

WHY AND HOW TO ADAPT CRITICAL THINKING TO THE UKRAINIAN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION?¹

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1. Why we must teach criticism today?

Last decades Ukraine is transforming itself from the authoritarian order to democracy. This principal goal was declared by the 1996 Constitution of Ukraine. People are beginning to adopt new ideas, values and norms. However, it is impossible to go to bed as a communist one night and get up as a mature democrat next morning. Deep and long-term changes in people's mentality are inevitable.

A whole bunch of great political disappointments both in the country and outside are connected with crash of lightweight illusions about short and fast "jump" from the authoritarian order to the democratic one. Actually, we are going through just an initial stage of long post-authoritarian – or pre-democratic – transformations. This stage presupposes naturally a conflicting mix of old traditions and newborn modes of life. Communist and democratic values are still in confrontation in our country. In addition, there exist not only the "left" threat, but the extremist "right" and especially criminal-oligarchic threats as well. It makes possible back and forth movement in politics, economics or social attitudes. In order to minimize the antidemocratic threats we must, among other things, educate Ukrainians democracy persistently and without any break.

But what does it mean – to educate democracy? I have no intention to solve this complex problem in a short paper. I would like to state here one idea only – about teaching criticism as a necessary component of democratic education. In my opinion, teaching criticism must be an effective instrument to change mentality of Ukrainian people, especially young, in accordance with basic democratic values and norms.

Totalitarian and authoritarian orders are based on more or less strong tendency to total uniformity both in material and spiritual life. Any non-orthodox diversity, freedom of choice in economics, politics, religion or culture is forbidden. At the same time criticism of "our authorities" is rejected absolutely. For example, in the Soviet Union under Stalin all more or less serious independent critics were exiled or killed, including "senior Lenin's guard" (L. Trotsky, N. Bukharin, G. Pyatakov, etc.). Unconditional acceptance of the leader's commands becomes a vital feature of people's mentality during this epoch. A typical "people's hero" from the classic George Orwell's "Animal Farm" resumes this feature by the excellent slogan: "If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right".

In contrast, ability to comprehend information critically, make decisions independently and argue for it becomes most important in the open democratic society. The more democratic is a country, the more opportunities for diversity and mutual criticism in all spheres of life appear. Therefore, to enhance the development of democratic mentality, it is necessary to introduce civilized criticism into both public and private activity, elite's and people's life. On the way to real democracy, Ukraine cannot avoid to solve this problem. On my opinion, this conclusion is sound for all Newly Independent States (NIS) as well.

There are many academic and everyday life ways and tools to teach criticism. Among diverse ways to get this goal, the national system of higher education seems the most relevant one, especially for young generation. Fortunately, there is a relatively advanced tool to educate in criticism in universities – I mean the academic discipline "Critical thinking". This discipline has spread in the North-American system of education after the World War II widely. But it seems impossible to spread the American approach to Ukraine or other NIS "mechanically", without serious relevant adaptation. So, main goal of this paper is to discuss some important characteristics of this adaptation process.

2. What is critical thinking?

Concept of critical thinking is quite fuzzy and ambiguous. It has many different connotations and interpretations. For the sake of clarity, let us define and explain the notion in a manner suitable in this paper. An American specialist in critical thinking Richard Paul has proposed next scaffolding definition: "...critical thinking is thinking about your thinking while you're thinking in order to make your thinking better. Two things are crucial: 1) critical thinking is not just thinking, but thinking which entails self-improvement and 2) this improvement comes from skill in using standards by which one appropriately assesses thinking. To put it briefly, it is self-improvement (in thinking) through standards (that assess thinking)" [1, p. 91].

At first glance, it is possible to conclude: critical thinking is quite allied to logic, which studies or improves thinking as well. More essential and accurate relation between critical thinking and logic is a matter of special discussions. However, in my opinion, critical thinking today is relatively independent and one of the most practically oriented branches of logic in a broad sense – as science about thinking and its articulation by a language. There exists a principal difference between traditional logic and critical thinking: it consists in their presuppositions concerning nature and role of errors and fallacies in human knowledge.

Traditional logic (like Aristotle's syllogistic, Bacon's *true induction*, Leibniz's *calculus ratiocinator*, etc.) tries to find an *organum* in order to reach absolute truth with guarantee. It understands fallacies as temporary and in principle removable

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troubles on the highway to final true results. «*Let's calculate*», – this famous Leibniz's slogan puts into words a fundamental dream about “absolute weapon” of knowledge. In contrary, critical thinking presupposes principal fallibility of any scientific or real life knowledge, except for religious dogmas. The “absolute weapon” is impossible absolutely! Therefore, in its philosophic foundation current critical thinking tends to Karl Popper's critical rationalism [2, p. 36-38, 115-166]; since the seventies it has found relatively more convenient logical grounds in informal logic. It does not mean that today criticism rejects any formal approaches and results *a priori*. In my opinion, critical thinking is able to work and works actually on different logical bases: on base of natural logic (or good reason) and on base of logical science, including formal and informal logics. Each this branch produces a set of relevant norms for control or self-improvement in thinking. However, all these sets should be combined in order to both improve criticism and teach critical thinking effectively depending on particular educational situation.

The reason “to democratize mentality” which was pointed out above to support teaching criticism in Ukraine and other NIS is completely valid to educate in critical thinking. This reason is important but not unique. In principle, there are two big sets of similar ones – local, i.e. valid for the NIS *par excellence*, and global. The reason “to democratize mentality” belongs to the first set. Other local reason to deliver critical thinking consists in intention to advance national education to the world standards both in form and in content. An important global reason consists in taking into account rising transition of humankind from the industrial civilization to the post-industrial, or informational, one. This process demands principal changes in education. A global reform in education seems inevitable. I agree with Richard Paul that “*critical thinking is the heart of well-conceived educational reform and restructuring because it is at the heart of the changes of the 21st century*” [1, p. 97-98]. Institute for Critical Thinking at the Montclair State University worked out an original vision of the critical thinking role in such reform as well (see, e.g., [3]).

3. How we should adapt critical thinking?

North-American theoretical results and practical experience in teaching critical thinking create necessary foundations to introduce this academic discipline to the NIS educational systems. Nevertheless, it is impossible to accept this model literally without adaptation to national mental specificity, educational traditions, local situation in the NIS, etc. I would like to discuss here only a few but basic adaptation problems.

It is well known that American mentality is mainly pragmatic while the European one *par excellence* is oriented fundamentally. That is why there is a deep difference in cognitive values. A typical American educator delivers particular problem solving methods, whereas her European counterpart teaches how to find fundamental causes and general rules. Both of these approaches have great outcomes and a lot of practitioners in their own domains.

This important difference determines diversity in both curricula and content of academic disciplines, including disciplines about human thinking. Typically in America we see a critical thinking course as an introductory one for the university freshmen [4], [5]. Course in logic is not so popular, only young philosophers or logicians study this one in depth. In contrary, in Ukraine – as in a European country – we find widespread traditional logic for freshmen. However, as many specialists recognize such sort logic courses are very sophisticated but not appropriate for everyday or professional practices

In the situation described my proposition for the Ukrainian system of education is “to interbreed” basic university course in logic and course in critical thinking. As a result, we should get at least two principal “descendants”: *logic with elements of critical thinking* and *critical thinking on base of logic*. The first course seems more suitable for university freshmen. It should be a relatively plain version for prospective specialist, practically oriented depending on their professional specialization. Elementary knowledge and skills in criticism should be formed in frame of this version (see, e.g., [6]). The second course seems relevant for the senior students, especially majored in humanities, social sciences, pedagogic, management, and law. Its objects are to refresh and develop the thinking skills with main accent on criticism. A principal specificity of the course proposed is permanent references to early-accumulated logic knowledge. On this way, we will put training in critical thinking on systematic basis of logical science; *self-improvement in thinking through standards* will be combined with realization of the standards' fundamental nature (see, e.g., [7]). The proposals stated above are not a product of pure speculations. Some relevant practical steps have been taken already in Kharkiv, for instance in the Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs and V. N. Karazin Kharkov National University. This activity was supported and enriched due to my visits to the Bowling Green State University (USA, 1998), Montclair State University (USA, 2005), and Central European University (Hungary, 1996, 2010).

It is possible to conclude that the initial stage of adaptation of critical thinking to the Ukrainian higher education is completed more or less fruitfully (see also [8, p. 479-480]). There is information about attempts to adapt critical thinking in leading Russian and Belorussia universities [9], [10]. However, the process has local character and limited enrollment. It demands further deepening and widening definitely.

4. Next steps of the adaptation

To adapt critical thinking to the Ukrainian educational systems in order to teach democracy and transform national higher education in accordance with the best world standards many important steps are inevitable. These ones are impossible without the national institutions' and specialists' joint efforts. At the same time, we need diverse international cooperation to organize:

- international conference or seminar devoted to a role which critical thinking has in up-to-day world, especially under conditions of complex and long-time post-authoritarian transformations;
- translation to Ukrainian or Russian, publishing and dissemination of the world-wide recognized textbooks, monographs, research papers in critical thinking and its role in democratization (both in “paper” and electronic form);
- an international (virtual) research and pedagogic center in critical thinking in Ukraine.

Such sort activity should produce good impact to raise democracy in our country. In the end, the cooperation should be fruitful for all partners from NIS, Europe and North America.

5. Conclusion

Adaptation of critical thinking to the Ukrainian system of education is necessary because of different factors including necessity to change mentality of Ukrainian people, especially young, in accordance with basic democratic values and norms. This great task should be solved, among other things, by means of “interbreeding” of course in critical thinking typical in North America with typical in Ukrainian universities basic course in logic. As a result, we should get at least two principal “descendants”: logic with elements of critical thinking and critical thinking on base of logic. Two decades practice in leading Kharkiv universities verifies that the first course is quite suitable for university freshmen; the second one is relevant for the senior students, especially majored in humanities, social sciences, pedagogic, management and law.

When the initial stage of adaptation of critical thinking to the Ukrainian higher education is completed more or less fruitfully, the process has local character and limited enrollment. It demands further deepening and widening including diverse international cooperation.

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