

Liberation Philosophy as Critique: Ellacuría¹

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Abstract

We begin by asking if philosophical reflection can reclaim the critical function it traditionally had and which is currently being questioned in certain hermeneutic sectors. Various philosophical trends that maintain this claim in the context of a reformed conception of “critical” are considered. Within this framework, we have included Liberation Philosophy (as understood by I. Ellacuría), which we reconstruct from the standpoint of the methodological requirements of conception and critical-rational action.

Resumen

Empezamos preguntando si la reflexión filosófica puede salvar la función crítica que tradicionalmente ha tenido, lo que se debate actualmente en ciertos sectores hermenéuticos. Se consideran varias tendencias filosóficas que mantienen esta posición en el contexto de una concepción reformada de lo “crítico”. Dentro de este armazón, hemos incluido la filosofía de la liberación (como entendido por I. Ellacuría), que reconstruimos desde el punto de vista de los requisitos metodológicos de concepción y de la acción crítico-racional.

I. Is philosophy as critical knowledge possible today?

In the early twenty-first century, after a century of hermeneutically transformed philosophical thought, does it make sense to make a claim for the critical nature of philosophy? If so, in what sense? And in particular, how can Ellacuría’s way of carrying out his critical-philosophical project be reconstructed in this hermeneutical context?

Approaching these questions today is neither simple, nor obvious; nor is it naive. At a time when the so-called “critical” philosophy is in crisis and hermeneutical thinking prevails (in some of its more widespread versions—Gadamer, Rorty, Vattimo—this trait of modern thinking is expressly rejected). It requires a complete transformation of what can be understood by “critical”, including its scope, structure and possible methodologies, in order to

defend the critical function as Ellacuría does.

One must keep in mind that the *causes* of critical philosophy’s loss of social effectiveness are the result both of the culmination of scientific-illustrated thinking, and of the effective development of the hermeneutic alternative. On one hand, the modern Enlightenment tradition has come to a division of reason (theoretical reason-practical reason) that has established a prevailing restrictive instrumental reason, which prioritizes the *logic of knowledge* over the *potential of reality*.

On the other hand, in this particular aspect, hermeneutics has developed in a strange way. It has evolved from the Nietzschean “hypercriticism” to “non-normative” hermeneutics, i.e., the waiver of the critical function (in the form of relativism, play or weak thought), and reached its crucial point with the Heideggerian

challenge to the science, art and the metaphysics which sustains them.

The interaction between these two dimensions has placed us in a scientific-technical-industrial rationality (and the resulting political organization and individual and collective psychological self-conception), whose driving force and underlying base is *production*, and this depends on *consumption*. Hence, a great deal of social energy (both material and human), is invested in maintaining and/or increasing consumption. This strategy is incompatible with the questioning of such a socio-political-productive system. The organization of knowledge and its social effectiveness depends on the goal of maintaining the established social "order". This questions the very possibility and reach of critical-philosophical action.

At least two tasks can be derived from all this. Firstly, the task of broadening the notion of 'critical' beyond Kantianism in terms of the hermeneutic transformation of thinking. Having come to terms with the turn to the facticity, one can no longer believe that the possibility of criticism should be necessarily linked to pure reason and its contents, i.e. "to everything belonging to reason irrespective of all possible experience"². New ways of conceptualizing the critical action must be approached.

Secondly, the task of reviewing current human experience in its diversity and coexistence, in order to avoid "wasted experience"³. This is a source of conceptual innovation, essential to do justice to what reality (both material and human) requires and offers, and thus respond to the original purpose of modernity formulated by Bacon of filling the needs and interests of human beings. Knowledge must be aimed at "improving the human status and increasing human power over nature"⁴. In turn, new ways of action which are critical of factual givens must arise.

II. Transformation of the concept of "criticism"

"Criticism" is a structurally bipolar notion, based on the distinction between

two levels, which always involves a dislocation, fracture, or a gap in some sense. Criticism always moves between reality (what things are, factuality, social status, givens, facts, current standards, etc.) and unreality (what things should be, Utopia, ideal, possibility, universality, transcendence, what is rationally required, what is desirable, individual or collective self-fulfilment, etc.).

This raises several methodological problems: what criterion should be used to distinguish these two levels? Where does the required impetus to go beyond reality or facts come from? Which is the best strategy for addressing the unreal level? Which is the reach of critical action? Which are the scopes of application of criticism? Who is the subject of such action?

In order to address these issues certain methodological points must be clarified. Firstly, the *object* of criticism is always a human product: society, knowledge, history, language, political organization, etc... For example, an earthquake cannot be criticized, but the failure to take all possible prevention and recovery measures can.

Secondly, the *context* in which the critical action can be exercised has three characteristics: freedom, fallibility (finitude) and conflictivity. The lack of freedom is always gradual, thus the exercise of critical action is proportional to the combination of the objectively prevailing and the subjectively accepted degree of freedom.

The inherent fallibility of all human action is the expression of finitude, an inescapable component of human facticity. Structural perfectibility of all human products is precisely one of the formal pillars of critical action. This does not imply that facticity is equivalent to contingency, since in facticity there may be times of an absolute epistemological nature⁵.

Given the challenging nature of the given circumstances (e.g., what is established and accepted), critical action always encounters a resistance to changes (mental and/or material), so it tends to develop in a context of conflict, in a number of

forms (social struggle, class struggle, individual or collective rebellion, labour disputes). But it sometimes happens that the lack of conflict implies a highly tense situation, and even one of great violence. In this sense, the existence of conflicts arising from critical action may be a symptom of normality (social, political, epistemological, etc.), while availing individual and/or collective self-fulfilment.

Thirdly, the purpose of the critical action is to identify and, as appropriate, overcome what in some sense is experienced as a deficiency regarding a certain threshold. To overcome the deficiency is the transformative dimension of critical action. The object of transformation can be anything from the state of knowledge on a particular topic to a specific social situation.

Fourthly, critical action, insofar as being rational, must account for its statements and actions as an internal condition of its legitimacy. This implies that any dogmatism and decisionism is rejected on principle.

Fifthly, critical action insofar as rational action, intends to be intersubjectively valid, so its scope must maintain a formally *universal* dimension. That is to say, consistent with the particularity or even individuality with which every criticism in every situation must be made.

Sixth and last, the *structure* of critical action combines specific categories: normativity, judgement, distinction between criticizer and criticized, division between facticity (the present) and ideality (the possible), criterion (standard), methodology, truth, etc. The relative position and the interpretation of each concept determine the type of criticism made.

III. The architecture of criticism and its forms

From the architectural point of view of the structure of criticism two different strategies can be distinguished⁶.

A. Criticism based on "ideality".

There is an instance external to the facts (although its origins may lie in the

facts themselves), which serves as a reference and in comparison that which is factually given proves to be deficient in some way. The horizon is what it "should" be in some way. This instance may be either utopian, ideal, counterfactual, etc. K.O. Apel's transcendental pragmatics would be a paradigmatic case of this strategy in current philosophy.

B. Immanent criticism

The criticism is based on the things themselves, on the possibilities they contain. The horizon is not what they should be, but what could be. In this case the strategy is to explore the internal capabilities contained in specific situations, which change with the very evolution of the criticized entity (whether it be knowledge, a political organization or a personal biography). A clear example of this approach is Zubiri's noology.

These two strategies can be compared with the *modus operandi* of two people travelling at night. One is guided by a visible light at the end of the road, on the distant horizon. His movements attempt to approach the source of light that is never quite reached, but always and unfailingly indicates the correct direction.

The other traveller in the dark is guided by the lights of his own car. His field of vision is reduced to the limited range covered by the headlights of his vehicle. Given the short stretch of lighted road, the driver has to continually decide where to direct his steps, in which direction he should travel, not knowing where the final destination is.

The first traveller represents the strategy of criticism from ideality, while the second follows the strategy of immanent criticism. The first strategy must avoid the possibility of naturalistic fallacy, that is, deducing what things should be from what they are. The second must clarify how to specify the real possibilities and avoid falling into a conservative strategy by sticking to them. The first strategy is idealistic, while the second is possibilistic. The main question here is whether the two strategies are incompatible.

Among the current philosophical proposals, some defend that character and critical strength are needed for philosophical discourse. This is reflected in many different approaches regarding origin, methodology, scope, etc. of philosophical criticism. To systematize this diversity the following hypothesis is proposed. The platform generating, supporting and acting as a critical instance is the reality in its many manifestations, levels and dimensions. In keeping with this reconstructive hypothesis, the following classification of current critical philosophies can be established.

Four groups can be distinguished according to the instance acting as a criterion for the critical action: firstly, approaches that make social reality the critical instance: dialectical hermeneutics (W. Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, F. Jameson) and liberation philosophy (I. Ellacuría, E. Dussel). Secondly, those philosophies which make the reality of language the platform for extracting critical standards: critical-communicative hermeneutics (K.O. Apel) and descriptive metaphysics (P. F. Strawson). Thirdly, those currents of thinking that use the reality of knowledge, interpreted in a certain way, as a critical instance: archaeology of knowledge (M. Foucault) and critical rationalism (K. Popper, H. Albert). Fourth and last, some philosophies believe that the otherness of reality is the threshold of critical reference: phenomenological-realist noology (X. Zubiri) and phenomenology of the presence of others (E. Levinas).

IV. Liberation Philosophy and Modernity

In order to place liberation philosophy in the context of modern criticist philosophy and its transformations, one must firstly take into account that this philosophical trend does not directly reject the traditions of Enlightenment thinking, insofar as a technical-scientific-industrial paradigm (in a theoretical sense) and as democratic liberalism (in a practical sense). Liberation philosophy takes a critical position, but it does not give up its

most valuable origins⁷.

Liberation philosophy is not to dispense with the theoretical tools developed in the modern tradition and become doomed to some kind of irrationalism. But on the other hand, one is aware that a transformation of the entire social structure cannot be carried out only in the 'practical and ideological' aspect (in the manner of the neo-conservatives)⁸. The transformation should affect the overall theoretical and practical worldview of the modern world in its effective results. Liberation philosophy strives to traverse the experience of the Enlightenment, take the best of it and transform it. This exploitation and transformation is reflected in at least three focus points of enlightened rationality: technology, universalism and emancipation. In all cases there is a divergence from the actually established conception, but without an actual breach which may prevent exploiting its potentialities in a transformed conception.

A. Technology and liberation.

First, technology, one of the star products of modernity, becomes accepted within a transformed context (unlike M. Heidegger for instance). "Humanization requires a more elemental and 'materialistic' approach, effectively including political, scientific and technological rationality, without which liberation may become a mere dialectical game"⁹. Certainly, this assumption is made while insisting that scientific-technical reason perform a self-criticism if it wishes to move forward on this most promising project.

In this same line, Ellacuría believes that "today it is meaningless to consider the possibility of giving up modern technology" and he claims its immense liberating potential¹⁰ when placed in the right conditions. Human beings would not have discovered their creative potential if they had not travelled the road of technology, a path that has historically qualified human beings to unimaginable levels, while exposing the unfathomable possibilities of reality.

But technology as a social event implies a crucial ambiguity: "...neither should technology be merely seen as a necessary evil. But on the other hand, it would be naive to think that technology, left to its own doings, would bring only good things ... technology can make a humane or inhumane world, it can be oppressive or liberating, it can create or destroy, hide or reveal"¹¹. Far from rejecting the technological complex in view of the material and social destruction that it has caused in today's world, he believes that "ending of its effects and potential would be a catastrophe"¹², so that technology is something like "the heart and soul of the world". Both qualitatively and quantitatively, technology opens up almost limitless horizons, which could meet the basic needs of mankind; human beings never had so much power.

However, most of mankind's needs and interests have not been fulfilled. Something is wrong with the process of generation, use and distribution of the results of technology. So the key issue is finding a "suitable technology" which will promote its "rescuing power and minimize its current destructive power"¹³.

The technical development that has actually taken place "in no way ensures the humanization of the species or the finding of truth"¹⁴. Therefore, Ellacuria exposes the irrationality of conceiving the technical-operational sphere as being self-sufficient and independent of its results. The technical-calculating action is within a framework of prior decisions and subsequent consequences that are part of the overall governing rationality in such human action. Technology is not neutral; its research and findings are used depending on certain goals and interests¹⁵. An integrated understanding of reason has to include not only the calculating discussion about the best mechanisms for finding solutions to problems, but also an argumentative discussion about the goals to be pursued with technical-calculating action. An undivided reasoning should include both means and ends¹⁶, because technology is part of a social totality that currently

has a global or worldwide scope.

Therefore, the problem of technology serving the needs and interests of all mankind not only involves the development of the means, but also contains a political aspect, namely to define what goals are a priority for guidance and control of the use of material and human resources in technological development. In a world of scarce resources, this is a crucial issue.

The primary objective of the technical action must be the satisfaction of mankind's basic needs¹⁷. Until such time as it is achieved society is failing in the use of technological development. In order to advance towards this goal, domination and dependence relationships must be replaced by multilateral interaction¹⁸. Progress in this direction is a matter of political will and agreement and certainty about what kind of society is to be achieved. Making the level of consumption of the citizens of more developed countries the goal is a mistaken ideal of society and individuals. Only a technology really governed by the primary objective of meeting the basic needs of all mankind can be an appropriate technology, both in an operational sense and in an ethical sense, and only then can it be a vital tool for progress and constitute a "liberation technology". Otherwise, it is a bad technology insofar as irrational.

B. Universality and Eurocentrism.

The claim of universality present in the modern concept of rationality is also questioned. This challenge is carried out as a claim against the *Eurocentric* nature of the Enlightenment project, which, according to Dussel, is still upheld by J. Habermas and Charles Taylor. A historical element external to modernity and self-identity in which Europe is the centre needs to be recognized, namely, the discovery of America. This is what made modern man. "America is 'the other side of the coin', the alterity of Modernity"¹⁹. In particular, Dussel rejects the "Eurocentric" version: "I understand 'Eurocentrism' as the claim that simply identifies the Eu-

ropean 'particularity' with 'universality'. No philosopher can currently avoid being Eurocentric if he fails to acquire a critical and *explicit* awareness of the issue of Eurocentrism itself ... and this has certainly happened to Apel.²⁰

To be quite fair, Dussel's position regarding the European philosophical traditions should be qualified, especially as a result of the discussion held with K.O. Apel during the 90s. Dussel diverges from this tradition by using an element not unknown to the European philosophical tradition, as is the philosophy of Levinas, and in particular the idea of the universal and radical exteriority of the Other. This factor supports an unconditional ethical demand (and therefore not dependent on historical or cultural contexts). This demand reaches all worlds of life and all of society; it has a "trans-ontological" character. Thus Dussel formulates a sort of "categorical imperative": "Free the poor!" (No doubt applicable to I. Ellacuria's approach too).

In pursuing this partially alternative approach, Dussel takes as a starting point "the original ethical reason," which is universally part of the oppressed and marginalised communities and a prior element to any communication or discussion. The original starting point is opening-up to the "Other affected marginalised" whose transformation involves seeing him as a person, as the subject of the liberation process: "The ethics of liberation, for its part, considers that the criterion and starting point is the bodily suffering of those dominated or marginalised: the alterity of the Other denied his dignity²¹. This shows Dussel's "total" confidence in the ethical "substance" of individuals, in the moral foundations of human reality. From this starting point Dussel seeks to rebuild an inclusive rationality, that is, with a universal scope.

As shown, Dussel does not reject all "Eurocentric" universalism, but rather requests the transformation of the universalistic conception which he also claims as his own. Thus stated, there is a certain convergence with the Apelian discursive ethics, intended to overcome any cultural,

historical or geographical relativism. The universal ethical requirement stated by Dussel should be circumstantially applied depending on the moment, culture, society, etc... We must therefore find a balance between universality and particularity, making it necessary to revise certain rationalities with an allegedly universal claim.

Indeed, European culture has been in a historically asymmetric and dominant position compared to other cultures²². And that dominance has defined the "centre" and the "periphery", the "core" and the marginalised, and is not acceptable to ignore or hide Europe's main responsibility in the exploitation of other people and cultures, or in the current ecological crisis. However, the fact that a proposal or criticism arises from a particular tradition, does not necessarily imply a unilateral or arbitrary nature, something that depends at least in part, on a certain "criticism of ideology." Otherwise the very proposal of liberation philosophy would be self-contradictory.

In order to determine and define the above convergence, one must take into account three aspects²³: firstly, not all European intellectual findings are part of a unique tradition. Hence one must distinguish different traditions, which have had varying degrees of adherence to and expression of the demand requiring universality for rationality and in particular for moral reason.

Secondly, one of the key sources of argument (though by no means the only one) comes precisely from the European Enlightenment tradition. This philosophical "topos" has been one of the scenarios in which historically there has been a greater struggle for the progress of the rational requirement of universality for the organization of human society.

Thirdly, from this perspective, the very requirement of universality of liberation philosophy, as amended by Dussel, uses the universal principle of the European tradition to sustain the criticism. As for Apel, he places the particular configuration of Dussel's categorical imperative in

“Part B” of discursive ethics²⁴. This location is rejected by Dussel, who attempts to position himself at a point of origin prior to the one Apel uses.

Thereafter, the European Enlightenment rational conception itself has generated rational resources of self-criticism and self-improvement in order to organize human society according to two variables: the identification and design of universally applicable minimum standards for every rational being, and the universal obligation to respect differences in values and ways of life²⁵. In this regard the European tradition has failed to meet even its own demands and ideals. As long as this awareness is not lost, the door will be open to rational progress. An important part of the critical-rational task of today’s philosophy is precisely to keep that door open.

C. Liberation philosophy and Marxism.

Thirdly, there has been a special relationship between the philosophy (and theology) of liberation and Marxism. While some have rejected this philosophical source, most have used it to varying degrees, which has generated some problems with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Many liberation philosophers refer to Marxism critically in the aspect of emancipating Enlightenment tradition. This dimension converges with the desire to develop a philosophy aimed at liberation and which intends to use the particular situation arising both as a starting point and a final reference point, and without prejudice to the indispensable dimension of universality typical of philosophical reflection. According to this view, Marxism appeared to many as a very useful tool both for philosophical and theological analysis, and for the opening-up and transformation of Marxism itself. This has led to a “comprehensive and sound reinterpretation of Marxism from a Christian perspective²⁶. For example, for Dussel, liberation theology assumes “a certain kind of Marxism”, but maintains a “non-subservient” attitude regarding the analytical tools developed by this tradition,²⁷ and do so not

only to interpret reality, but to justify its transformation.

This attitude towards Marxism means that certain elements of the philosophy have been rejected, such as, historicism, or in particular, dialectical materialism²⁸. But the impact of Marxism on the philosophy and theology of liberation has been decisive. It has produced a true “epistemological revolution” in the history of Christian theology.²⁹

Ellacuria, in the same line, recognizes the deeply moral nature of Marxism, insofar as a rejection of evil and social injustice, and in the seeking of a new and more just man and society³⁰. Marxism gives liberation theology and philosophy an ethical sensitivity toward injustice, the material and political dimensions of poverty and its central role in the Christian message, the historic character of hope, the suspicion that theology has been ideologized, recognition of the poor as an appropriate epistemological perspective for understanding the truth, the relevance of praxis for a proper theological discourse (in addition to orthodoxy), the importance of socio-economic aspects, the relevance of history as an area of expression of truth and reality, the recovery of the materiality of human beings and their history, etc.³¹

However, Ellacuria wholly rejects that Marxism should be a decisive factor in the theology and liberation philosophy; it is always instrumental and therefore subordinate. He thus states that “indeed there is in a direct or indirect presence of Marxist elements in most of the liberation theology, but the decisive principle is faith as expressed in the message of the Bible³². The advantages of Marxism should not be overlooked: “The analysis of liberation theology in its dual practical and theoretical sense, shows perhaps transformed features of Marxism which have largely enabled its novelty and coherence”; however “There is no doubt that Marxism commits theoretical and practical errors, which are not outweighed by its alleged scientific elements or its nature as a class struggle.”³³.”

In conclusion, liberation philosophy has aligned itself (critically speaking) with some of the central aspects of the Enlightenment program which has covered most of Modernity: Technology for the fulfilment of needs and interests, the emancipation from all oppression and dogmas as liberation, and universality as the road to rationality.

Perhaps that is why, despite its critical and somewhat alternative nature compared to the “European” tradition, it holds strong links with philosophical trends such as Marxism or phenomenology (for instance through Levinas’s ethics or Zubiri’s noology). Therefore, part of the criticism raised by liberation philosophy can be understood as the need for real and effective progress in implementing the spirit of the Enlightenment program, which included in its essential foundations its extension to all of mankind.

V. Ellacuría’s model of criticism: structure, scope and method

Ellacuría’s thought does not forsake the critical aspect of philosophical reflection, defining it as a “liberating process”³⁴, with the intension of providing individual and social transformation. Consistent with Zubiri’s original theory, it falls in line with Heidegger’s *turn to facticity*. However, Ellacuría develops his own analysis of facticity with significantly different findings from those obtained by Heidegger.

Within this framework, Ellacuría focuses his analysis of facticity on the socio-political area and its historical dimension, and based on this he defends a worldwide perspective, or, as we would say nowadays, a globalized perspective, for philosophical reflection: the whole of humanity is the reference from which to assess the results of political, social, economic or cultural action. But this does not lead to an abstractly universalistic approach, but to a reflection on the concrete reality of humanity’s most disadvantaged communities or those in a situation of overt misery.

Thus, Ellacuría turns his reflection into an experiential philosophy that moves between the universality of certain kinds

of human experience (primarily in a historical dimension) and the particularity of the concrete experiences of specific societies in given historical moments. The Ellacuría line of thinking moves between a universal interest and a specific starting point. This is the “hermeneutical situation” which the reflexive action is based on; a reflexive action that not only strives to be analytical-understanding (interpretative), but also seeks to transform reality.

The driving force behind the philosophical thinking is the global perspective of the whole of humanity, with a particular interest: the interest in freeing mankind from all oppression and dogma.

But the correct starting point to address and achieve this goal is the reality of human misery (both material and spiritual), in its various manifestations, including poverty, marginalization, oppression, etc. It is not, therefore, a matter of seeking a neutral and aseptic objectivity. In the underlying basis of cognitive action *sides have been taken* in favour of what Ellacuría defines as the “option for the poor.” This approach must defend itself firstly from the accusation of being mere decisionism (whether epistemological, moral, rational, political, or otherwise).

Ellacuría refuses to admit that the option he proposed as a suitable starting point for reflection may be irrational. To understand his position one must firstly distinguish between critical action as a mere spontaneous rejection of something, and a reflexive critical action, whereby the rejection is the result of an analysis. This latter route is the one taken by Ellacuría, and it can be said that to choose is to know intellectually.

Secondly, we must distinguish two senses of the notion of “starting point”. First of all, the “option for the poor” is the epistemological instance which is the methodological and structural beginning of the analysis. Moreover, one reaches this first instance after a certain critical reflection on the given situation. From this second point of view, only understandable in the context of the turn towards facticity, the methodological starting point is not a

priori but experiential. This means that Ellacuría's theoretical proposal, like all philosophers', can only be understood in its deepest internal logic based on a decisive experience in the author's life (not only in his mind).

For Ellacuría both senses of the notion of "starting point" are present when he says that this point must be the "option for the poor"³⁵ For this reason the option intends to situate itself within a rational framework with a structure that will allow for the justification of its own starting point. So Ellacuría speaks of an "enlightened choice", i.e. made in the light of certain information, experiences, goals and interests. The philosophical analysis is not in fact made from an allegedly neutral viewpoint, yet rather the starting point is the fact that "injustice and non- freedom [are] a fundamental repression of truth"³⁶, accompanied by the ethical evaluation which makes this situation the essential reference of human rational action. But this is not outside the framework of rationality because of the experiential nature of Ellacuría's philosophy, falling within Zubiri's original theory and therefore in the context of the turn towards facticity.

Enlightened based on the acceptance of this experience as a starting point, three types of arguments in Ellacuría's thinking can be cited, which contribute to the "justification" of the option for the poor by addressing the analysis of knowing and knowledge. Firstly, if the starting point is the aforementioned experience, and the dominant aim which confers rationality to the investigational and analytical action is human liberation, then anything that brings us closer to the goals defined by the prime interest is rational. It thus becomes reasonable to take as a primary reference that area in which the intended aim is particularly relevant, even when it is radically deficient.

Secondly, the above must be understood within the framework of Zubiri's theory of intelligence, whereby to choose is to know intellectually, and intellection is always intellection of reality. In this context, the choice is not only within the

framework of rationality, but it can only be understood as a way of intellection. This intellectual action involves several types of elements: on the one hand, reason, emotion and will, and on the other, the presence of reality involved in every intellectual action. Thus, Ellacuría's requirement to take sides is not a feature of irrationality, because it is justified within this conception of intelligibility, in which reason is intertwined with praxis. Therefore, making a choice involves various realms of the individual personality and of collective social life; it should therefore be asserted that in this context, a choice is not just a conclusion reached at a conceptual level, but means a way of life, where both theory and praxis combine and come into play. Posed in this way, there is the prospect of truth, an essentially theoretical-practical notion. This is how the theory that choosing is knowing intellectually should be understood.

Lastly, the methodological role of using the perspective of the poor is not only psychological, insofar as it reminds us of things that usually goes unseen, perhaps because they are the not so nice and less rewarding side of reality. This role is extremely important in itself, but it is not the only purpose. Adopting the perspective of the marginalized communities also has an epistemological role, that is, from this point one can access types or parts of knowledge that would be very difficult or perhaps impossible to reach from other perspectives. This is exactly how to understand Ellacuría's idea that the perspective of the poor puts us "*in the place that offers truth*"³⁷. If indeed, this view offers a type of specific knowledge, then this factor constitutes a rational justification for what at first appears as an option.

Ellacuría's position contains an apparent paradox. The search for truth must be made using the best available resources. But when Ellacuría seeks the best of humanity, he does not point toward the core of the most influential, powerful and successful people, yet precisely to those that have been pushed to the side. According to him, this is the most

suitable epistemological perspective because it is “the place that offers truth.” Obviously this notion of truth is not the scientific concept (in the narrow sense), but refers to any practical dimension of truth which could be linked with human liberation. Sharing this experience leads to a level of truth where theoretical reason and practical reason have not yet divided.

So what this perspective can teach us specifically is that if we pay heed to that majority of underprivileged human-beings, we shall feel pity, solidarity, the need to help change that situation, in short, this perspective makes us more sensitive to human reality. The perspective of the marginalized people is the place of truth because it makes us more human.

However, this place that offers truth cannot be determined once and for all, because it is not actually a “place” as such but a situation which, as all situations do, relates to a historical, social, political, cultural, context, etc. Therefore there are always positions which state the truth in each given place and time. Truth is not a thing or an outcome, but is essentially a historical task³⁸ of intellection and discrimination.

Source of criticism: The critical force arises precisely from the imbalance between the historically determined social reality and the expectations generated by that very social reality regarding individual and collective self-fulfilment (in terms of meeting needs and interests). With the reflection positioned on this imbalance, Ellacuría rebels critically against any approach which somehow legitimizes or conceals the real situation. This self-fulfilment horizon becomes a criterion for critical action.

The *method* created by Ellacuría to address reflection, from this perspective, does not have a purely a priori nature concerning the reality to which it applies. This shows the experiential nature of his thinking, so the method is not a theoretical elaboration thoughtfully prepared and valid for all reality to which it is applied. Rather, the orderly development requires a certain relationship between “practice” and

“awareness of the praxis”. The interaction between these two levels means that philosophy maintains its nature of “critical, systematic and creative” reflection, or otherwise it “can become ideologization”³⁹.

As such, Ellacuría’s proposed method has two aspects: an experiential and a theoretical one. The experiential aspect is the requirement that “philosophers and philosophy should be in the right place and engage in appropriate practice. The place “from where” one reflects is a preliminary, individual and social mediation of all methodological resources used, to the point of defining different “types” of philosophies.

According to Ellacuría, the “privileged” place where true “wisdom” can be acquired is the perspective of “the dispossessed, the mistreated and the people that suffer”⁴⁰. This perspective is a “principle of truth.” To reach this place one must participate in the historical praxis of liberation. “When separated from this practice it is difficult to define philosophy as such, and even harder to define it as liberating and more so that it may actually help towards liberation”⁴¹. So there must be a relationship of understanding, in its hermeneutically stronger meaning, with the subject of the liberation, which according to Ellacuría cannot be dogmatically determined once and for all and for every historical situation.

Only from this experiential position and for this purpose is it possible to design a philosophy that is both “regional and universal” and that contributes to the “liberation” of communities and individuals.

The second aspect of the method, involving theoretical development, is the historicizing of concepts⁴². It involves the reconstruction of abstractly considered concepts and values in their dimension as part of a particular praxis and the effect really produced on them. In this process its valuable core must be revealed in terms of promoting truth, justice, freedom, etc.

This critical drive based on historical reality is based on things themselves (concrete socio-historical realities) and on the

opportunities reality generates, since each realization of a possibility opens up new possibilities (Zubiri). Thus, this historical-hermeneutic situation is not a sterile circle, but feeds back on itself using new ingredients that create unique experiences⁴³. Ellacuría thus moves away from all idealism which appeals to some a-historical or abstract source.

Regarding the previous distinction between immanent critique and criticism from ideality, Ellacuría provides a mixed example. It lies mainly in the scope of immanent critique, since it does not appeal to ideals, rather its strategy is to see what things or situations can provide in each given situation. As noted, the source of criticism precisely comes from the mismatch between the given situation and what each historical situation makes possible and allows. This unreal and in some sense “ideal” situation is foreseen by Ellacuría within the notion of “height of the times”⁴⁴. The awareness of deficit this creates is the source of criticism.

However, this approach also involves some idealism, which is not based on any facts, but has a function of mobilizing and guiding. The more specific piece in Ellacuría’s approach is the ideal of a liberated humanity, which requires a historical process of liberation, conceived as an at-

tempt to achieve it on strictly universal scope. The contents of this ideal is reflected in different ways in each historical situation and social context. But such an ideal of liberation is not specific to any of them. It is situated in a sort of interactive dialectic between the given situation and the universal ideal. Hence the mixed nature of this approach for the two modes of critical action described above.

In short, it always involves approaching the real conditions of each situation and the possibilities that each situation really contains. This is the historicizing character of Ellacuría’s thought. The focus is always to go beyond the facts (of reality), but always from the side of here and now. The development of this process, never linear, is the history of the emancipation of social groups. This is the conception of history as the appropriation of possibilities. The dynamic of opening and eliminating possibilities is what puts us “at the height of the times”, which has its own particular characteristics at each point in time and in each case. Thus, History is the field for refining and for debate in which the value of real progress of the evolution of societies is seen, and “if taken in all its concrete reality” for Ellacuría it becomes “the great criterion of truth”⁴⁵.

Notes

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² I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AXII, AXX and B3.

³ Cfr. B. de Sousa Santos, *Crítica de la razón indolente. Contra el desperdicio de la experiencia*, ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao, 2003.

⁴ F. Bacon, *La gran restauración (Novum Organum)*, ed. Alianza, Madrid, 1985, p. 366.

⁵ K.O. Apel makes a thorough analysis of this issue in “Das Problem der philosophischen Letzbegründung im Lichte einer transzendentalen Sprachpragmatik”, Kanitscheider

(Hrsg.), *Sprache und Erkenntnis*, Innsbruck, 1976, S. 55-82.

⁶ Cfr. A. Honeth, *Pahtologien der Vernunft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a.M., 2007; H. Albert, “Kritizismus und Naturalismus” in Hans Lenk (Hrsg.), *Neue Aspekte der Wissenschaftstheorie* Vieweg, Braunschweig, 1971, S. 111-128.

⁷ Cfr. H. Samour, “El significado de la filosofía de la liberación hoy”, in J.A. Nicolás, H. Samour (eds.), *Historia, ética y ciencia. El impulso crítico de la filosofía de Zubiri*, Comares, Granada, 2007, 477-502.

⁸ A systematic analysis and presentation of this issue is given by J.A. Nicolás, “Alternativas actuales a la crisis de la metafísica moderna”, in J.A. Nicolás, M.J. Frápolli (eds.), *Eva-*

- luando la Modernidad, ed. Comares, Granada, 2001, 79-105.
- ⁹ Quote from J. Miguez Bonino in E. Dussel, "Teología de la liberación y marxismo", I. Ellacuría and J. Sobrino (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis*, UCA editores, San Salvador, 1993 (ed. orig. 1990), vol. I, 129.
- ¹⁰ I. Ellacuría, "El concepto filosófico de tecnología apropiada", in *Escritos filosóficos III*, UCA editores, San Salvador, 2001, p. 239 and 248 (ed. orig. 1979). Cfr. también I. Ellacuría, "Técnica y vida humana en Ortega y Gasset: estudio de *Meditación de la técnica*", in *Escritos Filosóficos I*, UCA editores, San Salvador, 1996, p. 415-518.
- ¹¹ I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 233 and 240.
- ¹² I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
- ¹³ I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
- ¹⁴ I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 239.
- ¹⁵ Cfr. I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, pp. 240 and 246-7.
- ¹⁶ Cfr. I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
- ¹⁷ Cfr. I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
- ¹⁸ Cfr. I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
- ¹⁹ E. Dussel, "Eurocentrismo y modernidad", p. 67.
- ²⁰ E. Dussel, "La ética de la liberación ante la ética del discurso" in K.O. Apel, E. Dussel, *Ética del discurso y ética de la liberación*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 2004, pp. 297-8.
- ²¹ E. Dussel, "La ética de la liberación ante la ética del discurso", in K.O. Apel, Dussel, *op. cit.*, 300.
- ²² Cfr. E. Dussel, "Ética de la liberación. Hacia el 'punto de partida' como ejercicio de la razón ética originaria", in K.O. Apel, E. Dussel, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-289.
- ²³ Cfr. K.O. Apel, "¿Necesitamos en la actualidad una ética universalista, o estamos ante una ideología de poder eurocéntrica?", in V.D. García Marzá and V. Martínez Guzmán (eds.), *Teoría de Europa*, Nau Llibres, Valencia, 1993, pp. 9-17.
- ²⁴ Cfr. K.O. Apel, "La ética del discurso ante el desafío de la filosofía latinoamericana de la liberación (II)", in K.O. Apel, E. Dussel, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-267.
- ²⁵ In this sense Cfr. R. Fernet-Betancourt, *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía*, Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao, 2001; también "Liberación e interculturalidad en el pensamiento latinoamericano actual" in J.A. Nicolás, H. Samour (eds.), *Historia, ética y ciencia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 455-476.
- ²⁶ E. Dussel, "Teología de la liberación y marxismo", *op. cit.*, p. 141.
- ²⁷ E. Dussel, *op. cit.*, p. 124 and 130.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ E. Dussel, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- ³⁰ Cfr. I. Ellacuría, "Teología de la liberación y marxismo" in *Escritos teológicos*, UCA editores, San Salvador, 2000, vol. I, pp. 468.
- ³¹ Cfr. I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, 473-480.
- ³² I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.* p. 469.
- ³³ I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, pp. 472 and 474.
- ³⁴ I. Ellacuría, "La función liberadora de la filosofía", in *Escritos Políticos I*, UCA editores, San Salvador, 1991, 93-121.
- ³⁵ Cfr. G. Gutierrez, "Pobres y opción fundamental", in I. Ellacuría, J. Sobrino (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis*, *Op. cit.*, vol. I, 303-321; A. Salamanca, *Yo soy guardián mundial de mi hermano*, IKO Verlag, Frankfurt a.M., 2003 (chap. 7: "Universalidad de la opción por los pobres", 207-275).
- ³⁶ I. Ellacuría, "La función liberadora de la filosofía", *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Regarding truth as a task and extreme experiences as a way of experiencing truth please see J.A. Nicolás, "Explorando la experiencia de la verdad", in J.J. Acero et al. (eds.), *El legado de Gadamer*, Univ. Granada, Granada, 2004, 153-170.
- ³⁹ I. Ellacuría, "La función liberadora de la filosofía", *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.
- ⁴⁰ I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
- ⁴¹ I. Ellacuría, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
- ⁴² J.J. Tamayo, "El método de historización de los conceptos teológicos en Ellacuría", in J.A. Nicolás, H. Samour (eds.), *Historia, ética y ciencia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-211.
- ⁴³ Regarding this innovation experience, J.A. Nicolás, "Neofilia: la vida de la experiencia" (in newspapers)
- ⁴⁴ Regarding this concept, please see J.M. Romero, "Los fundamentos históricos de la crítica" in J.A. Nicolás, H. Samour (eds.), *Historia, ética y ciencia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-117; also "Humanism, History and Criticism in Ignacio Ellacuría", *The Xavier Zubiri Review*, 10, 2008, pp. 5-15.
- ⁴⁵ I. Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, Ed. Trotta, Madrid, 1991, p. 474