

## Constructive and Destructive Criticism

To begin with, we have to differentiate between the word *naqd* "criticism" which means separating what is good from what is bad and the word *naqd* which means destruction. The first word is derived from *naqd al-dhahab wa al-fiḍḍah* i.e. to separate or pick out the fake gold and silver coins from the genuine. The second word "*naqd*" means destruction as it is said that someone died under *al-anqaḍ*, meaning under the debris.

Linguistically speaking, the word *naqd* "criticism" has two meanings. The first is finding fault with people and disparaging them as in the saying of Abu al-Darda' (may Allah be pleased them), "If you find fault (*naqadta*) with people, they will find fault with you, and if you leave them alone they will leave you alone."

The second meaning the word *naqd* "criticism" is separating and distinguishing the good from the bad. So it may include praise and approval or dispraise and disapproval and a critic may combine the merits and demerits.

Criticism may also be subjective or impressionistic and it may be methodical or objective as grounded on scientific facts. The first is based on the first impression as when you read an article or listen to a speech or watch a painting and admire or criticize it before coming to know its technical details and the reasons behind its quality of lack of quality. On the contrary, methodical and objective criticism is the one based on scientific, objective and technical foundations and it requires three basic components:

First: The tools related to the industry or the art. For example, the literary critic needs to be familiar with the sciences of language, such as grammar, morphology, prosody, rhetoric, criticism and literature and with a part of the general culture of other human, social and psychological sciences as well as the arts of history, civilization, ekistics, etc. The sports, economic, political, literary and artistic critic must be familiar with the fundamentals of his/her profession; otherwise, his/her criticism will be superficial and in need of criticism and refutation and it might be discussed by another critic to show its shortcoming.

Second, the critic must have experience and talent. You may listen to two excellent reciters of the Quran or public speakers or read two excellent articles for two eminent writers or analyze a technical process that is extremely sophisticated and innovative and distinguish between them with something that you realize but cannot describe in words as in the saying of Al-Amidi, "One may find two magnificent horses sharing signs of noble descent and strength and find it difficult to distinguish between them. However, horses' experts prefer one of them to the other."

The same applies to paintings and the works of artists as well as other fields and affairs of life and industries, the matter which stresses the importance of experience and practice in addition to the tools of any profession or industry for critics. If the field of criticism was dominated by persons who lack experience in the industry or art and its tools as well as the qualifications of criticism, this would lead to the destructive criticism that is useless and harmful.

The third and most important component is sincerity and fairness. Critics must keep away from personal inclinations and settlement of accounts because they have negative consequences that must be avoided. Some people have sick hearts that know nothing except destruction as stated by Imam ‘Ali Ibn Abd Al-Aziz Al-Jurjani in his introduction to his book “*al-Wasata bayna al-Mutanabbi wa Khuṣumih* (Mediation between al-Mutanabbi and his Opponents), “He mentioned that incompetent people are divided into two groups. The first group is working to remedy their shortcoming and this is a positive approach because they are preoccupied by their own affairs and are working hard to rectify them. The second group is unable to remedy their shortcoming because of their weakness or laziness and find nothing to cover their shortcoming except disparaging and envying virtuous people thinking that such acts would derogate them to their inferior level.

Some people, even in old times, used to earn their living from praising and disparaging other people. Making a living from praising other people was widely known among poets including the poets of pre-Islamic era, such as Zuhayr Ibn Abi Sulma, al-Nabigha al-Zubayni and others. However, there were some other poets who used to earn their living from lampooning other people even in the early days of Islam such as al-Ḥutay’ah who used to blackmail people with his satire. Caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭab (may Allah be pleased with him) threatened him with a severe punishment if he did not keep away from disparaging other people. Al-Ḥutay’ah replied that his children would die if he did that. The Caliph paid him forty thousand dirham on the condition that he would never disparage anyone with his poetry. He abided by that condition throughout the caliphate of ‘Umar and then returned to his old habit after the death of ‘Umar.

Destructive criticism will never create a real civilization and will not bring to the fore competent people among the community who really deserve praise and appreciation. On the contrary, it will contribute to the destruction of the community. Fair and objective criticism based on scientific foundations and experience, talent and practice is the kind of criticism which praises those who excel in doing their job and politely criticizes those who do their job badly. In this case, critics identify the shortcoming and the ways of reforming it. This is the purposeful criticism

which is not destructive but constructive, fair and encouraging. At the same time, it identifies the shortcoming and turn people's attention to it.

If leadership places a great responsibility on those who assume it, the practice of criticism and analysis also places responsibility on critics and analysts and all of us shall be held accountable before Allah, the Almighty, for the responsibility with which Allah entrusted us. We are also responsible for building the homeland and working hard for its progress, construction and reform and for preclusion of destruction, demolition or opportunism and vainglory. Fortunately, the vast majority of people in Egypt are able to separate the wheat from the chaff. Allah, the Almighty, says, “As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth” (the Quran, 13: 17).