
From Defiant Critical Citizenship to Pluralist Political Critique

An important theme that has emerged in the evolution of democratic life, particularly in the expression and interpretation of votes, is that of *critical citizenship*. This is often mobilized to explain voters' sanctions against elected officials who are not reappointed, or against the objectives of votes, initiatives or referendums. This is the case in Switzerland, for example, one of the rare semi-direct democracies, where initiatives or referendums are sometimes rejected even though they had the support of parliaments or governments at the various levels, cantonal or national. Beyond these interpretations by journalists or political actors, some political science works understand critical citizenship almost exclusively in negative terms. It is then interpreted close to defiance or even anger. It translates into demobilization, if not a certain cynicism on the part of citizens. It is then difficult to envisage an appetite for broader participation.

In this chapter, I do not intend to remain with this negative, but above all reductive, understanding of critique. Firstly, critique can be motivated by positive aspirations. Secondly, I will take seriously the plurality of meanings to be given to critique. We will see that many studies in political sociology make very different assumptions about critical citizenship, but above all that in these works, critique remains unclear in its very definition. Instead, I will exploit the richness of the concept of critique, which is central to modern thought and to the entire philosophical tradition. I will thus broaden the critical understanding of critique, adopting, as is often the case in philosophy, a *meta-critical* posture or a *critique of critique* to better distinguish its possible meanings and conditions. To say it tersely, I intend to move from the reactive critique of some citizens to a reflexive and pluralist

critical citizenship¹. Indeed, it is necessary to go as far as accepting the expression of opposing critiques, emanating from citizens, and even the justifications, the guarantees and the management of the cohabitation of their critiques. The liberal and pluralist democratic framework guarantees this cohabitation in several ways. These guarantees are mainly provided by its institutions. For authors such as Habermas and Rawls, whose concern is the justification of institutional systems, institutions are better guarantees, more hospitable to this diversity than the citizens themselves (Habermas 1995, 1998; Rawls 1995; Reber 2020a).

One of the major contributions of this chapter is to propose analytically to distinguish four different types of critiques, ranging from an individual critique on elements requiring variable knowledge and skills to critique taking into account the plurality of critiques emanating from other citizens or groups of citizens. I thus describe critique as *reactive* (primary), *evaluative*, *propositional* (first- or second-level) and *pluralistic political*. I thus value certain dimensions of critique that deal with different subjects and require different capacities as well. I take into account the result and the sanction at the end of an evaluation, when it exists, which can be positive and negative. Indeed, reactive critique does not bother to evaluate; it amounts to a sanction. Ultimately, I recognize that critique with all its virtualities is even essential to political life. It contributes to the capacity to understand, to step back, to challenge and to develop solutions. Indeed, critique is always there to transform a state of the world in a direction desired as better or at least preferable. It can also want to resist these changes. It is more particularly analyzed and put in context here in front of the democratic system, its improvement and the will of the citizens to take part in these changes. More precisely, it is the main features of its legitimacy that are tested here.

Trying to deploy analytically the virtualities of critique itself, I discuss in this chapter some perspectives or some models that integrate very differently the critiques towards the democratic functioning. In particular, we will look at the pessimistic stealth democracy (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002) and its optimistic opposite, the sunshine democracy (Neblo et al. 2010). Indeed, these two labels for appreciating democracy are often associated with critical citizenship. I will criticize these models by mainly showing how they miss the content and substance of the critique itself. I will add to my critique what I call relational models in which citizens' trust or, conversely, distrust, is measured in relation to the institutions to which that trust is or is not granted, rather than to the content or reasons for that trust or distrust.

¹ I have already played with this distinction in the title "From Critical Citizenship to Citizenship Critique" (Reber 2018b). Indeed, for this title not to be the product of inattention, we must understand the repeated terms as having different meanings. See also Reber (2015b).

We will then take a closer look at how to sort out different types of critical citizenship and types of critiques. We will then examine whether and how citizens are willing to engage. We will see that cynical withdrawal is in the minority. Then, we will see how they view democracy. The next step will be to analyze the democratic framework on which their critique is based, or simply what they believe best defines and legitimizes democracy. These last questions are related to the hoped-for improvement of democracy or the deployment of its promises. However, these are often formulated in the form of critique. This is one more reason why the quality of the critique should be equal to the expected improvements, notably because of the constraint of pluralism and the need to propose acceptable and more responsible solutions than what is criticized.

1.1. Testing critical citizenship

In addition to the conceptual exploration of critique, its virtualities and its role for democratic life, without erasing the possibility of negative sanctions, one of the originalities of the approach of this chapter is to rely on a quantitative survey. This is rare in philosophy. It is a methodological innovation. Indeed, the *Democracy and Citizenship Module* (DCM) was conceived and developed through a close collaboration between political philosophy and quantitative political science². From the point of view of method, this work contributes to question the split between philosophy and sociology, and, from the point of view of analysis, it allows us to get out of the opposition between political analyses which believe that citizens express via their critique their distrust, their disillusionment, or their weariness, or, conversely, their democratic aspirations. I would add, above all, that it gives a better account of the complexity of the concept of critique and of its democratic promises. Indeed, democracy is undoubtedly one of the only systems to accept and institutionalize its own critique. As a result, it understands its self-critique for the purpose of improvement. If we push the reasoning far enough, it is therefore banal, even a truism, to speak of democratic innovation. Or we must say in virtue of what innovation is real and especially desirable on the democratic level (Reber 2020a). It is then necessary to reveal the features that underpin its legitimacy. But these are different, sometimes complementary and sometimes not. For example, it is impossible to promote the broadest and most inclusive participation possible and quality deliberation (Girard 2010; Reber 2012a).

² It was inserted in wave 9 within *L'Enquête électorale française. Comprendre 2017* (December 2–7, 2016), for a sample of 18,013 people registered on electoral lists, constituting a representative sample of the French population aged 18 and over, surveyed on the Internet, according to the quota method: gender, age, profession of the reference person in the household, region and urban area category. Cevipof, Ipsos Sopra-Steria, with *Le Monde*.

This rare interdisciplinary collaboration had to solve in a second step the problem of how to empirically reduce the complexity of philosophical debates to propose features of theoretical models of democracy³ to make them survey response items and test their attractiveness. Indeed, if citizens are critical, we can hypothesize that it is not only out of mistrust but also because they have aspirations to improve democratic life, fed by ideals or models of democracy, which correspond to theories of democracy. This constitutes another originality with respect to the literature on critical citizenship, as we confronted respondents with different traits involved in democratic legitimacy, taken from normative theories of democracy (Cunningham 2008)⁴. We were not only interested in the critique of the political exercise in a representative democracy, in the disposition to citizen engagement, but also, and this is the main purpose of this chapter, in the political theories that justify this or that type of democracy. To put it briefly, different political theories of democracy compete for the foundation and definition of democracy.

1.2. Critique as defiance

Even though understood as defiance, critical citizenship covers very different assumptions and research perspectives for political science alone.

1.2.1. Relational critique

Let us first briefly look at the general framework of critique, approached in a relational manner from the perspective of trust. Critique is approached from the point of view of the relationships of trust and, in a way, of distrust that the citizens surveyed have with those who are supposed to represent them (on different territorial scales) or, more generally, with institutions such as the media, which can be distinguished according to the media, or even experts. I will then make a few remarks.

As far as elected officials are concerned, with the form of representative democracy, citizens accept to delegate a large part of their power to them. However, it is they as voters who choose these representatives through regular elections. However, forms of questioning representative democracy are appearing. These are sometimes radical. Sometimes, a more direct participation is desired. However,

3 I leave aside the fact that in political philosophy and theory, there are discussions and disagreements (e.g. Bächtiger et al. 2018). We will return to this at length in the next chapter.

4 For the connection between democratic legitimacies and critical citizenships, which should be written in the plural, see, in particular, Reber (2018b, 2020c).

when direct forms of democracy exist, negative critique is also expressed when citizens are invited to vote on objects or projects through referendums, which are more regular in small states, such as Switzerland or certain states in the United States, for example. In fact, the majority of citizens sometimes take the opposite view of their representatives⁵.

We also see speeches appearing, often from extreme parties, opposing “the people” to the system. However, if the term “people” is at the basis of the *democratic* system, it is above all the citizens who are the main actors. Moreover, in democratic and pluralist countries, this people is divided, not simply for cultural, ethnic or religious reasons or for social or professional class interests, but by virtue of normative preferences affecting the very heart of the political and democratic exercise and its conditions⁶. This applies to the discussion of partly common and often very divergent conceptions of normative concepts and values such as welfare, justice, freedom or security, whether in their definition, prioritization or implementation. This is even more true for larger, international spaces, which are part of a long institutional construction, such as the European Union, which often advances through crises.

Critique thus reflects an erosion of trust in representatives, in the initiatives, referendums and consultations they promote⁷, and, more radically, in the institutions of representative democracy. This is the case of studies, such as those of the *Baromètre de la confiance politique* (*Barometer of Political Trust*), analyzed by *Centre de Recherches Politiques de Sciences Po* – CEVIPOF⁸, which analyze the critique from the point of view of relations with a particular mediation or type of institution.

These findings echo other works outside the strict academic sphere, such as those of the very popular pollster in France, Brice Teinturier, Deputy Director General of the IPSOS Institute (2017), who went further by talking about citizens who would have become “prafists”, for the qualification of (translation) “no longer giving a

5 Of course, we must keep in mind that in Switzerland, for example, it is often represented parties that launch initiatives and not only associations. Moreover, initiatives or referendums have been discussed and voted on before the vote of all citizens who certainly have the last word.

6 This is a mistake made by many relativistic approaches in social and political science that fold back preferences and ethical justifications on identities (Reber 2005a, 2005b, 2011b, 2016b).

7 Without forgetting that it is often more the promoters who are targeted than the objects, especially in countries where these votes are rare.

8 See: <http://www.sciencespo.fr/cevipof/fr/content/le-barometre-de-la-confiance-politique>.

damn/participating in politics” (in French, *plus-rien-à-foutre-de-la-politique*). He thus describes a population of voters who no longer expect anything from politics. According to him, (translation) “30% of French people show disgust or indifference and without making any noise they have distanced themselves from politics” (2017). He even goes so far as to say that (translation) “32% of French people think that other political systems can be as good as democracy”. This observation is alarming and doubts arise as to whether citizens would accept to throw themselves wholeheartedly into experiments in participatory and deliberative democracy.

Some remarks about the relationalist reduction

First, we note in these approaches that it is more the negative part of critique, understood as mistrust, which is at stake.

Second, it is not so much the content of trust (or, conversely, of critique) that is thematized, but rather relations to institutions or representations (institutions or persons), more or less *trustworthy*.

Third, these works associate with this critique the disinterest of citizens themselves in political action.

Indeed, critical citizenship could be described as a growing cynicism between citizens and their representatives, resulting in a diffuse crisis of mediating institutions, notably political parties, especially in their traditional form, or even trade unions and the whole of organized civil society, as the so-called Yellow Vests crisis in France was able to show. It should be noted, moreover, that this multiform movement resists for the most part the delegation for its own representation. This stage is extreme because it amounts to criticize without assuming to entrust representatives to carry this critique⁹. We would thus aid for this reason a deficit of engagement in the traditional political organizations, even for any form of delegation.

We will see later that critique is not necessarily a negative evaluation and that the majority of citizens surveyed in the DCM are ready to get involved. Moreover, a majority of them wait for initiatives from elected officials, for example, rather than proposing engagement actions themselves. What is missing from the relationalist approaches is the very content of the critique, which deserves to be explored further.

Before doing so, we will address two opposing conceptions that are associated with critical citizenship. They are important because of the challenge they pose to the plausibility of a hoped-for greater participation of citizens in political life.

⁹ However, we should qualify this because at least one list of Yellow Vests appeared in the last European elections, led by a former singer. Certainly, it obtained a very weak score.

1.3. Stealth democracy versus sunshine democracy

These two conceptions of democracy can be found in the work of Stoker and Hay (2012; Stoker 2006, 2012; Hay 2007; Hansard Society 2011), in particular. They are inspired by cognitive anthropology explanations of the type of folk theories (Kempton 1986; Keesing 1989; Holland and Quinn 1989; Lakoff 2002). These explanations look for shared, “common sense or taken-for-granted” understandings among citizens or respondents (Stoker and Hay 2012, p. 4) that can guide individuals’ actions. Stoker and Hay also explore critique in its negative and, as we will see, restricted sense. However, and this is what interests us, these works make more loaded assumptions than relationalist approaches, sketching out conceptions of political functioning in a democratic setting. I will present a few of them and then elaborate on a series of remarks.

It is mainly Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) who have adapted these very general theories of cognitive anthropology to political science. They then proposed the idea of a vision of democracy as stealth. I will abbreviate it as StD. Their conception is pessimistic, even cynical, and the advocates of participation or of a greater inclusion of citizens in political life would do well to take it into account, even though it means, as I will do, responding to these pessimistic assumptions. Indeed, they see democracy as an unpleasant aspect of modern life. It is a waste of time and leads to corruption. These authors also infer that, as a result, citizens find it very painful “under sufferance” to engage in politics. Political debate is pointless, because according to them sensible people agree on what should be done. These authors add that according to this vision, what is expected from the government is an efficient action, which would be better carried out by experts or thanks to good information. The main thing in politics according to this representation is therefore efficiency.

However, among political scientists, there is an opposite and more optimistic vision, that of Neblo (Neblo et al. 2010): the version of the so-called sunshine democracy, which I will abbreviate as SuD. This liberal model of representative democracy instead values debate and, above all, recognizes the importance and necessity of seeking compromise in politics. The essential thing for this model is that politics allow for reconciliation. These analysts add that as long as the political game sufficiently conforms to this ideal, citizens are willing and even happy to engage.

Remarks about non-symmetric oppositions

The opposition between these two models based on the presuppositions of folk theory, general cognitive anthropology assumptions, calls for some comments.

First, Theiss-Morse and Neblo et al. (2010) establish a direct dependence between their model and what elected officials should do. For StD, they must make effective decisions. For SuD, they must reach compromises. On reflection, the terms efficiency and compromise are not necessarily opposed. More efficiency can be achieved as a result of compromise. Moreover, depending on the institutional forms of states, obligations to compromise are more or less conditional (Steiner et al. 2004). This necessity is required with proportional election systems or those that guarantee an important place for minorities. In contrast, a majority party is less constrained or inclined to compromise.

Second, for StD, the presuppositions of both models, which are not discussed, are that the right decisions are self-evident. They would be of the order of common sense. It is still necessary to account for this common sense, for complex decisions such as a good number of collective choices and, above all, for ways of justifying them normatively, as is the case for tax justice, government reform, the relationship between citizenship and democracy or the just ecological transition, for example, to take up these themes of the Great National Debate and the Citizens' Convention on Climate. Where can we find this common, collective sense, and on the often-conflicting terrain of politics, even more so in a democracy where political conflicts have the right to be heard? The very institutional construction of the separation of powers, the guarantee of pluripartism and the existence of opposition parties favor the emergence and recognition of these conflicts.

Third, this theory (StD) is paradoxically accompanied by the replacement of elected officials by experts. This is illogical as common sense is very often understood as the opposite of sophisticated scientific knowledge and sometimes it is even counterintuitive. Expertise, especially in the analysis of complex systems, is often opposed to the lifeworld (Habermas 1984, 1987). However, the political exercise is eminently complex because of the dynamics of the systems at stake. New laws or measures, for example, do not have unilateral and deterministic effects on these systems, not to mention the interpretive quarrels they cause, when it is not a detour of their spirit. We should even recognize that in politics we make decisions about several complex systems, economic, environmental, caught up in international relations. Rather than deterministic effects, probabilities and even great uncertainties prevail. These decisions are often far from common sense. The management of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, for example, required much more knowledge to be combined than just common sense. Moreover, the opposition between lay and expert knowledge has often been noted, as numerous works attest, notably in the field of controversial technological choices and participatory technology assessment (Reber 2011c). It must be recognized that many collective choices are traversed by controversies where common sense does not impose itself from the outset. This view of common sense pays little attention to the pluralism and difficulties of judgment that we will see in Rawls (1971, 2003, 2005; Reber 2016a).

Conversely, SuD takes conflict or at least pluralism (of interests, interpretative or even normative) seriously, as compromises must be reached through discussion. Like compromise, the recognition of pluralism can lead to decisions that are better than those made on the basis of “common sense” alone.

SuD may be close to a minimal form of deliberative democracy because it remains committed to a representative framework, where citizens participate only indirectly in decisions. Indeed, Neblo and his colleagues leave a minimal margin of initiative to citizens. They are there more to take an interest in or support the political action of representatives than to engage directly or decide.

Fourth, the StD does not distinguish between democracy as it exists and what it should be, while the SuD conditions citizen engagement on the quality of the political game. According to the latter, if the political life exercised by elected officials is in the direction of the ideal, citizens will get involved. The implication should be that if the ideal is not met in practice, citizens may not engage or may even join the StD¹⁰.

Fifth, while Neblo et al. (2010) model leaves more room for citizen engagement and is limited to a representative framework, they speak of deliberative democracy, which is a different model of legitimation than representation. With deliberative democracy, as we will see, there is an expectation of exchanges of good reasons or arguments to support this or that claim (Reber 2012; Bächtiger et al. 2018). Certainly, with debates about deliberative democracy, the systemic turn (deliberative system), a conception of deliberative democracy as a system composed of various more or less deliberative scenes (Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012) and which includes experiments in mini-publics and diverse institutional sets, we mix representative and deliberative theories without really thinking about it. But this is at the cost of forgetting the requirements and promises of the first works on deliberation in politics, which did not separate the two, as we will see in the next chapter. Moreover, with this vague notion of deliberative system, we do not take care to think about the links between mini-publics (intra-institutional deliberation) and existing political systems (inter-institutional deliberation), which we will take up again in Chapter 6.

Moreover, we can note that the two authors, John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, often mentioned as inspirers of deliberative democracy always had in mind an existing system in front of them and not the mini-publics (Reber 2020a), which have

10 Stoker and Hay have shown in a survey that good policy or its opposite does not motivate citizens to get involved. We could object to the work of Robert Alexy, taken up by Habermas (1996, p. 414).

offered the main experimental grounds for deliberative democracy. We will develop these points in the following chapters.

Sixth, and going in the same direction, with these two approaches, StD and SuD, citizens are not asked whether they would take an active part in political life, whether they expect initiatives or how they see the democratic exercise and the improvements to be made. On the contrary, in the *Democracy and Citizenship Module*, we have addressed these questions in order to test them empirically. Indeed, we can refer to theories of democracy other than the one of representation alone, which we did in the sample survey¹¹.

Approaches such as those of Norris, the *Baromètre de la confiance* or even those opposing StD and SuD are therefore lateral to what we are interested in with deliberation and responsible communication or what we wanted to look for with the *Democracy and Citizenship Module*. Indeed, the contents and settings of discussions (conversation, deliberation, consideration), as well as the communicative capacities and ways of “responding to”, that are addressed in this book go far beyond those relationships, trade-offs or common sense discussed above. Similarly, for the survey module, we asked citizens directly about their engagement, the initiative they might take or expect to take, and most importantly, the differential attraction of the types of theories of democracy presented to them.

1.4. From reactive critique to pluralist political critique

Before making a sixth point about the two models of stealth democracy and sunshine democracy, I will explore at greater lengths some different interpretations of the rich concept of critical citizenship. I have chosen a fairly simple analytical approach to critique in the context of political exercise. I will complicate matters in the remainder of the book by adding, among other things, the problems of communicative capacities, responsibilities, conceptions of the burdens of Rawlsian judgment and the possibility of Habermasian rational critique. I could also have exploited the resources of philosophy, such as Kantian criticalism, or those of certain social science theories, such as the critical theories of the Frankfurt School, or those of Pierre Bourdieu, and of sociologists who relate differently to critique, including Luc Boltanski. All of them use critique differently in their work.

It is therefore surprising that none of the models of citizenship and democracy presented so far address critique head on. I therefore intend to clarify what can be

¹¹ This is not to say that representative democracy and deliberative democracy cannot be articulated for work that would assess the quality of deliberation in representative bodies, such as parliaments (see, for example, Steiner et al. 2004).

meant by “critique” in terms of what is criticized, what implicit competencies are required, and what frameworks for the cohabitation of critiques are or are not envisaged. This last point is intimately related to democracy because it incorporates the possibility of opposing critiques, notably through the recognition of pluralism (Rawls 2003, 2005; Reber 2006c, 2011d, 2016b).

The analyses of critical citizenship discussed briefly above are far from exhausting all the roles and meanings of the notion of “critique”. At the very least, critical citizens may have aspirations, want change and have a say in proposed laws or measures for collective life and democratic improvement. For some, they could even go so far as to commit themselves to participate in transformations. This attitude would thus already be differentiated from a more primary, reactive and unresponsive critique: reactive critique. One expression of this primary critique is, for example, that which consists of sanctioning by a punishment vote or which expresses a desire to dynamite the system. Max Scheler’s description of resentment in the wake of Nietzsche could be associated with this state of mind and action. Albert Camus in *The Rebel* praised Scheler’s finesse of approach: “a completely negative concept that like of resentment [...] is very well defined by Scheler as an autointoxication – the evil secretion, in a sealed vessel, or prolonged impotence” (Camus 1956, pp. 25–26).

It should be noted that the original meaning of resentment is almost the opposite, as it expressed gratitude before becoming a felt animosity for wrongs and prejudices suffered, sometimes with a desire for revenge. Indeed, the components of Schlerer-Camusian resentment occupy an important place in political life. It is a critique of others that has no means of expression, no means of changing things and no means of participating in change. It is content with a negative sanction without justification, hence the term reactive. It is very poor or imprecise on the proposals to do otherwise, when it has some to put forward.

Critical citizenship, as it is analyzed in political science, is largely in its vicinity. It is true that the questions asked in quantitative surveys often leave little room for forms of reflexivity and justifications for the answers. It is true that there are open-ended questions, but they are rarer and their processing is complicated.

A second form of critique in line with the aspirations we seek to discover is a capacity or a virtue that allows citizens to evaluate a situation, proposals, the actions of elected officials and political actions: evaluative critique. This critique takes care to judge elements of political life thanks to normative backgrounds, expectations and also promises. In the first two cases, for example, it is conceptions of social justice, equity, the welfare state or democracy that can be used to develop this critical evaluation. In the latter case, we are dealing with an evaluation established on the

basis of the promises of a candidate or their party in the action following their election, or even promises confronted with some of their choices and actions during the exercise of their mandate. We are more in a contractualist logic where it is the coherence of a political actor between their promises and their decisions that serves to evaluate their action. We could therefore distinguish between general evaluative critique (based on normative concepts) and contractualist evaluative critique (based on promises). I would add that these judgments can be made *ex post* or *ex ante* in relation to political actions, the conditions for their establishment being different.

It should be noted here that openness to evaluation brings to light another meaning of the notion of critique, namely the *negative result* of the evaluation. Often, in fact, when we say that a jury was critical, it is the result, the sanction that is retained rather than the process that led to this assessment. But the process is just as important as the result. It is surprising that it is the negative valence that occupies the common sense of critique.

It is therefore the two valences of critique as a result, *positive*, as praise, or negative, as sanction or as blame, which must be distinguished in each of the conceptions of critique presented here. I would add that between these two poles, negative and positive, there is room for a gradation.

A distinction must also be made here between a vague assessment, or even a sanction, made before any analysis (reactive critique) and a more or less substantiated evaluative critique. In the case of the jury, we hope that the decision was preceded by a cross-assessment. In the case of reactive critical citizenship, this evaluation is absent and the sanction is negative in its defiant form.

A third kind of critique is propositional critique. It is quite similar to the previous one. It is not conceived as a form of critical sovereignty or negative politicization, but as a *capacity* or a *virtue* not only to evaluate a situation but also to propose answers, solutions or actions different from those issued, for example, by a government. The difference with the two previous forms of critique lies in the strength of the proposal.

Analytically, we should even distinguish two forms of propositional critique: one attached to the entities being evaluated, for example a particular political action (first-level propositional critique), and another, more sophisticated and second order, capable of criticizing the very frameworks of the evaluation of the thing judged (second-level propositional critique), for example what public action or democratic control should be. The first-level propositional critique is close to the evaluative critique. It only adds the capacity to propose something alternative to the proposal of the political action being evaluated.

A fourth form of critique, pluralist political critique, is the one capable of formulating a critique while taking into account the fact that different critiques coexist in a democracy. This cohabitation is even a condition of the democratic exercise. We could thus say that even though it is paradoxically more elaborated and often little discussed, it is first compared to the other conceptions of the critique. It allows their deployment.

Several difficulties contribute to the necessity of thinking of this cohabitation: the burdens of judgment that we will see in Rawls (Reber 2016a), which leads to the fact of reasonable pluralism, normative pluralism (political and moral) or even at a simpler level, the plurality of interests in order to be situated at a collective level. This critical level takes seriously the irreducibility of conflict in politics, the legitimacy of pluralism, political (Rawls 2003, 2005) or even combining political, legal and ethical (Reber 2006c, 2016a) and the need to discuss in order to reach various types of agreements.

It is thus an ambitious critique that, if we think about it, is an essential capacity for democratic life, where normative assertions are put in competition not only with moral conflicts but also with normative constraints guaranteeing forms of cooperation, free and fair in collective life, with, in the first place, political life and collective choices. Now, this level of pluralist political critique is the one that allows not only the expression and the discussion of critiques but also their justifications. It is even the most hospitable system to critiques in its diversity.

The aspirations of citizens and their ambitions for democracy could thus be the source of their critique. As such, critique is then a prerequisite for enlightened or reflexive citizenship in a pluralistic context, where the action of rulers and offers in competition must be evaluated. This competition is not the one that would oppose “a people” largely fantasized to its rulers. It exists, is organized and institutionalized between political professionals and party members, and also between citizens, associations and interest groups.

With this last level of pluralist political critique, we move from the contestation of two points of view or opinions carried by two individuals – or two groups – in conflict or disputing, to the level of the collective response to this binary contestation at a level involving many more people and positions.

Moreover, this political level believes that decisions should be made taking into account minorities and ideally all points of view. It is one thing to express a critique or even to have a well-argued position in a discussion, to put forward an alternative proposal, it is another thing to organize this discussion in a political and pluralist way, hospitable to critiques going in sometimes opposite directions. The critical distance is here much more demanding.

We could therefore summarize the types of critique as follows: 1) reactive, 2) evaluative (general or contractualist), 3) propositional (of the first or second level) and 4) political pluralistic.

Forms 1 and 2 have positive and negative sanctions. Form 3 is capable of making proposals. Form 4 envisages the coexistence of critiques. This last form thus envisages all of the others, as well as their conditions of expression, even of admissibility. It is the one that sees the farthest and broadest range of problems posed by critique, which can be only a reaction but can move on to an evaluation (with a theory or contract) and make proposals (of the first and second level).

1.5. The critique of common sense

These distinctions with respect to critique lead us to the sixth remark made in section 1.3 about the work in political science on critical citizenship. Indeed, in the types of democracy that oppose Theiss-Morse to Neblo et al. (2010), the former are monistic because they rely on *one* common and univocal sense that seems to be shared by all. Even though many citizens may think that this common sense exists, political life quickly brings out all sorts of conflicts during discussions. We can think of the application of decisions in different contexts or of the interpretative confrontation of these decisions. We can also doubt the robustness of this common sense on the level of the political exercise. The complexity of relations, for example, in international politics or economics, soon dispels the evidence. I leave aside here the problem of the equivalence between *common sense* and *good sense*. The latter has a positive normative value, certainly, but it is not self-evident. Moreover, we do not know its opposite, something like bad sense, unless it is insane. If certain decisions are senseless, several different aspects of this lack of sense can be revealed if we go to the trouble of understanding them, of knowing their intention, their interpretation, their application or their secondary effects, when it is not their detour. What we do not understand or what expresses another vision of things is not necessarily insane. Certainly, not everything in life is “struck with common sense”, and some actions deserve to be criticized and evaluated negatively.

However, we must recognize a bias in the surveys linked to the weakness of the sole recourse to common sense. In effect, assumptions are made about the ease of understanding of respondents and the common sense of the terms used. However, this common sense is not the one that is supposed to be easily accessible in the political exercise of StD, because the political exercise is subject to discussion, constraint, opposition and reformulation.

In addition, the answers of the survey participants are not the ones they could use in the exercise of the power, with the appropriate information and the various

relations of power, or the rules to respect. Similarly, the social ontology, which concerns the relationships between individuals and groups, an implicit and forgotten phenomenon in Internet surveys, can also lead to the reinforcement of this bias. Indeed, respondents are alone in front of their screens. Even in the case of telephone interviews, the respondent does not encounter any resistance, questioning or opposition. The only constraint is that of the interviewer, who is supposed to keep their influence to a minimum. The so-called common sense is not tested much.

Neblo et al. (2010), on the contrary, have taken note in their presuppositions of the necessity of having to discuss in politics in order to reach forms of agreement. They even go so far as to speak of “reconciliation”. Moreover, they are open to more participatory political experiments, while other analysts are resistant or at least skeptical about the virtues of more inclusive political discussion. However, the term they use, reconciliation, is loaded and strong. The consideration of opposing views and possible conciliation would be interesting enough. Reconciliation implicitly marks that disagreements are very strong, perhaps long-standing, that wrongs have been committed causing separations and that “compromises” must be reached. They have chosen this term, which is also susceptible of several meanings (Médevielle 1998).

The term compromise, beyond its content, which is acceptable to the parties following a negotiation, includes by its etymology the term promise. It is therefore also oriented towards the future, indicating a commitment to be kept together, a promise made together, binding the parties.

It would be necessary to discuss with the political scientists of the StD their definitional choice relative to this term of compromise in order to know if it is necessary, as they do, to grant it only a negative valence, the compromise as compromising. However, this is only a limited and widespread meaning. On the contrary, compromise can have a positive valence, as a political production requiring a great creative capacity. This practice of working out compromises is, for example, very widespread in the European Parliament, where no group has a majority on its own, or even only in association with another group, as is currently the case. Moreover, under the heading of agreements, we could propose many other kinds of agreements such as consensus, dissensus or deliberative disagreement or acquiescence to dissonance (Rescher 1993; Reber 2011c, 2011d, 2016a).

This seriousness of critique (section 1.4.) – in order to differentiate its various meanings – allows us to discuss the main analytical frameworks of critical citizenship in political science. It is mainly the meaning of the first type that is implicitly retained, interpreted as reactive criticism, essentially negative. Moreover, these surveys do not directly ask citizens if they could get involved, make counterproposals or define the forms of democracy they aspire to, more or less

hospitable to divergent critique. Instead, we have tried in the DCM to test these possibilities and questions.

1.6. Intensity of critique towards democracy and propensity to engage

Another reason justifies this exploration of the main virtualities of critique to go as far as the properly political critique (pluralist political critique). In this module, we are not only interested in the critique of politics as it is practiced, in the disposition to commitment but also, and this is an original perspective of this chapter, in the theories that justify this or that type of democracy. To put it briefly, different political theories of democracy (Cunningham 2002) compete for the foundation or legitimization of democracy. Without aiming to be exhaustive, we have included in our response items the forms already present in the classic surveys, such as representative democracy (“[...] delegating political decisions to elected officials”) and epistemic democracy (specialized knowledge; “entrusting experts with the task of making the right decisions”). We have added to these features of theories, participatory democracy, which can also be called continuous (“[...] participate in public life, beyond the elections”), and, for the first time, deliberative democracy (“[...] discuss together in order to go through the arguments and decide”). The last formulation that we have proposed gives pride of place to rights, in particular the right to challenge bad or unjust decisions. This form of democracy can be compared to the republicanism of non-domination within liberal theories of democracy. In fact, to avoid undue domination, mechanisms allow us to contest certain decisions that apply to individuals: “[...] to give oneself the right to contest decisions that one considers bad”.

Certain paths, such as catallactic democracy (of the exchange of voluntary, adjusted and consented relations), which are close to the theory of rational choice and economics or pragmatic democracy, could not be retained. But the five paths explored are already very interesting. To our knowledge, citizens have never been asked about theories of democracy. Their discussion is left to theoretical debates, in philosophy or in political theory, whereas participatory or even deliberative experiences are more and more numerous and have left the confines of research and experimentation. This is a paradox, because the promoters of these experiments claim to offer more legitimate procedures and must resort to democratic theories, if only by evoking traits of this legitimacy for the choice of procedures and rules.

We can therefore hypothesize that in order to criticize democracy, citizens have recourse, often implicitly, to models or ideals, however vague and sketchy, that reflect theories of democracy. For example, in the last few decades, there has been talk and sometimes experimentation, albeit on a modest scale, with a model other

than that of representative democracy: participatory democracy. In the political offer that was intended to be new during the 2017 campaign of the French presidential election, it is this that was most often discussed. However, there are other theories of democracy in philosophy that we wanted to test. These democratic theories are as good as the imported models of cognitive anthropology used for StD or SuD. The former are more specific to democracy. If they are sometimes sophisticated, they ultimately rely on the intuitions of their producers, even though they are political philosophers. Some philosophers appeal to these intuitions in the discussion of their theses.

It is surprising, moreover, that in philosophy, it is rare to rely on survey devices and empirical work. Many philosophers believe that what nonphilosophers think about the subjects they deal with is of no interest. This is not our opinion. I would like to add that this is not a practical or empirical philosophy that would only use a few cases to illustrate a theoretical point without consideration for the methods of social and political sciences, in this instance quantitative. These methodological and interdisciplinary remarks already anticipate problems that will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

A last reason making this connection with political theory plausible is the fact that philosophical ideas or texts can inspire political proposals or actions. Rousseau's texts, for example, provided ideas that were later exploited in political speeches during the French and Russian revolutions. Marx even actively participated in some political changes. Closer to us, we could hear Paul Ricoeur's texts quoted in politics by Emmanuel Macron, who may have briefly collaborated with him, or by Chantal Mouffe, who supported the leader of *La France insoumise* (extreme left) Jean-Luc Mélenchon during the 2017 presidential elections.

We can thus summarize the problem that ultimately interested us for this module as follows. How do citizens respond when offered various theories of democracy, even in a highly stylized form? In this framework, the qualifier of critique is revisited. Distrust, disinterest and a form of negativity towards politics do not have, by far, a monopoly on critique. It can, on the contrary, be positive, constructive and the bearer of an aspiration. It can take several forms: reactive, evaluative (theoretical or contractualist), propositional (of first or second level) or pluralist political. This last type of critique is more particularly targeted, as it is a question for the respondent to the survey of classifying traits that justify different points of democratic legitimacy or even different democratic theories. Now, according to the theories, the place of critical pluralism is more or less pointed out.

These virtualities of critique can in turn contribute to improving democracy by developing some of its modalities.

Here are the main results obtained for the first question, followed by the analysis of two tables¹², with some remarks at the end.

A first result comes to shake up the received ideas about critical citizenship thought under the angle of distrust or suspicion. Indeed, within the restricted framework of a questioning on the democratic functioning and its possible amendments, only 8% of the respondents question the democratic system itself (“Democracy doesn’t work, we must find another political system”). We can call them *Exiters* (those who are for the exit of democracy). This is almost as many as those who are content with the status quo (“Our democracy works well, there is no reason to really change things”).

A second, more important result is the aggregation of the responses to the other two items (83%) of those who believe (48%) that our democracy can be improved on many points (“Our democracy should be improved on many points”), and those (35%) who call for “radical” changes (“Establishing a true democracy in France would require a radical change”). The former, whom we can call *reformist critics* (RCs), constitute almost half of the surveyed population (48%). They are more numerous than those who want more transformation, *transformative critics* (TCs). A first lesson is that the vast majority of respondents believe that democracy can be improved. This result consolidates the important existence of a critique thought as an aspiration to improve democracy rather than to reject it or, more broadly, to desert politics.

A remark about this table. Firstly, we have in the first row the general distribution of all respondents to the question about the functioning of democracy. Then, in the second row, we have the distribution between those who think that democracy should be changed (RCs and TCs) or even leave the system (*Exiters*). We have left out those who think that democracy works well (9.2% of all respondents). Finally, we have in the following rows the distributions of the respondents to the questions on democracy according to which types of commitment they consent to or not.

Table 1.1 thus combines several results. The first result is that 74% of the respondents are ready to commit themselves, if we leave aside those who think that democracy works well and who would therefore not have any critique to make. The second result is that 62% of the respondents think that this commitment is conditioned by an initiative in which they could participate. A quarter think that it is not up to them to contribute. Critical citizenship is therefore not uniform in the scope of the observation on democracy and its functioning, nor in the type of commitment to which citizens are ready to consent.

12 The tables were designed with the precious help of Flora Chanvril-Ligneel (Cevipof), mathematician and specialist in the analysis of surveys.

	“Our democracy works well, there’s no reason to really change things”	“Our democracy should be improved in many ways”	“Establishing a true democracy in France would require a radical change”	“Democracy doesn’t work, we have to find another political system”	Total
TOGETHER	9.2%	48.3%	34.6%	7.8%	100%
	–	53.3%	38.1%	8.6%	100%
“It’s not my place to contribute” 26%	–	54.9%	34.9%	10.2%	100%
“If there are initiatives that work for me, I’d like to be part of them” 62%	–	56.3%	37.3%	6.4%	100%
“I have ideas to defend, I feel ready to propose actions to change things” 12%	–	33.3%	50.1%	16.6%	100%

Table 1.1. Type of commitment and intensity of critique of democratic functioning

	Not at all in agreement (0 to 1)	Somewhat disagree (2 to 3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4 to 6)	Somewhat agree (7 to 8)	Totally agree (9 to 10)	Disagree (0 to 3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4 to 6)	Agree (7 to 10)	Average scores
... give yourself the right to contest decisions you think are wrong	2%	3%	27%	38%	30%	5%	27%	68%	7.3
... to discuss together, go around the arguments and then decide	2%	4%	31%	40%	23%	6%	31%	63%	7.0
... participate in public life beyond elections	2%	5%	38%	37%	18%	7%	38%	55%	6.7
... delegate policy decisions to elected officials	6%	9%	48%	28%	9%	15%	48%	37%	5.7
... entrusting experts to make the right decisions	11%	12%	45%	23%	9%	23%	45%	32%	5.2

Table 1.2. Attractiveness of definitions (theories) of democracy

Table 1.2 goes further, as it seeks to find out the percentages of respondents according to the intensity of their critique of the functioning of democracy and according to their propensity to engage or not, and in which ways they would be willing to engage.

The first group, those who think it is not their place to contribute, is more numerous among RCs (55%). We have a similar distribution for those who could be involved in an initiative that would be appropriate for them.

We have a different breakdown, with the third group, those who are willing to advocate and propose actions. They lean towards radical change (50%) and especially towards changing the system (16.6%). This shows that the expectation of radical changes in the democratic system, or even the exit from democracy, is more pronounced among those who are ready to commit themselves. However, this should not obscure from the overall result on the role of the citizen in the transformation of democracy, which reminds us that only 12% of the whole want to engage in this way on their own initiative and without waiting for initiatives to which they could adhere.

We are therefore far from the 32% of “prafists” of Brice Teinturier mentioned above and even further from the analyses borrowing from the explanations of stealth democracy for which citizens would have little interest in politics, if not a frank repulsion.

1.7. Comparative attractiveness of five features of democracy

The next step ventures towards theories or more modestly towards some traits that participate in the legitimization of democracy. As expected, all of the traits (items of answers to the questions) get above-average scores because they are positive elements that are in competition.

If the differences in scores are not very important, it is the ranking of the response modalities that matters. Indeed, representative democracy, our current framework, is ranked very low, just above “expertocracy”, which could be compared to epistemic democracy¹⁶. Participation (or forms of continuous democracy) comes just above. This is surprising compared to current debates that focus on more inclusive forms of citizen participation or more extensive forms of participation through information and communication technologies, notably *civic techs*. Going back to the top scores, we find the need to discuss together in order to go round the arguments and then decide. This schematically covers what is understood in theory

16 See, for example, the work of Estlund and Landemore (2018).

and in political science by deliberative democracy, whose expressions, certain developments, debates, but above all its unresolved problems, we will take up more systematically in the following chapters (Reber 2016a). It should therefore not be confused with participatory democracy.

In percentage terms, the overall responses of those who agree (7–10 of the scale) indicate an even greater drop-off for representative democracy at 18 points below participatory democracy and 26 points below deliberative democracy.

The highest score is the one that establishes a right of contestability. It should be noted here that the survey is limited by the fact that, according to the wording of the item, contestable decisions are those that are “considered bad”. Moreover, this response may combine the crude or direct contestation of citizens with more institutionalized or legal forms of contestation. I would add that this response item does not make it possible to distinguish the depth, the motives and the basis of the contestation according to the types of critique that I have presented.

1.8. From critical citizenship to citizenship critique

As we have shown, critical citizenship, as it is widely understood in political science, is rather thin in content. Moreover, it is its negative sanction that prevails. But critique and its virtualities are much more varied, even sophisticated. Critique is even a condition of democracy. It is a problem to respect, to make it live. Certainly, it will require us to question its conditions as we will see in the following chapters. In the same way, if it can take part in the questioning, critique and responsibility must be able to be articulated as we will also see.

As such, we could thus leave to *critical citizenship* the sense of reactive critique, and for the other, more demanding senses, going up to the recognition of the cohabitation of critiques, speak about *citizenship critique*. The opposite could be defended, but as the expression *critical citizenship* is already taken in political science in the sense of mistrust, I insist here on the types of critique expected to be at the level of a citizenship that grants widely and in a pluralist way the city rights to the others. Indeed, a citizen has to be critical about what is proposed to them, even though it is to accept it with full knowledge of the facts. In the same way, they must grant this right to those who do not share their opinion. Here, citizenship and granting the right of citizenship to other citizens takes on a very strong meaning. We could say that a citizen who does not honor this requirement is not indeed a citizen. Certainly, they will enjoy, thanks to legal guarantees, citizen status, will be able to vote, for example, but they will remain de facto below the level of a more complete democratic exercise. It is this kind of quality that is put to the test during participative experiences, for example. They must also be able to compare several

conflicting proposals and critiques. Full citizenship thus requires demanding dispositions that are not spontaneous but are acquired. This is one of the virtues of participatory and deliberative experiences that is not sufficiently emphasized.

If these features of the legitimations of democracy should not be detached from each other, the weight attributed to them indicates the expectations and aspirations of democratic perfectionism. It is this perfectionism as a source of aspiration for the citizen critique that we could distinguish from the critical citizenship, which we could thematize by this module. We can certainly question whether this improvement is attainable, and not only for citizens drawn randomly, invited in for experiments. It is this perfectionism that sometimes acts as hope or legitimization of experiences claimed to be better and more democratic than the usual debates between elected officials, subject to too many constraints and influences. Should democratic perfectionism be aimed at these elected officials, whose election and maintenance in office must be confronted with all sorts of opposing strategies, obeying more the logic of efficiency than legitimacy? The mere recognition that democracy obeys and is guaranteed by a whole legal arsenal, based in part on normative resources and features, and that the latter even allow for the improvement of both law and democracy, indicates in any case that pure strategy, cynicism or even cognitive anthropological description of the StD type are far from exhausting the functioning and analysis of democracy. Its normative demands and promises have their place and cannot be reduced to the existing. It is more widely the tension that exists between what is and what ought be, which cannot be reduced to each other.

The problem of knowing how far we can go with these normative expectations, whether for citizens chosen randomly or for political professionals, also remains and deserves to be clearly posed, before anticipating the superiority of the convocation of the former and condemning the weakness of the latter. Moreover, citizens and elected officials take their place within a broader democratic system, which can also be more or less deliberative, as we will see in Chapter 6.

1.8.1. Democracy, citizenship and types of critique

We have thus been able to show in this chapter that critical citizenship is far from disinterest in politics or even a certain cynicism on the part of citizens. Moreover, it is not uniform; its dimensions and scope are varied. At the end of this chapter, we will clarify the relationship between the questions of the *Democracy and Citizenship Module*, the features of democracy and the types of critique I have defined. Indeed, this module was primarily designed to track citizens' aspirations and desires to improve democracy by building on some of its ideals to the point of readiness to engage, rather than being oriented towards cynicism and distrust. A

second reflection on the analytical contours of the critique then arose. Indeed, the first two questions of the module on the functioning of democracy and on the participation that citizens are ready to assume make it possible to know how they look at it, the importance of the improvements to be made to it, and, in a second time, their willingness to commit themselves. We have seen that the commitment that is most represented is the one that is conditioned by initiatives outside the citizens interviewed. In relation to the types of critique I have elaborated, we can say that the respondents are not simply reactive in the sense of resentment that would make them unengaged. Moreover, more of them are *positive* about democracy (as an ideal), and even about how it works¹⁷. Of course, both deserve to be improved more or less radically depending on the respondents and whether one is aiming at democracy as it exists. Indeed, it is less certain that the respondents are thinking about the improvement of a political ideal. The evaluation here is general (general evaluative critique) because we do not take the promises of this or that politician as a witness. The questions asked and the items were not directly dedicated to propositional critique, but some respondents believe they are capable of making alternative proposals. Twelve percent of the respondents are ready to commit themselves (“I have ideas to defend and I feel ready to propose actions to change things”).

For these first questions, it is assumed that the theory of democracy in question is representative democracy. This is the framework with which citizens are familiar, with a few exceptions for those who have practiced direct or semi-direct democracy. It is only with the questions of the ranking of the traits of democratic legitimacy that other theories of democratic legitimacy are tested. But it is these different traits of democratic legitimacy that allow for a critique of democracy itself and not simply of its functioning. What do these different features of critique say about political theory, even though they remain frustratingly limited by the constraints of quantitative surveys?

We can classify these theories into two groups: those that envisage a *direct critique* (contestation, deliberation, participation) and an *indirect critique* (through delegation to elected officials and experts). But even in the second case, critique has its place, but it is delegated. We can even hope that it is different, more argued and technically solid in the case of experts. For elected officials, critique has its place and is expressed in debates and all modes of expression. It should be noted in passing that the elected representatives take advice from experts, but it is the place where legitimacy is sought that counts for the investigation. With the first group,

¹⁷ The questionnaire would have deserved to be clearer about democracy as an ideal system or the actual functioning of democracy in France, which is what is most often analyzed in political science surveys. I would like to point out that both are equally difficult to understand and that their knowledge requires different and complementary knowledge.

especially with contestation and deliberation, we aim more directly at more specific elements of critique. One points to the guarantee of its possibility with the right of contestation, and even “to discuss together and go around the arguments [...]”. These two forms thus implicitly assume a pluralist political critique. They are thus the two types of democracy which are more political, by the recognition of the conflict, and which touch on the difficulty posed by the coexistence of critiques, which can even be opposed frontally.

The contesting form is well aware that critique can arise if decisions are judged to be bad. The difference that we have already indicated as a problem to be dealt with for future research on the types of contestation is between those who only think of attributing to themselves the right to contest (univocal) and those who think that this right of contestation must be guaranteed for all and requires a framework with respect for pluralism. In this second case, we will arrive at conflicts of contestation. The deliberative form also takes this problem into account and foresees solutions, as it defends that it is necessary to go through arguments, to try to go around them, and even to give in to the force of the best argument (Habermas 1984, 1987; Toulmin 1988): themes that we will take up at length in Chapter 5.

The two types of democracy that are best evaluated are thus those that are closest to the most demanding form of critique, *pluralist political critique*, as it takes into account the cohabitation of critiques along with the problem – which we will see in Chapter 4 – of the burdens of judgment (Reber 2016a), combined collectively.

For future work, it would be interesting to test more systematically the types of critique specified here that the module does not allow for direct analysis. Certainly, we would have more difficulty formulating questions that stick to respondents’ self-assessment, such as a question like, “are you willing, if you feel it is necessary, to make different proposals than those proposed by the government?”. Asking them to write their proposals and then evaluating them would be tedious and time-consuming.

1.8.2. Beyond the four types of critique: communication, responsibility and burdens of judgment

If the four types of critique that I have proposed, following a simple analytical approach, are instructive in terms of knowing what we are talking about and understanding what critique is, I will try to go further. I propose to see what the relationships between these types of critique are and how to make the model more complex in order to go in the direction of what is announced in the introduction of my book and which will be treated more widely in the following.

1.8.2.1. *Moments of critique*

As far as the relationship of the types of critique to each other is concerned, we can say that primary and evaluative critiques have results in the form of sanctions, positive and often negative. Evaluative critique is more complete because it has criteria or simply supports to evaluate. Both share in common the fact that they do not propose anything.

The proposal takes up all of the space in propositional critique. We can deduce that if a proposal is made, it is following an implicit negative sanction of a proposal of elected officials, for example.

The last form of critique, pluralist politics, is situated in a withdrawn position, a meta-critique, because it assumes the possibility of the cohabitation of critiques.

These critiques thus insist on the different moments of critique in general: the evaluation of a situation or a proposal of a third party (e.g. the government), the sanction and the proposal of other solutions. However, if these three moments must be combined with participation, and if participation is pluralistic, then three additional problems must be addressed.

First, we have to accept that critique can be divergent and be able to accommodate this difficulty (pluralist political critique).

Second, we must be able to step back from the evaluation (general evaluative critique), as the evaluations of the various parties will sometimes be opposed.

Third, it will be necessary to make proposals guaranteed by background justifications (second-level propositional critique).

It should be noted that in ordinary political life, it is often only reactive critique that is expressed. This is the case in opinion polls and their media coverage, which leave little room for justifications and which cannot deeply exploit the disagreements between respondents that would be exposed. Of course, these disagreements are taken into account in the researchers' analysis, but not by the respondents who cannot interact with each other. However, to imagine putting respondents in contact is to move towards participation, whether it is real or mediated by computer platforms. If we do not remain superficial or ambiguous and if we want quality participation, then we are confronted with the additional problems that I have mentioned.

It is surprising that it is the sanction that is often first with critical citizenship, as it is only an outcome. Yet, as we will see in the following chapters, this is often done too quickly. In the case of participation, conflicts and disagreements will quickly

undo what is not supported by some justification. This is even truer if pluralism is accepted, which is the case, for example, with the drawing of lots of citizens, corrected by sociodemographic criteria to constitute assemblies that reflect the diversity of the territories considered, of countries, cities, or even larger entities, such as the European Union. Of course, diversity is not yet normative, moral and political pluralism. We can very well correspond to such or such socio-professional class and not have the same opinion as others of this class on these different plans.

1.8.2.2. *Critique and communication skills*

So far, with these four types of critique, we have not yet said anything about the communicative capacities required. As far as communicative abilities are concerned, we can recognize that reactive critique leaves almost no room for communication. There is nothing to say to validate their sanction. The reasons can be as diverse as lack of knowledge, bias, self-interest, poor interaction or exposure to disagreement.

In contrast, other forms of critique raise questions, such as “on what basis should we evaluate?”. Pluralistic political critique has already foreseen the problem of cohabitation between critiques and even between their justifications. It is to be expected that the more the critique has to stand back, the more it has to call for complex communicative capacities. Indeed, justifications based on narratives will lack strength when it comes to convincing people of a different opinion. A narrative illustrating a case of injustice, for example, will be insufficient. It will then be necessary to move on to a contradictory interpretation of that case, or even to a general interpretation of justice, in order to deal with it in the light of other possible cases.

This idea can be formulated differently. With these three moments of critique and their complexification, we have mainly considered measures or laws. But with the general action of a government, the perception is of something much vaguer and more general. It is often with a few anecdotes, a few short sentences and snippets of stories that we enter into the subject. However, we soon come to conflicts between narratives and also on the meaning and interpretation of these narratives in order to make something more general and meaningful or something more convincing.

By reversing the relationship between types of communicative capacities and the place of critique, we will note that critical hindsight, or critical exploration, therefore triggers a shift between communicative capacities. We will see this in detail in Chapter 6 (Ferry 1991a, 1991b). Indeed, according to Jean-Marc Ferry, it is the critique that obliges to pass from one communicative capacity to another.

I will be even more radical and explain more precisely that it is *the type of questions* asked, implying a change or a widening of the context, between narration

and interpretation, for example, which is at the origin of these passages. Different questions, such as “how?” or “why?”, allow for a deeper critique. This is also the case with the passage from a critique as a reaction, corresponding to the negative reaction to a “what?”, to an evaluation of general scope, which answers a “why?”. In the same way, we can rely on the distinctions that we have established in order to identify, more finely than Ferry, types of critique.

With these considerations, we see the problem of the difficulty of opposing judgments, which plagued Rawls and Habermas, who responded in different ways. It is here that Habermas imposes the communicative capacity of the argumentation to defend a *rational critique*. Rawls says nothing about communicative capacities. He therefore does not favor any of them. He proposes *weighing* reasons. This may seem simpler, except that reasons are integral to reasoning. The problem therefore remains. We will see this in detail in Chapter 4. Moreover, the evolution of the theory of deliberative democracy (Chapter 2) remains largely silent on this problem and even moves away from it. However, with the slightest exercise of participation, we are quick to encounter the problem of judgment in the plural and collective. This is one of the main difficulties: it is true that we must be inclusive, but when the time comes to make choices and to select, inclusion becomes a constraint, to be held with a search for solutions that are as fair as possible.

There remains the question of critique in the face of the problem of responsibility, of which I said in my introduction that they were interdependent. Indeed, the agent of an action is actually or virtually called into question for it, in the form of a critique. They will then have to “respond to”. Now, we have several types of critique that can be addressed to them. How do these position themselves in relation to the responsibility in the case of an accusation?

In terms of what is targeted and how the critic assumes responsibility, we have two groups. The first group includes propositional critique, which, although it does not go so far as to exercise power, nevertheless anticipates an assumption of responsibility. The one who questions is capable of making proposals.

The second group includes two other types of critique, reactive and evaluative, which are more backward, because they sanction and evaluate without assuming responsibility for the action in question, having nothing else to propose. I leave aside here the only critique that would be directed at the delegates, the elected officials and politicians themselves. Indeed, it is their actions that are most often discussed. Apart from the cases where they obviously did not live up to their individual responsibilities as elected officials, it is much more the policy proposals that they helped to get voted on and carried out that should be criticized.

In this relationship between responsibilities and critiques, we may want to specify not only the types of critique but also the types of responsibility. We can at least distinguish responsibility as a capacity to carry out actions (knowledge, skills, abilities), as an authority to do so, as a virtue (quality of achievement up to excellence), as deserving blame or conversely praise, as accountability and as responsiveness¹⁸.

In addition to the distinctions specific to the types of critique indicated above, relating to what is aimed (reaction, evaluation, proposal) and the way in which responsibility is or is not envisaged, we find on both sides of the critique, the one who criticizes and the one who must answer, as well as conceptions of responsibility that vary according to the types of responsibility. It is a question of going further than knowing whether a responsibility is envisaged or not, in order to understand what type of responsibility it is. Now, on the side of the critic, their capacities, going as far as excellence, their authority, to say nothing of the adjustment of their critique, are very variable. There is thus an important asymmetry between the governors and the governed, as regards responsibilities as capacities and authorities¹⁹. This is inherent, for capacity, to professionalization through studies and by the function exercised over time, and, for authority, to the acceptance of a legally-framed delegation. Certainly, more and more, those in government are going through the requirement of accountability (Bovens et al. 2014). In terms of excellence in the way decision-makers (in French *responsables politiques*) carry out their responsibilities, it is here and in the adjustment that much of the debate, questioning and disagreement is played out. Responsibility understood as deserving blame or praise is even more frequent. More moral than political, it is easily mobilized, focused on individuals rather than on complex systems, which are more important for the quality of political and general life.

These first rather simple descriptions are soon more complicated with actions, such as that of a government or all of the collective actions that make up our world. Think, for example, of the ecological transition. Questions of control and delegation will arise. The well-known problem of affected publics, whether direct or secondary, becomes very complicated when it comes to participation in the fight against climate warming, where everyone bears some responsibility (Reber 2014, 2016b). Certainly, in the *cause* and in the *capacities* to fight against it, the responsibilities are different. If I take up the problem of the vague appreciation of a government's action, it is illuminated even differently with the problem of responsibility. We could even say

18 For a more complete picture in 10 interpretations of responsibility, see Pellé and Reber (2015a, 2015b).

19 This is pointed out by Pierre Rosanvallon (2015), without, however, exploring it and without integrating the problem of critique and the various senses of moral and political responsibility.

that this action is diffuse, even confused, when it is a question of disentangling what depends on the action of this government, its implementations by other actors and what does not depend on it but participates in this action.

Responsible critique, communication and deliberation are therefore variable. More simply, we can observe that communication with responsibility is not the same thing as communication without responsibility. The relationships to the realization of the action are not the same. The carrying out of the action makes it possible to know things that those who only judge do not know. But, conversely, the effects of actions, notably undesirable ones, weighing on those who are confronted with them, give them the right to call into question those who caused them. This challenge is more or less supported, both by its critical content and by the various aspects of responsibility assumed. In the same way, the answers of the authors (directly or on behalf of their authority) are expected. The exchanges will often be too brief and asynchronous in our complex societies. But these responses could be through a variety of communicative capacities mobilized through conversation, deliberation and perhaps some considerations understood as careful scrutiny. If these three possible frameworks for exchange rarely share the same places, they exist fortunately, but fragmented and dispersed. This exchange between critics of the governed and those in government is another justification for the need for a pluralist political critique that can regulate contestation, accountability and sanction (blame or praise).

1.9. An unusual debate to tame the critics

If for many political scientists, critical citizenship rhymes with distrust, cynicism and the will to sanction the powers that be, or sometimes the elites (Reber 2020a), I have shown that critique can be interpreted quite differently. On the contrary, it can be positive, aspiring to change in the name of democratic ideals. With the three episodes of the Yellow Vests crisis, the Great National Debate and the Citizens' Convention on Climate, we have an additional problem: that of critical citizenship and the necessary ecological transition. Here too, critique can be both the brake and the resource to discuss and make the right choices. It is therefore this perspective of broadening critique that I propose as a course for my analysis. This time from the demonstrations and actions of the Yellow Vests to C3 via the GND can be considered from the perspective of a *transition* from *reactive and defiant critique* to a constructive and pluralistic critique that imagines the compromises to be made in order to get the best out of opposing critiques. This transition could therefore be one of the conditions for a successful ecological transition.

In order to bring to light what was not perceived from abroad, where viewers mostly saw the spectacle of the Yellow Vests parades or the debates broadcast live between the French President and various audiences on the sidelines of the GND, I therefore intend to mainly present, by going to the point, the composition of this second large-scale episode. The GND's budget is estimated at 12 million euros, divided among several ministries, of which nearly half is borne by the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Solidarity. A GND mission was set up, attached to several government ministries.

The President of the Republic, in a solemn address to the French, proposed in December 2018, in addition to a series of immediate economic measures, the organization of a great national debate. He wrote a letter addressed to all French people²⁰. This is not the first mention of such a debate from him. Indeed, many analysts forget, he spoke about it during a conference with the main actors of the Ecological Transition to announce the *Plan de Programmation Pluriannuel de l'Énergie* (Pluriannual Energy Plan). The speech is entitled: “*Changeons ensemble. Discours relatif à la stratégie et à la méthode pour la transition écologique* (Let's change together. Speech on the strategy and method for the ecological transition)”²¹. He talks about change of method and addresses elected officials, associations, all territories and even representatives of the Yellow Vests. This speech was delivered on November 27, 2018, 10 days after the beginning of this movement and three weeks before the announcement of the GND on December 18. He spoke of a national debate, necessary because “democratic life [...] takes more violence today. [...] is made of more demagoguery and of a kind of degradation of the democratic debate” (translation, p. 9), and he thought a duration of three months would be sufficient.

Yet, this issue is at the heart of the difficulties for all countries in the face of global warming and environmental crises, as well as the public policies to remedy them. The forms of public debate can play an essential role in this.

This proposal for a major national debate was bold or reckless, depending on our assessment of the state of unpreparedness and the risk taken, as it was born in a context of mistrust exacerbated by the Yellow Vests crisis. These have been chosen as a symbol to cover themselves with reflective vests as a sign of rallying. These vests have even been covered with all sorts of slogans and drawings often very humorous. We can note that this vest is compulsory for every motorist to make them

20 See: <https://granddebat.fr/>.

21 See: <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/11/28/transition-energetique-changeons-ensemble>.

visible in case they have to get out of his vehicle in case of breakdown. We thus diverted an obligation of the state to question the government. We can also read in this vest a request of attention of the governors, exceeding that to be noticed by the other motorists. The qualifier of reflective to name these vests is also interesting because it also has the meaning of reflect, to think, in the present participle²². It followed nearly a month of social movements ranging from traffic blockades, particularly to cut off access to department stores, to violent demonstrations on the Champs-Élysées, with thugs taking advantage of the disorder to attack shop windows and monuments with a strong symbolic charge such as the Arc-de-triomphe, which houses the flame of the unknown soldier.

Even before the GND began, some communes opened “citizens’ notebooks”. We can recognize behind this re-characterization the old name of the *cahiers de doléances* (written lists of grievances), the first steps towards the French Revolution. This desire is probably not neutral because the time was not for the expression of grievances, numerous in late 2018, but for the choice of possible solutions. However, the contents of these notebooks are very often lists of grievances written by individuals. However, in 1789, the contributions were collective, in particular because knowing how to write was not within the reach of many people. 16,337 (out of 35,416)²³ communes in total proposed the constitution of such notebooks, that is, a little less than half of the communes in France. An Internet platform was opened for online contributions from January 15, 2019 until March 18, where 1.9 million contributions were submitted (30% proposals, 70% completed questionnaires). It included factual presentations related to the four issues selected for the debate, as well as a questionnaire composed of closed and open questions: ecological transition, citizenship and democracy, taxation, organization of the government and public services. Traveling stands (in train stations or post offices) allowed people to get acquainted with the GND and to answer, for example, people without Internet access.

A total of 27,374 letters and emails were sent to the government to make proposals about the four topics. They came from all kinds of people: former ministers, members of associations, professionals or simple citizens.

22 Some groups have claimed this second meaning to designate themselves. This is the case, for example, of a group from Château-Thierry. However, some people made fun of the Yellow Vests by referring to them as reflective vests.

23 At this time, these notebooks are collected in the 101 departmental archives. It would cost several million euros to digitize and analyze them all. For reasons of data protection and ethical compliance, only a portion of these documents were accessible. It seems to be changed. First reports have been made by associations of mayors, for example.

From January 3 to March 15, 10,134²⁴ Local Initiative Meetings (abbreviated RIL in French) were held throughout France and even abroad. They were announced on the GND website. On average, 70 people came to spend between one evening and one day together. In some cities, organizers repeated the experience by planning a day dedicated to each theme. To help facilitate these debates, a “methodological kit” was made available; the site provided links to other verified data. It provided instructions for the conduct of the RILs, recalled good practices and, briefly, some data relating to the four questions (contextual elements and points of debate), listed the questions on the website and the platform, but above all included a charter. This charter, one page long, recalled in particular the principles of: “pluralism, argumentation, transparency, secularism (*laïcité* in French), as well as the general principles of democracy²⁵”. This material encouraged people to send their reports to the GND Mission and provided a model report based on the open and closed questions related to the four GND themes. These reports were then made public. Other guarantees were posted on the website: “transparency, pluralism, inclusion, neutrality, equality, respect for speech”. Five guarantors, personalities recognized for “their commitment to the general interest”, were chosen by the presidents of the three assemblies and two by the Prime Minister. Their role was to guarantee the independence of the GND, the impartiality and transparency of the process, to ensure the regularity of the method and the work of analysis and synthesis of the contributions collected.

From March 11 to 13, 2019 national thematic conferences (abbreviated CNT in French) were held. Leaders of associations and trade unions representing organized civil society, as well as organizations of local elected officials were able to put forward proposals, which were then debated among themselves for a day on the four themes.

On the weekends of March 15–16 and 22–23, Regional Citizens’ Conferences (RCCs) were held in all regions and in the DROM-TOMs (Overseas Departments and Regions and Overseas Communities). One conference was dedicated solely to youth. All of these meetings were composed of an average of one hundred people drawn at random to form panels that met certain diversity criteria. They worked for

24 A study carried out at the Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po, Paris (Cevipof) estimates the number of these RILs at 9,296 for metropolitan France, 66 overseas and 220 abroad, that is, 9,582 in all if we remove the duplicates (see Bono, P.-H. and Foucault, M. (2019). *Radioscopie des réunions locales*. April 4). This document benefited from the assistance of members of the Observatoire des débats: <https://observdebats.hypotheses.org/1>; and of Cevipof who traveled and of the laboratory staff for a significant part of the data entry.

25 See: <https://granddebat.fr/>. Other principles follow which cannot be presented here because they are numerous.

a day and a half on the four questions, mainly in small tables of five to eight people moderated by a facilitator with different types of training (mediation, investigating commissioners, CNDP (National commission for the public debate) guarantors, private company facilitators). The methodology had to allow for the selection of the *main problems* to be followed by the proposed *solutions*.

On April 8, 2019, the Prime Minister made a summary restitution of the 1,500 pages of the final document²⁶. He did the same in the National Assembly, then in the Senate.

All kinds of debates and media took place: those organized for the President; a debate in the National Assembly (April 2, 3 and 9, 2019) and in the Senate (April 10). The presidents of the main parliamentary groups were able to speak.

Among all of these debates, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (abbreviated CESE in French and ESEC in English) organized a debate convening in two separate assemblies, advisors and randomly selected citizens, cooperating during certain sessions: *Fractures and transitions. Reconciling France*²⁷.

We can underline a very great resilience of the political and associative fabric given the number of meetings and participants much more important than for the neighborhood meetings or the debates organized by the Commission of the public debate (CNDP) or even the debates *What is your Europe?* (April–November 2018)²⁸. The proposers of the GND's local initiative meetings (RIL) ranged from ordinary citizens to town halls, to elected officials of all levels of competence and all parties to trade unions, to religious groups, to universities or even to the media. The events were sometimes highly improvised, with a commissioner of inquiry (working for CNDP) meekly following the questionnaire in the "GND kit" and letting people express themselves, and sometimes were organized by companies specializing in change or participation and experienced in facilitation methods. These discussions were attended by a wide variety of people, predominantly older people. Many were attending a political meeting for the first time. Groups of Yellow Vests joined some debates, sometimes in large numbers. Some debates were organized by Yellow Vests.

26 For all summaries, see: <https://granddebat.fr/pages/syntheses-du-grand-debat>.

27 See: <https://www.lecese.fr/travaux-publics/fractures-et-transitions-reconcilier-la-france>.

28 See: <https://www.touteurope.eu/index.php?id=588>. These 1,700 events (including 1,082 in France) were organized in 27 European Union countries.

Even though time was very short for such a rich debate on complex issues, the GND was in some ways recognized as a success. Certainly, from the very beginning, many expressed their prevention and severely judged this debate as a communication operation. Some Yellow Vests continued to take to the streets for demonstrations. It was only the Covid-19 crisis that prohibited their demonstrations for health reasons.

Some Yellow Vests organized what they called *Le vrai débat* (The Real Debate). They were equipped by the same platform as the GND but activating all the features that were bridled on it, such as the possibility to support or invalidate a proposal. Although they had fewer financial resources, and even though research teams helped them, they were not able to achieve their ambitions. They would have liked to organize an ambitious deliberation on the basis of the proposals collected.

Other critiques were heard from members of opposition parties, from teacher-researchers who are specialists and activists in participation, and from defenders of the National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP is the French abbreviation), whose President, to whom the debate had been entrusted, had given up. However, many of these sanctions had not taken the trouble to attend and analyze this rich political moment.

The speeches of the presidents of the opposition groups in parliament during the Prime Minister's return, for example, were more posturing than knowledge of what had happened.

It is true that the "proliferation" of this debate has made it difficult to understand. However, we must at least recognize that we could have found empty rooms. Moreover, with regard to the reactive critical citizenship, it is already an achievement that people who do not know each other accept to exchange on subjects as divisive as politics, especially with the previous sequence marked by its lack of civility and its lack of openness to contrary opinions.

Moreover, the mechanisms that encourage interaction in the RILs or RCCs make it possible to move from reactive critique to a type of critique that is more open to the critique of others (pluralist), sometimes by asking people to formulate different proposals. Certainly, at the RCC level, the proposals were more of a general recommendation. Participants often failed to see the difference between a problem and a proposed solution. Even at these conferences, which were facilitated by public debate professionals, it was difficult to move from a collection of individual expressions, often written on post-it notes, to real deliberations. Curiously, the participants had difficulty choosing and selecting proposals. They had difficulty choosing and abandoning the proposals of others as well. This point is important in

relation to theories of deliberative democracy, which move very quickly to the question of defending our own positions in front of others in order to aim for the strength of the best argument. In these debates, justifications are rare. Moreover, the randomly selected citizens are not in a hurry to fight. This is already a denial of the cynical interpretation of critical citizenship.

Another aspect throughout these debates is that expertise has been lacking. Yet this is necessary to understand the complex problems to be dealt with, to avoid repeating what already exists, sometimes decided at the European level, and to imagine other or complementary solutions to those of the associations of the organized civil society, composed of specialists and professionals.

The Great National Debate offered opportunities to move from forms of reactive critique – often unaware of other contexts, interests, solutions other than those of the only interested parties – to civil confrontations, or at least to exposure to proposals and critique from other perspectives. We have often crossed the threshold of civil and respectful discussion, which is already a precious achievement when not only the street but also the exchanges between political decision-makers, and even the media show, especially on the Internet, have lost respect and the possibility of nuancing its remarks. However, selection biases must remind us that the participants in the platform and in the RILs came at their own initiative. While corrections were made for the RCCs by drawing lots, most of those who agreed to come are more open to deliberation than the general population. They are more willing to speak up and to be exposed to the opinions of others.

This debate, too large and too crowded, carried out in a time constraint that was far too tight, had the potential to deploy a real *deliberative system* with the various potential takes, ranging from individual, associative, media, party and organized civil society contributions, to exchanges between a president of the Republic and various publics²⁹. This system could not be put into action and its power was underexploited. The Citizens' Convention on Climate that succeeded the GND did not even take the time to explore the multiple proposals that emerged from it. This is not unique to the GND. The proposals at all territorial levels, up to the international level, start the exercise over again each time, rather than capitalizing on, comparing and exploring the work of other citizens.

Moreover, the coherence between institutions whose competences and functioning are legally guaranteed is not always what we would expect. Think, for example, of the reports of the executive power towards the recommendations of the

29 Of course, these debates must be distinguished from the rest. The guarantors have warned against too many of these highly publicized debates, which were not intended to overshadow the GND.

Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC), a part of organized civil society. The links with mini-publics of randomly selected citizens whose legitimacy is less certain are still largely to be thought out, in order to find their rightful place, as they should not replace elected officials, associations, opposition parties or other voters or even constitute more interactive forms of surveys.

The media implemented, in all directions for the GND, each have their strengths and limitations for the implementation of the critique. Above all, they have allowed for the juxtaposition of expressions, the requirement of civility required for the assemblies and the exposure to very different opinions. The forms of communication that would make it possible to go beyond this, in particular the justification of points of view and their critiques, in order to go as far as possible towards decisions without voting or prioritizing preferences as in the RCCs, were underdeveloped. Responsibilities were very often individual, for example, on the side of the citizens the small gestures in favor of ecology, and at the other end their judgments towards the behaviors of elected officials, without thinking of the collective responsibilities and their entanglements within public policies.

