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Critical thinking and criticism of thought. A journey into the human essence in times of crisis

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Summary

The study aims to explore the critique of critical thinking in the context of artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on humanity. It seeks to understand how AI can affect our critical reasoning capacities and the meaning of our human essence in a society increasingly dominated by technology.

Methodology: A multidisciplinary approach is adopted that integrates perspectives from philosophy, psychology, education, and ethics. Theoretical and empirical studies that address critical thinking and the influence of AI on social dynamics are reviewed. The ethical and philosophical implications of automation and the use of algorithms in decision-making are analyzed.

Conclusions: The analysis suggests that AI, while having the potential to improve efficiency in various fields, also poses significant risks to human autonomy and critical thinking ability. It concludes that education should be adapted to include the development of critical and ethical thinking, ensuring that individuals maintain a sense of humanity in the digital age. The need for policies that promote a harmonious coexistence between AI and fundamental human values is emphasized.

Keywords: Critical thinking, artificial intelligence, ethics, education, humanity, automation, philosophy, multidisciplinary.

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Introduction

In a world saturated with instant information and automated decisions, where artificial intelligence promises to revolutionize our existence, we are faced with a fundamental question: have we lost our human essence? This question is not only an echo of ancient philosophy, but a cry of alarm that resonates in every corner of our contemporary lives. At a time when ideologies are crumbling and the crisis of thought is taking hold of our societies, we are at a crossroads where the need for profound change becomes imminent.

Imagine a future where curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking are not mere skills, but the cornerstones of our existence. A future in which every individual, armed with the power of discernment, can challenge not only oppressive structures, but also transform the fabric of reality. Through this book, we invite you to embark on a deep journey towards understanding what it means to be human in an interconnected and constantly evolving world.

This is not just another book; it is an invitation to question, to reflect and to act. Here, we will explore how education, politics, economics, and the very essence of the human being are intertwined in a complex web that requires our immediate attention. As we unravel the crisis of thought, we'll present you with inspiring stories and in-depth analysis that will motivate you to rethink your role in this global transformation.

Through the pages that follow, you will discover not only the power of education as a tool for change, but also the responsibility that each of us has in building a more humane future. This book is a call to action, a challenge for you to take charge of your own story and contribute to the creation of a society in which the human essence can flourish. It's not just about reading; it's about joining a movement. By acquiring this book, you will

not only be investing in your personal growth, but also in the possibility of significant change in the world around you. Are you ready to explore the depth of your own being and the impact you can have on society? The journey starts here. Welcome to reflection, transformation and hope!

The Crisis of Thought: A Call for Reflection

In the current context, the crisis of critical thinking that we have described is not a philosophical abstraction, but a palpable reality that crosses entire nations and regions, influencing their social, economic and political crises. Countries such as Russia, some nations in Europe, the Middle East, and Venezuela are today caught in the trap of superficial and polarized thinking that has degenerated into devastating conflicts.

Russia, for example, has been plunged into a protracted conflict with Ukraine, marked by the manipulation of information and the use of propaganda as a tool to mobilise the population. The critical capacity of citizens has been systematically eroded by a government that, through control of the media, promotes a simplified and emotional narrative. This lack of critical thinking has allowed broad sectors of the population to accept, without question, political decisions that have generated not only human suffering, but also international economic and political isolation. As George Orwell warned in his novel 1984, the manipulation of truth and disinformation are powerful instruments in the creation of docile societies, incapable of resisting.

In Europe, the crisis of critical thinking manifests itself differently. The growing disaffection with traditional politics has opened the door to populist and nationalist movements that simplify complex problems with immediate and emotional solutions. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, better known as Brexit, is a clear example. Decisions based on media campaigns that exploited fears and insecurities, rather than on a rational analysis of the pros and cons, led a country to face a process of political and economic disintegration. This shows how, in a society that stops questioning and reflecting, democratic values and stability are compromised.

The Middle East, in particular, is a region where a lack of critical thinking has been exploited by decades of conflict. Leaders of various factions have used religion, fear and violence as instruments of control over populations unable to organize around a deep analysis of their social realities. The wars in Syria, Yemen, and Palestine are the product of narratives that simplify complex conflicts, eliminating any possibility of peaceful resolution through dialogue and rational analysis. The lack of critical thinking has not only perpetuated violence, but has prevented the building of strong states, leading to unprecedented humanitarian crises.

In Latin America, Venezuela represents one of the most tragic cases. What began as a political and economic crisis has turned into a humanitarian catastrophe. The country, caught in a cycle of polarization and simplification of political narratives, has seen how the lack of critical thinking in the population has been manipulated by both the government and the opposition. The result is a total collapse of institutions, where real solutions to the country's problems have been supplanted by ideological discourses that do not address the root causes of the crisis. As the philosopher Herbert Marcuse pointed out, when societies lose their critical capacity, forms of oppression become institutionalized, making the liberation of the masses impossible.

These examples, scattered throughout the world, are the most convincing evidence of what we have called here the "crisis of society". In each of these cases, the lack of deep reflection has allowed destructive decisions to prevail, aggravating crises and leading to situations of violence, poverty and despair. The inability to think critically not only affects the quality of life of individuals, but dismantles the ability of societies to face their own challenges.

It is in this global context that critical thinking must be seen not only as an academic tool, but as an urgent necessity for the very survival of nations. Wars, humanitarian crises and the collapse of democracies are not mere historical accidents, but the product of a process of intellectual erosion that has allowed irrational and simplified decisions to dominate the scene global. As the philosopher Karl Popper warned, "true ignorance is not the absence of knowledge, but the refusal to acquire it." This ignorance is what has led societies to their current crisis, a crisis that, if not faced through critical education and reflection, will only deepen.

How do we know that we Really Think and that we do it?

The Depth of Critical Thinking

Political discourse analysis has been a powerful tool of persuasion throughout history, and its impact on the collective consciousness is undeniable. Contemporary philosophers and thinkers, from Michel Foucault to Noam Chomsky, have studied how discourse becomes a mechanism of power that shapes the perceptions, ideas, and actions of the masses. Discourse is not just a set of words, but a tool that shapes reality, manipulating truths, constructing enemies, exalting myths and generating collective identities.

Foucault, in his studies on the relationship between power and knowledge, points out that "power is not only repressive, but productive", which means that discourses create realities and, therefore, are a way of exercising power over bodies and minds. Through language, political power establishes norms, defines what is true, and constructs narratives that generate social control. From this perspective, discourse analysis is not simply a study of words, but of the way in which those words construct political and economic realities.

A devastating historical case of the use of discursive persuasion is that of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. Hitler, through carefully crafted speeches, managed to persuade an entire nation of the legitimacy of his racist and expansionist policies. Using symbols such as the swastika and the exaltation of the "Third Reich", he created a collective imaginary based on racial superiority and the need to eliminate the internal and external enemies of the nation. Hitler's speech, loaded with emotional symbols and narratives, simplified complex problems and directed hatred toward minorities, such as Jews, blaming them for the country's economic and social crises. As the philosopher Theodor Adorno pointed out in his work *The Authoritarian Personality*, this type of discourse appeals to the deepest prejudices and emotions, exploiting the insecurities of the population in times of crisis.

Today, we see how this type of discursive manipulation is repeated in various parts of the world. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin has used nationalist discourse to justify the invasion of Ukraine, appealing for the "protection" of Russian minorities in other countries and the restoration of national pride. Putin's speech, like that of many authoritarian leaders, is based on symbols of past greatness and the creation of external enemies, which legitimizes aggressive policies and human rights violations. Rhetoric becomes a tool that overrides critical thinking, and through controlled means, discourse is repeated until it becomes the only accepted truth.

In Latin America, Venezuela presents another revealing case. Both the government and the opposition have used political discourse to polarize society, dividing the country into absolute terms of "good" and "bad." Hugo Chávez, and now Nicolás Maduro, used the narrative of "Yankee imperialism" to justify failed domestic policies, diverting attention from the country's economic and social problems to an external enemy. This resonates with what Chomsky has pointed out in his analysis of media control: political elites manipulate language to create consensus around their interests, dismantling any possibility of critical thinking.

From sociology and psychology, it has been explored how political discourses affect the construction of collective identities and the perception of reality. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggests that language not only describes reality, but constructs it, that is, political discourse shapes citizens' perception of the world. The symbols, words, and narratives used by political leaders create what Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital," a power that legitimizes their authority before the masses. In times of crisis, as Erich Fromm pointed out in The Fear of Freedom, societies look to authoritarian leaders for emotional security, which makes them more susceptible to simplifying and manipulative discourses.

As for the consequences of this phenomenon, the use of persuasive discourses that annul critical thinking generates passive and polarized societies, incapable of facing their problems rationally. Economies are affected when political decisions are not based on indepth analysis, but on empty rhetoric that promises quick and easy solutions. In politics, populisms are growing, perpetuating cycles of poverty, violence and inequality. In sociology, the social fabric breaks down when collective identities are built around imaginary enemies, fostering xenophobia, racism, and other forms of exclusion.

The case of the United States during the presidency of Donald Trump is also illustrative. His use of populist discourse, loaded with symbols such as the promise to "make America great again," built a narrative of recovery that appealed to the economic and social insecurities of a part of the population. Using social media and mass media platforms, Trump polarized the nation, creating deep divisions and legitimizing acts of violence such as the storming of the Capitol. This discursive manipulation is not a mere political strategy, but a direct erosion of critical thinking, generating distrust of democratic institutions and scientific truth.

The use of political discourse as a tool of persuasion, when it is detached from critical thinking, has devastating consequences. Philosophy, politics, economics and psychology agree that a society that does not think critically is vulnerable to falling into the hands of authoritarian leaders who, through simplistic symbols and narratives, manipulate reality for their own ends. History has shown us, from Hitler to today's leaders, that when political discourse is not subjected to critical analysis, the consequences are war, poverty, polarization, and, ultimately, the crisis of society itself.

Analysis of Political Discourse as a Tool of Persuasion

The third question that arises after examining the crisis of critical thinking and the analysis of political discourse is profound and disturbing: have we lost the ability to think, or have we been suppressed and manipulated to stop doing so? While it is tempting to answer both questions in the affirmative, the truth is that reality is more complex and woven with multiple historical, philosophical and sociological factors.

The philosopher Herbert Marcuse, in his work The One-Dimensional Man, warns about the transformation of advanced industrial society into a system that annuls the critical capacity of the individual. According to Marcuse, modern society has created a "onedimensional thinking" in which the logic of consumption and technology dominates both the economic and personal spheres, eliminating the space for deep reflection. This simplification of collective thinking does not occur in an overt or violent way, but through subtle control, in which distractions and an overabundance of information disarticulate our ability to discern. This connects with what Guy Debord described as the "society of the spectacle", in which everything is reduced to superficial images and representations that replace reality, creating a screen that disconnects us from genuine critical thinking.

From a historical perspective, thought control and manipulation of the collective mind is not a recent phenomenon. We could trace its beginnings to the times of great empires and organized religions, when political and religious leaders used dogmatic narratives to maintain power. The Middle Ages, with its rigid theological system, offered a clear example of how critical thinking was suppressed in favor of a self-perpetuating ideological structure. With the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, philosophers such as Spinoza, Locke, and Rousseau championed freedom of thought and intellectual emancipation, marking a turning point in the history of mind control.

However, the twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of ideological control through new mechanisms. The totalitarianisms of Nazism and Stalinism demonstrated how, through the systematic use of propaganda and the control of discourse, the masses could be manipulated into accepting atrocities and suppressing any critical questioning. Hannah Arendt, in The Origins of Totalitarianism, points out how these regimes managed not only to physically control their citizens, but to colonize their minds, making them accept false realities and dangerous narratives. This control, Arendt argues, is the most devastating suppression of the human capacity to think, since it generates a disconnect between objective reality and subjective perception.

In the contemporary world, critical thinking seems to be caught between two forces: deliberate manipulation of discourse and subtle suppression through the excess of trivial stimuli. The "isms" – nationalism, populism, neoliberalism, communism – have become dogmas that, instead of inviting analysis, simplify reality in binary and conflicting terms. Karl Popper, in his work, The Open Society and Its Enemies, warns of the dangers of dogmatism and closed ideological systems that eliminate genuine debate and questioning. According to Popper, any ideology that purports to offer absolute truth about reality is inherently dangerous, as it suppresses critical dialogue and encourages intolerance.

So how do we break this cycle of manipulation and control? The answer cannot be simplistic or partial. The French philosopher Jacques Rancière proposes in The Ignorant Master, a radical approach: intellectual emancipation. For Rancière, the problem lies not so much in the suppression of thought as in the belief that a few think for the rest. Emancipation, according to his vision, is to recognize that we are all equally capable of thinking and questioning. We do not need to be "educated" by an elite, but we must awaken our own critical capacity.

On the other hand, the solution also lies in a comprehensive education that fosters not only technical or instrumental knowledge, but also philosophical and ethical reflection. Martha Nussbaum, in her work, Nonprofit, argues that contemporary education has lost sight of the development of essential human capacities, such as empathy, imagination, and critical thinking, in favor of a utilitarian teaching that serves the interests of the market. For Nussbaum, recovering the teaching of the humanities and philosophy is essential to create citizens who think for themselves and do not allow themselves to be dragged down by manipulative discourses.

Finally, breaking with this control also implies a profound review of our relationship with technology and information. Byung-Chul Han, in his work, The Fatigue Society, warns that information overload and digital hyperactivity have led us to a form of self-exploitation, where the time for reflection and critical thinking is reduced. Instead of being passive victims of manipulation, we must regain the ability to disconnect from this onslaught of stimuli and reclaim time for contemplation and analysis.

In conclusion, we have not completely lost the ability to think, but we certainly live in an era where this ability is constantly eroded and manipulated. Society, through ideological discourses, dogmas and simplifying narratives, pushes us towards superficial and conformist thinking. Breaking with this cycle requires a revaluation of critical education, a constant questioning of ideologies that claim to offer absolute truths and, above all, a return to deep reflection and intellectual autonomy. Only in this way will we be able to resist manipulation and regain control of our minds in a society that seems, more and more, to move away from true thinking.

Generational Changes and their Impact

The noticeable change in the ways of thinking and acting of generations is one of the most revealing phenomena of our era. Throughout history, generations have been shaped by their socioeconomic, political, and technological context, generating cultural and psychological patterns that affect the way they see and relate to the world. The acceleration of technological change and the advent of the digital age have accentuated this difference,

introducing new questions about the evolution of critical thinking, education systems, and the role of artificial intelligence (AI).

The sociologist Karl Mannheim, in his essay, The Problem of Generations, points out that each generation develops a "generational consciousness" from shared historical experiences. That is, socioeconomic and political conditions influence a generation's beliefs and attitudes, creating psychological patterns that can last for decades. During the post-war period, for example, the baby boomer generation was characterised by optimism, faith in progress and the welfare state. Contrasting this, subsequent generations, such as Generation X and millennials, grew up in a context of greater uncertainty, with neoliberal economies, financial crises and a move away from the ideal of linear progress.

One of the most significant transformations in recent generations is their relationship with technology. Jean Twenge, in his work iGen, argues that the generation born after 1995 has been deeply influenced by the constant use of mobile devices and the Internet. Twenge shows how this "Generation Z," also known as iGen, experiences higher rates of anxiety, depression, and isolation, while decreasing their attention span and skills for face-to-face interaction. In this sense, digital technology has not only transformed the way new generations think and communicate, but also how they conceive of themselves and the world around them.

From a historical perspective, this shift in thought patterns can be linked to major technological and cultural milestones. The Industrial Revolution, for example, radically transformed the perception of time, production, and social relations. Work became mechanical, repetitive, and large cities began to fragment the traditional social fabric. Similarly, the Digital Revolution and globalization have generated a "liquid society," as Zygmunt Bauman describes it, in which everything is ephemeral, flexible, and constantly changing. In this liquid society, social ties are weakened and identities are increasingly fragmented, leading to a sense of psychological and cultural instability.

The digital age has also brought with it a profound transformation in politics and economics. The South Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han, in his work The Expulsion of the Different, argues that we live in an era where digital hypercommunication and social networks have replaced traditional public spaces for political debate. Digital platforms create ideological bubbles where individuals surround themselves with similar ideas, which fosters polarization and hinders critical dialogue. This fragmentation of political discourse is reflected in populist movements that, as in past times, exploit the simplification of complex problems.

In the economic context, automation and AI have begun to redraw the global labor map, raising questions about the future of human work. Economist Carl Benedikt Frey, in her book *The Technology Trap*, warns that automation, while it can improve efficiency, also generates inequality, displacing lower-skilled workers. AI, in this sense, has the potential to amplify social and economic gaps if not implemented fairly and equitably.

This brings us to the crucial question: is there critical thinking in the age of artificial intelligence? While AI can process large volumes of data and offer quick and accurate answers, its ability to generate truly critical thinking is questionable. AI operates on patterns and algorithms, replicating what already exists, but lacks the ability to disrupt innovation or question the very foundations of the system. Nicholas Carr, in his essay What's the Internet Doing to Our Minds?, explores how reliance on algorithms and fast internet searches has

changed the way we think, making it more superficial and less reflective. According to Carr, overexposure to digital information leads to a "cognitive disconnect," where depth of thought is sacrificed for immediacy.

As for education systems, the problem is getting worse. Many of today's formal education structures are inherited from the Industrial Revolution, designed to train workers who can adjust to a system of mass production. Today, however, we face a future where the critical skills are not technical or manual, but cognitive and creative skills, those that machines cannot replicate. However, the education system has been surprisingly resistant to change. Sir Ken Robinson, an advocate of education reform, has argued that the current system kills creativity by prioritizing the memorization of facts over the development of critical thinking. According to Robinson, the shift towards a more dynamic and creative education is urgent if we want new generations to be able to face the challenges of a world dominated by AI and automation.

All of this raises a number of crucial questions: Are we preparing new generations for a world that no longer exists? Are current education systems obsolete in the face of the cognitive and emotional needs of digital generations? If power structures continue to design discourses that shape collective thinking, how can we ensure that young minds have the space and freedom to think critically?

The future world, marked by digital technology, AI and globalization, seems headed towards unprecedented complexity. However, this complexity requires not only technical skills, but, above all, the ability to think critically, ethically, and creatively. If education systems do not adapt to this new paradigm, we run the risk of producing generations that, although immersed in technology, lack the capacity to face the deepest problems of our society.

In this scenario, philosophy and the humanities remain essential, not as a mere accessory to technical knowledge, but as the nucleus that fosters reflection, questioning and the search for meaning. Artificial intelligence can be a powerful tool, but it can never replace the human essence of doubt, creativity, and the ability to think outside of pre-established schemes. And it is in this tension between technological progress and the need to preserve what is most human that the future of our societies is at stake.

The Human Essence versus Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence has raised a number of crucial questions for contemporary society. As you rightly point out, although AI is a powerful tool, it cannot replace key elements of the human essence: doubt, creativity and the ability to think outside of preestablished schemes. The question that arises then is: have we lost the human essence? And if so, what kind of society are we building?

Current education systems, designed largely to standardize knowledge and evaluate performance using limited metrics, have been criticized for their inability to encourage critical and creative thinking. Ken Robinson, in his famous TED talk "Do Schools Kill Creativity?", argues that today's education systems were designed for an industrial age and, consequently, prioritize memorization and repetition over questioning and innovation. Under this scheme, there is a risk that students, instead of developing a critical mindset, will conform to a predetermined mold, thus limiting their ability to generate new ideas or challenge the *status quo*.

Ivan Illich, in his work The Unschooled Society, deepens this critique by pointing out that formal education systems tend to indoctrinate students instead of empowering them. Illich suggests that education, as structured, reinforces a hierarchy of knowledge that contributes to social inequality and perpetuates a narrow view of learning, limiting individual exploration and discovery. If we take this perspective, it is possible to argue that curricular programs and assessments out of context have contributed to an erosion of the human essence, reducing our ability to act autonomously and creatively.

The philosopher Byung-Chul Han, in The Fatigue Society, proposes an even more disturbing vision: today's society, governed by productivity, has led to widespread selfexploitation. In this model, individuals are caught up in a constant search for efficiency and success, which has displaced deep reflection and creativity. Han suggests that the pressure to be "productive" has eliminated the possibility of stopping and doubting, a fundamental element in preserving humanity in an increasingly mechanized and algorithmically governed world.

If we follow this line of thinking, it is plausible to say that, in a context where thought is manipulated through mass media and restrictive educational policies, we are losing what makes us human. Undoubtedly, the control and standardization of education and public discourse mold our minds in a way that favors conformity and hinders creativity and autonomous thinking. Consequently, we are moving away from true intellectual freedom.

What Society would we have without Human Essence?

A scenario without human essence would be, by definition, a highly mechanized society devoid of the characteristics that have defined our humanity over the centuries. It would be a society governed by calculation, efficiency, and conformity, where decisions are made based on algorithms and statistics rather than ethical reflection, debate, and empathy. This could lead to a "dehumanization" of our everyday interactions, where human relationships would be superficial and based solely on utilitarian transactions.

A close example of this scenario can be seen in China, with the development of the social credit system, where citizens' behaviors are monitored and evaluated in real time. In this context, individual freedom is subordinated to state control that uses advanced technology to shape people's behavior. In such a society, the human essence—the ability to resist, question, and seek deeper meaning—is relegated to the background, replaced by obedience and efficiency.

From a philosophical perspective, this leads us to a kind of "dystopian society" that philosophers like Michel Foucault already glimpsed. Foucault, in his studies of power and control, suggests that modern power structures act not only through direct repression, but also through the normalization of behaviors, causing people to internalize imposed norms. In a society without human essence, this type of control would be absolute, eliminating the possibility of resisting or acting outside the established norms.

What distinguishes us from homo, from AI?

What sets us apart, in essence, is our ability to transcend mere instinct or programming. Humans not only react to external stimuli, as a primitive *homo* or a machine would, but we are capable of reflecting on our actions, questioning our decisions and looking for meanings beyond the immediate. Our capacity for doubt – as Descartes proposed with his famous maxim "Cogito, ergo sum" – is fundamental to our humanity. Doubting implies

not accepting reality as it is presented, but digging into its foundations and considering alternatives. AI, while powerful in its ability to process data, lacks this ability for conscious reflection.

Neuroscientifically, creativity and the ability to innovate depend on a phenomenon known as brain plasticity, the ability of the human brain to adapt and reorganize itself. While an AI is limited by its algorithms, the human brain can generate new neural connections from novel experiences and constant learning. This allows us to deal with unforeseen situations and respond in creative and innovative ways.

What would a Humanoid be in this Context?

A humanoid would be a being that, although possessing a human form, lacks the essential attributes that distinguish us as humans: creativity, doubt, and the capacity for empathy. In a metaphorical sense, we are already seeing the emergence of "humanoids" in contemporary societies: individuals who move through life following pre-established patterns, without questioning, without innovating, without really living, many just coming to "exist." This is one of the key concerns of the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who spoke of "bad faith," the act of living according to the expectations of others without assuming one's own freedom.

In a future governed by AI and educational systems that prioritize efficiency over humanity, it is possible to imagine a world where humans become something closer to automatons than to reflective beings. This scenario would be the final collapse of the human essence.

What can be done to Save Humanity?

The solution to this problem does not lie in ideologies or political utopias, but in a reassessment of the human from a transdisciplinary perspective. Neuroscience can help us understand how to foster creativity and empathy, philosophy can teach us to reflect on our existence, and sociology can offer us models for building a more equitable society. Education systems must transform to prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and ethics. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, with his theory of communicative action, highlights the importance of dialogue and consensus in the construction of a more just and democratic society. Only through dialogue and constant questioning can we keep our humanity intact.

The future of humanity is not determined by technology, but by our ability to resist the total mechanization of our lives. Maintaining the human essence means cultivating doubt, creativity and empathy in a world that is increasingly inclined towards the technological and the mechanical.

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