

AN ASPECT OF LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY: PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

Ivonne A. de Nava
Eugenia Díaz Medina
Lorenzo Pérez Alvarez
University of Chihuahua

As the principal spokesman for the philosophy of liberation, Enrique Dussel said, "It is an attempt for a freer, more modern, popular and feminist philosophy, that belongs to the youth, the weak, the poor, and the oppressed." It starts from the will to have a philosophy that is in agreement with our own reality and mentality.

Its origins were in Argentina, from among a group of philosophers as an expression of the people's struggle against the dictatorship of General Onganía in 1969. It continued to be a very concrete expression until 1976, when the government was overthrown by General Videla, and the philosophers and teachers were expelled from the country.

This way of thinking does not constitute a complete system, it is a philosophy in process, it is growing with a new spirit and language, with a search from within, assimilating the past and being aware of its own reality, and from there moving to universality.

This process did not start and end in Argentina, it began centuries ago, and now we are beginning to see the first fruits of a philosophy that belongs to the present and to the future.

Like Pragmatism (starting from success and utility reality), this philosophy is the result of an experience (oppression reality) with a logic process coherent with reality that it develops in three phases.

I. Philosophy of Domination. This first phase starts during the Spanish domination, with the introduction of the predominant ways of thinking from Spain, with the clear intention to form legal subjects true to the values and ideas of the church and state.

Some philosophical reflection took place but only from the Spanish perspective. Nothing new was made, one of the few reflections was whether the Indians were human and if the Spanish were right to dominate them.

The universities that were formed all over Latin America were always a reflection of the old world. In the new world only Pragmatism has an original form.

II. Latin American Philosophy. In this section we start looking for ideas which still belong to the old world, but with the purpose of making a contribution to our reality; we do this with a certain fear, and for the first time we realize that it is possible to produce our own thinking.

Positivism had a great influence and was accepted by the leading classes in the period of capitalistic consolidation. It also had a great influence in education as an attempt to change what we inherit from colonial times. In Mexico, José Vasconcelos and Antonio Caso made a criticism of Positivism.

From it, we learned, first, to consider reality, second, to obtain a critical spirit, and third, to distrust absolute statements. Positivism became a method and also a starting point.

We also were influenced greatly by Marxism, Neothomism, phenomenism, the analytical tradition, existentialism; this last one made us see into ourselves. All this happened around 1940, and the outstanding philosopher, Leopoldo Zea, appears in such time as an expert in Latin American thought.

For Zea, the only way to make true philosophy is to search for our own reality and to seek for it in our history. Zea and Miró Quezada are interested in looking for a true philosophy and making sure that it is not a bad copy of other philosophy but an expression of a real feeling. This arises from our own circumstances, using our own intellectual resources.

They are not trying to be original but suggest we base philosophy on our problems and find our own solutions. In this respect, Miró Quezada said, "The fact of whether it was important or not (to be original) was secondary." The same phenomenon occurs all over Latin America. There was hunger for authenticity; our reality was the main subject. This meant that we doubted our creative possibilities. "Philosophy" was made in Europe, and we knew that we were merely a copy, so we wanted to have our own way, and not to be conquered again. We wished to do something for ourselves, to give importance to our ideas, to our culture; this was the only way to liberate ourselves from our inferiority complex—to reaffirm our human condition by creating an authentic Latin American culture. An entire generation inherited this restlessness, all toward the same goal. Two steps were taken: first, to reflect about culture and our human condition, second, to reflect about philosophical problems in general.

III. Filosofía de la Liberación—Philosophy of Liberation. At this time, philosophy is discovered as an element of liberation, and it has now a practical function.

It takes its name during a philosophical movement which arose parallel to the people's struggle against General Onganía in 1969; later, in the Philosophical Congress, in Córdoba, Argentina, the relation of the struggle was expressed in philosophical terms. By 1973, the foundations and hypothesis were expressed, too.

This was the first time that *philosophy* was applied to reality in Latin America and linked to history, to the lower classes, which represent the

majority of the country. The consequences did not wait. When a philosophy criticizes or shows disagreement with the establishment, it is repressed, persecuted, and forced into exile; this happened in the past, and it is happening now.

At the University of Cuyo, in Argentina, the philosophy department is a very good example of the fulfillment of these goals. The curriculum is focused on the national reality and acts within it. One of the stated aims of the university is "the building up of an Argentinian and Latin American way of thinking with a social justice and service spirit, to be ethical in social, educational, economical, and political fields, all of this as a liberation process." The purpose of the university is to transform the reality, starting from the reality itself. The philosophy had a clear political intention.

A nationalistic feeling also affected literature and the fine arts; they were arousing the conscience with all the needed background and instruments. All this was and still is a liberation instrument.

Why is Philosophy of Liberation Necessary?

Up to now, the philosophical discourse in Latin America has been given only at an abstract level and independent of human existence. The discourse that occupies us today is different; it finds itself inserted in the totality of daily affairs. This is why we have to be alert to foresee the intrusion of any conditioning that will transform it into an ideology which we define as any expression of thought that has the practical function to cover rather than discover the meaning of the reality it pretends to present."

Colonialism exists in America; to the external colonialism (the one developed in poor countries by the capitalist nations with their agencies and transnational enterprises), is added the internal colonialism (the small native capitalist groups—private investors—who are closely associated and related to the capitalists of other nations. The exploitation system originated by the so-called Western World still maintains the caste and social groups that make their hegemony (state and all institutional dependencies, including universities, working together to keep the status quo) in the new old exploitation of the man who works the land. The neocolonialism of Latin America rests on the indigena (natives), colored people, and the poorest mestizos. The Latin American population equals approximately 340 million inhabitants, two-thirds of these are indians, mestizos, negroes, and quarterons (negro and indian descendancy). They all have been denied the quality of being human. All these men still are the expression of barbarianism (not civilized people) and their national and international oppressors say of them, as Manuel Gonzalez writes, "Wherever it reads human barbarianism translate: without white skin."

The indigena problem starts from our economic system. It has its roots

in the regime of landed property. And from here starts our new philosophy. The answer to the problem of the indian, the exploited and marginalized Latin American man, must be a social answer. They must themselves make their own solution; they must themselves overcome the economical, ideological and social chains of underdevelopment. In this way, Latin American thought divorces itself, definitely, from the use of ethnological definitions which have established new forms of domination over a great number of people in this America.

I. Space-Time Context. Philosophy must be constructed to reflect the thought which has its roots in the historic-social reality of our communities, translating their needs and goals. Philosophy is essentially political and social in its object. The overcoming of philosophy is intimately joined to the overcoming of underdevelopment and domination; in such a way, an authentic Latin American philosophy is possible. It has to be a consequence of this historic, transcendental change movement. Its existence as philosophy will depend on a previous social and economic change. Now, on the other hand, we have the philosophy of Liberation's position, which states that philosophy must not be something to reach, but something that is right now being created. Its goals are not attitudes but solutions given to the problematic realms this philosophy establishes—philosophy already and previously (to a structure's change) operating in the oppression and dependency realms—philosophy that makes us conscious of this situation and, by means of criticism, helps us to overcome European philosophy. This philosophy will exist as long as underdevelopment and dependency do.

II. The Geopolitical Space. We are at war—cold war for the ones who make it; hot war for the ones who suffer it; pacific co-existence for the makers of arms; bloody existence for those who are forced to buy and use the arms. The space as a war field, like geography studies to win over the enemy by tactics and strategy, like an environment limited by borders. Real, conflictive space. It is the geopolitical space. Philosophical prospects now present, right in this space, and so it is the space which comprehends all spaces: physically and existentially.

Faraway men are found in the peripheral space. They have a perspective from the border to the CENTER: They wait because they fight, that is why their philosophy will never be an ideological ontology. Critical thought is born here.

Functions and Prospects

I. Negative Aspect. Since the sixteenth century up to the twentieth century, Latin America is an ontological oppressed continent, by a "power of will" carried out in the whole world by Europe. Our peripheral countries were

conquered over five centuries ago. The imperialists forced us into their economical and political way, and imposed on us a culture, a religion, and a philosophy.

And it is precisely through that the imperialists need to reinforce their categories of domination. Philosophical thought would become the way of making philosophy in the peripheral area. Our conquered people should only be the repeaters of European thought. Dussel says, "We call colonial philosophy not only the one that is held now (since the 16th century) in Latin America, Africa, and Asia but specially to the peripheral way of pure imitation and repetition of the actual CENTER philosophy." Oxford, Cambridge, and Paris were transformed into "re-educational" and "brain-washing" centers until the beginning of the twentieth century. The colonial native oligarchies copied the metropolitan philosophy and their job was to repeat what they had learned in the metropolitan universities.

The national academic repeaters will fall into the dominating games. They were not aware of their own reality; they were only reviewing a strange European one. So European reality comes to hide our poor and dependent reality. And so the CENTER closes the circle from which we are excluded. The powerful hides his power and force to the oppressed one. Thus the oppressed reality of our countries expressed by this philosophy is false.

It is convenient for the dominant part that we apply all our theoretic capacity to repeat and elaborate a universal, abstract, European-American philosophy instead of a concrete Latin-American philosophy. "Philosophy is abstract, not real, sophistic, when its thought is not inserted in the reality, and this thought doesn't emerge from the concrete realm of its own problems." Philosophical discourse is not made abstractly nor independent from human existence, on the contrary it is found immersed in the totality of everyday life.

In the traditional dominating context, philosophy comes to repeat and not to criticize, so it is logical that the schools of philosophy in our Latin American universities come to be, as Dussel says, "Hegemonic state apparatus."

Students will distract themselves with scientific-analytic and language views. But with this training, they will be far from discovering freedom, that is the function philosophy must fulfill. Talking with some students who finished philosophical studies, we are aware of the distance between them and the real Latin American way of life.

This philosophy comments on the classical texts or philosophical European themes; it is the philosophy of Domination to us because it does not speak of the themes that the philosophy of liberation needs. In our dependent countries, philosophers will be quite discouraged. In front of this evi-

dently dominating situation, the philosophy of liberation is indispensable. If the philosopher in Latin America does not have his own place now, it is because he has found refuge in the classroom and has lost the city. Philosophy dies when it refuses to face reality.

The philosophy of liberation tries to take the philosophy student from his classroom and from his text books. Its intention is to take him into the street to face people, face reality. Let us see what academic philosophy has to say about poverty, marginalization and oppression.

Having lost their political aims they will feel safe in the fortress of the classroom, and they will deny themselves the capacity to free themselves and meet their people.

The function of the philosophy of liberation will be to destroy the ideologic platform of pseudo-philosophical attitudes and to rethink the borrowed reality. The philosophy student, when he discovers his dependence and oppression, will feel the compromise with philosophy.

II. Positive Aspect. The center imposed itself on the peripheral areas five centuries ago. But for how long? Is the geopolitical preponderancy of the Center in its final phase? Could we glimpse an increasing liberation process from the peripheral man? When the Latin American man begins to recover his reality to transform it, the problems begin, and the risk, too. Meanwhile the oppressed one accepts oppression, everything is in order. But when he is unjustly treated, he becomes aware of his need for liberation. The oppressor, through means of communication under his control, will accuse the one who pretends liberation as communist, subversive, agitator.

People will agree to lose 35 thousand lives, as in Nicaragua, in order to acquire their freedom. Domination will become repression when the oppressed attempt to liberate themselves from the pressure they suffer. Repression is the uncovered fact of domination.

Before, or in front of, this threatening situation, the philosopher will pronounce his liberation discourse, on realistic themes, that will answer the need to clarify the consciousness of the oppressed group.

The philosophy of liberation will have a very clear starting point. There is no national liberation in front of the operating imperialism without social liberation of the oppressed. It is with the laborers that domination really fulfills its purpose, when the product of labor is not recovered by people, by the worker. Due to the unfair way of producing, alienation arises in its most effective way, consequently the philosophy of liberation's option will be the national liberation from the dependence of North American capitalism, from political hegemony, and from the oppressor groups.

The philosopher who points out most precisely and objectively the philosophy of liberation is Enrique Dussel: "The labor class liberation re-

quires an economic and complete revolution. The study of philosophical economics must clarify this problematic field, the one of transfer to other social formation, worldwide and peripheral beyond the capitalist way of production."

The philosopher of liberation will not disguise the economic politics that the International Monetary Fund imposes on dependent countries, such as Mexico. Nor will he be unaware of the economic model of the Chicago Boy's School of Milton Friedman, which is imposed on the Chilean and Argentinian countries in order to help them overcome their crises. It is evident that these economic models will deepen its dependency and make the poor poorer.

The unemployment rates will speak for themselves of the contradiction of such economic politics. In business, the CENTER nation will say nothing about peripheral towns of their demand for just prices for raw materials.

It is Dussell who speaks of priorities and clues in the philosophy of liberation: "Undoubtedly it is the political instance which comes before the economic and ideological instance. At the same time, philosophy of liberation as philosophy of praxis is at the right time of the pre-revolution of the third world countries."

The peripheral countries, entering into the liberation process, must take into account imperialistic politics, which is willing to prevent and stop any economic and military liberating intention. We should remember Chile's case when the dirty hands of the United States distributed thousands of dollars to corrupt and prevent liberation principles. And now, just two weeks ago, the United States impudently supported El Salvador's governing board (who ordered the massacre of their people—giving them 5.7 million dollars in arms) through its neighbors Guatemala and Honduras. The largest and richest country in this Continent and in the whole world, the United States, is exulting in cruelty and is merciless with the smallest one, El Salvador. In this unequal fight we, as Latin American countries, are no longer spectators but actors, who know what we are about to lose or gain.

It may seem that this philosophy comes to formulate a theoretic philosophical frame that permits us to think on the most urgent themes of the oppressed world, people, women, and youth. At a stage when the philosophy of liberation was in effect in Argentina (1969–1972), it was defined as a theoretical instrument of popular liberation.

Science and technology are necessary for the liberation process of the peripheral and popular nations. But we have to create and redesign, according to our proper needs, science and technology even when it comes from outside. Certainly, we are too far from having our own technology

and science, but there are other more important facts, our people require to be realized, to be conscious of reality, immediately.

We who suffer in our flesh exploitation and domination have a compromise with philosophy. Because we love our poor and dependent Latin American continent, we must dedicate ourselves to overcome this reality. It is our interest to make an authentic philosophy; in such a way, liberation will advance towards the demands our oppressed people claim to reach.

Some contributions of this philosophy:

To make philosophy contribute to restructure reality be restating the dominator's categories in their own field.

To know the difference between making philosophy in the oppression field and making it in the dominator's field.

This philosophy works with "oppression" as its principal instrument; considers this aspect locally; it is existentially involved to foresee strange solutions and prevent ideologization, consequently deeper domination.

It is authentic because it criticizes social experience locally.

It is a method—not a system—and starts from a proper and original dynamics.

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