

## Notes For A Renewal Of Criticism In Social Work: The Poetic Turn

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### Abstract:

The article addresses the need to renew and expand the meaning attributed to critique within the field of social work. It argues that it is imperative to broaden the interpretations of critique in the evolution of social work to embrace alternative ways of understanding the critical, aiming to elevate the poetic dimension of human dwelling in the world. The article asserts that critique, when it evolves into a poetic form, enables a deeper understanding of the subjects' experiences, addressing aspects that transcend the rigor of method and concept. In this sense, the role of social work is questioned in relation to the complexities inherent in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Social work, critique, poetics, epistemology, comprehension

### INTRODUCTION

The article is about of the a matter related to the need to renew and broaden the meaning attributed to criticism in the field of social work. In a global context characterized by accelerated and profound transformations in the social, political, cultural and economic spheres (Rosa, 2016), it is essential to approach the issue of criticism by admitting new possibilities of interpretation. In this sense, the article brings into play the possibility of broadening the meaning of "criticism" to think of it as *Poetic display*. This new conception of criticism focuses its efforts, on the one hand, on the understanding of the experiences of the subjects and, on the other, on the ways in which the subject settles in the world; efforts of understanding that are situated outside the attempts of objectification and reduction of a specific type of rationality: scientific-technical.

The term "renewal" comes from Latin *renovatio* which means: to restore, modernize or change an invalid thing for a new one. Appealing to the need for renewal implies taking for granted that the *Status quo* A matter of something requires a substantial modification by virtue of the finding that its possibilities have been exhausted. In the academic field —of the sciences in general— From time to time, reference is made to the need to renew the theoretical, conceptual and methodological presuppositions of a discipline or set of

disciplines, since discursive structures and paradigms<sup>1</sup> on which it is supported have lost their explanatory capacity (Kuhn, 1996). It is true that some of these processes of renewal have caused real schisms in the ways of understanding reality. See, by way of example, the crisis arising from the introduction of the heliocentric theory in the *Corpus* conceptual of astronomical studies in the mid-sixteenth century; theory expounded by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) in his work *Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* of 1543.

What Copernicus suggested (2009) radically transformed what until then had been conceived as *Canon* Regarding the structure of the universe: the model *Aristotelian–Ptolemaic*. The model described by Aristotle, and later specified by the Hellenistic astronomer Ptolemy, was based on the premise that the Earth occupied the central place in the *Kosmos* and that the other celestial bodies revolved around it in circular orbits —Geocentric model— (Nieto, 2019). This particular vision of the universe also influenced the construction of a self-referential image, in which the human being was conceived as the very center of creation (Koyré, 1979); an image that shaped, to a large extent, the social, cultural, political and economic structures of Europe from the second century BC. to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D. In this context, Copernicus bursts in affirming that it is not the Earth, but the Sun, the true center of the *Kosmos*. Consequently, it is the other celestial bodies, including the Earth itself, that orbit around it —heliocentric model— (Nieto, 2019). The approaches of the Renaissance polymath, later demonstrated by astronomers such as Galileo Galilei (1564 –1642) or Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), not only renewed the *Corpus* theoretical about the laws that explained the universe, but had a decisive impact on the reconfiguration of the self-referential image of the human being in his relationship with the world (Villoro, 2010). Which means that if the Earth is no longer the center of the *Kosmos*, the human being loses his position of privilege in a universe that is now presumed to be infinite; and if the thesis that affirms that the universe is infinite, as Giordano Bruno maintained, is taken for granted, the idea of "center" ceases to be valid (Shapin, 2018).

The table below summarizes the transition between the different conceptual models that explain the structure of *the Kosmos*

**Table I Conceptual Models Explaining the Structure of the Cosmos**

Key Concept	Description	Impact
<b>Geocentric Model</b>	The earth as the center of the universe according to the approaches of Aristotle and Ptolemy.	The human being is considered the center of all creation; it is the foundation of social and cultural structures until the fifteenth century.
<b>Heliocentric theory</b>	In 1543 Copernicus proposed the sun as the center of the universe.	Onto-epistemological rupture with respect to the relationship of the human being with the world. Copernicus' ideas became the basis of modern astronomy.

<sup>1</sup> We borrow here the concept of paradigm introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996). In that text, Kuhn argues that a paradigm represents a set of practices, concepts, values, and techniques shared by a scientific community that defines a field of study in a specific period. A paradigm provides an accepted model of how science should be done in a particular area, guiding research and interpretation of data.

<b>Crisis of Centrality</b>	Displacement of the earth and the human being from the center of the universe.	Idea of the infinite universe; loss of human privilege; onto-existential crisis.
<b>Emerging Modernity</b>	Reconfiguration of conceptions of the cosmos and the human position in the world.	Cultural, philosophical and epistemological transformation towards a new horizon of thought.

Source: Own elaboration

Thus, the paradigm shift in reference to the conception of the universe and the *no-Venue* that the human being occupies in it, provoked an onto-existential crisis that led Europe in the sixteenth, seventeenth and subsequent centuries, to go through a period of profound transformations that would converge in what is called modernity (Blumenberg, 1981). In effect, Copernicus renewed the astronomical theories of his time. In other words, he put something new in place of something else and, with it, radically changed the conception of the universe and the position of the human being in it.

The intention to renew in the academic-intellectual field presupposes the need to set objectives in order to overcome the theoretical-conceptual limits of a discipline or a broad field of knowledge; a matter that, on occasions, manages to transcend purely theoretical aspects to influence questions of an existential nature, as evidenced in the example of the so-called "Copernican turn". In this sense, we ask ourselves, in reference to social work: 1) From what criteria are the limits of what must be renewed defined? 2) What is it that is specifically intended to be renewed? and 3) What would be the possible scope of this enterprise? With regard to the definition of criteria by virtue of which the limits of what can be subject to renewal are set, a historicist perspective of the profession-discipline is at stake<sup>2</sup>; a perspective that allows us to understand the place of social work in the networks of meaning and meaning that guide praxis contemporary ethical-political. With regard to what is intended to be renewed, it is advisable to carry out a thorough examination that sheds light on the current state of social work in terms of its ontological, theoretical and methodological foundations. Finally, in relation to the scope of the renewal process, it is necessary to take into account the varied scenario of currents of thought and action that currently cross the professional and disciplinary field; a subject that is not minor since there is no single way of conceiving social work<sup>3</sup>. The three issues referred to require a rigorous assessment if we want to sufficiently account for what the company implies in renewing social work.

In what follows, some brief reflections will be outlined on question number two: What is intended to be renewed in social work? To this end, we will try to make the following premises credible: 1) social work is a *situated* practice in which the onto-epistemological foundations that shaped Western culture converge. In particular, we will show how the process of configuring social work as a field of knowledge was directly linked to the concretization of modernity in its positivist sense; 2) To answer the question, a path will

<sup>2</sup> We welcome here the concept *profession-discipline* in the terms in which it was briefly outlined in the recently published text: *Guidelines for Social Work Training* published by the National Council for the Teaching of Social Work CONETS on (2022). It makes it clear that the debate around the consideration of social work as a profession or discipline has not yet been settled. However, the conjunction of both terms attempts to position itself as an alternative that includes the main arguments in favor of one and the other.

<sup>3</sup> Discursive univocity in relation to social work is not only not possible, but it is not, nor has it been, one of its aspirations.

be explored that allows us to get out of the confinement to which the *instrumentalization* of the profession-discipline led; a matter that is typical of a modern conception of itself. The need to renew the traditional meaning attributed to criticism will also be highlighted. The above with the aim of risking the poetic as a possibility of being of social work.

### **Positivist onto-epistemology and *praxis* in social work**

The debate around onto-epistemological paradigms and theoretical-methodological approaches in social work represents one of the most relevant topics today (Cifuentes Patiño, 2009). These discussions focus, on the one hand, on the way in which the *Praxis* of social workers in relation to the contexts in which their professional work is played; and, on the other hand, in the epistemological and methodological frameworks in which it supports its action. From the above, it can be deduced that social work is a field in permanent dispute, since its theoretical-methodological referents, as well as the various scenarios in which it is deployed, are subject to constant critical revision (Zurita, 2012).

Over the last few decades, social work has made efforts to rethink the onto-epistemological and theoretical-methodological canons on which its work is based. *Praxis* (Payne, 2002). These efforts have aimed to examine the different ways in which the profession-discipline acts on the social, economic, cultural and political realities in which it is inscribed. In this way, it is feasible to assert that social work can be understood as a socio-historical concretion together with the discourses of each era<sup>4</sup>.

The self-understanding of social work as a situated *praxis* in which discourses, imaginaries and signifiers converge, admits the question of the configuration of the meanings attributed to professional *praxis* in relation to its structuring foundations and the scope and limits of its concrete action with subjects and human groups. In other words, social work rethinks itself as a scenario of tension between, on the one hand, the discourses that guide its *praxis*, and, on the other hand, the realities on which it intervenes. It is in the midst of this tension that debates unfold regarding issues such as identity, the construction of a disciplinary field of its own or the ethical-political project. Therefore, the permanent and thorough revision of the foundations that cement social work allows us to question its place as a discursive field deployed in a specific spatial-temporal horizon. Thus, the question of place entangles the need to highlight the symbolic, political, social, cultural and, ultimately, ontological frameworks from which social work understands itself.

The form of self-understanding of social work as a situated practice extends into a shared horizon of meanings that precedes and determines it. We borrow here Gadamer's approaches (2017) with respect to the circle of understanding to show how every action, and in a broader sense, the life experience of the subjects, is determined by their belonging to a tradition. If Gadamer's suggestion is accepted, we can affirm that any action referring to the —and from the— Social work is contained in a way of being that enables it and gives it meaning. In other words, the acting-doing of social work is pre-fixed by a way of being that orients it and gives it a place. If the above is admitted, it would be convenient to ask, then, about the constituent elements on which its particular onto-episteme gravitates.

Social work is a *Praxis* modern. Its origin, documented and debated extensively (Malagón Bello, 2001), is imbricated in the logic of the processes of configuration of the modern-

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<sup>4</sup> In accordance with Foucault's suggestion (2002), the concept of discourse describes a set of statements, practices, and representations that not only structure knowledge, but also constitute power relations within a society. For Foucault, discourse is not simply a set of words, but a system of practices that defines what is considered true, possible, and legitimate.

enlightened project of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the *Praxis* of social work, and of the social sciences in general, was directly linked to the realization of modernity as a cultural project. The fact that the profession-discipline is a *Praxis* linked to the genesis and subsequent development and consolidation of modernity, highlights the need to question its founding elements in relation to the ontological substratum that prefigures its specific way of being. Briefly, the historical realization of social work is based on an ontology that contains it and gives it shape. That ontology is the *Positivism*. Here, positivism is not limited to the meaning that circumscribes it to the realm of the paradigmatic or the methodological. On the contrary, he represents, following Janke (1988), an ontology, a constitutive way of being that is consubstantial to Western culture. To show the validity of this assertion, we will describe, in what follows, some of the elements that are at the base of the tradition of thought in the West and that would find their highest point in the affirmation of scientific positivism as a distinctive feature of the modern cultural project; In addition, the way in which social work understands itself as *Praxis* deployed in the processes of configuration of the mode of being of modernity. Modernity is conceived as an experience of radicalization of a certain form of *being-in-the-world*. The subject, following the argument proposed by Heidegger in his work *Forest paths* (2010), assumes itself in its condition as an entity for which knowledge of the world is possible; The object —world— it is assumed in its condition of openness. In line with Janke's suggestion (1988), modernity as a civilizational project led to what the author describes as "impoverishment of the world"; that is: the consideration of the world as an entity, as a thing. Such consideration reached one of its highest points in the approaches of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857) and his theory of the three stages (Comte, 2009).

**Table 2. Comte's theory of the three stages**

Stadiums	Description	Impact
<b>Theological or religious</b>	Reality is explained by supernatural or divine causes. Religious and mythological thought predominates.	The supernatural was the explanation for every phenomenon of nature.
<b>Metaphysician</b>	Supernatural explanations are replaced by philosophical abstractions and essential concepts (such as "nature" or "essence").	It derives from the first state God, the divine being who creates and directs the world.
<b>Positive Science</b>	Speculation is abandoned and knowledge is sought through empirical observation and the scientific method. It is the most developed	The experimental method is valid for all explanations.

<sup>5</sup> On this issue, see the contributions of Antonio Gutiérrez Resa, *Origins and development of Social Work* (2010); and the developments of Manuel Gil Parejo and Henar Pizarro Llorente in *The history of social work through its literature* (2006).

	stage according to Comte.	
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Source: Own elaboration

The characteristic of this theory lies in the teleological conception that the author attributes to the development and evolution of human thought. According to Comte, the theological stage would be overcome by metaphysical thought and this, in turn, would give way to positivism (Silva, 2017). In this order, Comte warns of the arrival of an era in which scientific knowledge is privileged over apparent propositions. "Our age, that of victorious positivism [...] it has the property of being an epoch of the world without metaphysics" (Janke, 1988, p. 27). In line with the above, Janke wonders if "it is not that the increasingly colossal clarification of the world disfigures human inhabitation of the world?" (Janke, 1988, p. 29). The clarification of the world is given by its legibility and openness to thought. "The true world is the correlate of positive science" (1988, p. 33). In fact, it is the human being, in his condition as a subject, who appropriates the world—now considered only as an entity—through the use of reason. The world becomes a knowable object.

As can be seen, positivism does not represent only a paradigm or a methodology among others, devoted to the production of a certain type of knowledge. On the contrary, positivism is at the base of the modes of self-understanding of the human being. Therefore, if we accept Janke's suggestion regarding the conception of positivism as an ontology, we can take it for granted that this ontology disposes *the vision of the world* and the experience of the subject. The above can be assimilated, without too many reservations, to what concerns the processes of configuration of the social sciences in general, and of social work in particular. However, the influence of positivism in social work is not only reduced to the fact that it serves as a reference in the design of methodologies for working with groups and subjects. That is to say, positivism is not limited to being a methodological perspective of social work, among others, oriented to the analysis and intervention on reality, but constitutes the ontological substrate that determines it.

### **Social Work and the Critical Tradition**

Critical reflections and questioning of the positivist legacy that underlies the construction of referential frameworks and methodologies for intervention in the field of social work are not a novelty in the academic developments of social work. For example, these questions were already at the core of the discussions promoted by the Reconceptualization Movement in the 1960s in Latin America (Vivero-Arriagada, 2020). This Movement, promoted by schools and social work collectives, took on the task of reviewing and problematizing the epistemological and methodological foundations that shaped the discipline from its origins, questioning its dependence on positivist perspectives and opening the way to new ways of conceiving intervention in social reality. This is stated by Grassi, quoted by Alayón and Molina, when she states that "with the Reconceptualization Movement, social workers [...] assumed for themselves—in the most active way throughout its history—the task of conceptualizing both the object of their intervention and its practice" (2004, p. 32). The theoretical and methodological frameworks inherited from European and North American academic traditions were subjected to an exhaustive questioning, the objective of which was, on the one hand, to highlight the lack of situated theoretical production capable of addressing in depth the complexities of local realities; and, on the other hand, to highlight the need to develop ways of thinking and *Praxis* that arose from the historical subjects themselves, marked by a common experience. This intellectual enterprise sought not only to overcome the limitations of approaches and perspectives foreign to the sociocultural particularities of Latin America, but also to



vindicate the capacity for agency and self-reflection of social actors in the generation of knowledge and transformative action.

Among some of the results of the reconceptualization period, the following stand out, as Guevara maintains, *et al* (2022), the adoption of critical theory as an approach to understanding the forms of knowledge production and the *Praxis* professional in a context marked by the expansion of the capitalist model. It is important to note that the conception of the critical was clearly rooted in Marxist theory (Montaño, 2019). In this sense, a good part of the discussions within social work and the social sciences of the time adopted the proposals of the German thinker to carry out an exhaustive review of the negative effects caused by the social and economic policies anchored to the developmentalist doctrine imposed in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century (Siqueira, 2021); doctrine that materialized in the so-called *Alliance for Progress*<sup>6</sup> (Luque, 2004).

It is worth mentioning that the period of theoretical and methodological revision originating within social work itself was intertwined with the emergence of diverse voices from different social sectors, which promoted a call to action to question the social and economic policies that relegated Latin American countries to a peripheral position vis-à-vis the countries of the industrialized center (Joven, 2007). For this reason, in addition to the questions and questioning about the epistemological and theoretical foundations of social work, issues such as economic marginalization, poverty, inequality, among others, were added; which led, ultimately, to raise the need to think of a social work aimed at intervening directly in the problems that were pressing in the continent. In addition to the above, the process of reflection and critique on the epistemic and discursive foundations resulted, as has been shown so far, in a strong critique of the dominant influence of the positivist matrix in the design of theoretical and methodological frameworks. It was quickly noticed that a distinctive feature of the *Praxis* of social work was, precisely, the particular relationship between the professional (subject) and his environment (object), defined by an asymmetrical link based on power and authority, concentrated in the figure of the professional (Netto, 1992).

What has been stated so far allows us to assert that the *modern ethos* has had a determining weight in the ways in which social work is carried out. A good part of the epistemological frameworks on which he bases his work are still anchored to a peculiar way of conceiving the relationship between human beings and the world; a relationship in which the idea of apprehension and control of entities by means of instrumental rationality is privileged. Along these lines, it is necessary to explore the evolution of criticism in some of the authors and currents that have dealt with the concept, highlighting its relevance and the interpretative plasticity inherent in its very essence.

### **Critique of criticism. Brief Archaeology of the Concept**

The critical tradition in Latin American social work constitutes, even today, a reference point in terms of discussions that try to link professional work with a *Praxis* devoted to the transformation of the conditions of exploitation, exclusion and structural inequality that characterize late capitalism as a mode of social organization (Valencia, 2015). It is on this line of thought that criticism has focused its theoretical and practical efforts; efforts that have contributed significantly to maintaining a permanent dialogue —inwards— in correspondence with the characteristic events of the time. However, if we admit the need to renew social work in its structuring aspects —epistemologically, theoretical, and

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<sup>6</sup> The *Alliance for Progress* was a cooperation program promoted by the United States government in 1961, during the administration of John F. Kennedy. Its purpose was to stimulate economic, social, and political development in Latin America in order to confront the influence of the Cuban Revolution and prevent the spread of communism in the region.

methodologically—, it is pertinent to explore the limits of what is understood by criticism. What does the term criticism [*Krísis*] in the contemporary context? Who is the critical subject and how is it formed? *Krítikos*] of this time?

The term criticism has accompanied the developments of Western thought since its origins. Already in Aristotle we can find a meaning of the term understood as the capacity for discernment, distinction [*Krínein*], especially of books and authors (Leal Carretero, 2003). For Aristotle, criticism does not only imply an external evaluation, but an intellectual operation that allows us to differentiate the true from the false, the valid from the invalid, within the framework of a rational inquiry into the world (Aristotle, 2022).

Although it is possible to identify the antecedents of criticism in the philosophical reflections of antiquity, it was only until the consolidation of modernity as a cultural project that the concept acquired a broader meaning (Ávila-Fuenmayor, 2010), which is evidenced, for example, in the works of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Karl Marx (1818–1883). Both authors, with notable differences in the intentionality of their theses, argued in favor of criticism as a *Methods*.

On the one hand, Kant expanded the classical concept of criticism to make it the core of his philosophy. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (2013) Kant redefines criticism not only as an evaluation of existing knowledge, but as a fundamental "tool" for exploring the capacities and limits of reason itself. The philosopher establishes that reason must be subjected to a rigorous and systematic examination that allows it to recognize both its legitimate scope and its intrinsic limits. In addition to the above, criticism, in the sense projected by the philosopher from Königsberg, does not consist of a mere external evaluation of theories or doctrines; on the contrary, criticism is a reflexive exercise that seeks to understand the conditions of possibility of knowledge *a priori* and determine the powers that make it possible (Beade, 2014). For Kant, this critical work implies distinguishing between the empirical and the transcendental use of reason, recognizing that valid knowledge arises from the synthesis between sensibility, understanding, and the pure categories of thought. In this way, the critique of reason does not intend to invalidate knowledge, but to establish the epistemological foundation that delimits what can be legitimately known from that which exceeds human capacities, as is the case with the ideas of God, the soul and the world in its entirety (Chaves, 1990).

On the other hand, Marx, in Montaña's interpretation (2019), conceived criticism as a "weapon", as a tool for social transformation. For Marx, critique is not a simple intellectual exercise, but a practical instrument for understanding the power relations, economic structures and social dynamics characteristic of capitalist society. In this way, the Marxist critique is based on a materialist analysis of history focused on unraveling the internal contradictions that are inherent in the model of capital (Sartelli, 2007).

The Marxist theory of criticism found a new development in the twentieth century with the thinkers of the so-called Frankfurt School. While Marx proposed critique as a tool to unveil the relations of exploitation and alienation inherent in the capitalist mode of production, the Frankfurt theorists, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and later Jürgen Habermas, expanded this conception by analyzing the cultural, ideological and communicative dimensions that perpetuate the dynamics of domination in contemporary societies.

Horkheimer and Adorno, in their essay *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (2016), reformulated the Marxist concept of critique, arguing that a truly critical theory must not only interpret reality, but also transform it—in a clear allusion to Marx— by unraveling the social conditions that generate inequality and oppression. For his part, Marcuse highlighted the role of the culture industry and technological rationality, pointing out how these instances



contribute to the reproduction of the social order by numbing the emancipatory potential of the so-called subaltern classes.

The theoretical deployment carried out by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, kept alive the Marxist premise that criticism must be oriented to the *Praxis*. But he introduced new analytical categories, such as culture, subjectivity and communicative rationality, which Jürgen Habermas would address in his theory of communicative action. Habermas, in critically reformulating the postulates of the Frankfurt School, places the core of criticism in the communicative conditions that allow the construction of the social order. In *Theory of communicative action* (2003), argues that modern rationality has been reduced to its instrumental dimension, which has led to the colonization of the world of life by the economic and administrative systems. To counteract this distortion, it sustains a communicative rationality based on understanding-oriented intersubjective dialogue, where claims to validity—truthfulness, truthfulness, and normative correctness—are the basis of social interactions. In this way, the critique not only analyzes the material structures, but also the discursive dynamics that hinder a democratic and participatory public sphere. As can be seen, the Frankfurt School broadened the Marxist critical horizon, adapting it to the complexities of industrialized societies and the emergence of new, more subtle, but equally effective, forms of social control (Wiggershaus, 2009).

Although it is recognizable that criticism has occupied an important place in the philosophical developments of modernity, especially in the twentieth century, it is important to recognize a precedent that cannot be ignored in relation to the critique of positivism. This antecedent is found in the European Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Through the exaltation of subjectivity, emotion and individual freedom, Romanticism opposed positivist mechanism, challenging the conception of reason as an exclusive instrument of domination over nature (Berlin, 2015). The Romantics deeply questioned the reduction of the human to a purely measurable and scientific reality, advocating, instead, a more complex and multidimensional view of existence. In this sense, Romanticism was not only presented as an aesthetic reaction to the rigidity of Enlightenment reason, but also as a profound philosophical stance that appealed to a revaluation of human experience in its entirety.

Romanticism is, following Safranski, (2018), not just a nineteenth-century artistic or literary movement, but a vital attitude and worldview. In short, Romanticism represents a prototype of the critique made of the radicalization of the technical and scientific perspective that tried to impose itself as a privileged way of understanding natural phenomena and all the dimensions of human life. In what follows, we propose to present in a succinct way the most relevant approaches of some of the most important thinkers linked to romanticism in order to illustrate the forcefulness and depth of their critique. Through the exploration of the ideas of representative figures of the Romantic movement, we will try to show how, from a philosophical and poetic perspective, the relationships between reason, emotion, nature and freedom were reconsidered, proposing alternatives to the mechanistic and utilitarian dominance of positivist thought.

### **The poetic turn**

*Why poets in times of misery?* It was the question that at the beginning of the nineteenth century corroded the thinking of the man who was, perhaps, along with Novalis and Schelling, the most outstanding German poet of the time: Friedrich Hölderlin. The question contains, at the same time, a halo of disenchantment and fury, of uneasiness and frustration. It stands as a lament in the face of the triumphant becoming of the *Logos* as a technique. For Hölderlin, this fact constituted what he called *The misery of the world*: a world that is understood only from its material, measurable and quantifiable properties. It is, therefore, the triumph of the scientific-technical rationality affirmed in the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, which subsumed the world in the eternal night of thought (Hölderlin, 1995). What place does the poet have now in a time governed by technology and science? Hölderlin's lament well knew how to capture the tragedy of his time: the imposition of technical rationality as the only way of relating to being. His epoch is the epoch of the world that became machinery, instrument, resource. It is the time of the *Twilight of the Gods*, who have had no choice but to flee, to seek refuge above the heads of men (Hölderlin, 2022).

The architecture of the question formulated by Hölderlin two centuries ago has not lost an iota of strength. His complaint against the rationalization and instrumentalization of the world entails a relevance that cannot be denied to him. Who, then, are the poets of this time? What characterizes *misery* in the contemporary context? In the first place, the term *poet has to* do here with a novel, disruptive disposition that questions the networks of meaning and sense that populate the discourses of oppression and deception. The poet is the one who tries to bring to light what has been deliberately veiled, hidden behind the splendor and cheers of technology and science. The poet is, therefore, the one who "unties the chains, and yields a new thought to the world". But what kind of thinking? One that dwells at the limits of what can still be thought. Secondly, The term "misery" exposes a state of affairs in which evidence is collected of a time marked by the objectification and radical reduction of all human experience to an accumulation of statements demonstrable through technical-instrumental reason. Poetry and misery. Both terms circulated strongly in short stories, essays and poetic anthologies that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, sought to evidence the decline of the poetic link of the human being with the world, in favor of the "distinction" and "clarity" provided by the scientific method and knowledge.

In addition to the approaches of Hölderlin, Novalis and Schelling, they evidenced in their poetic work the limitations inherent in positivism. Novalis, in his *Hymns to the night* (2009), deployed an incisive critique of the scientific reductionism of his time, suggesting that poetry and imagination should not be seen solely as art forms, but as privileged means of accessing a deeper and more transcendental dimension of existence. Poetry, in Novalis's opinion, was erected as the way by which the individual can reconnect with the totality of the being —The one<sup>7</sup>— and the symbolic dimension of the world, offering an alternative to the cold objectivity of science. This is shown in a short poem entitled *When formulas and figures are not* (2017)

When figures and formulas are not  
already the key to all creatures,  
when those who kiss, those who sing,  
know more than the most learned sages,  
When the world recovers  
freedom and the world again,  
when then again light and shadow  
are founded on a certain clarity  
and stories and poems be looked at  
as eternal stories of the earth,  
It will be enough to say the secret word  
and this upside-down world will vanish.

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<sup>7</sup> In the poetry of German Romanticism, "the one" refers to the transcendental unity of reality, a philosophical conception that seeks harmony between the human being, nature and the cosmos, dissolving the divisions between subject and object, and understanding poetry as a means to experience that totality.

For his part, Schelling, in his *Philosophy of Nature* (1999), not only distanced itself from the mechanistic approach of positivism, but reconfigured the relationship between the subject and nature. In his view, nature is not simply an object of study to be reduced to physical laws, but a dynamic and organic process that had to be understood through philosophical intuition and poetic creativity. Poetry, in Schelling's thought, constitutes a form of knowledge that, by integrating the rational with the intuitive, allows the human being to perceive the unity of the human being. *Kosmos* and to overcome the fragmentation imposed by the reductive scientific vision. In short, both Novalis and Schelling, like Hölderlin, showed through their works the inadequacy of a purely scientific vision of reality and defended poetry as a form of superior knowledge, capable of offering a deeper, more integral and transcendental experience of the world. Through verses, literary and philosophical elaborations, an attempt was made to unveil the vicissitudes of the transition between two antagonistic ways of conceiving the human being and the relationship that he establishes with his environment.

The nineteenth century is the period in which logos, in its technical-scientific connotation, makes its way in an overwhelming and devastating way. However, this period is also the time in which the critique of the longings for totality collides, as in Caspar's painting *David Friedrich*, with a *Sea of Ice* [*Die gescheiterte Hoffnung*]; In the work of the German painter, the situation of vulnerability and fragility of the human intellect is projected, which was thrown into the sea without the slightest precaution. The frozen sea, immense and icy, is a representation of a *kosmos* indifferent to the efforts of human reason.

**Figure 1. Sea of Ice by Caspar David Friedrich**



*Das Eismeer* (1824). Caspar David Friedrich. Fuente: Wikimedia Commons

These first criticisms elaborated on the hegemony of positivism as a privileged form of relationship with the world would find in what Nietzsche suggested one of their highest points<sup>8</sup>. Nietzsche confronts the pretension of the *Logos* —understood only as scientific knowledge— of acquiring absolute knowledge, revealing the illusory condition of formal language. It shows how what rationalism calls truth is nothing more than the product of

<sup>8</sup> There is a debate about whether Nietzsche can be considered to belong to the romantic movement of the nineteenth century. Although he shares with the Romantics the criticism of rationalism and the valuation of art and subjectivity, he is differentiated by his rejection of transcendental conceptions and his emphasis on nihilism, affirming life without appeals to the divine or idealized.

the intoxication of thought, drowned in an overwhelming delirium of totality. "In some remote corner of the sparkling universe, scattered in innumerable solar systems, there was once a star in which intelligent animals invented knowledge" (Nietzsche, 2012, p. 21). Here Nietzsche shows the contingency—even chance—with which knowledge is introduced into the world, taking away from reason the halo of transcendence and immanence that has been granted to it in Western culture.

The romantic critique of the process of consolidation of scientific-technical rationality must be understood not as a simple opposition to technical development, but as a profound denunciation of the limits and dangers of a paradigm that privileges instrumental reason over other forms of understanding the world. This questioning arises from an ethical, aesthetic and metaphysical concern: the possibility that scientific and technical progress displaces essential dimensions of human experience, such as the sense of the transcendent and the connection with the natural environment (Berlin, 2015).

The criticism made by philosophers and poets of Romanticism of the process of consolidation of scientific-technical rationality had a decisive influence on the theoretical developments of some of the most relevant thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century, including Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and María Zambrano. Heidegger (2010), for example, warns that technology and science impose a particular perspective on the world, a vision that reduces reality to mere objects that can be manipulated. This limits the understanding of existence and what is meant by humanity. In the same vein, Gadamer (2017) He argues how science and technology tend to reduce human experience to simplified and measurable categories, which results in the loss of the richness and complexity of human life, since experience becomes quantifiable and predictable. For his part, Zambrano (2016) He observes that modernity, by privileging a reason detached from intuition and sensibility, has lost sight of a full understanding of human existence. His concept of "poetic reason" seeks to recover a form of knowledge that integrates reason and emotion, logic and "mystery", in a unity capable of understanding reality in its complexity and depth, thus opening the possibility of a knowledge that embraces both conceptual clarity and revealed truth in the symbolic and the poetic. Next, we will briefly focus on the concept of poetic reason presented by the Spanish thinker, in order to outline some preliminary strokes in relation to the poetic horizon of criticism in social work.

### ***Poetic Reason and Praxis in Social Work***

As we have argued so far, criticism, as a concept and *method*, has taken various forms. However, at its core it is possible to find a rigorous effort to denounce and establish criteria by virtue of which a reflection can be elaborated that highlights, on the one hand, the failure of modernity as an emancipatory project; and, on the other hand, the need to reorient thought towards ways of knowing that recover the ethical, poetic and community dimension of the human being.

The fact that criticism can be included in the horizon of the poetic implies transcending instrumental rationality, seeking a fuller understanding of the human condition that includes the link between individual and collectivity, the integration of reason and affectivity, and an openness to the *transcendent* as the foundation of authentic freedom. Poetic reason alludes to the formation of an existential disposition contrary to the purely analytical and instrumental rationality that characterizes modern thought. In the words of Zambrano, "the method of poetic reason is the method that teaches us to open those clearings or open spaces where the revelation and contemplation of truth takes place" (Zambrano, 2011, p. 89). In this order of ideas, poetic reason is not limited to the merely cognitive, but aims to restore a harmonious relationship between thought and life, revealing dimensions of existence that rationalism has left in the shadows.

By pointing out that criticism – in social work – can be directed towards the horizon of poetic reason, we allude to a profound reorientation in its modes of understanding and *action-in-the-world*. This openness suggests transcending the predominant instrumental and technical rationality, directing criticism towards a form of knowledge that values sensitivity and *experience* as fundamental dimensions for understanding and social transformation. This means that the poetic challenges the limits of technical-instrumental rationality, proposing instead a form of knowledge that includes experience, the symbolic and affectivity as valid sources of understanding and action. Thus, poetic reason not only enriches the scope of criticism, but also redefines the relationship between subject and reality, by suggesting that knowledge must be born from full connection with human experience, rather than being kept on the plane of the merely objective.

For social work, this openness involves a renewed sensitivity to subjectivity and personal history, recognizing that social contexts are spaces woven by unique meanings and experiences that cannot be fully captured through structural analyses. In other words, in the field of social work, poetic reason provides a transformative perspective, by proposing a *praxis* that sees each individual and collective not only as objects of intervention, but as "complete" subjects, possessors of worlds of meaning that must be recognized and understood in depth.

The poetic allows us to integrate emotional, subjective dimensions, which the so-called positivist approaches tend to overlook. In the context of social work, in which human problems are complex and multifaceted, this comprehensive understanding is essential. The poetic approach aims to unveil people's subjective experiences, offering a more comprehensive vision of their experiences and the ways in which they construct their visions of the world. The poetic has to do, then, with the discursive frameworks that support the experiences of the subjects in a temporal horizon that determines them. Therefore, the historical origin of the different conceptions of the world that the subjects project in their stories and experiences of the world is assumed from the outset. From this point of view, the poetic does not only represent a method of intervention since its intention is not aimed at the mere description and objectification of the subjects, but, on the contrary, it raises, in the event of the word, the need to understand and interpret the frameworks of action in which the practices are inscribed. discourses and experiences of human beings. In other words, the poetic, in relation to the *praxis* of social work, alludes to thinking of professional work as a *hermeneutic of action* in which understanding is played out as a constitutive condition of all experience. Consequently, the poetic allows the assumption of *professional praxis* in social work from a place that is neither totalizing nor exclusively mediated by the ideals of objectivism and universalism; consequently, the poetic highlights not only the need, but the urgency of understanding the subjects in the ways in which they understand themselves through their stories and stories. beyond the merely rational pretensions founded on the positivist paradigm.

Ultimately, poetic reason, as the horizon of critique in social work, facilitates a *praxis* that is not restricted to "solving" problems or meeting immediate needs; instead, it aims at a profound transformation that recognizes the complexity of the human experience, promoting authentic relationships and meaningful understanding that enriches both the social worker and the people and communities with whom he or she interacts. Thus, social work finds in poetic reason a horizon from which to cultivate an ethic of understanding, compassion and respect for the *mystery* of the human condition, which makes it possible for social criticism and action to be oriented towards a form of emancipation that encompasses not only the structural, but also the structural. but the profoundly human.

## CONCLUSION

To answer the question of what needs to be renewed in social work, it was necessary, first, to show how positivist ontology has prefigured a way of being distinctive from the Western tradition. This tradition ennoble the point of view according to which it is possible to account for everything that exists from the configuration of a rationality that is situated at the basis of positivism: instrumental rationality. This form of rationality shapes the experience of subjects and their *acting-in-the-world*. It was also shown how positivist ontology serves as a substrate for the production of referential and methodological frameworks in the field of social work; an issue that strongly permeates the way in which social work understands itself. This required a critique of criticism, of what has been understood by that term and the variations to which it has been subjected over time. Along these lines, it was argued that the very fact that criticism has mutated and acquired different connotations and scopes according to the intentionality of those who have dealt with it, is irrefutable evidence of the condition of plasticity that is intrinsic to its way of being. In other words, criticism has been able to adjust to the requirements that the constant transformation of the social world demands of it, since at its core persists, regardless of the use that is given to it, its revealing capacity.

Finally, it is suggested to welcome criticism as a poetic display in social work. A matter that implies taking on the task of thinking rigorously not only about matters related to referential or methodological frameworks for professional action, but also opening up to the possibility of understanding human realities from non-totalizing perspectives of human experience in the world. Thus, the poetic not only enriches the understanding and practice of social work, but also fosters a more human *praxis*, which is truly aligned with the complexities of human experience. The evolution of criticism as poetics in social work can constitute a profound transformation in how the pressing social issues of this era are conceived and addressed.

### Statements

#### Bioethical Criterion

This article supports universal principles such as decency, truthfulness and honesty, fundamental characteristics as professionals in the human and social sciences, and meets the criteria of the disciplinary field.

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