

# Crítica y ciencias sociales

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[Critique and Social Sciences]

PENSAMIENTO CRÍTICO EN COLOMBIA

## Resumen

El presente texto analiza la relación entre la crítica y las ciencias sociales a partir de la racionalidad ilustrada planteada por Kant que limita y legitima el conocimiento científico, pasando por el juicio racional de segundo grado que cuestiona los saberes prácticos de quienes participan directamente en los fenómenos sociales objeto de estudio y por las teorías y análisis realizados a partir de la experiencia de los dominados, oprimidos y explotados, hasta llegar a la crítica que tiene como fundamento el saber y la vida de los otros, la otredad epistemológica.

*Palabras clave:* crítica, ciencias sociales, hermenéutica, feminismo, marxismo y postcolonialidad.

## Summary

This text analyzes the relationship between critique and social sciences from the starting point of enlightened rationality proposed by Kant that limits and legitimates scientific knowledge, passing through second order rational judgment that questions the practical knowledge of those who directly participate in the social phenomena that are the object of study, and through the theories and analyses performed starting from the experience of the dominated, oppressed and exploited, until arriving at the critique whose basis is the knowledge and the life of others, epistemological otherness.

*Key words:* critique, social sciences, hermeneutics, feminism, Marxism, poscoloniality.

## Introduction

Since the structuring of social sciences as a distinct area of knowledge that attempts to describe, understand and rationally explain social life, critique has fulfilled the role of establishing its limits and possibilities; it has demarcated the boundaries of sense, always varying, that separate them from other forms of learning. Social sciences even acquire their own identity by distancing themselves critically from the knowledge areas of the subjects that participate in the phenomena being studied, and the value judgments that these subjects must necessarily make in their intersubjective relationships. Nevertheless, from Marx's epistemological proposal, critique begins from an external look at social sciences, and not from its own rationality. The environment of difference begins to transgress its boundaries, taking as a starting point the experience of domination, subjection or exploitation of those who are the object of the knowledge. The place of the others also becomes the place of critique. The emancipation of those who are materially and concretely unable to access the rationality promised by science becomes the aim of the critique itself. The limits and the objective of social sciences attempt to be redefined according to intersubjective self-realization, in virtue of the possibilities offered by reason with aspirations of universality. Critique ceases to be simply internal and innate in social sciences and is assumed as a qualifying adjective that denotes the place and evaluative position from which scientific knowledge is built. It adds its social disposition to the rational nature of science. But the Other, the alternate, is not just a place, but rather a way of describing, understanding, explaining and interpreting the social world from rationalities that in the midst of power relations, in which sciences are also immersed, have been made invisible or hidden. When these forms emerge, critique mutates, without losing its previous characteristics, into a permanent questioning of science as a manifestation of power-knowledge, while at the same time the perspective grows from radically changing its limits and possibilities, transforming the rationality that sustains it. The theories related to the relationship between critique and social sciences, from self-reference to alter-reference, constitute the contents of this essay.

## Self-referential critique

Social sciences, like all sciences, have been based on a critical pretension since the Enlightenment. According to this pretension, concepts, hypotheses, explanations, understandings or scientific methods are, due to their own nature, temporary and relative, or absolute only with respect to

the temporality in which they are validated by the scientific community, or at least by the communities that are dominant within the social field of science, in conformance with the parameters established by reason.

Michel Foucault reminds us that Kant (2004), upon defining the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) as the coming of age in which humanity makes use of its own reason without submitting itself to any authority, highlights the necessity of critique to “define the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate to determine what can be known, what should be done and what can be expected.” (Foucault, 2003:79). Consequently, at first instance, critique allows social sciences to elaborate the objective and temporary reference points of its internal legitimacy, founded on a rationality that in turn is the result of the philosophical critique of reason.

The rational judgment of the epistemological validity of a determined area of knowledge that characterizes this critical pretension allows the distinction between scientific and non-scientific learning while at the same time permitting the definition of science as a system open to its own transformation. As a result, the traditional differentiation of social sciences with respect to religion and ideology is made starting from this critical pretension and the historical criteria that support it, such as logical and analytical coherence, empirical falsifiability, interpretative rigor or explanatory precision.

Religion and ideology with respect to science are generally considered to be forms of knowledge that are presented as timeless and absolute and, in consequence, as resistant to change, as they are articulated around a closed and circular dogma that justifies itself in virtue of its own form and content. Bertrand Russell illustrates with clarity and some political naïveté this critical pretension of science and the authority derived from it at the dawn of modernity:

The authority of science, recognized by many philosophers of the modern era, is something very different from the authority of the Church, given that it is intellectual and not governmental. No punishment is given to those who reject it; no argument of prudence influences those who accept it. It prevails only due to its intrinsic appeal to reason. It is, additionally, a fragmented and partial authority; it does not formulate, like Catholic dogma, a complete system that spans human morality, human expectations and the past and future history of the universe. It only speaks as to what, in time, seems to have been scientifically verified; it is a small island in a sea of ignorance. There is yet another difference with respect to ecclesiastical authority; ecclesiastical authority declares that its affirmations are absolutely true and eternally inalterable; scientific ones are made as a trial, on a basis

of probability, and they are considered to be subject to modification. This creates a frame of mind very different from that of the dogmatic medieval. (Russell, 1978:112)

In virtue of this traditional differentiation, dogma in religion appears to be transcendent, derived from a cause that is presented as presocial, while in ideology it arises as imminent, as the result of a *doxa* that reproduces in a vegetative, asexual way, within a closed system of knowledge. The critical pretension in social sciences leans towards self-referential critique, towards the permanent questioning of the validity of a piece of knowledge as scientific and of the criteria to define such validity, due to the temporality and relativity of science; it leans towards the critique of science in the name of science, which lends it its specificity as a form of learning in the ample field of social knowledge. In the words of Fernando Mires:

Recovering the value of the scientific implies performing nothing less than a critique of scientific reason itself, or what that reason has come to be. To formulate the thesis in another way: the time has come to affirm that a science that does not critique itself cannot continue to be science. Because if science concerns itself with “new” things, an undeniable destructive capacity must be recognized in it, and not in the bad sense of the term. A new concept cannot be built without destroying, or at least altering, another older one, in the same way that it is impossible to make an omelet without breaking an egg. In that destructivity, which true scientists perform with certain pleasure, and which today is known by the euphemism of “deconstruction”, there is a radical incompatibility with respect to religious and ideological beliefs. (Mires 2002:99)

Nevertheless, in the power struggle inherent to the scientific field, where diverse epistemological currents socially dispute the control of truth and the institutional capacity to establish the field’s limits of inclusion/exclusion and the knowledge that characterizes it, the sciences drift permanently towards ideologies or towards the dogmatization of the *doxa* that constitute them. This drift is especially marked when the hegemony of the dominant epistemological currents is threatened by the emergence of a new paradigm, in the terms of Kuhn (2000), or of a new research program, in those of Lakatos (1989) or, inversely, when the new paradigm or research program aggressively attempts to impose itself within the scientific field.

This drift towards ideologization, which contemporaneously has been

fundamentally imputed to Marxism and even to Marx, as did Popper (1973 and 1982) in the context of the Cold War, within a clear power strategy conducive to the political loss of legitimacy of the epistemological adversary, may be identified in all scientific currents, from positivism to hermeneutics, from empiricism to rationalism or from individualism to structuralism. Within this tension between critical tendency and ideologization it can be said that a type of knowledge is scientific when it has *self-referential critique* as an epistemological axis and that every social science, in order to be considered as such, must be critical.

### Hetero-referential critique

In the case of social sciences, this *self-referential critique* is accompanied by *hetero-referential critique*, related to the necessary distancing between scientific knowledge and the social phenomena that are attempted to be studied, understood or explained. As highlighted by Dilthey (1986) in his hermeneutic, without abandoning empiricism and positivism, these social phenomena are not simply objective, like those of the natural or exact sciences, but rather they have clear subjective and intersubjective components, within which exist multiple forms of knowledge and interpretation of the same phenomena. The social scientist must distance himself from them, and observe them through a lens that allows him to evaluate first-order knowledge with second-order validation criteria.

The social scientist needs to contribute to the deciphering of the hidden side of social phenomena with respect to those who participate in them or the dimensions that are made invisible in social relations or in societal production. *Hetero-referential critique* implies the subjugation of social phenomena and the immediate knowledge that conforms them to scientific validation criteria, just as Bourdieu understands it for sociology:

It seems to me that the possibilities of contributing to the production of the truth depend on two principal factors, which are related to the occupied position: the interest one has in knowing and making truth known (or inversely, in hiding it and hiding it from oneself) and the capacity one has to produce it. Bachelard's quotation is well known: "There is no science but the science of the hidden". The sociologist is better equipped to discover the hidden when he is scientifically better equipped, when he better uses the capital of concepts, methods, and technique accumulated by his predecessors, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and many others, and when he is more "critical", when the conscious or unconscious intention that drives him is more subversive, when he has more interest in unveiling what is censured or rejected in the social world. If the sociologist—and

social science in general—do not advance faster, it is probably in part because these two factors tend to go in the opposite direction. (Bourdieu, 1984:22-23)

Within social sciences, the practical knowledge of those who participate in the studied phenomena should be subjected to critique, to the rational judgment of the investigator, on its function within the power relations that make up the social framework. In this case, rationality does not play a role of legitimation, as in *self-referential critique*, but rather of revelation; it allows the unraveling of what the subjects of the practical knowledge keep in the dark or are incapable of observing, precisely due to its subjective implication. The absence of *hetero-referential critique* annuls the pertinence to social sciences or, more precisely, to the forms of knowledge that attempt to present themselves clothed as social sciences, as it becomes a simple repetition or synthesis of first-order knowledge of the actors who directly participate in the production of social life.

### **Exo-referential critique**

These two types of epistemological critique, *self-referential* and *hetero-referential*, with differing variables, are generally accepted as constitutive of the contemporary social sciences because, as we have seen, they define their specificity and pertinence. In relation to them, stating that a social science is critical becomes tautological.

The same cannot be said of *exo-referential critique* that is made from a political and ethical position external to scientific knowledge or to the subject/object relationship within social sciences. This type of critique, which originates from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy* and is developed by different generations of the Frankfurt School, recovers its vitality at the beginning of this century, after the epistemological silences caused by the Habermasian turn towards communicative action and language, and by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. Witness of this was given in two works produced in different cultural contexts, that of Axel Honneth that contains his reflections on social pathologies, the society of disdain and the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 1997 and 2006), and the discussion in the pages of *Cuaderno de Herramientas n° 1* of the Argentine magazine *Herramientas*, about an article by Enrique Dussel published in 1999 and titled "Marxism and epistemology: Karl Marx's scientific research program (Functional and critical social science)".

The launching point of *exo-referential critique* is topological and evaluative. It is related to the position from which questions are

formulated for social sciences and topics of scientific research are selected. An author such as Weber (1982), in spite of insisting on axiological neutrality or disengagement (*Wertfreiheit*), highlighted the impossibility of avoiding the axiological reference (*Wertbeziehung*) on the part of the researcher in the first phase of research in social sciences, regarding the place where these are considered. This brings him to assume an evaluative position. Weber tried in vain to make the effects of these references on scientific knowledge relative, considering them to be simply hypothetical and differentiating them from value judgments (*Werturteile*), of a categorical nature. Nevertheless, he could not avoid the fact that every evaluative reference biases the eye of the observer (Lamo de Espinosa et al., 1994:88; Muñoz Torres, 2002:163-164).

But it is in the *Frankfurt School*, particularly based on the Horkheimer approach, as highlighted by Honneth (2006:183), where critical theory is seen as the “intellectual side of the historical process of emancipation”, that is, as a form of knowledge that is supported by a “prescientific experience”, which implies an emancipating interest in the existence of “driving social forces that, in the historical process, tend to critique and overcome established forms of domination” and are directed towards a future political practice (ibídem).

In Dussel’s argument this position and evaluation is remitted to the original negation:

The “negativity” of which we speak, in the first place, is the “cannot-live” of the oppressed, exploited, of the “victims”—to speak as Walter Benjamin or Emmanuel Levinas—(in the text: “the workers”). It is what we have called in other works the “original negation”—especially, in the modern globalization process of capitalism expressed in the misery of the peripheral countries, of Brazil, Mexico and today also Argentina, of Kenya or Nigeria, India or the Philippines. Without considering “negativity” there cannot be *critical* social science. (Dussel, 1999b)

It can be seen that in both cases critique sets off from some actors and an experience external to science. It is thus *exo-referential*, and this can be the proletariat, social movements, the oppressed, the exploited or victims of human rights violations, and from the practical and theoretical interest that they have in their own emancipation.

Nevertheless, the concept of negativity has different implications in the Frankfurt School and in Dussel’s arguments. For the latter, negativity originates in the “cannot-live” of those who are subjected to a domination that ontically denies them and in an ethical judgment that he calls



trans-systemic, that is, made from the critical outside of the capitalist system, and that would form part of a fate of objective ethic:

There is a second sense of “stealing”: b) “Stealing” as a “critical” judgment, not just intra-systemic but rather trans-systemic. It concerns a kind of judgment that is enunciated by a subject who is situated “outside” of the horizon of the world of the capitalist system (just as, for A. Smith, the capitalist for was “outside” of the slavery system, etc.). I call this type of “practical and critical judgment” “ethical” (no longer “moral”, and as I have indicated it has nothing to do with “value judgments”, but rather it sets off from the legislation of empirical judgments on the corporal and living human being from which scientific “explanations” or equally scientific hermeneutical “understandings” can be developed). (Dussel, 2001)

The weakness of this objective ethic is evident, as it ends up being presented as a fate of scientific ethic safe from critique, which also serves as the foundation of a critical science. In this way the circular nature of the argumentation results in darkening the basis of *exo-referential critique*, sending it to a fate of social metaphysics.

In the *Frankfurt School*, as analyzed by Honneth, the reference to the beginnings of social justice is insufficient to form the basis of a critical theory; for this reason, the reflection sends us to “the violation of the conditions of the good life”, derived from a deficit of social rationality that denies the possibilities of intersubjective self-realization<sup>1</sup>. In the same philosophical line of the Hegelian and Marxist left it is considered that the organization of society in capitalism impedes the complete fulfillment of a universal rationality that has been developed by the productive forces of the same society or in the case of Habermas by the communicative consensus. Consequently, the social pathologies from which the *exo-referential critique* is built would settle in the “detours with respect to the ideal to be reached through the fulfillment of rational universality” (Honneth, 2006:104-109). Nevertheless, as Honneth himself notes, in Habermas’ philosophy the rationality that would lead to communicative consensus would only guarantee the conditions for an autonomous self-realization and not the self-realization itself. In other words, within the *Frankfurt School*, the position from which a critical social science is formed has as an objective reference the existence of a historically produced potential and universal rationality, which those who are subjected to relationships

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1. The sharpest proposal about negativity as a critical force and the most distorted and misunderstood in: Adorno & Horkheimer (1987).

of capitalist domination that deny their self-realization cannot access. The search for this self-realization would imply a process of emancipation that intellectually would be complemented by critical social science.

The Hegelian assumption of the existence of a rational universality or of a potentially achievable rational universality, that is in this case impeded by capitalism or by the systemic colonization of the world of life, ends up becoming a very heavy burden for the critical social sciences, the “intellectual side of the historical process of emancipation”. Critical social sciences must alone assume the task of human self-realization through the contributions of knowledge to the emancipation from work with respect to capital or by way of the construction of a universally inclusive consensus based on communicative action. This enormous responsibility is derived from relegating the knowledge of the subalternate or subordinate subjects to a residual intellectual terrain as part of a “pre-scientific experience”.

Dussel is located partially within the first perspective. He establishes as a second characteristic of social sciences its materiality, which is found “in the contents of the praxis in what refers to the production, reproduction and development of human life, of human corporality. We are not angels, nor souls, nor stones: we are corporal beings that live and die, and therefore we must eat, drink, get dressed, study, produce artwork... and a few other things. It is in that level that “negativity” (alienation) appears as “materiality”: misery (for Marx), pulsional repression (for Freud), bank pedagogy (for Freire), etc.” (Dussel, 1999a). The materiality of scientific knowledge would be a part of the subordinated and blinded life of the oppressed, exploited or dominated.

Honneth is within the second perspective, and he considers to be limited both the material perspective, as it does not explain the set of actors who suffer from *social disdain*, that is, the absence of social recognition, and the communicative action and the recourse to the pragmatism of language (to the pragmatic linguistic) in Habermas, due to its formalist character and the exclusion of the experience of the subordinated actors as the basis of *exo-referential critique*. Honneth proposes to resume the path of conflict as constitutive of society and base critical theory on the struggle for recognition, that is also a struggle for own identities. Starting from the analysis of the interdisciplinary studies of social movements and anti-establishment collective actions, he arrives at the conclusion that the normative heart of the ideas of justice of those who protest is “constituted by relative expectations with regard to their own dignity, honor, or integrity. If the results are generalized making an abstraction of the context of every study, one tends to conclude that the obtainment of social

recognition is the normative condition of every communicational activity; in effect, the subjects are on the horizon of a reciprocal expectation of being recognized at the same time as moral persons and because of the social activities they perform.” (ibídem, 192). The concept of recognition, also with Hegelian roots, becomes the nucleus that serves to define *exo-referential critique* in social sciences.

Honneth thus rescues the “pre-scientific” experience of social movements and of collective protest actions as a basis for scientific critique, but simultaneously attempts to seek in communicative action the rational process to achieve social recognition and, as a result, emancipation. Likewise, he reexamines work, which had lost all its importance in the philosophy of Habermas, as a fundamental element in the struggle for recognition and fuses in this way the materiality and the formality of critique: “In effect, the point to which the cultural definition of the hierarchies of tasks determines the degree of social esteem that the individual may obtain from his activity and the qualities associated with it, the possibilities of the formation of an individual identity, passing through the experience of recognition, are directly related with the handing out and distribution of work” (ibídem, 200).

Honneth’s proposal to understand *exo-referential critique* in social sciences resumes the tradition of the Critical Theory of the *Frankfurt School* and posits alternatives to exceed its internal limits, the same as those of Dussel’s proposal. If the fundamental reference for a critical social science is the position of those who are subordinated within the dominant power relations in contemporary society and the impossibility of their self-realization, the relationship between capital and work does not appear to be sufficient to provide a basis for critique, as it would exclude the majority of the subordinates, and more so when work has broken the boundaries of the salaried world and has deeply penetrated the world of human life, just as Paolo Virno highlights when he states that the core of the biopolitics lies in the domain of the life of the worker, of his *dynamism*<sup>2</sup>. In such a way,

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2. “The capitalist is interested in the life of the worker, his body, only for an indirect motive: this body, this life, is that which contains the ability, the force, the *dynamis* [...] Life is placed in the center of politics in the extent that what is at play is the force of immaterial work (which is not present in itself). For this reason, and only for this reason, it is reasonable to talk about ‘biopolitics’. The living body, with which the administrative apparatuses of the State concern themselves, is the tangible sign of an unrealized force, the pretense of work not yet objectified or, as Marx says in a very beautiful expression, of ‘work as subjectivity’. The power to work, bought and sold along with all other merchandise, is work not yet objectified, ‘work as subjectivity’. It could be said that, while money is the universal representative of the value of exchange, the condition that makes

negativity and recognition would constitute the basis of *exo-referential critique*; however, scientific knowledge would still be the intellectual side of emancipation, as if the social knowledge of the subordinates or subalternates did not exist.

### **Altero-referential critique**

The need for recognition from the other subordinate goes much further than what Honneth supposes. It cannot be reduced to being accepted as a unique member with equal rights within a determined society; it also implies that its forms of knowledge, its life experiences and its culture have the guarantees for their full development and for the establishment of a horizontal dialogue such as that which Gadamer (2006, 2007)<sup>3</sup> would suggest with social sciences and with scientific reason that would permit mutual transformation; consequently, that would not be relegated to a secondary plain, a subordinate and “pre-scientific” place.

This is how, for example, Boaventura de Sousa Santos understands it when he proposes a new paradigm, the *diatopical hermeneutic*, to definitively overcome what he calls *epistemicide*:

The new paradigm constitutes an alternative for each one of these traits. In the first place, in its terms there is no unique form of valid knowledge. There are many forms of knowledge, as many as there are social practices that generate and sustain them. Modern science supports itself on a practice of professional and social technical division of work in the infinite technological development of the productive forces, of which capitalism is today the only example. Alternative social practices generate alternative forms of knowledge. Not recognizing these forms of knowledge implies questioning the legitimacy of the social practices that support them and, in that sense, promoting the social exclusion of those who promote them. The genocide that so many times accompanied European expansion was also an epistemicide: strange towns were eliminated because they had strange forms of knowledge and strange forms of knowledge were eliminated because they were based on strange social practices and in strange towns. But the epistemicide was much more extensive than the genocide because it occurred whenever it was attempted to subalternate, subordinate, marginalize or legalize social practices and

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possible the exchange of products and life functions as the power to produce, the invisible *dynamis*.” (Virmo, 2003:87-88)

3. On the relationship between hermeneutic philosophy and social sciences see Bauman (2002) and Herrera (2007).

groups that could constitute a threat to capitalist expansion, or during a good part of our century, to communist expansion (in this subject, as modern as capitalism). It was also more extensive because it occurred in non-European peripheral space as well as in European and North American central space, against workers, indigenous persons, blacks, women and minorities in general (ethnic, religious, sexual). (De Sousa Santos, 1998:491)<sup>4</sup>

In this case about the point is not a recognition in the equality of the dominator, but rather a recognition in difference and diversity (Geertz, 1994, 1996, 2001), where the subordinates are not a simple topological or evaluative reference for the critical scientist, but rather a full subjectivity that posits its own questions to science, to which science must be open to change even its criteria of falsifiability or rigor.

In the same sense, Walter Mignolo, following the lead of Edward Said (2006), tells us about “a thought in and of the colonial difference that *diversality* (epistemic diversity as a universal project) postulates, and no longer the search for new abstract universalities of the left or right” (Mignolo, 2001:18). Mignolo takes as an illustrative case that of the liberation philosophy of Dussel who, despite not including this characteristic within his specific analysis of the critical social sciences, develops it in his pioneer works on modernity and post-colonialism (Dussel, 1995, 1999, 2001).

Both Mignolo and de Sousa Santos discuss another necessary component of the critical social sciences, that of alterity or otherness<sup>5</sup>, that of the existence of other forms of knowledge, interpretation and explanation of society that do not only perform the function of changing the epistemological perspective of the researcher, as in the traditional Critical Theory, but rather question science itself as a substantial part of power relations, just as Foucault and Fals Borda (1984, 1986 and 1987) did in the second half of the last century, through genealogy and archaeology and participatory action research, respectively. They contribute in this way to set the foundation for an *altero-referential* critique that departs from the knowledge of the subordinates or subalternates, of *the others*.

From different theoretical and epistemological perspectives, subordinate studies and those of post-coloniality, or different feminist currents, both of equality and of difference, contemporaneously structure this *altero-referential critique*. *Speculum of the Other Woman* by Luce

4. Further development of this hermeneutic proposal in De Sousa Santos (2003).

5. For this reason Derrida and Levinas constitute a constant philosophical reference of self-referential critique.

Irigaray (2007) constitutes from its very structure as a form of knowledge an affirmation of alterity, just as the distinction that Seyla Benhabib makes between the generalized other and the concrete other, which illustrates the alternate approach from a feminist standpoint:

The point of view of the generalized other demands that we look at each and every individual as a rational being to whom corresponds the same rights and duties that we would like to attribute to ourselves. When we assume this point of view, we isolate ourselves from the individuality and concrete identity of the other. We take for granted that the other, just like ourselves, is a being that has necessities, desires and concrete affections, but what constitutes his moral dignity is not what makes us different from each other, but rather what we have in common, and speaking agents and rational actors. Our relationship is governed by the rules of *equality and formal reciprocity*: each one has the right to expect and assume from us the same thing that we expect and assume from him or her. [...] The categories of morals that accompany such actions are justice, obligation, law and the corresponding moral sentiments are those of respect, duty, value and dignity.

The point of view of the concrete other, on the other hand, makes us view each rational being as an individual with a story, identity and concrete emotional-affective construction. When we assume this point of view we separate ourselves from that which constitutes what is common among us and we focus on individuality. We try to understand the necessities of the other, his motivations, what he seeks and what he desires. Our relationship with the other is governed by the rules of *equity and complementary reciprocity*: each individual has the right to expect and assume manners of conduct in the other through which the other feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete individual with specific necessities, aptitudes and capabilities. Our differences in this case complement each other more than they exclude each other. [...] The moral categories that accompany such interactions are those of responsibility, bonding and the desire to share. The moral feelings that accompany such interactions are love, care and sympathy and solidarity. (Benhabib, 2006:182-183)

As Foucault was already announcing in 1983, *altero-referential* critique is born from a transgression (*franchissement*) of scientific knowledge and not just of its limitation and legitimation as happened with the *self-referential* critique of Kantian inspiration, of the revelation typical of *hetero-referential* critique or the negativity and recognition of *exo-*

*referential* critique. The point of departure of this type of critique is, in the words of Foucault, archaeological in method, in the extent that it treats scientific knowledge as a historic event that constitutes us as subjects of knowledge within a determined temporality, and genealogical in purpose, “in the sense that it will not infer from the form what we are, what is impossible for us to do or know; but rather it extracts, from the contingency that has made us be what we are, the possibility of not being, of not doing, of not thinking, for more time, what we are, what we do, what we think.” (Foucault, 2003:91-92). Critique from the viewpoint of otherness converts knowledge into an “indefinite work of freedom” (Ibidem), which permits the transformation of science and its rationality from the knowledge areas that in a certain historical time are not considered scientific.<sup>6</sup>

### Conclusions

The critical nature of social sciences arises from ascertaining the limits of reason, due to the temporality and relativity of human knowledge, to understand oneself and to understand, interpret and explain social life. Likewise, it arises from the necessity to build intersubjective reference points with pretensions of objectivity within relativity, in order to become aware of the social world and act in society with a greater degree of certainty or with a lesser degree of uncertainty. With this cognoscitive horizon, *self-referential* critique, after the fall of religion and the decline of the metaphysical as models of interpretation of social life, offers the instruments to establish the limits of scientific knowledge and the related objectives for its legitimation.

Amid the search for temporary certainties, social sciences are also built on the distrust of practical knowledge areas. The necessity to subject the knowledge of the diverse subjects implied in the social phenomena being studied to the rational judgment of the researcher led to the struc-

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6. “The dialogue of social sciences with life is closely related to the dialogue of social sciences with themselves. Therefore, dialogue does not only involve an ethical and political imperative with respect to the marginalized visions of social knowledge, but rather it also implies an opening of the scientific practices that tolerates and promotes, within sciences, the presence of distinct interpretations of what is social. In this sense, research on social life cannot fail to recognize today that it must lend its voice to the dialogue that is being held between diverse forms of scientific thought. Each research study on social life, then, should intend to be a horizon that includes differences, that accepts designs, that recovers them with the understanding of the social phenomenon that is being studied in mind; in the end, as a horizon that allows the awareness of the historicity of the interpretations that have contributed before it to the construction of the research problem.” (Herrera, 2007:144)

turing of a *hetero-referential* critique that would allow for the elaboration of a second-order knowledge to reveal the hidden side of social life, by way of an exercise in distancing with respect to such practical knowledge areas.

Paradoxically, from the experiences of those who live in the world from which scientists distance themselves, there arises a critique that highlights the social boundaries of scientific rationality and the necessity for it to function not only to understand reality, but to transform it as a function of those who, due to their subordination, do not have the possibility to access the new world offered by it or to construct an alternative one. Consequently, the negativity of the life of the subordinated and the imperative of recognition structure this *exo-referential* critique.

Nevertheless, the life of others is not only negativity; it also implies forms of knowledge that revindicate their own rationalities and evidence the imbrications of social sciences in the power relations from which they fruitlessly try to escape. From an *altero-referential* critique, practical knowledge areas reclaim the possibility of questioning dominant rationalities to construct more comprehensive forms of social knowledge and a scientific reason that veers away from its focus on narcissistic self-observation and opens itself to the heterogenous glance of those who have been excluded from its rational universe, in order to be able to truly observe itself.

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