

Humanism, History and Criticism in Ignacio Ellacuría

José Manuel Romero Cuevas

Universidad de Alcalá de Henares

Madrid, Spain

Abstract

Ignacio Ellacuría's work comprises one of the most original and suggestive developments of Xavier Zubiri's philosophy. Based on his former teacher's concepts, Ellacuría sought a philosophy of historical reality with a liberating goal. In this article I analyze the relationships in Ellacuría's work among humanism, philosophy of historical reality, and criticism of what is given. In doing so, I try to emphasize the way in which this author conceives, in radically historical terms, the normative basis for questioning the intolerable social reality in the so-called "third world".

Resumen

La obra de Ignacio Ellacuría supone uno de los desarrollos más sugerentes y originales del pensamiento de X. Zubiri. A partir del planteamiento de su maestro, Ellacuría avanzó hacia una filosofía de la realidad histórica de pretensión liberadora. En este artículo se analiza la constelación que forman en Ellacuría pensamiento humanista, filosofía de la realidad histórica y crítica de lo existente. Con ello se pretende poner de manifiesto el modo en que este autor concibe en términos radicalmente históricos las bases normativas del cuestionamiento de la intolerable realidad de las mayorías sociales del llamado tercer mundo.

Introduction

Ignacio Ellacuría (Spain, 1930-El Salvador 1989) is an important figure in the Theology and Philosophy of Liberation in Latin America. A Jesuit from Spain who later adopted Salvadoran nationality, Ellacuría's theoretical work evolved in two different, though not divergent, directions: first, towards a political theology of liberation (that converged with the current that was emerging in the rest of Latin American) and, second, towards a philosophy of historical reality that grew out of the work of his mentor, X. Zubiri. In addition to the attention he devoted to theoretical issues, Ellacuría also devoted a great deal of energy to committing the Jesuit university in El Salvador –the *Universidad Centroamericana* (UCA), which he served as Rector for several years– to the social and political reality of that Central American nation, by

turning it into a platform for disseminating to the outside world news of the terrible crimes that military repression was committing there in the 1970s. As a consequence of his activities, Ellacuría was assassinated, together with a group of academics and employees of the UCA, by members of the army towards the end of the civil conflict that shattered the country. His untimely death left an unfinished body of promising philosophical thought, which is conserved in a series of articles and a draft of what was to be his magnum opus, a book entitled *The Philosophy of Historical Reality*.

This incomplete body of thought is the focus of this article, which intends to show that Ellacuría's explicitly humanist philosophical-political posture is capable of giving an account of the normative parameters of criticism that seeks validity for its own epoch based on the constitutional

historicity of human beings. This humanist position, one committed to human realization, emerges from a radically historical philosophy to clarify critical activity as that which finds its normative base in the very historical process of the realization of human capacities and possibilities

I. The facticity of criticism in Ellacuría: beyond Zubiri?

Almost three decades ago, and well before the expansion of discourses and debates on the phenomenon called globalization, Ellacuría explicitly adopted the horizon of globalism as the appropriate frame of reference for developing critical reflections on current reality. According to this author, problems must be framed in relation to a humanity that has become *one*; this because our modern world has transformed the course of history into one sole movement that encompasses all of humanity.¹ However, this return to a humanity that has become one through history, or to the world as the correct frame of reference, does not mean that Ellacuría's work elevates his discourse to a formal plane raised as a banner of a universalism seen as self-evident that, in contrast, could serve to conceal an unreflexive adoption of a theoretical perspective that sees as normative the discourses which, because they come from the dominant positions in the world's symbolic economy, make the subaltern groups invisible. Quite to the contrary, Ellacuría believed that reference to a horizon defined by a 'humanity become one' would become possible by reaffirming the radical facticity that constitutes thought.

The early Heidegger had affirmed the constitutive character of facticity for existence. In Ellacuría, we see this thought taken seriously, as he extracts important consequences from it. Clearly, Ellacuría goes beyond the level of formalism and abstraction that facticity still occupies in Heidegger's thought as an ontological category constitutive of *Dasein*, to comprehend this dimension in terms that are radically historical and geopolitical.² If thought is indeed constituted upon an

inextricable facticity of a historical, geographical and socio-political nature, then the proposals of a purely theoretical, formal or transcendental approach –in any of its forms: phenomenology, first philosophy or transcendental reflection– will be misleading or chimerical. Whether it likes it or not, and whether it knows it or not, all thought must always be situated in a certain position, one defined by a web of interests, among which ethical-political ones enjoy a high priority.³ This situation forces thought to reflect upon the facticity that constitutes it and the ethical-political interests that define its position and its opening to the world. This is not to extirpate it (as that is impossible), but to critically confront and value the normative pretensions of the posture with which one finds oneself in the conflict-torn world in which we live.⁴ For Ellacuría, this taking of sides entails that critical thinking choose *the place that provides truth*,⁵ that position in the social structure and world-system from which it becomes feasible to gain a clear understanding of the moral scandal that sustaining and reproducing that structure and system implies.

Given that Ellacuría has posited this problematic through thinking in terms of global, and not just national, reality, this act of reflexively assuming the option for the place that provides truth will solidify itself as an explicit one for those who are condemned by the dominant property regime on the planet, that, according to this author, includes the popular majorities of the Third World. It is in the reality of this doomed population that the truth of that regime becomes manifest, as do the types of relations between center and periphery that it establishes in the world economy. It is significant that in Ellacuría's work the following elements go hand-in-hand: taking a global framework as the referent for the process of formulating the problems and tasks of thought; rejecting a formal, abstract conception of theory; and being aware that all thinking is constituted at all times by taking a position in favor of one of the parties in conflict in our world torn asunder. I share Antonio González' view

that for Ellacuría,

...any philosophy and, in general, any human knowledge must become conscious of its own historicity, of its concrete links with the social praxis from which it emerges, which it serves, and in which it moves, as it is only the consciousness of one's own situation that makes it possible to approach objectivity, or even universality, though such objectivities and universalities will always be situated.⁶

It is the conscious placing of thought in reality (which for Ellacuría means an explicit commitment to the reality of misery in Latin America) that makes it possible to make a valuable contribution to the process of dialogue among different critical voices from far-off corners of the world, that seek a critical understanding of global reality and its transformation.⁷ By making the ethical-political interest that constitutes the aperture of critical thinking to the world, and the historical, geographical and cultural facticity in which that interest grows, into a reflexive task, thought becomes capable of understanding its critique of the global property regime as a contribution to a dialogue among diverse perspectives interested in establishing conditions of life that are valid for *everyone*; that is, conditions that are suitable for attaining the common good, but whose unfulfillment is assured for the reality of those popular majorities in the Third World to whom Ellacuría refers.

This reaffirmation of the consubstantiality of the facticity of thought leads the author to negate the pure autonomy that traditional theory had claimed for itself and, therefore, to conceive of critical thought as possessing meaning to the degree in which it is linked to a praxis to which it is obliged to provide light and sustenance. The definition of philosophy as a moment of emancipating praxis yet to be articulated demonstrates the radicalness of the rupture between Ellacuría and what Horkheimer calls "traditional theory"⁸, and his orientation towards a form of critical theory that does not succumb to

pessimism or immobility in either one of its two versions: that of Schopenhauer (the late Horkheimer) or that of Luhmann (Habermas as the theoretician of social modernization). One could advance the hypothesis that between the thinking of Zubiri and that of Ellacuría there emerges an intellectual displacement between a form of philosophy that comes close to what Horkheimer called "traditional theory" and a philosophy that points in the direction of what that German thinker called "critical theory". In Zubiri's theoretical discourse—defined by the gaze of the phenomenologist—the place of its pronouncement, its hermeneutical starting-point, is not posed as a problem (which gave his work the tone of a discourse for all eternity, effectuated from a philosophical subject with no context or facticity). In Ellacuría, in contrast, this problematic attains complete reflexivity and comes to form part of the nucleus of the theory. It could be argued that Ellacuría intended to elaborate a metaphysics that aspired to take as its object historical reality itself.⁹ However, his philosophical categories approached that reality due to the ever-present impulse of an ethical-political interest. In Ellacuría's work the construction of concepts and the conception of reality taken as the object of philosophy is illuminated previously by an ethical-political positioning that comes prior to the theoretical labor that orients it, drives it and gives it life.¹⁰

II. Historicity and possibility

Though Ellacuría's vision holds that every orientation of thought entails a positioning in the fissured field of the social, this does not necessarily lead to the critical posture of a search for the normative referent of confrontation with that which already exists in a utopia and which should orient the transforming action. Though some of Ellacuría's writings (especially those on theology¹¹) do include texts that seem to point in this direction, I consider that a more productive way of conceiving the normative parameters of criticism is the one he expounds mainly in his

unfinished work *Filosofía de la realidad histórica* (*The Philosophy of Historical Reality*),¹² as it is more congruent with the attention he devotes to the facticity inherent in critical thinking. Ellacuría's intention in writing that book was to develop an understanding of the formally historical; that is, of what properly defines historicity. In my view, this pretension does not presuppose an objectivist or theoreticist position regarding this problem but, rather, one that conforms to the abovementioned critical direction, such that this attempt at understanding the historical takes as its condition the need to situate one's theoretical perspective in an explicit interest in liberation, which will lead to illuminating levels of meaning that would otherwise remain opaque. From this perspective, the properly historical takes on the guise of the dual, mutual feedback process that Ellacuría, following Zubiri, calls capacitation and possibilitation.¹³ Here, history can be understood as a process—though one that is discontinuous and prone to retrogressions—through which the human subject acquires capacities (practical, technical and cognitive abilities), that uncover and actualize certain possibilities, while at the same time shutting off or jettisoning others in the context of social historical reality. This process is not simply, or always, of a progressive nature because, as Ellacuría argues, in the effective realization of historical possibilities “the better ones may [be] irremediably abandoned”.¹⁴ This obliges us to steer clear of triumphalist or naïve concepts of progress. Indeed, Ellacuría's concept of the formally historical as a process of capacitation and possibilitation may be based on the experience of modernity as a stage of history that has undoubtedly generated development in such domains as science, technics and material production, as well as in the human capacities that go with them.

The process of capacitation is not to be understood as something that involves just acquiring cognitive or technical abilities. Though Ellacuría does not explicitly develop this question, I would argue that the process of capacitation and possibilita-

tion can be understood as a broad one that does indeed include social and moral dimensions. Here, Ellacuría's proposal could find a complement in Honneth's theory that affirms, historically, the tendency towards the progressive acquisition of the ability—driven by moral conflict—to recognize value in other human beings, what this author calls the “struggle for recognition”¹⁵. In this way, Honneth can go on to speak, *a posteriori*, of a process of moral learning through which one acquires the capacity to appreciate certain qualities and features of other people as being of value. If this is accepted, then it must take on the inter-subjective character of the process of capacitation and possibilitation in several senses: first, in the sense that the way in which an individual illuminates new possibilities in the surrounding world on the basis of his capacities can only be understood on the basis of his earlier insertion and socialization into a community articulated through a world of shared living and a network of established practices of social interaction that can also introduce structural asymmetries into diverse population groups. Thus, one can take into account the relevance not only of the opening up of possibilities in the world by an individual, but also their perception, appreciation and inter-subjective valuation in the framework of a plexus of antagonistic social interaction. The process of capacitation and possibilitation emerges not only in the context of the relationship between an individual and his surrounding world but also, and above all, in the one between human beings ensconced in an inter-subjectivity made problematic by its fractured, conflictive nature. Thus, the process must be conceived of as possessing an important social and moral dimension in which conflict plays a very significant role.

Moreover, the processes of capacitation and possibilitation must be pondered not only in individual terms but also collective ones. This leads to the idea—one examined below in the discussion of Ellacuría's category of ideologization—that the illumination of new historical possibilities based on

acquired capacities is a collective activity the agent of which is an entire generation. This, in turn, allows us to argue that each epoch will be characterized by a specific illumination of possibilities on the part of the social collectivity, one which will be relevant to the political decisions and orientation of that social formation. If this is accepted, then the process of capacitation that Ellacuría theorized can be seen as a complex one that spans the practical, cognitive, social and moral dimensions and translates into one of possibilitation, as the new capacities acquired by individuals and collectivities come to constitute the factor that opens up new historical possibilities from out of the conditions that exist in the surrounding social world. Hence, the acquisition of a new capacity allows and even fosters the opening up of new possibilities in the practical, cognitive and moral dimensions, only some of which are realizable and effectively realized within the existing social framework, and thus come to be incorporated by individuals and social collectivities as new capacities in such a way that they can then act as new factors of possibilitation. Clearly, the question of which possibilities—from among all those illuminated—will come to be realized by a generation empowered according to the degree of capacitation acquirable in a certain epoch is more of a *political* than a technical nature, given that in an unequal and hierarchical social regime the actualization of historically-illuminated possibilities will be restricted by the imperative of sustaining that social system's conditions of reproduction, which will frustrate those possibilities whose realization could well lead to a greater gratification and satisfaction of collective needs, but would also distort the reproduction of the existing, asymmetrical regime.

III. Criticism as transcendent analysis

This conception of historicity lays the groundwork for a more adequate understanding of facticity and of the historical character of criticism that allows us to avoid referring to an ideal, or to more-or-

less transcendental, formal, universal and normative parameters that tend to lead to dangerous abstractions that are incompatible with the historical. In a text prepared for a seminar on Marcuse's *One-dimensional Man* (in 1970), in which he analyzed that book's proposals, Ellacuría included some comments on social criticism that are relevant to this essay:

How does one critique a society? Not as a function of an ideal society or of a past one: «a specific historical practice must be measured against its own historical alternatives».¹⁶ Taking into account the capacities and resources that currently exist, would it be possible to achieve through them a better yield «for improving the human condition?»¹⁷ This is a problem of historical objectivity that speaks of what can in reality be done, and not just of what can metaphysically be dreamt of doing. A society can only be judged and condemned, then, on the grounds of its real possibilities of being something else. Though it is difficult indeed to demonstrate the reality of a possibility, this does not mean that we cannot recognize a possibility as real, and it is only in relation to that possibility that a given historical realization can be judged. Thus, historical idealism can be rejected.¹⁸

There is no need for the critique of a society to resort to a supposedly absolute and ahistorical ideal of justice that might compromise its effectiveness. Rather, criticism should problematize a given society on the basis of its possibilities—the real possibilities it holds within itself—of being a better one. Clearly, these possibilities cannot be made explicit through a form of traditional theory (a purely theoretical proposal), as that would entail employing an objective or realist philosophical positioning, or require resorting to a speculative or teleological philosophy of history like Hegel, or to a Marxism that is prey to a scientific self-perception. The real possibilities present in an existing society (those that establish the bases for a better

one) can only be made explicit through a theoretical perspective that is already ethically-politically situated and has reflexively assumed an interest in emancipation.¹⁹ Such possibilities are made explicit in their historically and politically progressive nature—thus avoiding a fall into a speculative philosophy of history—by a *critical* theory and never by a traditional one that is conceptually incapable of clarifying in any adequate way the normative parameters on the basis of which it confronts reality. The fact that those positionings that commune with the reproduction of the existing social structure perceive these possibilities as dysfunctional for its reproduction and, therefore, as things that must be impeded at all costs (while a posture that is committed to their transformation reveals them as progressive) shows that such possibilities are not of a merely subjective character but are, indeed, rooted in the very processes of the objective development of that social body itself.

In his text on Marcuse, Ellacuría also refers how this author's social criticism makes explicit, on basis of our reality, that which is transcendent in relation to which is simply given; *i.e.*, the real possibilities that make possible a critique of the a historical situation:

What is required, in this sense, is a transcendent analysis. Here, transcendent does not mean metaphysical, as the idea is not to judge a historical alternative on the basis of God, absolute values, or utopian realizations. It means only going beyond the facts in order to confront them with the real possibilities of those same facts coming to have some different form. This transcendent analysis pertains to the structure of the social theory. The transcendence of which we speak here is of a rigorously historical, empirical and critical character, as what analysis should attempt to do is discover in the established totality of discourse and action of a society that which in said totality could be a historical alternative, a real pos-

sibility distinct from that which has been forged in a certain moment of history. Critical analysis of social theory is, therefore, transcendent, but historically transcendent. Here, transcendence is not a synonym of some idealism, it just announces the need to separate itself critically from a concrete reality so as to perceive, measure and criticize [that reality] on the basis of its historical alternatives; [*i.e.*], its real possibilities. To be understood as historical alternatives, those possibilities must be within the reach of said society, and must constitute well-defined goals that can be reduced to practice.²⁰

Ellacuría perhaps over-emphasizes the transcendent character of historical analysis, as that analysis clearly critiques that which is given on the basis of its own possibilities; that is, the critique is based on the thing itself, on the possibilities it contains. True, a critique transcends the given form of the thing, but on the basis of its own possibilities. Hence, I sustain that it can be argued that the kind of critique that Ellacuría makes explicit here contains important analogies to the conception of immanent critique of the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, which assumes as its task to reveal, *in and through that which is immanent*, that which is transcendentally intra-historical.

Returning to our guiding thread, and to Ellacuría's conception of the formally historical, I coincide with Héctor Samour²¹ in that, following Ellacuría, one may conceive of criticism as being based on a "phase lag" between, on the one hand, the possibilities of individual and collective gratification and self-realization revealed by a subjectivity based on the level of capacitation that an epoch attains and, on the other, their limited realization, which is defined by the existing socio-political structure. Although the following quotation refers to Hegel, it may also be relevant to our topic: according to Ellacuría, philosophy (we could say, criticism) appears "when a certain separation and distinction

that is always one of the conditions of the dialectic movement emerges: This separation is born of a rupture between internal yearning and external historical reality; a sign that a 'world' is on the road to dissolution."²² The normative criterion of criticism is thus radically intra-historical: the possibilities of realization and gratification revealed as actualizable through subjectivities enabled by possibilities that are already historically grounded in the surrounding social world of that epoch. The normative criterion of criticism is what Ellacuría, following Zubiri, calls that which the epoch itself can *give of itself* with regards to a collective gratification and self-realization, which is illuminated by the level of capacitation of the very subjectivities of that epoch.

Ellacuría's productive actualization of Hegel (and Marx) is made in a framework of thought that, at the same time, distances itself profoundly from them by breaking with all teleology. Referring to Hegel, Ellacuría sustains that the dynamic principle of dialectics is the no-identity: *i.e.*, the no-correspondence between form and content (in Hegel's words, between the concept of a reality and its being of such a form and not of some other; *i.e.*, its real existence). Ellacuría deemed especially relevant and meaningful (and a contrast to the meaning of Hegelian idealist philosophy) that in the constitution of the driving principle of dialectics (no-identity), priority belongs to content, it is content that possesses "the principle of dynamism",²³ as its development and maturation are what makes the previous form unviable and outmoded and ends up converting the current form into a straitjacket, into an obstacle that must be done away with. In Hegel's view, of course, this "*must be*" has no place, given that his speculative philosophy of history affirms that it will, in fact, be eliminated by the very necessity of the process. The problem arises when one ceases to believe (like Ellacuría) in that necessity, when the no-identity between form and content can no longer be considered ontological (and hence dictated from a purely philosophical perspective), but

only illuminable from, and through, a specific political-moral perspective. Thus, the Hegelian dialectical process breaks down, it collapses, leaving a stage on which the no-identity, which can only be made into a topic from a certain ethical-political stance, is no longer the dynamic principle on an ontological plane and only serves to define one of the conditions for a critique of that which exists oriented towards its transformation. The maturation of the content no longer necessarily drives the dynamic process of history. The dynamizing no-identity of the historical process ceases to be conceivable as ontological (that is, objective, independent of any subject, and graspable through what Horkheimer called traditional theory), and comes to be understood as revealed through an interest expressed in a critical activity and a certain political praxis. The conception of the formally historical as a process of capacitation and possibilitation also lacks necessity—internal logic or *telos*—that unfolds through immanent events. In contrast, the process appears as something contingent and, as such, fragile and subject to severe retrogressions and losses.

IV. Ideologizations and the crisis of criticism

The historicity of criticism becomes affirmable upon considering the deeper dimension of meaning, which Ellacuría sees as metaphysical and pertaining to the category of ideology.²⁴ Ideology would be an interpretation of the surrounding social world—and of ourselves—that uncovers a reality in which certain possibilities are realizable while others are not. Ideology defines the ontological perimeter of what is realizable as a possibility of a particular historical subject. However, this phrasing says nothing negative about the notion of ideology, and this is precisely what Ellacuría looked to accomplish, as he shared with Althusser the idea that ideology (understood in these terms) is an inextricable social reality of this and any other conceivable society. In Ellacuría's work, the concept of ideology takes on a negative

meaning (that earns it the name of ideologization²⁵) when it leads to the establishment in a particular society of a dominant interpretation of ourselves and of the surrounding social world that considers as realizable a cumulus of possibilities that, with respect to the level of capacitation of the subjects and the degree of realization in the social body of historically possibilities, can be characterized as restricted. Ideologization, therefore, delimits the ontological horizon of what is realizable as a possibility of subjects according to the reproductive needs of the social system, and *not* in accordance with satisfying collective needs. Thus, it renders irrepresentable for individuals and collectivities certain possibilities that their degree of capacitation might indeed allow them to illuminate.

This situation, in the conservation of which ideologization collaborates, is what Ellacuría calls in theological terms “historical sin”;²⁶ that is, a situation in which the social collectivity, in the context of a certain institutional definition of what is possible, in effect reveals possibilities that are *below* the existing, true level of capacitation. Here, conflict—“phase lag”—between what is foreseen as possible and what is effectively appropriate in the framework that the institutionalized rules of the social game define has disappeared. Once this tangle is dissolved, criticism loses its foundation. This crisis of criticism and the twilight of subjectivity that experience the limits established by the period as an amputation concords with what has been conceptualized, for over a quarter of a century now, as the post-modern condition. However, in answer to its apologists, the historical character of that condition can be affirmed on the basis of Ellacuría’s model, because in the same way that the conditions of its emergence can be reconstructed, so also can we attempt to trace the appearance of the historical factors that would bring about its dissolution. In effect, Ellacuría’s ideas allow us to affirm that in a situation in which the imperatives of the reproduction of the social system demand increasing restrictions on

that which is representable as possible in relation to that which is technically and materially revealed as feasible, and in a context where those imperatives demand, moreover, an increase in the degree of capacitation to bring it into line with the level of the new exigencies of material productivity, the conditions will be generated for a modification of the existing historical condition that will lead towards breaking this “phase lag” between expectations and the institutionally-defined limits of what is feasible upon which criticism is founded, and which can only be constrained by intensifying the ideologizations (though here one must ask whether the intensifying of ideologization can be thought of as a process without limits).

IV. Historization as criticism

The procedure that Ellacuría devised to dissolve ideologizations is what he called historization. To clarify the meaning of this term, we can compare it to the mode in which the necessity of a historization of human rights was theorized, as postulated in the societies that claim to have realized them in their interior.²⁷ Here, Ellacuría confronts an abstract conception of human rights extracted from the social conditions of their realization. Any defense of human rights that fails to take into account the material, social and political conditions of their realization and appropriation by the social collectivity itself falls into a form of ideologization by sustaining as valid and enforceable in universal terms certain rights that, in reality, are appropriate only by a minority. Here, Ellacuría’s perspective focuses directly on the real conditions of an epoch, in an attempt to assess from them the possibly ideologized nature of the affirmation of human rights as a pillar of an existing society (as when something is stated as being ‘effective’ when, in fact, the structural conditions required for its realization are absent), and the possibly perverse character of reality itself, in that its given form or structure make any realization of those rights impossible. The historization of human rights is therefore a double critique:

first, of the ideologized character of the affirmation of human rights as something already attained; and, second, of existing reality, due to its antagonism with respect to the possibility of realizing those rights. What Ellacuría calls “dialectic historization”²⁸ contradicts what official discourse affirms as valid and effective with the conditions of its realization, thus making manifest whether or not those conditions contain the factors that systematically frustrate their realization. Clearly, historization confronts the way in which an ideologized discourse relates to reality by adopting a certain perspective on the basis of which it then goes on to carry out the process of historization. For Ellacuría, the perspective that presents truth is the one represented by the *popular majorities*: the position embodied by the disadvantaged is adopted as the perspective for judging the falseness or veracity of the way in which a society conceives of and implements those rights. From this perspective, it becomes possible to historicize the formal and ahistorical conception of human rights, which abstracts from the socio-historical conditions of their social presentation. Historization demonstrates the fracture between the discourse of the defense of human rights and the social reality to which it presumably refers, the schism between the discourse that legitimizes the existing social structure as the realization of human rights, and the real existence of those rights in the society. Moreover, it seeks to explain the conditions that would make an adequate collective appropriation of those rights possible.

Ellacuría’s historization and Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals are complementary modes of debunking abstract values and concepts that are not integrated into reality and historical praxis.²⁹ However, while the historization of concepts, values or rights intends to verify them by demonstrating their truth, or lack of same, genealogy eludes this question. For genealogy, the task is not to determine the truth or falsity of a value on the basis of a contrast between what it affirms as normative and the reality it intends to mention but,

rather, to show that moral values in and of themselves lack all objectivity and validity and are, in reality, conducting instruments that serve the struggle that social groups confront. Genealogy, as the critical history of moral values, dissolves the appearance of ontological consistency of value (all value as such), without questioning its veracity or falsity, suitability or fairness. It touches only that which is experienced as evident (the central Jewish-Christian values) and reveals its social and contingent nature, in the sense that they depends on a conflict whose orientation is determined solely by the correlation of the forces of opposed bands. The gap between Ellacuría and the nietzschean genealogy is revealed clearly in the fact that for the former the historization of a concept (or value) does not seek to merely dissolve its abstract appearance but, rather, to de-ideologize it as a concept (or value) abstracted from the plane of social praxis, but with the goal of promoting the realization of the normative nucleus that beats within it (its true content).

Conclusion

On the basis of this presentation, it can be argued that Ellacuría’s theoretical production permits the historical sustenance of a conception of criticism that may be relevant to our own present, one characterized by a crisis of criticism that also affects those theoretical positions that defend at all cost the normativity of a transcendental or quasi-transcendental dimension that has lost its historical credibility and effectiveness due to that crisis and is thus condemned to a sterile impotence. Ellacuría succeeds in making adequately clear the historical contingency, the facticity and the political perspectivism of critical thinking that, however, he conceives of as seeking universal validity for its own epoch. Once subjectivity constituted on the basis of the degree of capacitation of the historically-presented possibilities in the social body of a certain epoch becomes a subject of criticism, the distance between what is ‘given’ and what it is ‘possible to realize’ that he

makes explicit in the surrounding historical world seeks to have validity for the social body as a whole, for the global social structure. Hence, Ellacuría conceives of criticism as a labor undertaken, as Michael Walzer argues, *from within* a historical process in whose framework the normativity that constitutes the basis of critical activity is generated.³⁰ Ellacuría, thus makes important contributions: first, by confronting an understanding of the emergence of the normative parameters that sustain the category (central for the first generation of the Frankfurt School) of 'immanent critique'; and, second, by articulating a body of thought that, by radically assuming its historical-political place maintains the aspiration of effectuating a socially-rooted critique that seeks to be valid for its present. Of course, this pretension to validity must be tested through a necessary *dialogue* among different perspectives that, in the diversity of geographical-cultural horizons that co-exist in

the modern world, question, each in its own way, an unequal order of things that has become global. I consider this to be the most productive use that can be made of Habermas' conception of communicative action as 'action oriented to understanding'; that is, towards understanding those who seek to transcend this false fatalist consensus called unique thought, and transform a structure that the vast majority experience and suffer as unjust. Of course, not everyone experiences it in this way, especially those who benefit from it; and it is perhaps naïve to contemplate the possibility of convincing the totality of them of this unjust character (and that such an improbable convincing could have practical effects), as there is a dimension of socio-political facticity in our historical condition that dialogue cannot overcome, one that can only be made explicit on the basis of an affirmation of a final irresolvable disagreement among opposed perspectives in the social force field.

Notes

¹ I. Ellacuría, "Historización del bien común y de los derechos humanos en una sociedad dividida", in I. Ellacuría, *Escritos filosóficos*, San Salvador, UCA Editores, 2001, vol. III, p. 211-2.

² Towards the end of the 1920s, the early Marcuse had questioned the proposal of Heidegger's *Being and Time* in similar terms as Ellacuría; see J. Abromeit, "Herbert Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Martin Heidegger 1927-33", in J. Abromeit & W. Mark Cobb (ed.), *Herbert Marcuse. A critical reader*, New York and London, Routledge, 2004, p. 131-151.

³ Cf. I. Ellacuría, "Filosofía y política", in I. Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969-1989). Escritos políticos*, San Salvador, UCA Editores, 1993, vol. I, p. 47-61.

⁴ See I. Ellacuría, "Hacia una fundamentación del método teológico latinoamericano", in *Estudios Centroamericanos (ECA)*, no. 322/323, San Salvador, Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas" (UCA), 1975, pp. 413

and 420. This conception of the facticity of critical thought could establish an interesting dialogue with the reflections on this topic by S. Žižek in his work *The ticklish subject. The absent centre of political ontology*, London and New York, Verso, 1999.

⁵ I. Ellacuría, "Función liberadora de la filosofía", in I. Ellacuría, *Veinte años en la historia de El Salvador*, (ed.), *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 115.

⁶ A. González, "Aproximación a la obra filosófica de Ignacio Ellacuría", in *ECA. Estudios Centroamericanos*, no. 505-506, San Salvador, Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas" (UCA), 1990, p. 987.

⁷ Ellacuría's conception of critical thought opens the door to an intercultural practice of critical philosophy and liberation in a sense that contains analogies to the way in which it is currently being articulated by Fernet-Betancourt. See R. Fernet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, Bilbao, Desclée de Brouwer, 2001.

⁸ Horkheimer did in fact define critical theory as the moment of a praxis oriented towards

- new social forms; see M. Horkheimer, *Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie*, Frankfurt a. M., Fischer Verlag, 1987.
- ⁹ I. Ellacuría, “El objeto de la filosofía”, in I. Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969-1989). Escritos políticos*, ed. cit., p. 63-92.
- ¹⁰ I believe that Lèvinas’ and Dussel’s theses that ethics (according to the former) and politics (the latter) is the first philosophy may be able to shed light on this problematic. See E. Lèvinas, *Éthique et Infini*, Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1982 and E. Dussel, *Hacia una filosofía política crítica*, Bilbao, Desclée de Brouwer, 2001.
- ¹¹ See, for example, I. Ellacuría, “Utopía y profetismo”, in I. Ellacuría and J. Sobrino (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación*, San Salvador, UCA Editores, 1991, pp. 393-442.
- ¹² I. Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, San Salvador, UCA Editores, 1999, especially pp. 420-598.
- ¹³ Cf. X. Zubiri, “La dimensión histórica del ser humano”, in X. Zubiri, *Siete ensayos de antropología filosófica*, Bogotá, Universidad Santo Tomás, 1982, pp. 117-174.
- ¹⁴ I. Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, ed. cit., p. 523-4.
- ¹⁵ See A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Sozial Conflicts*, Polity Press, 1995.
- ¹⁶ H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964, p. x.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ I. Ellacuría, “El hombre unidimensional (seminario)”, San Salvador, Archivo Ignacio Ellacuría, UCA, pp. 6-7.
- ¹⁹ I explain this more extensively in *Hacia una hermenéutica dialéctica*, Madrid, Síntesis, 2005, pp. 292-5.
- ²⁰ I. Ellacuría, “El hombre unidimensional (seminario)”, San Salvador, Archivo Ignacio Ellacuría, UCA, p. 9.
- ²¹ See H. Samour, *Voluntad de liberación. La filosofía de Ignacio Ellacuría*, Granada, Comares, 2003.
- ²² I. Ellacuría, “Hegel y el método dialéctico”, San Salvador, Archivo Ignacio Ellacuría, UCA, pp. 17-8.
- ²³ I. Ellacuría, “Hegel y el método dialéctico”, San Salvador, Archivo Ignacio Ellacuría, UCA, p. 13.
- ²⁴ See I. Ellacuría, “Función liberadora de la filosofía”, in I. Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador*, ed. cit., pp. 101 and ff.
- ²⁵ See I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-102 and, by the same author, “Filosofía, ¿para qué?”, in I. Ellacuría, *Escritos filosóficos*, ed. cit., vol. III, pp. 124-8, and his unpublished manuscript entitled “Ideología e inteligencia”, Archivo Ignacio Ellacuría, UCA, San Salvador. On the conception of ideology and ideologization in Ellacuría, see the complete study by H. Samour, *Voluntad de liberación*, ed. cit., pp. 233-268.
- ²⁶ I. Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, ed. cit., p. 590. On this category, cf. J. Mora Galiana, *Ignacio Ellacuría, filósofo de la liberación*, Madrid, Nueva Utopía, 2004, pp. 101 ff.
- ²⁷ Here, I am following, in general, the argument of J. A. Senent, *Ellacuría y los derechos humanos*, Bilbao, Desclée de Brouwer, 1998, pp. 52 and ff.
- ²⁸ I. Ellacuría, *Escritos filosóficos III*, ed. cit., p. 436.
- ²⁹ On this topic, see F. Nietzsche, especially *The genealogy of Morals*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 13, New Cork, Gordon Press, 1974.
- ³⁰ M. Walzer, *The Company of Critics*, New York, Basic Books, 1988.