Subverted Crisis and Critique

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reflect on historical vicissitudes of relationship between crisis and critique. Starting point is an observational diagnosis of present socio-political conditions, which have transformed crisis from a turning point into a continuation and radicalization of the existing order. In an attempt to understand the ongoing subversion of transformative potentials of crisis, a similar process of pacification and subversion of critique in dominant theoretical paradigms will be examined. It will be argued that both socio-political and main-stream theoretical processes work toward pacification of the status quo that raises both existential and theoretical concerns. In order to support the claim that a different relationship between crisis and critique is possible, it will be referred to Reinhart Koselleck's seminal study, *Critique and crisis* (1959), where it is shown how absolutist state generated its critique by Enlightenment and then Enlightenment conditioned radical changes in form of French Revolution. Relying on that example, the following questions will be raised: What kind of historical structures have been lost since times which generated Enlightenment as a critical stance? What kind of theoretical tools are we missing in post-Enlightenment post-modern times in order to conceptualize and condition radical changes? What is the role of psychological theorizing in sustaining adaptation to the existing order instead of arguing and demanding its radical change? How to reclaim transformative potentials of critique and crisis?

Keywords Crisis · Critique · Modernity · Post-modernity · Koselleck · Pandemic

Introduction

The common topic of global crises will be approached in this paper from an angle which has historical predecessors but is hardly chosen in contemporary analyses, namely the relationship between crisis and critique. Thus, the aim of this paper is to reflect on historical vicissitudes of relationship between crisis and critique in order to acquire more comprehensive tools for understanding present situation which poses many challenges to future patterns of development of humanity in social, economic, ecological, educational, cultural, and many other regards. After analyzing a historical example from pre- and

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Enlightenment times provided by Reinhart Koselleck in his study *Critique and crisis*, the changed conditions characterizing post-modern societies will be examined in order to identify processes and patterns which subvert a possible productive overcoming of crises. It will be referred also to psychological conceptualizations of crisis and critique as an additional source of arguments for making concluding claims that it is necessary to reclaim critique in order to turn crises into a possible instigation to emancipatory processes.

Even though the current crisis—pandemic Covid-19—which in 2020 stands as the most pressing crisis while simultaneously generating many other crises worldwide, might be and indeed is largely seen as a surprise, it has come as a consequence of human activities, whose origin and shape could be traced back many centuries. For this reason, it is expected that the suggested time distancing from the present might be epistemically fruitful for an attempt to understand how developmental possibilities contained in present crises have been subverted.

The justification for the reflexive focusing not just on crisis but for an extension of the focus on relationships between crisis and critique could be found in different domains, in different times, and at different levels. Its historical semantic origin lies in Ancient Greece and that not just in the Greek roots of both concepts (*κρίσις*—*krísis*: power of distinguishing, decision, choice, election, judgment, dispute; *κρίνω*—*krínō*; *κρίνειν*—*krinein*: judge, decide, choose; Proto-Indo-European root *krei*: sieve, thus distinguish) as it is the case with many concepts used in philosophical and scientific vocabulary nowadays. In this case, the very relation of the concepts of crisis and critique has a Greek root in their common origin in the same Greek word—*krinein*, from which later on two concepts became differentiated, with different historical trajectories and destinies—critique has had a longer usage, mostly as literary criticism, while crisis started attracting attention in the last centuries.

Another historical reference of the relationship between critique and crisis is provided in a seminal study by Reinhart Koselleck published in 1959 under the title *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (translated into English in 1988 under a slightly different title *Critique and Crisis. Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society*), where he examined transformations of modern states and societies in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from the angle of changing relationship between critique and crisis. Koselleck's study is chosen here as it is expected that it can offer some insights that might help understanding dynamics of crisis and critique nowadays, in spite of primarily contextual validity of historical accounts and so many changes that happened meantime.

A further additional justification for linking crisis and critique can be drawn, on the one hand, from sociology of knowledge in a broader sense, and on the other hand, from insights of discursive approaches into formative power of discursive tools. While the former emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century (see, for example, Mannheim 1929), the latter discursive turn started reshaping social and human sciences in the second half of the twentieth century, even though the predecessors could be found already in the Renaissance. Sociology of knowledge relates knowledge production and validity of knowledge claims to social conditions under which producers and recipients of knowledge live and think, i.e., it argues for social foundations of knowledge. A very strong socio-genetic approach to cognition was shared also by the Critical Theory as elaborated in programmatic writing *Traditional and Critical Theory* by Max Horkheimer in 1930s (1937). Nowadays, there is an influential orientation within epistemology named social epistemology. Martin Kusch (2002), for example, argues for a communitarian revision of epistemology, which means that the source of knowledge is no longer an individual epistemic subject.

Discursive approaches expanded what was known as linguistic turn in philosophy associated mostly with Wittgenstein (1953) even though the naming itself became known after Richard Rorty (1967) edited a book under the title *Linguistic turn*. Among discursive approaches which are flourishing since the last decades of the twentieth century, Michel Foucault's is one of the most productive. Foucault (1971/1981) understood discourses as sign practices which construct the meanings of objects, conveyed in the rules how to talk (or not to talk) on them, how to think of them and how to deal with them: "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality" (Foucault 1981, p. 52). Thus, discourses do not copy reality but construct a specific view on it which then shapes approach to it. Therefore, discourses have a very important role in constituting subjective and social worlds. Within the broad field of discourse analyses, there are approaches which are specified as critical discourse analysis (see, for example, Parker 2015) and which are understood primarily as social critique—critique of power relations, injustice, inequality, violence.

To be sure, justification for the topic of this paper is derived also from the features of the situation people are confronted with worldwide since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in the first months of 2020. The situation which evolved as the consequence of the pandemic has been described as a plurality of crises. From the very beginning, the crises have been indeed accompanied by various voices of critique directed against the state management of the pandemic. However, it cannot be overseen that critical voices do not have the same space and support, to say the least, as regular broadcasting of statistical data on numbers of tested, infected, hospitalized, and dead of corona virus. Other means are used as well in order to subvert critique in the declared or assumed state of emergency. The situation is characterized by emergencies, exceptions, health, legal and economic concerns, mass lockdowns which include imposing curfews, closing borders, universities, schools, kindergartens, factories, shops, restaurants, hotels, libraries, cinemas, theatres, concert halls, museums, parks, then restrictions or even total suspension of public transportation, prohibition of all public events, suspension of political rights to demonstrate and assemble, or even to meet informally in groups.

Indeed, lockdown has quickly become a very suggestive catchword, while it is worth mentioning that in Webster New World Dictionary, Third Edition of American English from 1988, there is no entry lockdown. Nowadays, lockdown, used without translation in other languages as well (for example in German), describes almost universally adopted measures (the only two exceptions in Europe in the spring 2020 were Belarus and Sweden), taken by state authorities as means to prevent spreading of a very contagious corona virus Covid-19. At the same time, there are quite opposing views on lockdown, even among experts in the same field (for example, Melnick and Ioannidis 2020). However, I think it is important to add to the description or rather explicate a feeling and meaning of being stuck, which could be expressed by another, older word from the family of "lock"—namely deadlock. The word lockdown signifies also results of implicated actions—and indeed lockdowns have been ordered—and unfortunately even repeatedly ordered after a short period of selective re-openings—by governmental or local authorities, and this is an action which forbids other actions, or actions by other subjects and agencies. These features qualify lockdowns as belonging to a traditional repertoire of repressive, restrictive political mechanisms, and technologies of self, even though they are justified in terms of bio-politics (Foucault 1978)—care of lives and supposedly care of life of every individual. The word deadlock, on the other hand, signifies the produced situation from the perspective of those

deprived of exit options or at least viable exit options. Due to distribution and reproduction of power hierarchies also by semantic means and their pragmatic consequences, it is no surprise that the perspective of those having power to impose lockdowns has the semantic prevalence over the semantic position of those subjected to their power and experiencing to be at a deadlock.

Crises

There is no doubt that we are facing omnipresence of diagnoses of crisis. Before the current pandemic Covid-19, which occupies or even monopolizes public attention since the beginning of 2020, just about 10 years or so ago, in 2008–2009, the world was surprised—again, it was understood as a surprise—by economic crisis, described nowadays by Joseph Stiglitz (2020) as “Great Recession.” As for the current economic crisis as a direct consequence of pandemic, expectations of a quick recovery after a short lockdown were seen by Stiglitz in July 2020 as “probably a fantasy. The post-pandemic economy is likely to be anaemic, not just in countries that have failed to manage the pandemic (namely, the United States) but even in those that have acquitted themselves well. The International Monetary Fund projects by the end of 2021 the global economy will be barely larger than it was at the end of 2019, and that the US and European economies will still be about 4 per cent smaller.” (Stiglitz 2020, no pagination).

In view of unavoidably coming structural transformations induced by the pandemic—which is most probably going to last or even become worse in the next months—Stiglitz (2020) points out that “We know from both economic theory and history that markets alone are ill-suited to manage such a transition, especially considering how sudden it has been.” More reasons for Stiglitz’s pessimism are expected rising inequalities, while already existing inequalities have played their quite important role in the current pandemic, first of all not only in terms of access to medical care, but also in terms of unequally distributed possibilities to avoid exposure to risk situations (homeless people, precarious labor conditions with no unemployment insurance, etc.). In spite of the existing and expected even rising inequalities, in view of Stiglitz, no reliable mechanisms to meet those challenges could be seen in the existing political structures. In conclusion, it is argued:

“Because Covid-19 looks likely to remain with us for the long term, we have time to ensure that our spending reflects our priorities. When the pandemic arrived, American society was riven by racial and economic inequities, declining health standards and a destructive dependence on fossil fuels. Now that government spending is being unleashed on a massive scale, the public has a right to demand that companies receiving help contribute to social and racial justice, improved health and the shift to a greener, more knowledge-based economy. These values should be reflected not only in how we allocate public money but also in the conditions that we impose on its recipients. ... well-directed public spending, particularly investments in the green transition, can be timely, labour-intensive (helping to resolve the problem of soaring unemployment) and highly stimulative – delivering far more bang for the buck than, say, tax cuts. There is no economic reason why countries, including the US, can’t adopt large, sustained recovery programmes that will affirm – or move them closer to – the societies they claim to be.” (Stiglitz 2020, no pagination).

If there are no economic reasons, even less economic necessities, to keep on the existing socio-political models which evidently and permanently generate crises, then it is

necessary to put on the socio-political agenda the fundamental question: what kind of society humans need in order to live up to claims of freedom, equality, and justice? These claims need to have referents not just in signified linguistic and conceptual objects but—and that is indispensable—in conditions under which individuals live, in resources that are available to every individual, and in symbolic repertoires which would provide tools for their self-understanding as beings which need a good, just society in order to be human, to be treated as human and being able and willing to treat others as humans.

The recurrent diagnoses and even warnings of rising inequalities are themselves signs of crisis. I would even claim that society based on structural inequalities—by this I mean inequalities in access to basic structures needed for human way of life—housing, work, education, and health care—is a kind of *contradictio in adjecto*, as it does not provide what it is supposed to provide. Society consists of individuals, but as warned already at the beginning of scientific psychology by Wilhelm Wundt (1921), it cannot be reduced to a sum of individuals; it is a creative product whose features cannot be derived from features of individuals. This was Wundt's (1900–1920) justification for *Völkerpsychologie* as a necessary complement to individual psychology. Wundt argued against both individualism and naturalism—this is still to a great extent his forgotten legacy (cf. Jovanović 2019).

When applied to inequalities in society, this principle means that if a society does not provide access to basic social achievements to all individuals, it actually does not function as a society. Consequently, by depriving individuals society actually deprives itself. No partial measures of success can replace or compensate this basic failure. Therefore, it is at this foundational level that demands for change should be articulated and pursued. For that, it is necessary to change also main-stream conceptualizations of both individual and society. Even though the shift of the focus from individual to community, which could be noticed in psychological theorizing in last decades, is an important step in overcoming the prevailing individualism—and closely related to it is naturalism—it is no less important to avoid pitfalls of communitarianism as well, which could be a source for generating other forms of dualism, reproduced in forms of antagonism between in-group and out-group attitudes and related hostility against out-groups (Jovanović 2005).

In this context, it is worth mentioning that there is a second wording, additionally to lockdown, which has become a proper trade mark of the current pandemic crisis—social distancing. What is meant by social distancing is a recommendation or order to keep physical distance from other individuals (it started with 2 m, but gradually, it became reduced to 1.5 m or 1 m +; however, recently, new warnings came that virus is able to move via air over longer distances). According to medical accounts, a closer contact with others could be risky because of virus transmission. Thus, everybody is a potential threat to everybody, even more so as it is possible to be infected without having any symptoms of illness. By referring to necessity of social distancing, the narrative on Covid-19 symbolically recreated a return to a presupposed natural state in which Hobbesian (1651/2020) rule applies—*homo homini lupus*. This is indeed, on the one hand, the most radical and explicit realization of individualism and, on the other hand, its self-destruction—if everybody is endangered by everybody, it is clear that under such conditions, no prosperity for anybody could be achieved. Hobbes has found a solution—he argued that from insights into unbearable consequences of such a natural state rational individuals came to the idea of necessity of a social contract, i.e., of building a protective state body which stands over individuals. Accordingly, state provides protection which no individual is able to provide by himself individually.

What is striking in this wording “social distancing” is naming the physical distance—social distancing. Is this just an example of a conceptual confusion—among so many

others—or is it rather a kind of double-bind messaging, which needs to be decoded? Even though we are advised to distance ourselves from physical objects as well as they can be temporary storages of virus, other human subjects are the primary objects to be avoided or kept on a supposedly safe physical distance. What is the referent of the “social”—is the other individual understood as a social being or is the physical space or distance promoted into a social space or distance? Given the dominance of individualism, grounded already in individualistic epistemology and methodological individualism, adopted widely not only by psychology, but also by other social sciences striving to follow epistemology and methodology of natural sciences, and the fact that individualism is accompanied by a fast spreading of a new wave of naturalism (the rise of evolutionary psychology since the 1990s is a telling example), and powerfully supported by political, economical and ideological neo-liberalism—it would not be justified to assume that a social understanding of individuals has suddenly replaced discourses of individualism which have been so powerful for centuries, since seventeenth century (Hobbes, Locke). For sure, after conceptual plundering executed by both post-modernism and neo-liberalism, the concept of the social has very poor content and the concept of the societal hardly any.

The destiny of the other possible candidate for a signified of the “social” in the wording “social distancing”—namely the space, distance—is not much different. Physical space and distance can have different mental realizations—what is physically close can become mentally distant and physically distant can become mentally close. We learnt more than hundreds of years ago from Gestalt psychology that human subjects, under certain conditions, can perceive movement even though physically there is no movement—so-called phi-phenomenon. It is not the point here to refer to phenomena of illusions or hallucinations, or hysteric blindness, in order to argue that physical and mental do not correspond to each other in a relation 1 to 1. This means that they cannot replace each other. Consequently, it is important to be alert that a relatively simple wording—social distancing—when analyzed becomes a peculiar language game with significant pragmatic effects. In sum, what is granted from the repertoire of the social in an imposed social desert is social distancing.

The current pandemic narratives adopted by governmental authorities worldwide and organized around two focal points—lockdown and social distancing—perform another peculiar kind of social distancing—individuals are urged to protect both themselves and health care system in their countries by observing social distance. This implies that everybody is a twofold threat to everybody—as a potential source of infection and as a potential user or occupier of limited health care capacities (see, for example, Boris Johnson’s slogan “protect the NHS,” *Mirror*, 21. September 2020).

There is also international level of reproduction of the same pattern—others as threat and enemy. In this case, states are conceived of as enemies. The corona virus, Covid-19 itself, i.e., responsibility for its origin, has also become the subject matter of inter-state political confrontation between the USA and China. It has been reported about medical equipments diverted from the destination in a country which paid for them to another country which at the airport offered a higher price. Amid the pandemic, old sanctions have been extended (EU against Russia, USA against Russia, China, Iran, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, for example) and new ones imposed—USA against European individuals and companies involved in Nord Stream 2 pipeline project). For months, United Nations were not able to reach a consensus on ceasefire in ongoing wars worldwide during the pandemic.

At the same time, war metaphor has been widely used to describe coping with the pandemic—virus is described as an invisible enemy against which state authorities have to

and have waged a war. Of course, victory has been promised, under condition that citizens “stay home,” “protect the health system,” “keep on social distancing,” and “wear masks.”

These are main features of the dominant discursive-narrative environment in which people around the world—in Europe, Asia, North and South America, Africa, and Australia—live since the first months of 2020. Beyond and behind the narratives, millions of people suffer—because they are sick, homeless, unemployed or have to work under precarious and risky conditions, deprived of access to medical help, and exposed to violence even in their homes.

Beyond the pandemic crisis, all these phenomena are manifestations of a more general, global deep social crises. As there is already a long period over which an attitude and even “affect against the general, universal” (Honneth 1984, p. 900) have been fostered and mobilized and grand narratives discredited as repressive (Lyotard 1979/1984), it is quite challenging to theoretize the general, even at the level of a society. It is worth mentioning here that Lyotard used the metaphor of war to argue against the totality and against the consensus as features of modernity which should be replaced by postmodernism – “Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences...” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 82).

As a kind of a return of the repressed general, a discursive turn, at least a situational one related to the pandemic, could be noticed. It could be heard sometimes here and there a suggestive or seductive diagnosis “We are all in the same boat.” This is also an introducing chapter in Žižek’s (2020) new book devoted to the pandemic Covid-19 which “shakes the world” as proclaimed in the title of the book. Needless to say, even if all would be in the same boat, not all would be equal in that boat—either locally or internationally. As already pointed out by Stiglitz (2020), the already existing inequalities did not disappear during the pandemic; on the contrary, inequalities are rising.

The crisis has been described by official authorities in terms of uniqueness, then as comparable or even worse than Great Depression in 1930s. At the same time, some officials deny or minimize the danger. Thus, even symbolically, it seems not all are in the same boat. With few exceptions (for example, China, Cuba), state and society are positioned as opposing sides. Critiques and protests against state decisions and measures are coming from different parts of society. There are also experts, medical and scientific ones, who claim that the very definition and classification of this pandemic is questionable (Wodarg 2020). No single aspect of the pandemic is exempted from critique—measures taken by authorities, both restrictions and their lifting, validity and scope of the measures, their legal status, their costs and unequal and unjust distribution of costs to be paid immediately or as long-term consequences, diagnostic tests, their validity and reliability, therapeutic treatment, drugs used (chloroquine) and equipment employed (ventilators), personal protective equipment (face masks), expected vaccine, its possible mandatory status, published numbers of tested, infected and dead (Ioannidis 2020), involvement of private and corporate interests (Sies 2020) with no democratic legitimization whatsoever, short and long-term economic, social and political consequences of the pandemic regime and restrictive, authoritarian coping models (Pegla 2020), not to mention conspiracy theories, etc. However, there is a strong tendency to silence, discredit professionally and morally, or even excommunicate persons who oppose the official standpoint which requires unconditional acceptance of restrictive measures and the justification offered for them. Thus, discourses and practices on the pandemic are structured around the figures of heroes and enemies, generating in that way an additional source of patterns of hostility in the middle of quite many hostilities mobilized in this pandemic crisis.

Plurality of crises and critiques belongs to the phenomenology of the present pandemic situation. Both crisis and critique require taking decisions as response to pressures contained in them. What has been offered so far? What can be foreseen? What can be hoped for? What can be imagined?

Koselleck on Critique and Crisis

Before answering or rather trying to answer these questions, it could be heuristically worthy to undertake first some epistemic decentering from the present pandemic and associated crises and expressed critiques, even more so as there is a good historical example of a very comprehensive analysis of relationship between crisis and critique in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. The author of the study *Critique and Crisis*, German historian Reinhart Koselleck, was motivated to undertake his examination in the late 1950s (1959), additionally to the need to understand the “loss of reality and Utopian self-exaltation” of the German National Socialism, also by the then existing international constellation characterized by Utopian strivings of two powers Soviet Union and the USA. Koselleck hoped that insights from the past could contribute to a better understanding of his present. He expressed that hope also in the preface to the English translation of his book almost 30 years later (1988).

"There was also the context of the cold war. Here, too, I was trying to enquire into its Utopian roots which, it seemed, prevented the two superpowers from simply recognising each other as opponents. Instead they blocked one another and thereby destroyed the opportunity for a peace which each superpower self-confidently proclaimed to be capable of establishing single-handedly. It was in the Enlightenment, to which both liberal-democratic America and socialist Russia rightly retraced themselves, that I began to look for the common roots of their claim to exclusiveness with its moral and philosophical legitimations." (Koselleck 1988, p.1).

Even though since then many quite radical changes happened both internationally and in societal models adopted or imposed worldwide, the cold war is again at work nowadays; legacy of Fascism is still alive. These are quite important features of the current crises. Therefore, it will be argued in this paper that reminding of Koselleck's historical examination could be hermeneutically fruitful for self-understanding of our times.

Koselleck's study could be summarized in the following way. He analyzes historical transformations of the relationship between crisis and critique in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This relationship is an expression of the relationship between state—more precisely absolutist state—and emerging bourgeois society. Due to its origin as an attempt to find a solution after devastating religious wars in Europe in the seventeenth century, absolutist state was built on an assumption of a strict division between sovereign and its subjects, between the public and private, external and internal, and politics and morality. Referring to Hobbes, Koselleck (1988) wrote:

"In the midst of revolutionary turmoil Hobbes continued to search for a fundament on which to build a State that would assure peace and security.... He develops an individualistic anthropology, one corresponding to a human nature that has come to view its social, political, and religious ties as problematical... Hobbes's first effort, which already made his intention clear, was to do without the customary employment of the word 'conscience'. He removed its fluctuating value and replaced it with a concept bare of any religious significance: the concept of opinion." (pp. 23–24, 26).

However, over time, exactly that division, i.e., exclusion of moral issues from the definition of State and from public sphere, became target of critique whose consequences eventually led to the crisis, i.e., dissolution of absolutist state and finally to French revolution.

Just these few statements make it clear that many aspects of Koselleck's analysis are highly relevant to psychology, i.e., to understanding of the sociogenesis of many defining assumptions of psychology, first of all division of internal and external, the dualism of individual and society, and strong individualism. As claimed by Koselleck "the separation of inward and external ... is an integral part of Western tradition." (p. 27). Unfortunately, this cannot be dealt with within the scope of this paper.

What is in focus of this paper are Koselleck's analyses of how moral considerations and critique gradually transcended their original private realm of individuals and started entering public domain and subjecting it to critical judgments. Finally, critique transcended intellectual realm and acquired power needed in order to become a practically and politically transformative tool.

"the moral inner space that had been excised from the State and reserved for man as human being meant (even rudimentarily) a source of the unrest that was originally exclusive to the Absolutist system. The authority of conscience remained an unconquered remnant of the state of nature, protruding into the formally perfected State.... A morality striving to become political would be the great theme of eighteenth century." (Koselleck 1988, p. 39).

Needless to say how relevant those historical lessons could be for finding viable solutions to present crises, whose moral dimensions are no less destructive than other forms, even more so as it seems that intellectual and other tools produced in our time are not appropriate to address the deep lying global crises humanity is facing in the last decades—ironically enough after the end of history, i.e., after the allegedly final solution to socio-political organization of human life was proclaimed, so self-confidently, in 1990s (Fukuyama 1992).

A more general question would be: what are conditions of possibility for critique to transcend its intellectual domain and to become a means of societal transformation? Furthermore, is it possible to generalize insights provided in Koselleck's study? Would this be the best way to empower critique as a transformative tool? From another perspective—how has critique lost its transformative potential? What kind of historical structures have been lost since the times which generated Enlightenment as a powerful critical stance? What kind of theoretical tools are we missing in post-Enlightenment post-modern times in order to be able and willing to conceptualize and instigate radical changes?

Subversion of Critique and Crisis

The historical framework of Koselleck's analyses is modernity, i.e., transformations of the main structures built in modern times—state, society, and individual moral agency. All those structures appear as strong structures. The state was originally built as an absolutist state; bourgeois society proved to be strong enough to induce radical changes in the then existing order. Individual moral agency, even while being contained in internal realm, before it entered the external one, was strong enough to pursue individual moral progress. And such an agency became an agency of critique.

Compared with that historical context, conditions and structures which characterize our present time are very different. Instead of the meantime abolished absolutist state,

the norm nowadays is a democratic state, which means a state form which is supposed to represent beliefs and interests of the majority of its citizens, or at least majority of those who expressed their choices in elections. Even though such a state form should have overcome the historical opposition between state and society, this has not become a political reality so far. Some institutional changes have been introduced in order to allow for representation of ethnic minorities in parliaments. Other categories of minority interests or non-political interests are mostly addressed by non-governmental organizations. However, decreasing voter turnouts which characterize many elections—such a telling example are elections for European parliament (in the last election in 2019 total turnout was 50, 66%, but in 15 member states turnout was below 50%, for example in Slovakia only 22.74%, in Slovenia 28.89%, in Portugal 30.75%)—raise a more general question of legitimacy of the elected representatives or even question the whole model of representative democracy. Thus, instead of being the proclaimed historical solution at the end of history (Fukuyama 1992), parliamentary democracy seems to need to look for new solutions for itself in order to regain its legitimacy.

The questionable legitimacy of elected representatives in institutions has consequences for the position of individuals, i.e., it weakens its position, socially, and psychologically. Even though it might sound paradoxical, the neo-liberal order, promoted and imposed worldwide in the last decades, has not strengthened the position of the individual—contrary to its rhetoric of primacy of individual over society or community. On the contrary, the neo-liberalism, in its ideology and its practical applications, has deprived individual subjects of sources and supportive tools for their development. These sources and tools have to be provided by society and cannot be provided by any individual alone. This is the consequence of the fact that society cannot be reduced to a sum of individuals. As rightly pointed out by sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1992), society cannot be reduced to a sum of interactions either. Nevertheless, discursive atomizations of society have been quite seductive. Classical associationism, applied in accounts of nature, psyche, and society, is a very telling example, which has substantially shaped modern sciences, and quite powerfully psychology as well, as pointed out by Kurt Danziger:

"Just as societies were considered to be formed by the combination of separate and independent persons, so individual minds could be thought of as formed by the association of separate mental elements...What classical associationism accomplished was the establishment of a metaphorical homology among three levels of discourse, dealing respectively with the structure of society, the structure of the physical world and the structure of the human mind." (Danziger 1994, p. 347).

The neo-liberalism has continued the tradition of atomism and associationism. It has even diverted attention from society and placed all responsibility for individual success and failure on individuals themselves. In the processes of desocialization of social issues and their individualization and psychologization the real, structural sources of the problems remain repressed and consequently excluded as possible targets of critique. Instead, critique and blame are diverted to individuals. For "their" failures, individual psychotherapy is offered as a remedy. Thus, the far-reaching consequences of psychologization of social issues are lack of social critique and effective resistance, as warned by Zygmunt Bauman (1991).

"Thorough, adamant, hard and uncompromising *privatization* of all concerns has been the main factor that has rendered postmodern society so spectacularly immune to systemic critique and radical social dissent with revolutionary potential...What does truly matter is that it would not occur to them to lay the blame for such troubles they may suffer at the door of the state, and even less to expect the remedies to be handed over

thorough that door. Postmodern society proved to be a well-nigh perfect translating machine: one that interprets any extant and prospective social issues as private concern." (p. 261).

In that way, both crisis and critique have been actually subverted, i.e., their transformative potentials inhibited or pacified.

There are other changes as well which contribute to the weakening position of individuals. Not a strong, unified, rational subject of modernity, but a weak, fragmented, nomadic subject of post-modernity has come to the forefront. Grand modern narratives of emancipation which provided a long-term sense-making source have been discredited by post-modernist as repressive tools. Consensus as a way to secure at least some representation of the views and interests of participants in communication has been declared suspicious by post-modernists. Rationality also has lost its strong normative position. (Lyotard 1984).

For sure, human lives and human worlds cannot be reduced to a rational calculation, which has become the dominant modern type of rationality and which indeed has produced devastating effects, as warned by Stephen Toulmin: "...the ideas of strict 'rationality' modeled on formal logic, and of a universal 'method' for developing new ideas in any field of natural science, were adopted in the 1920s and 1930s with *even greater* enthusiasm, and in an *even more extreme* form..." (Toulmin 1992, p.159, italics in original).

More than a half a century before Toulmin, Husserl in his seminal study *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936) pointed at the problem of rationalism as a source of crisis, but his judgment on that is more differentiated.

"The 'crisis' could then become distinguishable as the apparent failure of rationalism. The reason for the failure of a rational culture, however ... lies not in the essence of rationalism itself but solely in its being rendered superficial, in its entanglement in 'naturalism' and 'objectivism.'" (Husserl 1936/1970, p. 299).

Both naturalism and objectivism are still haunting scientific culture. But it would be equally devastating to exclude rational arguments from decision-making and to abandon any requests for reasonable justification. More generally, as claimed by Habermas (1985/1996) and Honneth (1984) in their critique of post-modernity, it is not so easy to give up the project of modernity and its argumentative repertoire, in spite of its failures. How could it be then possible to argue for equal rights of all language games, as post-modernists do? Or how to understand claims made on the ground of human rights as universal rights? If the "general is wrong in itself," as Honneth summarized Lyotard's position and argued against it (Honneth 1984, p. 901), reference to local, arbitrary, unbinding criteria would not just exclude and discriminate more people, but it would deprive them of tools to struggle for their rights. It could be added that exactly in global crises as the pandemic or in ecological crises, more and not less universalism is needed. For sure, universalism needs to be enriched to become more inclusive.

But, unfortunately, it seems that not opening, but closing, not internationalism but nationalism are getting momentum, even stronger during the pandemic, although they started before the pandemic. In that sense, lockdown is a quite appropriate signifier, far beyond its direct referent and literal meaning.

But it goes even further. As rightly warned by Agamben (2020) on the occasion of the pandemic, it seems that a pure biological survival has occupied the whole scope of humanity and human life and state of exception replaced free society. In such an attitude, social Darwinism has replaced social and cultural history. By forgetting or repressing social and cultural history of human development, the true causes of the current pandemic crisis and

other related crises, for example, the ecological crisis, cannot be seen and understood, even less approached appropriately. Consequently, they will continue generating new crises.

Discursive shift and value reorientations away from long-term perspectives, away from general or universal criteria, and turning to the pragmatic, local, situational criteria have fostered a way of thinking and acting which proved unable to deal with the full range of consequences of the existing crises. A discursive lack of interest for them cannot make them non-existent, and that aspect has been overseen by discursive optimism in appropriation of the whole reality.

Psychology, Crisis, and Critique

How is psychology positioned with regard to crises and critique? Diagnoses of crisis have accompanied psychology since its scientific beginnings. What has been referred to is crisis of psychology. Different, opposed approaches to subject matter of psychology, to its methodology, to relationship between theory and practice as features of its development were also seen as symptoms of its crisis.

In history of psychology, two proclaimed crises of psychology are most known—Karl Bühler's *Die Krise der Psychologie* (1927) and Vygotsky's "The historical meaning of psychological crisis. A methodological investigation" (written in 1927, published in Russian in 1982, in English translation 1997). While Bühler remained within a theoretical framework, arguing for unification in psychology, in the context of this article, it is worth mentioning that he explicitly linked crisis and critique. In the preface to his book he wrote: "In the Greek verb *κρίνω*—(ich scheide—I separate) meet the meanings of names critique and crisis. This book is oriented toward critique in order to overcome the crisis of psychology." (Bühler 1927/1978, p. ix).

Unfortunately, Bühler's critique has not overcome the crisis of psychology, even if just one criterion is used for its assessment—psychology has become more and more fragmented, also within its subdisciplines. And it seems that unification is not even addressed nowadays. For sure, rapid fragmentation of knowledge is not just an issue in psychology. It is an expression of deeper socio-historical processes; therefore, it would be even more urgent to address them as they pose challenges even at the basic level of processing (fragmented) information.

Vygotsky, analyzing the crisis of psychology in the late 1920s and envisioning its resolution, assumed a broader perspective, including also domains beyond psychological theories. Manolis Dafermos summarized Vygotsky's analysis of crisis of psychology:

"According to Vygotsky (1997a), the development of science is determined by a complex process that depends on a wide range of external and internal factors. Especially, he distinguished three important aspects of this complex process: (a) the general sociocultural context of the era, (b) the general conditions and laws of scientific knowledge, and (c) the objective demands upon scientific knowledge that follow from the nature of the phenomena that are studied in a given stage of investigation." (Dafermos 2014, p. 152).

Obviously, these early diagnoses of the crisis of psychology addressed fundamental questions of psychology as a science, definition of its subject matter, its epistemology and methodology, and its relation to socio-cultural context. These questions are older than scientific history of psychology. According to its dominant historical self-understanding, psychology became a science when it left philosophy as its long-standing home. However, declaration of independence, wrongly ascribed to Wundt himself, did not empower

psychology to solve fundamental questions of its scientific status. Concerning these early diagnoses of the crisis of psychology, it is rightly concluded by Klempe:

"Consequently, the roots of the crisis in psychology are very much entrenched in a more fundamental question about the relationship between nature and culture, or more generally, between objectivity and subjectivity. This is of course a question that can be traced back to Immanuel Kant in Western civilization." (Klempe 2018, p. 375).

Less than ten years later, after Bühler and Vygotsky, in 1936, Husserl generalized the diagnosis of crisis to "European sciences"—and to European humanity. He named the first chapter of his book—"crisis of sciences as expression of the radical life-crisis of European humanity" and analyzed "the positivistic reduction of the idea of science to mere factual science" and "the 'crisis of science as the loss of its meaning for life.'" (Husserl 1936/1970, p. 5).

More or less at the same time, more general crises beyond the scientific, and particularly psychological scientific realm, were subject matter of critique, both implicitly and explicitly, in Freud's psychoanalysis—before psychoanalysis entered psychology, even though its position within academic psychology has never been uncontested. Freud's critical perspective reached the *conditio humana* itself (Freud 1930/1982), but Freud could not see any solution to the uneasiness in culture humans are doomed to live in.

Another critical approach was developed in the 1930s. The critical theory of society, later named Frankfurt School, combined both critique of the capitalist exploitative society and of "traditional theory."

"A consciously critical attitude, however, is part of the development of society: ...If we think of the object of the theory in separation from the theory, we falsify it and fall into quietism or conformism. Every part of the theory presupposes the critique of the existing order and the struggle against it along lines determined by the theory itself." (Horkheimer 1937/2002, p. 229).

The first representatives of the critical theory (Horkheimer 1937; Marcuse 1955, 1963) argued that a new, critical theory is needed in order to grasp both contradictions of society and subjective, mostly unconscious support by members of such a society. In order to understand that contradiction, i.e., willingness of people to support a system which generates suffering for them, it is necessary to refer to psychoanalytic insights into repressed, unconscious psychic processes. Therefore, critical theory referred to Freud's psychoanalysis (Jovanović 2020b). That contradiction between objective conditions which require radical change, i.e., revolution and subjective conditions which worked against the change, explains the missing revolution, first of all in Germany in 1920s (Jovanović 2020a).

Even if restricted to scientific domain only, a revolutionary overcoming of crisis has become a rare topic. Thomas Kuhn (1962) used the term scientific revolution to describe a change of the dominant scientific paradigm. Some authors (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) spoke of "silent methodological revolution" referring to a shift to qualitative instead of quantitative research approaches. However, even though the methodological repertoire of social sciences has been enriched in this way, this has not been scientific revolution in Kuhn's sense. Meantime, post-qualitative orientations are replacing qualitative ones (St. Pierre 2018; Nordstrom 2018). They have dethroned human subjects as agency and generously generalized agency attributes to animals and physical objects.

After the old, traditional agency—human subject—has been delegitimized and plurality of new agencies promoted, after the very project of universal emancipation has been discredited as a repressive one, it seems that critique has subverted itself. It remains without evaluative, judging agency and without evaluative criteria of judging and deciding. No resolution of crisis is possible without evaluative agencies and evaluative criteria. Humans

are evaluating beings and evaluation is an intrinsic feature of human way of life, as argued by Charles Taylor. He introduced, as he called it, strong evaluation, or second order evaluation, in which humans do not evaluate just the outcomes of their desires, but their quality: "For what is important is that strong evaluation is concerned with the qualitative *worth* of different desires." (Taylor, Ch. 1999, p. 16).

It is worth acknowledging here, in the context of psychology and necessity of revision of its main-stream historiography, that it was Wilhelm Wundt who, hundred years ago, pointed out evaluative features of human psychic functioning: "The critique wants, on the basis of the understood object, to judge whether it is genuine or not, true or false and to decide about its value." (Wundt 1921, p. 110).

In Conclusion: Reclaiming Critique for Crisis

If crisis is a turning point, obviously it is necessary to take decision in order to move out of crisis. In that sense the original medical Greek use of the word "crisis" to describe a turning point between two possibilities—to succumb to an illness or to recover and become healthy—is a proper metaphor to express transformative potentials immanent to any crisis. Understandably, what is desired is to provide conditions to move to a better situation than before the crisis. This would be a proper validation of the crisis, i.e., of transformative potentials it bears. Thus, decisions taken in a crisis undergo stronger evaluative judgments, beyond evaluative dimensions inherent to human cognition and actions in general. To assess decisions, value concepts are necessary—exactly those which for long time were expelled from supposedly objective scientific language.

However, values have returned as a necessary subject matter of philosophy of science. There are compelling arguments and valid evidence that facts and values are entangled in different ways. Therefore, science has to do with values.

"Treating values as entirely outside the realm of scientific rationality and objectivity can easily promote the idea that moral matters are entirely subjective and arational. Those views, in turn, have tremendous implications for how we should conduct moral debate and think of moral obligation. If values are an essential part of good science, and the content and justification for values, in turn, are sometimes sensitive to the deliverances of science, then moral issues must be differently conceived. The place of values in science thus has practical implications as deep as its intellectual implications." (Kincaid et al. 2007, p. 5).

The place of values in science has political implications as well. Starting with the very facts which are necessarily theory-laden and value-laden, science cannot be a value-free endeavor and certainly cannot become value-free by claiming it is neutral. This applies particularly to the role of sciences in modern societies. Science is not and cannot be neutral. And this is especially important regarding social sciences, including psychology. Martin Kusch argues that "there is no plausible, politically neutral, ahistorical and context-free answer to the question: which role have social sciences in the liberal democracy. Every plausible answer is based on political values..." (Kusch 2020, p. 414).

Referring particularly to psychology and relying on Vygotsky's theory, Anna Stetsenko argues for alternative models of science:

"There is a pressing need today for alternative models of science – at the intersection of theory, methods, and practice – that abandon claims to "objectivist" scientism with its notion of knowledge as a mirror-reflection of reality and its belief in "raw" facts disconnected from human practices. The challenge, at the same time, is to move beyond

postmodernist approaches marked by relativist indecision, selfdefeating skepticism, and lack of activist positioning. This chapter offers steps in elaborating such an alternative in building and critically expanding on insights from Vygotsky's project. What is suggested is a model of science as a nonneutral, *transformative activist endeavor* that transcends the separation between theory and practice while embracing human agency grounded in political imagination and commitment to social transformation." (Stetsenko 2015, p. 102).

Crises urge for "transformative activist endeavor." In order to take decisions in crisis which can bring health not only in a literal but also in a general sense, it is necessary to explicate values inherent to decisions taken in crisis. Beyond that and for the sake of long-term sustainable changes, it would be also necessary to explicate values in decisions which led to crises, the pandemic, social, ecological ones. The crises are a warning that commitments to different values are necessary than those embedded and reproduced in neo-liberal order. Not self-interest but a reclaimed common interest, which includes the whole society, not just small parts of it, and nature, both approached also from the perspective of future generations, as claimed by Hans Jonas in his ethics of responsibility, should be guiding.

Several decades after Jonas introduced "the imperative of responsibility" (1979/1984), there are other voices urging to assume responsibility:

"So near the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is once again time to move forward into an uncertain, open-ended utopian future. It is time to open up new spaces, time to decolonize the academy, time to create new spaces for indigenous voices, time to explore new discourses, new politics of identity, new concepts of equity and social justice, new forms of critical ethnography, new performance stages. We need to find new ways of connecting persons and their personal troubles with social justice methodologies. We need to become better accomplished in linking these interventions to those institutional sites where troubles are turned into public issues and public issues transformed into social policy. We must be relentless in pushing back against the structures of neoliberalism in these dangerous times." (Denzin and Lincoln 2018, p. 12).

And to use Taylor's differentiation, strong evaluations are needed because what is at stake is worth of life implicated in decisions taken in crisis. Otherwise, not just transformative potentials of crisis and critique will continue to be subverted, but the very possibility of human way of existence. The crisis urges to decide. Critique warns decisions of past wrongs and shows possibilities not realized yet, but urgently needed.

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