

# Reflections on the Normative Status of Critical Discourse

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## Samevatting

*In hierdie studie word besin oor die normatiewe status van kritiese gesprekvoering tussen mede- sowel as teenstanders. Dit blyk dat kritiese diskoers wesenlik gefundeer is in en gedra word deur logiese beginsels. Desondanks is dit duidelik dat daar ook buite-logiese beginsels bestaan wat die algemene gang van kritiese gesprekvoering mede-bepaal. Aandag word in die studie gegee aan die normatiewe dimensie van menslike bestaan, met besondere verwysing na etiese en nie-etiese normatiewe. Die skadelike invloed van ideologiese vooroordeel in soverre dit die interpretasie, asook toepassing van beginsels raak, word kortliks in oënskou geneem. Daarna word 'n poging aangewend om enkele kriteria vir kritiese gesprekvoering te identifiseer en onder woorde te bring.*

## 1. Introductory remarks

In his *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1962: 259 ff) Popper maintains that – in a truly democratic society – freedom of thought and expression coupled with the right of persons to engage in constructive criticism is guaranteed at all times, under all circumstances, and by all institutions, especially the state. In fact, Rawls, with good reason, claims that rational criticism and reasoned disagreement form the backbone of democracy, and that the “freedoms of expression guaranteed by democratic constitutions” are precisely “freedoms to argue and disagree” (1990: 12; cf. also Popper, 1962: 217; Facione, 1990:24). Fair-minded enquiry, analysis and resolution of differences in opinion, combined with the ability to express well-founded criticism undeniably have immense personal and civic importance. Indeed, *freedom of thought* and the *right and liberty to criticize* are powerful tools in our endless but unrelenting search for genuine freedom for all, as well as certainty and worthwhile knowledge regarding the essence thereof (cf. Popper, 1962: 158, 237, 239).

Consequently, critical thinking and critical discourse involving all members of the South African public should be prized as liberating forces, as potent and effective resources in the life of every South African, and as vital components in the founding of a rational, full-fledged democracy. But, over and above this, *active utilization* of the privilege to enter into critical discourse with supporters as well as opponents has the additional advantage that it will stimulate and assist present and especially future citizens of the state to develop into astute, resourceful, enterprising and independent personalities who are in control of their futures and lives. It would appear as though the opening of the minds of men and women of all ages to critical judgment and to the development of a capacity for genuine autonomy of opinion will be beneficial for every citizen, as well as our society as a whole. In these times – more than ever before – we are in need of empowered, self-determining, imaginative and courageous personalities who live, as far as possible, in critical independence from the doctrinaire influence of partisan opinion shapers and ideologically biased “persuaders” regarding the complicated issues that confront everyone in this country.

It is with pride that we can place on record that the realization of this ideal does not seem entirely unachievable in our modern, “post-apartheid” South Africa where – *in principle* at least – wide-ranging freedom is guaranteed and safeguarded by our constitution. As a matter of course, this fundamental freedom also encompasses freedom of thought and expression, as well as the inalienable right to on-going and unrestricted, reasonable and responsible criticism. Nonetheless, despite the realness of what is widely regarded as a truly democratic dispensation with a constitution ensuring liberty, equality and justice for all, South Africans still have to contend with the distress and embarrassment caused by an ideologically divided society. Prejudice, the inescapable result of ideological radicalism, inevitably leads to intolerance, hostility and even outright vindictiveness. There can be little doubt that this is one of the major reasons why harmony and goodwill over ethnic and cultural boundaries keep eluding the South African people<sup>1</sup>.

The fundamentally negative, inflexible and unaccommodating attitude of persons of dissimilar cultural and social backgrounds, and especially

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1 Without question, ignorance and indifference relating to the precise nature of other cultures (values and value related preferences, history, customs, day to day life style, manners of intercultural communication, and the like) do impede trans-ethnic communication. Yet, in the final analysis, it is *ideologically induced tunnel vision* that

political persuasion becomes painfully apparent wherever contending parties enter into critical discourse with one another. Deep-seated and unresolved antagonisms, animosity and latent conflicts that have remained embedded in our society and are tirelessly drummed up by ideologues, seriously jeopardize sincere and resolute attempts to communicate over ethnic and cultural borders and to confer and thrash out differences in opinion in an amicable manner. Despite praiseworthy efforts at national reconciliation by a variety of influential public figures and institutions, there is little doubt that *ideology* still imposes its authoritarian demands on everyone in its grip<sup>2</sup>, irrespective of whether it is propagated by ideologues faithful to the doctrine of *Afrikaner ethno-nationalism*, those under the spell of *Black revolutionary populism*, or those who are infected by the *ideology of English superiority* with its peculiar individualist liberalism (cf. Leatt *et al.*, 1989: 58, 63-64). For this reason, the detection and eventual elimination of ideological constraints that, even in our day, obstruct calm, candid and uninhibited communication among members of our society who entertain convictions that are at variance with those of others, are of vital importance to establishing and sustaining a South African democracy. This truth applies, irrespective of whether discussions are conducted at a *non-scientific* or *scientific* level.

In addition, the detection of ideological duplicity may well yield an exercise in critical self-examination of our deepest – more often than not unaccounted for – personal suppositions that may mar candid and dispassionate ways of reflecting on and accounting for weighty cultural, social, economic, political and other issues. Such a soul-searching enterprise may even lead to and facilitate a novel and rewarding

reconsideration of the *normative status* of criticism itself, that which has been set out to accomplish in this paper. However, before normative

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– inexorably – gives rise to two widespread fallacies that virtually exclude open, critical discussion among contending parties. These are (1) the misguided over-estimation of particular (partisan) perspectives that are erroneously regarded as only truthful interpretation of reality as a whole, as well as (2) the fabrication of prejudiced and bigoted images of others.

- 2 Ignorance regarding the various ideological undercurrents that – wittingly or unwittingly – have remained in place in the hearts and minds of those living in our so-called “post-apartheid” South Africa seriously undermines insight into the reasons why people think and act *as they do*.
- 3 In which even in our day echo traces of the obsolete illusion of *the chosen*, the *only true men*, including bits and pieces of an all-encompassing ideal to extend the British Empire to all continents, to perpetuate British rule throughout the world, and to either cajole or coerce the world’s nations into one English-speaking entity.

guidelines for open, convivial and unprejudiced criticism in an essentially post-ideological atmosphere can be identified, obtaining clarity regarding the intrinsically *normative nature of criticism*, as well as the way in which *ideology* biases the interpretation of principles for human conduct – including standards for day-to-day critical discourse – seems appropriate.

## **2. Critical Discourse as duty-bound and non-neutral activity**

### **2.1 The licence and obligation to enter into critical discourse**

Ongoing criticism aimed at the disclosure of truth is a responsibility that must be taken seriously by all who are involved in the search for fresh insight into and innovative interpretations of the reality we are part of (cf. Popper, 1962: 217, 239). For this reason, those who possess the required expertise and experience in a specific area of specialized knowledge have the right and obligation to assert their perspectives and enter into critical discourse with supporters as well as opponents. Ensuing critical discussions are vital for on-going progress in the direction of our common objective, namely that of gaining insight into, and wisdom regarding ourselves and the world we live in.

Nonetheless, this licence to criticize has a clear-cut counter-pole, namely *decorum*, perceived as a code of polite and affable behaviour during critical deliberation. This fact highlights the solemn and inescapable *accountability* of those who have the duty and courage to indulge in critical discourse. *Accountability*, on its part, raises the question regarding the disclosure of values, principles and criteria that hold sway during critical discussion and argumentation.

### **2.2 Brief survey of the normative dimension of human life**

#### **2.2.1 Preamble**

Popper argues that our collective desire to gain access to ultimate truth justifies the use of all forms of criticism. However, the outstanding and defining characteristic of this special and specialized enterprise is that it should be strictly *rational*, that is, *controlled rigorously by reason* (1962:231).<sup>4</sup> As such, critical thinking would then seem to imply establishing and weighing the rational grounds for an opposing view or unusual behaviour. It is believed to constitute a means of determining

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4 Clarification of the reasons why exponents of the different schools of thought – despite their unanimous and unreserved endorsement of and adherence to the *dogma*

whether a position or action is logically tenable, and therefore, worth holding, thus providing a reliable rational basis for further discussion and inquiry. Against this backdrop, one may conclude that criticism involves specific critical skills, as well as mastery of *logical* procedures and manners of analytical conduct. These, it is alleged, will enable a person to distinguish effectively between valid and invalid arguments. Along these lines it becomes possible to understand, analyze, interpret and evaluate the reasoning (arguments) and subsequent behaviour (actions) of others in a critical fashion (cf. Rafalko, 1990:1; also Z, 1994:19,20).

However, over and above distinct cognitive procedures and ways of analytical behaviour that control and regulate rational thinking, and as part of the *general normativity* that holds sway over our lives, *criticism* and *critical discourse* – on their part – are also subjected to *principles* that relate to and cohere with all remaining non-logical spheres of human life. Should we, therefore, endeavour to comment on the principles that govern *criticism* and *critical discourse*, we would be well advised to delve into and investigate the realm of so-called “values” that may be regarded as regulative for the former.

### 2.2.2 *The dogma regarding a dichotomous reality*

As a result of 18<sup>th</sup> century Kantian idealism that postulated a clear-cut dualism between “*what is* (exists)” and “*what ought* (should be)” and the subsequent (supposedly) “irreversible” rift fabricated by positivists between so-called neutral *facts* and committed *values*, the *normative dimension* of human life<sup>5</sup> became ever more alienated from that of human rationality. Such a coerced fragmentation of an otherwise naturally and closely integrated human experience developed into the central theoretic blueprint that held sway in scientific circles for the greater part of three centuries. It also inspired the frame of reference that became fashionable

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concerning the *autonomy of reason* and *science* – find it difficult, if not practically impossible, to convince their opponents *on purely rational grounds alone* of likely errors and fallacies, falls outside the limited scope of this paper. For a comprehensive and in-depth exposition of this central and decisive issue in the theory of science, namely how the different starting points or presuppositions of those who enter into critical discourse determine their distinctive scientific interpretations of states of affairs and scientific outcomes (even in the case of the so-called “exact” sciences), the reader is referred to H. Dooyeweerd’s 1953 *oeuvre*, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I, (1997, edition, D.F.M. Strauss, Editor). Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

5 Plus what was illegitimately subsumed under *morality* as common denominator.

in the case of non-scientific thinking. In essence, this “paradigm” *theoretically* dispelled with the vital and fundamental unity and coherence of human experience. By virtue of the fundamental dichotomy it introduced, it gave rise to a completely artificial and unrealistic view of human life and the world, and a concomitant dualistic interpretation and explication thereof. As a matter of course, this dogma also deluded people (scientists and laymen and -women alike) into believing the fiction that *logic* – per definition – was stripped of, as well as completely immune from any form of *responsibility*.

Yet, despite a virtually worldwide adherence by modern scientists to this blatant untruth, the reality of a universe that cannot be torn asunder in terms of arbitrary human conjectures remains in tact. In our naïve, non-scientific experience of reality we never encounter a fragmented reality. On the contrary, even a child will attest to the unity and coherence of its day-to-day experiences. The possibility of a so-called austere and disinterested, neutral and uncommitted scientific experience of reality – existing and operating in complete isolation from other normative spheres of human life – remains nothing but a supposition; a figment of the imagination.

This is also the case with *criticism* and *critical discourse*. Although critical thinking and critical discourse are undeniably *logical-analytic activities* that have as distinctive feature a special *cognitive skill dimension*, they cannot be confined to and shut off in the “factualities” of the logical province of human experience. As vital part of their total make-up, they also incorporate what Facione labels a “dispositional element” (cf. 1990:20-27). Such “affective dispositions” encompass *non-logical* attributes like inquisitiveness, honesty, the desire to be well informed, self-confidence, open-mindedness, flexibility, willingness to reconsider, etcetera (Facione, 1990:25). Over and above these “affective dispositions”, Facione (ibid.) also lists the following (also non-logical) *positive qualities* that guarantee cordial and open critical discussion among adversaries: tolerance and open-mindedness concerning possibly divergent opinions, reasonableness in selecting and applying criteria, as well as resolution and perseverance in the face of difficulties. In much the same vein, Rudinov & Barry make the following significant observation: “None of us can be totally objective, for as hard as we try, we will always view things *according to our own frames of reference*. But we can become aware of these influences and work to minimize their impact on our observations. We should expect the same of others. We should be aware of people’s frames of reference, their interests and their ‘taken-for-granted’.

This doesn't mean that we should automatically dismiss the views of those who have already established views or vested interests. We should realize, however, that *these may be coloring the evidence* they present as justification for a claim" (1994:272; the author's italics, P.S.; cf. also Rafalko, 1990:535).

From the above paragraphs it appears that, despite the traditional postulation of a stark dichotomy between *is* and *ought*, many contemporary specialists in the field of critical thinking recognize the fact that apart from intra-logical criteria that apply to logical thinking, a variety of *non-logical* standards or conditions "co-determine" the manner in which *critical debate* should be carried out. And as – even in our day and consistent with Kantian thinking – these non- or extra-logical principles are customarily regarded as of *ethical nature*, we are obliged to address the important question regarding the dissimilarities between *moral values* and *general (non-ethical) normativity*. Only then can we attempt to identify and designate normative criteria for *logical thinking* and *critical discourse*.

### 2.2.3 Ethical and non-ethical normativity

Although anything (including all forms of *criticism* and *critical discourse*) becomes *ethically relevant* the moment it is viewed from the vantage point of general morality, the ethical aspect of human endeavour may never be regarded as sum-total of all other (non-ethical) "provinces" of general normativity. To be sure, every phenomenon (entity, event, relationship, situation, activity or whatever) in our temporal world functions – either as *subject* or as *object* – in literally all aspects of reality. Therefore, everything can become the legitimate field of interest of ethics, as well as every one of the diverse (non-ethical) *special sciences* that we know, including *philosophy* as science of totality that explicates the coherence and interrelatedness of the various aspects of reality. As has been mentioned already in passing, there also exist – apart from the ethical mode of our life and the variety of ethically qualified entities – many non-ethical but nonetheless *normative* modes of human endeavour, as well as non-ethical but nevertheless normative states of affairs, entities, situations and relationships. In the specialist areas of, for instance, *jurisprudence*, *aesthetics*, *economics*, *linguistics*, *logic* and the like, where criteria for normative/ anti-normative behaviour are of non-ethical nature, scientists with expertise in a variety of non-ethical matters have the last word. Here, matters are not judged and assessed primarily from an ethical point of view or according to moral standards. In the latter instances, *ethics* – because of its limited and relational competence – cannot speak with unqualified authority.

*Ethics*, therefore, neither embraces all categories of values and principles, nor is it the exclusive discipline of “normativity” (cf. *supra*). It may never be seen as an activity focussed on and encompassing the universal and multi-aspectual problem of *good* and *evil*. *Good* and *evil* appear within the realms of all *normative* aspects of human endeavour and are articulated in various *non-ethical* notions and assertions like *logical/ illogical; clear/ obscure; elegant/ inelegant; social/ a-, un- or antisocial, polite/ impolite; economic/ uneconomic; harmonious/ disharmonious; just/ unjust, true/ false* and the like. *Ethics* represents a specialized perspective on the *moral dimension* of human life, that is, on rules of moral conduct valid for all humans, as well as for societal relationships that humans brought into being and in which they are actively involved. It therefore *primarily* investigates and analyses all ethically qualified states of affairs, events, entities, situations, relationships and the like and expresses itself with regard to these (cf. Olthuis, 1969: 198).<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, on account of their close interlacement with the ethical aspect, all non-ethical human activities, entities, situations, relationships etc. display perceptible ethical “facets”. Therefore, every non-ethical aspect of reality, state of affairs, entity, event, situation, relationship or whatever can legitimately qualify as the field of ethical interest (cf. Smit, 1983: 2-3). The only provision is that the unique way in which every qualifying function stamps all the remaining functions of every entity structure under consideration is properly accounted for. In other words, the *non-negotiable condition* regarding ethical investigation of whatever *non-ethical* entity structure is that every ethical statement and utterance of the moral philosopher will relate *exclusively* to the intrinsically *ethical facet* or *dimension* of such an entity structure (Le Roux, 1989:201, cf. 195 ff.). Disregard of this precondition unavoidably leads to the misapplication of ethical norms to non-ethical domains of human endeavour (cf. Olthuis, 1969:197). Should this happen, we succumb to a simplistic *moralism*, in terms of which the modally *restricted* and *limited* nature of the ethical (like that of all other non-ethical aspects of human life) is ignored and all forms of modal (logical, cultural, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, pistical) normativity are erroneously assessed and explicated as

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6 That the scope and objective of *ethics* is more often than not ill defined and poorly charted; that ethical issues are noted for the many contradictory opinions expressed in them; and that ethical questions are addressed in terms of defective, inadequate and confusing terminology (*manner, value, norm, conscience, morality, virtue, disposition, conduct, ethos, duty*; cf. Stoker, 1941: 23; Le Roux, 1989: 169 ff.) can be verified by anyone who has been obliged to explore this controversial discipline.

though they were of ethical nature and origin. Under such circumstances we have to contend, for instance, with situations where art, science or whatever is measured and appraised solely in terms of ethical principles.

Like all other modes of human life where cultural norms apply, the ethical mode of human experience does not exist in a void. It is based on and – by virtue of its singular position in the cosmic order of the aspects of reality – *regulative* for all *pre-ethical* modes of human endeavour, including – in the present case – *criticism* and *critical discourse*. Like all (pre-ethical) normative aspects the ethical is ultimately regulated by *faith*. The latter – in turn – is the outcome of our deepest and most profound religious convictions where *firm trust* and *unwavering certitude* apply. For this reason, neither ethics nor general normativity is “neutral” in nature. They are – under all circumstances – *meaningfully specific*. They manifest as Muslim, Hindu, Confucianist, Buddhist, Christian, humanist (professedly non- or irreligious)<sup>7</sup> or whatever normativity.

Apart from the likelihood that the disregard of norms can be attributed wholly to out-and-out obtuseness or indifference, the above states of affairs forcibly raise the question as to why people who wilfully and apparently without second thought overlook norms (of whatever nature), nonetheless unashamedly profess to adhere faithfully to all moral/ normative demands placed on them, either by some or other religion, or by humanity itself.<sup>8</sup> This curious phenomenon seems to indicate that pernicious influences from another – more profound – source impinge on our normal understanding of morality/ normativity and mislead people to choose against the sincere invocations and clear-cut and unambiguous stipulations of, for instance, Christian morality and a Christian system of values.

Even worse are the reasons presented by those who profess to adhere rigorously and under all circumstances to every demand placed on them by principles that regulate general rationality, while at the same time holding such demands in complete disdain.<sup>9</sup> Of special interest in this regard is the strange and widespread custom of turning a blind eye to the demands imposed on logical reasoning by the principle of *sufficient*

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7 Humanism can never transcend its Christian roots. It will never be totally secular/ profane. It is “marked by its experience of Christianity” (Ellul, 1975: 24; cf. also Zuidema, *s.a.*: 14) and, therefore, destined to reflect its Christian background at all times.

8 Why are ordinary, on the whole compassionate people more often than not so callous, so little moved by, or apparently oblivious to the plight of others? Why do rampant social atrocities, unmitigated poverty and blatant injustice evoke so little emotion and compassion from the majority of those who are not directly affected?

(adequate) *reason* or *grounds*<sup>10</sup> where corroboration of claims depends on substantiation by appealing to existing states of affairs.

Against the background of what has been suggested above, it would seem as though the obfuscation and contamination of human minds and hearts and the attendant *distortion* of logical and other principles should basically be blamed for any consistent deviation from generally accepted normativity. In the final analysis, it would seem as though the pernicious influence of *ideology* slants the way in which reality is experienced and understood (perceived) by those under its ban. Ideology appears to be the sole source of all biased, intolerant and anti-normative interpretations of logical and other principles, as well as day-to-day states of affairs. We are, therefore, obliged to reconsider briefly the nature and effect of ideology on normativity in general, as well as on *critical thinking* and *critical discourse* in particular.

### 3. Ideology with us

#### 3.1 Digest of ideology and the peril of ideological distortion of principles

Ideology is always illusory, deceitful and misleading. It must be understood as a system of fabricated ideas and rationalizations, proliferated among the gullible by means of confusing rhetoric that is directed at the justification, substantiation and continuation of class, political, economic, as well as personal interests. Ideology coerces and intimidates those under its bewitchment. It also triggers irrationality, obsession and psychotic fanaticism among its adherents. As such, it is insidious and destructive in nature and demands complete subjection to its dictates by all under its sway. It deludes people into viewing life and the world in terms of only *one* (their own)

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9 How can people justify the appalling living conditions of other human beings by considering them “normal” states of affairs that can be logically as well as morally defended? How can people disregard crimes perpetrated against persons as well as humanity as a whole and justify them on whatever grounds? How can anyone, despite the reality of indisputable states of affairs, intentionally misinterpret or ignore the obvious? How can anyone indulge in illogical reasoning and ignore sound, justified and valid criticism?

10 As such, the principle of *sufficient reason* refers the thinker to extra- (*other-than-*) *logical* states of affairs that are introduced into logical judgment/ argument to prove and support the validity of the latter. Should a judgment or argument put forward some outline of knowledge, an appeal should be made to existing *states of affairs*, thereby providing *adequate grounds* to substantiate the validity of the former. This is called the *act of verification*, discredited in the 20th century by Popper who petitioned for *falsification*.

viewpoint that is given the untenable status of unique, irrefutable and conclusive interpretation of reality as a whole (cf. Schoeman, 1998).

The regrettable consequence of this narrow-minded intolerance is *mental isolation* and an attendant irrational and unrealistic desire for eventual *physical seclusion*. This totally negative condition manifests, amongst others, as a complete absence of dispassionate and sincere *introspection* (self-examination and self-judgment). The precondition for frank and open *self-criticism*, namely full honesty in confronting and dealing with personal bias, is completely lacking. Criticism, even mere disapproving comment – whether justified or not – either from within the own ranks, or from without, is rejected categorically and considered, *per definition*, as either disloyal and without merit, or as spurious and hostile. Indeed, to be at variance with partisan opinion becomes a violation of *sacrosanct* truth and an attack on indisputable certainties. This delusion causes serious over-simplifications of the complex and thorny problems facing our society of the day. Over-simplified polarizations like *we – they, good – bad, right – wrong*, etc. become an essential and distinctive part of the jargon and grand narratives in terms of which ideologues and their followers refer to those outside the boundaries of a particular ideology (cf. Thompson, 1992: 60ff). Small wonder that every ideology regards itself as the absolute, the only genuine, consistent and unfailing route to the complete and permanent emancipation and eventual salvation of humankind. As such, each ideology comprises hedonistic delusions of future peace, liberty and self-gratifying happiness for a particular social group; often even for humankind as a whole. This radicalist attitude of superiority, detachment and isolation inevitably results in a fervent, though erroneous belief in own infallibility, with a concomitant denial of either personal or collective error and guilt (cf. Seepe: 2001; also Christie, 2004: V; Makhanya, 2004: 37; Siala, 2004: 36). On account of its fanatic, narrow-minded and eminently uncompromising nature, ideological allegiance of any sort – as a matter of course – obstructs open, critical discussion among those that entertain different opinions. It inhibits dispassionate analysis and evaluation that should be aimed solely at the discovery of truth<sup>11</sup>.

For this reason, austere and relentless *self-criticism* is indispensable if we are serious about reflecting critically on our own understanding and interpretation of states of affairs. This is the prerequisite for any subsequent reconsideration of our personal freedom and responsibilities, as they relate to *critical discourse* with those who entertain opinions and

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11 Even the concept *truth* is not exempt from highly contentious and ideologically contaminated explications.

depart from vantage points that are at variance with ours (cf. Rafalko, 1990:535; also Facione, 1990: 20, 25 ff., Rudinov & Barry, 1994:272).

### **3.2 On likely ways of surmounting an ideological mind-set**

Fortunately, the resolute mind can free itself from the shackles of ideology. Self-criticism and ultimate liberation from the mental and spiritual constraints that ideological obfuscation imposes on humans is possible provided a willingness to transform is present. The wish to escape from ideology on the one hand, and the birth of a post-ideological frame of mind on the other are usually set in motion the instant one becomes aware of contradicting elements that blemish one's convictions, or of logical inconsistencies in arguments customarily brought into play to defend allegedly irrefutable certainties. When this predicament triggers noticeable uneasiness and apprehension, one is probably on the threshold of sincere self-knowledge, the inescapable prerequisite for self-criticism.

Nonetheless, spiritual and mental change that empowers a person to opt for an alternative to ideological obsession, to alter established attitudes, to overcome traditionalism and to adjust lives radically are not easily accomplished. It involves a *voluntary choice* that is all the way supported by uncompromising *honesty*, great personal *commitment*, rigorous *intent*, austere *control* and astute *deliberation*.

Questions that present themselves in this regard relate to the signs and symptoms that reveal blind and uncritical allegiance to ideology and idolatry; ways of diagnosing and acknowledging one's preoccupation with and passion for idols and idolatry; the acquisition of frank and honest self-criticism and a constructive critical attitude; ways of dealing unflinchingly and courageously with the anguish and humiliation inflicted by the painful twists and turns of a *via purgativa* that is not first and foremost bent on justification as such, but compels virtually never-ending *self-criticism*.

It is hoped that in the long run an unconstrained and liberated exchange of ideas, not only among politicians, scientists and the like, but also among ordinary members of the public may develop that will eventually become part and parcel of a candid and unconstrained frame of mind among all South Africans.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, only the genuinely liberated and impartial spirit will be able to deal effectively and productively with the complicated,

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12 Apart from the customary unsavoury, loud-mouthed and belligerent discourses (with their attendant pedantry, rhetoric and sophistry) engaged in by too many South African politicians against their political adversaries, much additional embarrassment and

contentious and hazardous enterprise that is customarily referred to as an “open”, critical discussion among equals.

#### 4. Rethinking the normative status of criticism

##### 4.1 *Transcendent positioning in terms of the antithesis*<sup>13</sup>

Although many of the inferences and suggestions listed below are of a general nature and not the exclusive consequence of any specific belief system, what is to follow is offered – in principle – in terms of a *Christian ethos* that is impelled by the *central idea* regarding the total and indisputable autonomy of the Creator in contrast to the relative and relational nature and position of every creature. Against the background of the foregoing statement of commitment, it is necessary to comment shortly on the dissimilarity between the *Christian faith* and *ideology* in general.

In terms of a Christian point of view, ideology relates to idols, that is, pseudo-gods that are worshipped instead of the only true Creator of all things. It is, therefore, regarded as essentially *idolatrous*. The vital difference between a *Christian frame of reference* and *ideology*, then, relates to the absolute and fundamental dissimilarity between the Creator of all things on the one hand, and the creaturely world we live in and are part of on the other. The *central question* regarding the outcomes and consequences of human aspirations obligated by these opposing influences can be articulated as follows: *Do ideals, principles, intentions, enterprises, strategies, purposes, hopes, and the like serve the Kingdom of God, or are they directed at preserving some human/ worldly ideal, conviction, objective or issue?* Accordingly, for the Christian, the Divine Revelation is the starting point for the formulation of all standards for human conduct. For the ideologue norms for human conduct are, naturally, secular and of creaturely origin, namely *of, through* and *to* the demands of the ideology that dictates their normative fibre.

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exasperation is caused by the seemingly endless quibbling, disagreement and outright quarrelling among members of the current political establishment and their allies, including members of religious organizations regarding a variety of important (as well as wholly inconsequential) matters. Cf. Seepe, 2001; Christie, 2004: V; Du Plessis, 2004: 11; Makhanya, 2004: 37; Ndlangisa, 2004: 4; Pahad, 2004: VI; Vapi, 2004(a): 4; Vapi, 2004(b): 4.

13 It should be noted that the antithesis between “Light” (*civitas Dei*) and “darkness” (*civitas terrena*) constitutes the only real rift or line of demarcation to be found in an otherwise “undividable” creation.

The outcome of a Christian viewpoint is that, while only God is Absolute, nothing in created reality, that is neither state, nor church, nor humanity, nor science or whatever can ever claim autonomy and become elevated to the position of *law unto itself*. All creatures exist in relationships of co-ordination to one another and are, under all circumstances, of equal importance and worth. They are all – without exception – completely subjected to God’s Divine will for His creation. In the following folios every interpretation of whatever state of affairs will be effected in terms of *Christian principles*.

## **4.2 Transcendental considerations**

### **4.2.1 Preparatory observations**

In his 1990 *oeuvre*, Facione (3, also 20-27, especially 24-25) petitions for a normative approach to an otherwise “bloodless”, austere, rigorous science of logic that operates as though in a void, guided only by logical symbols. He describes those who indulge in criticism – well aware of the normative demands it places on them – as people who are “trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused on inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit.”

At the peril of relapsing – as Popper (1965: 232) cautioned – into a supercilious and patronizing sophism that professes to have convenient answers for all questions and an opportune solution for every problem, what is to follow is an unassuming and cautious attempt to initiate innovative and original deliberation concerning *aspects of broad-spectrum normativity that pertain to critical discourse in general*. Along these lines – it is hoped – a fresh and uninhibited *conviviality* into critical discussion of cultural, social, economic, educational, political and other matters by contending parties in the South African context, can be introduced.

### **4.2.2 Criteria for critical discourse**

In essence, criticism is a strictly *rational* (analytical) activity of a *thinking subject*. It is completely embedded in *theoretical analysis* with its essential components of *identification* and *distinction*. As such, it is *logically qualified* and, therefore, subordinated to all criteria (norms) that apply to *rational thinking*. Disregard of these *intra-logical* principles for rational thinking and argumentation does not suspend our capacity for rational thought. Yet, it certainly affects the quality thereof. In view of this

perspective, a very brief enquiry into the normative structure of our logical activities seems appropriate:

The logical-analytical mode of human life displays a normative structure in the sense that *principles* and not *laws* (of nature) apply. In this regard, it is important to note that *cultural norms* differ from *laws of nature* in the sense that the latter *control* reality in as much as they are already *positively applied* to every likely situation: natural laws *rule* the realm of nature, leaving no possibility for non-compliance.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the domain of *human culture* is ruled by *norms* or *principles* for (human) conduct. Humans, who are endowed with a *normative freedom of choice*, can either comply with, or transgress norms, although no anti-normative choice (disobedience) ever suspends (revokes) or abolishes the principle that is transgressed. In the case of logical thinking, this state of affairs allows for *logically correct* (normative) as well as *logically incorrect* (anti-normative) or *illogical* thinking, argumentative discourse and the like. This absence of exact and rigid “laws” that hold good for and apply to every possible logical situation (argument) allows for logical inconsistencies and errors during routine debate regarding day-to-day matters.

Principles that hold good for our logical enterprises are revealed once we investigate the *analogical*<sup>15</sup> way in which every *non-logical*<sup>16</sup> aspect of reality coheres with the normative structure of the logical dimension of human experience and activity:

- **Critical acuity**

There is no doubt that the single, most fundamental condition for legitimate and reasonable criticism is *thorough* and *complete understanding* of what is to be criticised and commented on. This requisite refers us to the essence of *logical analysis*, namely correct *identification* of a specific phenomenon by *distinguishing* (distinction is the counter pole of identification) it from what it is not.<sup>17</sup> Anyone who has the self assurance to enter into critical debate with those entertaining views that

14 No subject can transgress these laws *by choice* and *at will*. Thus, the law of gravity is positively applied to all subjects, under all circumstances, and at all times.

15 An *analogy* refers to distinct *similarities* despite noticeable *differences*/ distinct *differences* despite noticeable *similarities* inherent in unrelated and disparate phenomena.

16 The term *non-logical* refers to every remaining avenue of human endeavour of which the central meaning differs from that of the logical aspect, namely *analytical thought*.

17 What we experience as a *distinct unity* is *identical to itself* (the basis of the principle of *identity*, namely: *a equals a*). At the same time it is different from everything that *it is not* (the basis of the principle of [non-] *contradiction*, namely: *a does not equal non-a*).

are at variance with his/ her own but does not perfectly *comprehend* what is at stake, is well advised to reconsider entering into argumentative discourse, or stand branded as a charlatan. Keeness of perception, the precondition for *good judgment*, combined with thorough and sufficient *knowledge* of and *insight* into every facet of any specific *point of view*, *state of affairs* or whatever is to be critically analysed and commented on is *sine qua non* for the privilege, if not honour to request a critical discussion. *Critical acuity*, a *numerical* analogy that appears within the logically qualified structure of all critical activity, therefore, reveals to us a *constitutive principle* that is valid for all forms of critical discourse.

- **Critical distance**

A *spatial* analogy that appears within the normative structure of critical discourse is that of *critical distance*. In terms of this standard that constitutes all forms of criticism, those engaged in critique should avoid getting too involved (either positively or negatively), not only in the issue at stake, but especially with the persons whose points of view are being critically analysed, scrutinized and assessed. The critic should – under all circumstances and as much as possible – remain as austere,

detached[[Although the term “objective” can surely be used in this context, it has been utilized, traditionally, with a rather “laden” undertone, as a rule implying “devoid of all presuppositions”, an impossible anthropological condition, cf. Schoeman, 2002: 100-101. It is, therefore, avoided altogether in this paper.]], aloof, reserved and unemotional as possible, thus achieving and maintaining the necessary and required *critical distance*.<sup>18</sup>

- **Critical persistence**

The central meaning of the kinematic mode of our existence is that of *movement*, of *constant progression*. This implies that all forms of mobility and flexibility are possible only on the basis of and against the backdrop of what is *constant*. A *kinematic* analogy that appears within the logically qualified normative structure of critical discourse is that of *critical persistence*. In terms of this principle the pursuit of truth should be an overpowering, on-going and never-ending ideal of everyone who indulges in critical analysis and the critical assessment of points of view, states of

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18 This principle is counterbalanced by the norm of *critical solidarity*, cf. infra.

affairs, etc. This serious resolve and determination to serve the truth should be pursued with great perseverance. This principle requires single-mindedness, special dedication and extraordinary diligence on the part of the sincere and resolute critic.

- **Critical validity**

Within the normative structure of *critical discourse* there is an analogy of the *physical* aspect with its central meaning of *energy* that can possibly be designated as *critical validity*. If criticism is *valid*, its *impact* on critical discourse will be convincing and compelling. It will undoubtedly have the desired *effect* on the general direction and eventual outcome of an argument. In addition, *critical validity* guarantees the necessary *energy*, the “*critical vigour*” required to keep critical discourse on track. To indulge in criticism requires of the critic unremitting motivation and seemingly inexhaustible energy. Great effort must be brought to bear to ensure that critical discourse is constantly kept on course. By never losing the initiative despite many obstacles, stumbling blocks and other difficulties that tend to inhibit positive critical debate and discussion, critical dialogue can be kept alive and well. An undertaking like this must be promoted all the time and in due course brought to its logical conclusion, an activity that demands great strength of will and enthusiasm on the part of all involved in the venture.

- **Critical vitality**

An analogy of the *biotic* aspect with its central meaning of *life* appears within the normative structure of critical discourse and reveals the principle of *critical vitality*. In terms of this guiding principle, critical discussion and deliberation should – under all circumstances – further and promote the *development* of debate that fosters and advances the on-going search for truth. *Development*, as such, consists of two subdivisions, namely *differentiation* and *integration*. This means that the *development* of a critical argument depends on a critical *differentiation* of all its parts, while never forfeiting an *integrating* perspective on the whole. Along these lines, a critical position/ stance is prevented from disintegrating (falling apart). This constructive attitude of eagerness to pursue, nourish and encourage critical discussion is clearly of great importance to the development and augmentation of openness and candour during critical discourse. Parties involved in critical debate should never discourage, inhibit or terminate arguments in progress. On the contrary, the *initiation*, *encouragement* and *facilitation* of on-going discourse with a view to

furthering research and gaining clearer insight into problem areas is of vital importance.

- **Critical sensitivity**

A *psychical* analogy with its central meaning of *sensory feeling* that appears in the normative structure of critical discourse brings into focus the issue of *intent* (purpose). If the fundamental *intent* of critical discourse is to be *positive*, then this intent suggests the normative appeal that the motivation of every critic should be mitigated by civility and respect for opponents and opposing points of view. Such a constructive and benign attitude can be designated as one of *critical sensitivity* or *critical consciousness*. The principle of *critical sensitivity*, then, advocates that – notwithstanding differences in opinion that may exist between opposing parties – mutual empathy and respect based on a common objective, namely the disclosure of truth, combined with consideration and concern for others is mandatory for everyone who enters into critical debate. Superciliousness and disdain for the feelings and reputation of others do not befit the seeker of truth and wisdom. His/ her intent should be qualified by attributes like benevolence, cordiality; compassion, caution, circumspection, decorum, modesty, politeness, tact and tolerance. All forms of criticism – especially self-criticism where the primary focus is on the suppositions underpinning one’s own hypotheses – should be undertaken with the sole purpose (intent) of acquiring knowledge and wisdom in the process of revealing the truth and concomitant perspectives (insight) that encourage scientific progress. However, under no circumstances whatsoever should criticism be misapplied to ridicule or insult an opponent or disparage a specific point of view: as Popper suggested, criticise concepts and theories, never their authors. For this reason, those who have the courage and competence to criticise are well advised to steer clear of arrogance and rather opt for modesty and openness. In this way, the critic fulfils the obligation of maintaining an explicit and tangible *critical solidarity* with all (supporters as well as adversaries) that are engaged in and dedicated to our mutual and collective search for knowledge, truth and wisdom.

At this stage something must be said regarding the human inclination to err. No one should ever be ashamed of making mistakes, as it does not necessarily reflect obtuseness. Errors should be viewed positively as incidents that stimulate further investigation, research and discussion, thereby contributing significantly to the increase and expansion of insight

and knowledge and a meaningful way of making headway in our constant endeavour to gain access to the truth. As suggested by Popper (cf. *supra*), a sincere willingness to *learn from mistakes* is a prerequisite for the uninhibited growth of a genuine spirit of candid communication among adversaries. Popper's ideal<sup>19</sup> was that in the areas of everyday life, in society, in politics, as well as in science, everyone should be modest and realistic enough to be willing to *learn from their own mistakes*. This introduced a very important new trend in on-going criticism, namely the recognition of *freedom of thought for everyone*. The fundamental right of others – even scientists – to hold different views and to defend them without fear of ridicule, disregard, restriction and even excommunication is acknowledged. Such a state of mind implies that, henceforth, the arguments of others – no matter what their credentials – *are to be taken seriously* (Popper, 1962: 238). Popper maintained that only along these lines would it be possible to purge criticism from its traditionally negative connotation and allow it to become a fair, benign and non-discriminatory method of making progress in our common search for truth, as well as for the birth of new and creative positions that will enhance humankind's quest for peace and happiness.

- **Critical control**

An *historical* analogy with its central meaning of *free* (controlled) *formative power* appears within the normative structure of critical discourse and reveals the principle of *critical control* or *mastery*. To indulge in criticism demands of every critic complete *competence*, that is, literally being “in full control” of the situation. *Critical control* demands that those who enter into critical discussion with opponents are knowledgeable in the relevant problem area(s) and are well versed in each and every critical technique. Coupled with this, mastery and command of appropriate materials, theories and the like, including adequate experience in the fields in question are prerequisites for meaningful critical debate. For this reason, critical self-reflection is imperative for everyone who desires to enter into critical argumentation. Indeed, it implies that one actually has to “transcend” oneself, thereby opening the possibility of

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19 Popper, who maintained that *verification* – based on the logical principle of *sufficient reason* (*principium rationis sufficientis*) – was greatly overrated, opted for the method of “falsification”. Thus the search for *contradictions* was anticipated to become the standard procedure in research and criticism, and *refutation* was recommended to replace the traditional method of *justification*, cf. *supra*.

looking “inward” in order to assess candidly and critically every claim to personal insight, credibility, expertise and the like. Authorities in the various fields of specialized scientific knowledge have the right and obligation to make suggestions, point out fallacies and criticize proposed solutions to existing problems. Nonetheless, putative expertise in a specific subject *never* signifies infallibility. The actuality of potential error will always relativize every kind of human knowledge, endeavour and wisdom. Therefore, only when modesty, coupled with respect for opponents and their points of view genuinely distinguish a specialist’s approach to critical debate, he/ she can be said to be truly *competent*.

- **Critical clarity**

Critical discourse implies the exchange of ideas. On its part, this critical “dialogue” or “conversation” clearly relies on some or other form of *symbolism*. Traditionally, and with obvious reason, much has been made of this important aspect of critical discourse. Ambiguity, the origin of most forms of misconception, can more often than not be eliminated effectively through the expression and articulation of all forms of logical thinking in rigorously precise, that is, unequivocal and unambiguous language<sup>20</sup> The *lingual* analogy with its central meaning of *symbolism* that appears within the normative structure of critical discourse reveals the principle of *critical clarity*. In terms of this criterion, all critical discourse should be characterized by outstandingly high standards of precision and lucidity in interpretation and meaning, as well as clearness and simplicity in verbal expression and phrasing. Along these lines the successful control and eventual prevention of the pernicious effects of ambiguity and vagueness

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20 In the case of argumentative discourse and deductive inference, where it is imperative to understand precisely how *conclusions* follow from the *premises* that are brought into play, accurate and precise expression by those who engage in them is of vital importance. In order to circumvent the confusion due to imprecision and indistinctiveness in inference and argument that are formulated in everyday, run of the mill language with its metaphorical style, misleading idiom, as well as the vague and equivocal nature of the words in which thoughts are articulated, an elaborate and special *language of symbols* (cf. Copi, 1973:5-7, 337; 1994: 731, 732) has been devised. Therefore, quantification rules, as well as the different *rules of inference*, like *modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, *hypothetical symbolism*, *disjunctive syllogism* and the like are executed in terms, and with the aid of a *special logical notation*. By employing this distinctive and unique “tool”, logicians can do away effectively with the danger of ambiguity, vagueness, idiom, metaphor, etc. during the evaluation of arguments and the drawing of deductive inferences. For this reason, proficiency in the use of logical symbolism is highly recommended for everyone who gets involved in critical discourse.

is anticipated, thereby promoting criticism to the position of an indispensable method of acquiring meaningful knowledge (information) that fosters thorough understanding (insight).

- **Critical courtesy**

An analogy of the *social* aspect with its central meaning of *communication* appears within the normative structure of critical discourse. This analogy reveals the principle of *critical courtesy*. All forms of critical discussion involve more parties than one that are actively engaged in *communication* and *interaction*, as the practice of merely reasserting one's own position is futile. Sound and rewarding communication among associates (supporters) as well as adversaries depend completely on the measure of cordiality that exists between them. Such affable relationships and resulting *polite* and *courteous* demeanour between adversaries promote first-rate and productive communication and interaction, thereby fostering co-operation and consensus seeking rather than confrontation and associated attempts at rational domination by the more aggressive. Adherence to this criterion should warrant free, uninhibited and "open" discussion (communication and interaction) among peers.

- **Critical restraint**

Within the normative structure of critical discourse there is an *economic* analogy with its central meaning of *frugality* that reveals the principle of *critical restraint*. In terms of this norm those indulging in critical debate should always display *moderation* in whatever they undertake. Never should the critic allow him-/ herself to get "carried away", as it were, in the process of argumentation: "critical excess" or immoderation during disagreement and debate should be avoided carefully. Serious self-discipline and composure, combined with rigorous *economy of thought* – which disallows pedantry, sophistry, verbosity, drawn out arguments and the like during logical argumentation – should be pursued by all critics at all times.

- **Critical accord**

Analysis of the normative structure of critical discourse reveals an *aesthetic* analogy with its central meaning of *harmony*, which discloses the principle of *critical accord*. This criterion demands that those engaged in critical deliberation should always aim at achieving *accord* and *agreement*, thereby progressing – by design – in the direction of *consensus*.

- **Critical candour**

A *juridical* analogy with its central meaning of *adjudication* appears within the normative structure of critical discourse, revealing the principle of *critical candour*. In terms of this principle, criticism should always be characterized by frankness and even-handedness. All decisions and conclusions should be impartial and straightforward, forever devoid of malice or ill will. It also demands of the critic truthfulness, especially regarding his/ her personal suppositions that may influence his/ her perspectives and judgments. Indeed, during the process of critical discourse, close investigation and careful scrutiny by contending parties of the motives underlying and grounds for and against all (opposing as well as own) positions are essential. Opponents should willingly submit to “inspection”, as true openness and candour during critical argumentation are completely dependent on such assessments.

- **Critical integrity**

It has already been mentioned over and over again that the crucial and fundamental motive for criticism should be nothing but complete and unconditional commitment to the disclosure of truth. Criticism born of ulterior motives like the desire for personal aggrandizement is objectionable and offensive. Honesty, sincerity and reliability during the process of critical debating of issues is demanded in terms of the principle of *critical integrity* that is revealed by the *ethical* analogy with its central meaning of *temporary love* that appears within the normative structure of critical discourse.

- **Critical certitude**

Finally, a *pistic* analogy with its central meaning of *certitude* appears within the normative structure of critical discourse and reveals the principle of *critical certitude*, the groundwork for *critical assurance* and even *self-assurance*. In terms of this norm, whatever is undertaken during critical debate must be underpinned by *trust* and *faith*. On their part, *trust* and *faith* confirm and authenticate the *credibility* of a partner in critical discourse, an attribute that will enhance his/ her *critical persuasiveness* and further his/ her ability to convince opponents by *persuasive argument* to accept other (or amended) points of view. Nonetheless, despite all conviction and certitude that a critic may possess, every point of view should – essentially – remain open to correction. For the Christian the sum total of certitude is to be found in the Creator of all things. This fact gives rise to a normative condition, namely that whatever is undertaken during

critical argumentation and debate should always be done *Coram Deo*, that is, as if in the presence of the Lord. Therefore, where conflict of opinion exists and despite all the certainty that one may possess, respect for the dignity of others is mandatory during all forms of critical discourse.

## 5. Conclusion

In an enlightened and uninhibited society everyone will be able to indulge openly in amicable, critical discourse. This *freedom of thought and expression*, this splendid outcome of a free and open society is undoubtedly one of the cornerstones of a true democracy in the sense understood by Popper (1962; cf. 239). In the South African context – and despite all that has come to pass during the past ten years of putative democracy – ideology regrettably still obfuscates human minds, while irrational prejudices and stereotypes even now continue to undermine liberated thought and actions. The obligation to realize the ultimate goal of a *free and open society* is critical for all who desire a genuine democracy for all South Africans.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative that the on-going schooling of all our citizens, and especially of our young people at all educational levels in the skills of critical communication with others should be taken seriously. Especially those who are responsible for and involved in the training of people in *critical thinking* must view their teaching obligations in this regard as exercises in the empowerment of all to deal appropriately with controversial issues. Nonetheless, learners should be trained not only in ways and means of identifying the features of “good” and “bad” thinking and resist and defy undemocratic and manipulative pressures from whatever source. They should also become well versed in its underlying *etiquette*, in the subtle *decorum* thereof that elevates wholesome critical discourse above the level of unsavoury and unrefined squabbling.

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