedoms (freedom of speech also presupposes a pluralism of opinions and attitudes).

The current reality of everyday life, however, reveals a paradoxical state: freedom of thought, which is supposed to enable individual and independent (critical) thought

is increasingly being manifested through mass consciousness, that is, in the voluntary subordination of individual thought to the general (societal) view. Hence, opinions that should exhibit individual critical thinking (e.g. political ones) are often simply forms of demagogy or merely fashionable attitudes. It is thus possible to claim that, in the absence of an ability or unwillingness to acquire genuine knowledge and adopt critical attitudes, individual thought is dissolving and becoming part of general opinion or mass consciousness (Dudinský & Dudinská, 2002, pp. 172-173).

In light of this it is essential to analyse the relationship between individual thought and pluralistic interpretations of the world and their social preconditions. The problem here is not the world *per se*, but our narratives, interpretations, and modes of reasoning. Because the principle of pluralism presupposes and enables a set of different or even incompatible value and ideological positions, attitudes, opinions, conceptions, ideas, and so forth, which are incapable of making claim to the (absolute) truth, it simply confirms the principles of equality and legitimacy in their current (distorted) manifestations. Thus, despite the kind of theoretical and practical problems that inevitably arise out of this postmodern predicament, we tend not to challenge the validity of the view that no opinion can have an *a priori* claim to the truth. However, under certain conditions the view that no one is capable of knowing the truth or that there is no truth at all causes a paralysis of individual thought, which undermines our trust in certain cognitive practices and, therefore, our pursuit of legitimate educational projects. Indeed, for many today cognition (knowledge) is no longer a value. We are thus confronted with perverse forms of behaviour by democratically elected representatives who, as agents possessing political power, usurp their right to representing the demos in a domain of thought that no one delegated to them in the first place.

Critical thinking versus pluralism

We do not consider the problem of pluralism to be specific to our modern or postmodern situation because the pluralism of the Sophists of Ancient Greece had already addressed equality (equal rights), and the collapse of individual into group thought. Accordingly, we can appeal to Protagoras' famous statement that: "Man is the measure of all things; of things that are not, that they are not; of things that are, that they are …" (80 B 1 from Plato), which can be understood as a paradigmatic expression of sophistic pluralism.

In his dialogue with Theaetetus, Socrates summarizes Protagoras's position:

> Well, is not this about what he means, that individual things are for me such as they appear to me, and for you in turn such as they appear to you -- you and I being man? ... For as each person perceives things, such they are to each person (80 B 1 from Plato).

In this context, it is possible to conclude that Protagoras does not distinguish between individual people—*each and every person* is the measure of all things. The significance of this view for our purposes is that it makes everyone equal in terms of the validity of their opinions, conceptions, attitudes, and so forth. Although Protagoras admits that not all individuals are equally wise, he advances the principle that: "no one has a true assumption, and nor do you – whether you want or do not want to – you must admit that you are the measure" (80 A 21a from Plato). Protagoras' statement *Man is the measure...* refutes the

notion of a common/universal truth and, therefore, the affirmation that all subjects are equal concerning the possession of truth. “Protagoras acknowledges that what appears to one is true, and so he introduces relativism...” (80 A 14 from Sextus Empiricus).

The importance of this sophistic claim to relativism can be understood in the context of the specific historic conditions that enabled and dissimulated the initiatives of the Sophists. The Sophist School is generally viewed as an educational strategy rather than a philosophical doctrine, and the initiatives of Protagoras and the Sophists can also be seen as directed at overcoming the aristocratic/elitist approach to education and the monopoly of the elite in public life. Hence, the Sophists portrayed cognition as being widely available in the prevailing social and political order—captured by the slogan, *everyone is the measure...*—by disputing authorities of any kind. This political shift towards enhancing the status and role of the opinions of ordinary free citizens in Greek cities helped promote individual thought among citizens. However, in a break with tradition, the Sophists emphasized *paideia,* not *sophia,* in education and, as a result the problem of truth was correspondingly transformed into a matter of mere opinion.

Socrates and Plato recognized this specific quality of the sophist educational strategy. According to Protagoras a weakness in the prevailing educational strategy is that “... teachers ... torture the young people by forcing them, who just escaped from science, back into the study of science, even though the youth does not like it. They force upon them the teaching of mathematics, astronomy, geometry and music.” This had to change. But what did Protagoras offer the students of his school?

> But the youth coming to me, will learn nothing but what they desire to learn. I teach them how you become successful with your personal business affairs. And in what concerns political affairs, I educate them in such a way, that they develop the skills—in words and deeds—to be able, and most efficiently so, to participate in governing the state (80 A 5 from Plato).

Clearly it was an educational programme focused not on mastering a specific science, art, or craft but on acquiring whatever education would enable individuals to manage their private and social/public affairs effectively. Accordingly, the art of managing (“political art”) supersedes discipline-specific knowledge and art; a person who has mastered a political art is, according to Protagoras, someone “who can carry out a transformation from what appears to one as evil and is evil, to making it appear good and be good” (80 A 21a from Plato). Hence, the primary instruments of success are rhetoric and dialectics—the arts of persuasion, not of cognition, understanding, and justification. In fact, one needn’t be an expert in a particular area in order to provide advice/guidance on it. The result, as Socrates observes, is that: “... not one of those paid private teachers, whom the people call sophists … teaches anything other than the convictions the masses hold when they are assembled together” (493 A from Plato), and they call this wisdom. If the manipulation of the affects and dispositional tendencies of the masses through rhetorical means fails, then they appeal to force: “the ones who do not obey them are punished by denial of the civil right, financial penalties and death” (492 E from Plato). In some places, the reader gets the impression that Socrates is a contemporary responding to our current reality! The current absence of critical and self-critical evaluation of opinions can be associated with the self-appointed right to express opinions on a variety of subjects in various contexts, regardless of whether they are

reasoned or dilettantish. The principle of equality in the validity of statements developed this "negative potential" in mass consciousness and significantly contributed to the loss of individuality and increasing uncertainty, which in turn only served to strengthen the position of the manipulators in question.

The means of coping with the theoretical and practical aftermath of the widespread acceptance of the principle of pluralism was clear: the Sophists eventually became an "episode" as the ancient Greeks ultimately preferred orderly Cosmos to disorderly and endless Chaos. As Deleuze noted:

> ... Greek spirit always lived under the impression that signs, mute speech of things are a disfigured, unstable and deceptive system, the ruins of Logo that dialectics must restore, *philia* reconcile, *sophia* harmonize, the Reason, that precedes, take control of (Deleuze, 1999, p. 126).

Critical thinking and postmodernity

Our current epoch is dealing critically with the legacy of modernism by radically rejecting narratives about a universal reason capable of revealing the common purpose behind history and of achieving the ultimate liberation of human beings. Hence, from the postmodern meta-narrative perspective, great goals, universal truths, timeless ideas, and great heroes have lost their credibility and persuasiveness. The traditional conception of unity has been replaced by plurality—we now find ourselves in a world in which everyone's life is a point at which various stories, goals, logics, principles, and meanings intersect, but none can claim universality. Society has stopped being governed by one principle, meaning, goal, or structure; rather, it has become an open space in which all previously existing universalistic assumptions and world-views suddenly become mere fictions.

By revealing new horizons for understanding language, postmodernism's radical "turn to language" dismisses the world of its subject-object relations, calls into question the discourse that had served as a reliable intermediary allowing the subject to keep in touch with the natural world for centuries; in this view, language is turned into a kind of supra-subjective force that does not depend on humans and society, not to mention nature.

According to Derrida, a critic of the classic (static) concept of the sign, there is no privileged (transcendental) signified and the practice of signifying has no limits. We even have to reject the concept of the word "sign" itself—for in signification a "sign" has always been understood and determined, in its sense, as a sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier that differs from its signified. The ubiquitous dynamism of signification eliminates serious differences between the signifier (intelligible) and the signified (sensible). For this reason, Derrida argues that we must give up the metaphysical concept as well as the word "signifier". The sign in itself erases the contrast between the sensible (signified) and the intelligible (signifier) (Derrida, 1993, p. 180). According to Derrida, there are two ways of erasing the difference between the signifier and the signified: the traditional way, which involves reducing or deriving the signifier (sensible), that is, subsuming the sign to thought. This, however, is now considered outdated and counterproductive. The second lies in questioning the system in which the preceding reduction functioned in the first place: beginning with the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. Accordingly, the

significance of the sign is no longer "guaranteed" by the structure of language. On the one hand, the sign is determined by its difference from other signs; on the other hand, this difference is unstable because the means of differentiating the limits of signs is always shifting. As such, the domain of meaning became independent and started to exist as a self-sufficient world. *The world of humans* (the identity of a talking and thinking subject and its social and historical context, etc.) and *the world of nature* were thus radically separated from one another. The basic terms of the "world" of signs include "language system", "significant", "simulacrum", "text", "writing", "death of the author", "quoting", "deconstruction", and "decentralization".

Adopting the principle of pluralism implies coming to terms with the philosophical tradition that was built on the categories of absolutum, necessity, law, generality, and so forth. Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that overcoming Platonism became one of the main tasks of postmodern philosophy (Deleuze). Plato sought to distinguish the real (world) from the unreal, the true from the untrue. His dialectics, which juxtaposes original and copy, presupposes inequality from the very beginning: an original (idea) is always better than its copy. Moreover, it is not the case that all copies are equal: they are varyingly good or bad depending on the degree to which they approximate the ideal/model. Tension clearly exists between this view and the principle of pluralism that is built upon recognizing the equality of all kinds of individual opinion and the rejection of the general or universal as superior. Rejecting the distinction between an idea and its imperfect copy thus aided the development of conditions in which individualities were equalized (in the absence of a common model/ standard of individuality). The pairing of "idea – copy" was replaced by the neologism of the *simulacrum*, a synonym for the only real being. Hence, reality was transformed into a *world of simulacrums* in which identities are merely simulated, formed as an optical "effect" of playing around much more comprehensively—playing with differences and repetitions. Since being is only presented in terms of the variety and diversity of equivalent and equal simulacrums, it is then possible to fundamentally reject all that was traditionally categorized as general, universal, and necessary, including generally valid standards and values. To a certain extent, it is possible to reject a general idea, or model, as part of an "antidogmatic initiative", but we still lack the *principle of selection* that allows us to select between particulars, individuals, accidentals, and so forth, precisely because they are all presumed equal in advance. By not pursuing such criteria of selection, this approach eventually plays into the hands of *passive* reason rather than stimulating critical thought.

Accepting the principle of pluralism required targeting not only the systems of logical reasoning that claim to account for the general relations of the objective world—labelled "masks of dogmatism"—but also any attempt at "coping with the past". Any obligations to the past, traditions, to authors and their works are thus rejected. In this respect, Barthes notes that,

> each historical moment can in fact believe that it has possession of the canonical meaning of a given literary work, but it's only a matter of enlarging history somewhat in order to transform this univocal meaning into a plural meaning and this closed literary work into an open literary work. The definition of work itself is changing: it is not only a historical fact, it is becoming an anthropological fact, since no history can exhaust its meaning. The variety of meanings is not a matter of a relativist approach to human mores; it designates not the tendency that society

> has to err but a disposition towards openness; the work holds several meanings simultaneously, by its very structure, and not as a result of some infirmity in those who read it. Therein lies its symbolic nature: the symbol is not the image but the very plurality of meanings (Barthes, 1994, p. 102).

The task of literary science, therefore, is to reveal the plurality of meanings of texts in light of the rejection of a univocal/canonical meaning and of the authority of authorial intention. According to Barthes, it is because of a fundamental shift in our current experience and opinions

> that the author can lay claim to the meaning of his work and can himself make that its legal meaning, from this notion flows the unreasonable interrogation directed by the critic at the dead writer, at his life, at the traces of his intentions, so that he himself can guarantee the meaning of his work: people want at all costs to make the dead person, or a substitute for him, speak. Such substitutes may be his historical period, the genre, the vocabulary, in a word everything that is *contemporary* with the author... (1994, p. 107).

Assigning a text to an author, according to Barthes, means locking it up, bringing it to pure explicitness, giving it a final and single meaning, and silencing anyone who reads it. Thus, as he says: "Death has another significance: it renders unreal the author's signature and transforms the work into myth..." (p. 107). Franz Kafka similarly expresses Barthes' thinking in a footnote: "What causes posterity's judgment on the individual to be more correct than that of contemporaries lies within death. One develops in one's own way only after one's death..." (p. 107). Deleuze can also be understood to be endorsing this position when he writes that the question about origin is not asked because the problem of origin is not open to exploration. There is no need for anyone to be the originator of the statement and the statement needn't refer back to a cogito, that is to say, to an originator (author) or a transcendental subject, a Self that would utter it for the first time, or to the Spirit of the era that would preserve, reproduce, and compare it (Deleuze, 1996, p. 15). According to Barthes, 'text' means:

> *Fabric*; but whereas until now we have always taken this fabric as a product, a ready-made veil behind which meaning (truth) lurks more or less hidden, we are now accentuating, in the fabric, the generative idea that the text makes itself through a perpetual intertwining (Barthes, 1994, p. 160).

"By erasing" the author of the text we dismiss the notion that there is a final meaning and open up a multidimensional sensual space. However, Barthes (1994) places constraints on this open-ended "play" with interpretation when he writes:

> It is sterile to bring the work down to pure explicitness, since then *immediately* there is nothing more to say about it and since also the function of the work cannot be to seal the lips of those who read it; but it is hardly less vain to seek in the work what it might be saying without actually saying it … (p. 115).

Nevertheless, in relation to the above mentioned, Barthes does not even indicate who the potential "informer" (censor, critic, etc.) is that could tell the author of the account that his interpretation is incorrect because his work has not produced such an authoritative meaning.

Postmodernism dismisses all references to a centre (and also existence itself), to a subject, and thereby rejects the idea that there is a privileged reference to an absolute origin or arché. Derrida thus writes that the philosophical or epistemological requirement for a centre appears to be a historical illusion[1]. The centre is no natural locus, but rather a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions come into play. As such, when there is an absence of a centre (origin), everything becomes discourse, that is to say, a system in which the central, original or transcendental signified is never absolutely present (Derrida, 1993, p. 179). Decentralisation is understood as a (positive?) alternative to centralization, that is to say, to all principles of arrangement and organization. In principle, the absence of a centre means the absence of a unifying principle, common orientation, and authority. From this perspective, any general principle can be criticized, whether it be a substance or the author of a text. The elimination of such "centres" is crucial to the aforementioned creation of a pluralistic environment (in the pejorative sense).

In postmodern thought pluralism is a key principle in learning and in interpreting the world, and also extends to human beings who are no longer seen as individuals, but rather as a kind of amalgam manifesting more or less uniform and coherent thought and behaviour. In relation to this shift in understanding human nature, Deleuze observed that:

> Structuralism is not at all a form of thought that suppresses the subject, but one that breaks it up and distributes it systematically, that contests the identity of the subject, that dissipates it and makes it shift from place to place, an always nomad subject, made of individuations, but impersonal ones, or of singularities, but pre-individual ones (1993, p. 47).

In other words, the individual is not an autonomous Cartesian subject (with the *Cogito, ergo sum* maxim) that possesses an essential identity independent of language. In contrast to this traditional understanding, postmodern philosophers understand selfhood to be socially constructed (although real) fictions produced through the medium of language and specific discourses. A person's internal division is correspondingly expressed in terms of "quotations of thought": the text, consciousness of its author, and also the consciousness of its interpreter, are, in fact, just a summary of quotations. The process of creating a text is thus seen as a sort of playing around (quoting) with ready-made linguistic fragments or resources (quotations). The notion of "quoting" is, therefore, deeply pluralistic, presupposing the chaotic, disorderly blending of various elements. Indeed, it implies an insurmountable and irrevocable pluralism (chaos) within the subject.

As such, we are "forced" to accept the pluralistic nature of the world (environment), which is further manifested in fundamental shifts in the interpretation of cognitive processes and their central category: truth. The process of cognition—including scientific cognition—begins with the use of *epistémé*, that is to say, a system of a particular order that pre-regulates the *how* and *what* (object) of knowledge. This innovative form of rationalism, or to be more precise, theoretism—understood to be the methodological antipode of empiricism—predefines the space of a specific culture, defining the space and mode of organization of the world, and even the mode of *thought itself:*

[1] Cf. Derrida (1993, pp. 187-189).

> There is one aspect, however concealed it may be, of the logos, by means of which the Intelligence always comes *before*, by which the whole is already present, the law already known before what it applies to: this is the dialectical trick by which we discover only what we have already given ourselves, by which we derive from things only what we have already put there (Deleuze, 1999, p. 120).

In light of the above, it is entirely legitimate for each subject to express the world from his or own particular viewpoint, thereby articulating an entirely different world. The expressed world does not exist outside that which expresses it. The so-called outside world is, according to Deleuze, just a deceptive projection, a constraint that encompasses all the expressed worlds (p. 54).

Deleuze says:

> cognition, learning ... essentially concerns *signs*. Signs are the object of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an abstract knowledge. To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if it emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. ... Everything which teaches us something emitssigns, every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs (1999, p. 12).

Intelligent thoughts only have value because of their conventional meaning and philosophy itself mistakenly leads us to presuppose that good will is thought, desire, and the natural love of truth. In fact, philosophy only arrives at abstract truths, which, according to Deleuze, challenge and disturb no one: "To seek the truth is to interpret, decipher, explicate. But this "explication" is identified with the development of the sign in itself. This is why the Search is always temporal, and the truth always a truth of time" (p. 26). However, all that happened outside the subject-object relation was (and for many remains) the alpha and omega of the cognitive process: "We are wrong to believe in facts; there are only signs. We are wrong to believe in truth; there are only interpretations" (pp. 104-105). These are the implications of the "divorce" of the signifier from the signified. We became victims of "the dictation" of the signifier/ed, which, in our opinion, is unsustainable in the long term.

Another characteristic trait of postmodern initiatives is the rejection of the "will to truth" (or desire for truth) as one of the main aims of human existence. Through Proust, we learn that we seek the truth only when we are forced to by particular situations, when we are exposed to a certain kind of violence which forces us to seek it. Truth is never the product of a prior disposition, but rather the result of violence in thought. Thus, it is pointless to talk about the (philosophical) method; there are only two fundamental themes stimulating the pursuit of truth: the accident of encounter and the pressures of constraints. To talk of a natural desire for truth (or will to truth) is mere subterfuge. A person who "wants the truth" actually wants to interpret, to decipher, to translate, to find the meaning of the sign (Deleuze, 1999, pp. 24-25).

Reasoning without notion

Traits that are essential to the existence of modern human beings are multi-dimensionality and polymorphism, fragmentation(s) and internal contradiction(s). On the one hand, because of and determined by the pluralistic ideology endorsed by the established social

order, humans aspire to become individuals; on the other hand, their thoughts, opinions, and attitudes exhibit the form of stereotypes. Under the existing social conditions pluralism is simply one factor that may possibly (have the potency to) affect the emergence and shaping of individual and original thought. However, the right to freely express our thoughts has meaning only if we are, in fact, *able* to have our own thoughts. Thus—given the intellectual and psychological state of 21st century humans—it is currently possible to observe a voluntary abandonment of independent thought and action, an unwillingness to actualize freedom in the conditions fostered by democratic (pluralistic) ideology. Hence, it is possible to speak of a collective "escape from freedom" (Fromm). Accordingly, the predominant mode of existence for modern humans—as manifested by a variety of indicators—corresponds to the mode *to have,* rather than *to be.* Consequently, we are witnessing a deformation of the main attributes of the distinctively human mode of being that Fromm once identified: independence, freedom, and critical thought (Fromm, 1994, p. 72). The essential characteristics of the mode *to be*—activity (not in the form of being busy, but as an internal activity) and the creative use of potential—are increasingly diminished and marginalized in favour of the mode *to have*.

The problem, however, is not exhausted by the phenomena described above. Individual thought does not depend exclusively upon the desire *to have* or cultivate it. In addition to the desire, one must also possess the necessary habits of mental activity, especially reflectiveness. We maintain that the full value of human existence under postmodern pluralist conditions requires the subject to develop the capacity for autonomous thought and self-reflection. We do not hold that such reflectiveness is merely a side-effect or spontaneously formed product of basic education. Rather, the history of thought shows that reflection occurs during the process of intensive intellectual activity, through realising (finding) oneself within a certain tradition of thought and *critically* coming to terms with it.

However, experience shows that the realisation of freedom of speech is often the first and last "glimpse" (discovery) of the intellect of many "selves", followed by a transition to passivity whereby genuine thought is "substituted" by the mere reproduction and repetition of previously given answers, statements, and opinions formulated "by someone". As Barthes remarked about forms of mass culture there is a disgraceful repetition (of content, ideological scheme, the erasure of contradiction, etc.) manifest in a variety of superficial forms (ever more new books, broadcasts, films, stories, etc.) that simply repeat the same meaning (Barthes, 1994, p. 146). Giving increasing space to various forms of influence also means opening the gates to mass consciousness, to the "thought" of the masses, to standard group or collective (corporative) value-orientations. Such an attitude is "protected" from dogmatism because the *choice* of model or "thinking" authority is reached through a "free", individual decision. What escapes attention, however, is that uncritically rejecting the general, the universal, the law, and so forth, (as manifestations of dogmatism) makes us vulnerable to a variety of political, ideological and religious dogmas hidden behind the veil of the prevailing pluralism. It is thus possible to claim that many humans are now experiencing difficulty dealing with the demands of pluralism; we maintain this despite the fact that under such conditions individuality not only manages to survive but also flourish.

When justifying the need to open texts up (important for literary science), Barthes refers to the issue of citing an intertext: "In Papua", says the geographer Baron, language is very

impoverished; each tribe has its language and its vocabulary grows ever smaller because after each death several words are eliminated as a sign of mourning. On this point we outdo the Papuans: "we respectfully embalm the language of dead writers and reject the words and new meanings which appear as the world of ideas: the signs of mourning accompany birth and not death" (Barthes, 1994, p. 90).

However, it is possible to achieve the same effect as the Papuans—the dying of language that we take to be indispensable to critical thought—by implementing "suitable" content and curricular school reform; we will end up closing down texts (or not opening them up at all) because we will lack the requisite vocabulary and habits of critical rational thinking. Suitable school reforms will, in a populist (Sophistic) way, emphasize the "teaching" of only the things practical life *requires*; we will no doubt acquire a certain level of information, but not of *education*, not to mention wisdom. In contrast with the pioneering school reforms of enlightened rulers, *the product* of (post)modern *political* school reform is best provided in the form of short text messages, simple sentences, in which words will be the bearers of a single meaning that will convey to or inform the receiver of the existence of something that has already been named.

Sophistic and postmodernist thought share similarities as well as significant differences. While Sophists turned to the masses with their *educational* programme, politicians and the so-called "new (postmodern) philosophers" are creating an image of mass consciousness which they do not criticize, but describe as reality, as a fact that cannot be surpassed. Hence, we can say that, despite the disapproval of many, the strategy of acquiring a so-called *subliminal* education—a maximum level of knowledge and habits defined by school reforms that do not achieve the minimum level required to initiate the individual subjectivisation process and subsequent cognitive development—makes genuine pluralism of thought and behaviour a privilege of the elite. Individuals that are shielded from critical reflection, an activity which requires them to work continuously on themselves (care of the self), are thus prevented from developing into full-fledged subjects. For such individuals, pluralism of thought and free choice become a *terra incognita*—an unknown, undiscovered, or forgotten form of self-realization.

Conclusion

If we consider the transition from myth to logos—achieved through the introduction of conceptual thinking and critical rationality—to be a significant milestone in the history of human thought, then we are confronted today with a kind of reason that is satisfied with mere images and exhausted by affective responses. We are no longer reliant on truth-seeking and the critical evaluation of information: today, "truth" and information in the social media seek us out. Text is increasingly being replaced by images, just as conceptual thinking is being replaced by subjective thinking. In short, truth is no longer the remit of critical thinking: the number of "likes" and "clicks" is now the primary criterion for evaluating the relevance of information. As such, the gap between awareness and knowledge is widening. Consequently, we consider the analysis of the various factors behind these (negative) trends to be crucial to the future of critical thinking and its development.

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Institute of Political Science
Faculty of Arts,
University of Prešov,
17. novembra 1,
080 78 Prešov
Slovakia
Email: vladislav.dudinsky@unipo.sk
Email: anna.polackova@unipo.sk