

A Return to the Foundations of the Critically Oriented Theologies of Liberation

Manuel Mejido Costoya, Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, Chile

Abstract

Against the historical-hermeneutic dissimulation of the theologies of liberation, we propose here a return to the Ellacurian synthesis of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic and the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism.

Introduction

[1] Jürgen Habermas's idea of "knowledge-constitutive interests" allows us to understand the theologies of liberation as the most radical theological "crisis" of modern theology, grasping it as a tension between the "practical interest" of the "sciences" (Mejido). Indeed, rethinking the movement of modern theology in light of this tension brings forth the problem of the dissimulation of the Latin American theologies of liberation. Against this dissimulation, we propose here a return to one of the foundations of the theologies of liberation, namely, Ignacio Ellacuría's *Philosophy of Historical Reality*. But first, let us sketch the movement of modern theology in light of the difference between the historical-hermeneutic and critically oriented sciences.

The Historical-Hermeneutic Theologies

[2] From Friedrich Schleiermacher to David Tracy, the progressive theologies of Western Europe and North America have, for the most part, understood themselves within the limits of what Habermas has called the "historical-hermeneutic sciences." That is, they have established theological knowledge through the interpretation of the meaning of transcendence. This theological knowledge has been possible only to the extent that transcendence has been grasped through the category of *praxis* (i.e., intersubjectivity, interaction, language, communication). In so far as modern theology has posited *praxis* as the very conditions of possibility for interpreting the meaning of transcendence, we say it has labored under an interest in the maintenance of mutual understanding – that is, it has labored under a "practical cognitive interest."

[3] Since the end of the eighteenth century theology, understood within the limits of the historical-hermeneutic sciences, has seen four different moments: consciousness, time, becoming, and language. Let us briefly examine each of these moments.

Consciousness

[4] Modern theology emerges when the transcendentality of being gives way to the transcendentality of consciousness, when the analogy of being is annihilated by the synthetic activity of the knowing subject. This inversion had been germinating in that voluntaristic tradition that can be traced through, for example, Avicenna's subordination of being to essence (Zubiri n.d.),¹ John Duns

¹ Avicenna maintained that being was added to essence, that it was the first of its metaphysical accidents. He was arguing here against Averroes who, following Aristotle, rejected the idea of a real distinction between being and essence.

Scotus's distinction between the philosophical contemplation of being and the theological pursuit of the *summum bonum* (Zubiri 1994),² G. Wilhelm Leibniz's subordination of the real to the logical, and, of course, René Descartes' egology, his *cogito, ergo sum*, which granted pride of place to the *verum* over the *ens*, which favored the problem of verification over the problem of being. But the shift from the transcendentality of being to the transcendentality of consciousness would crystallize with Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in metaphysics. With his subordination of speculative to practical reason and his reduction of being to essence, Kant marks the apogee of voluntaristic rationalism.

[5] When modern theologies have grounded themselves in the Kantian horizon of consciousness, the problem of the limits of theological knowledge has been formulated as either the Neo-Kantian problem of the historical interpretation of the essence of Christianity, or as the Neo-Scholastic problem of the speculative affirmation of the noumenal object. God-as-limit has been posited as that transcendental ideal existing outside of space and time. And transcendence has been grasped as what asymptotically correlates the infinite and the finite, God and world. These are the fundamental elements of the historical theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Transcendental Thomism of Joseph Maréchal.

Time

[6] It was Friedrich Nietzsche, with his idea of an "eternal return of the same," who first adumbrated this new conception of time that would serve as the basis for the overcoming of the Kantian horizon.³ Henri Bergson too, with the idea of the "*durée réelle*" as a critique of the Kantian reduction of time to space, contributed to the radicalization of the idea of time.⁴ But it was Heidegger that would make the clear break with the Kantian transcendental consciousness. For Heidegger abandoned altogether that horizon that had concerned itself with the way consciousness actively grasps things – even if this consciousness was an intuiting or historical consciousness, even if this consciousness had performed an *epoché* or had grasped itself as pure duration. Resuscitating the doctrine of being that had been pushed to the periphery since Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum*, Heidegger takes as his point of departure, rather, the way being manifests itself through things and the way the

Averroes argued rather that being was the most intimate of all things and thus could only be properly understood *analogically*.

² Duns Scotus aligned himself with Avicenna and taught the *univocity* of being, against, on the one hand, Thomas Aquinas's *analogy* of being, and, on the other, Henry of Ghent's *equivocity* of being, thus rightfully earning the title "*Doctor Subtilis*." Avicenna's idea of a real distinction between being and essence became in Duns Scotus the tension between intellect and will, philosophy and theology.

³ This idea of an "eternal return of the same" was a repudiation of the onto-theological distinction between the temporal and eternal that had served as the basis for Western philosophy and theology, a distinction that had manifested itself in Kant's philosophy as the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. The notion of the eternal as an atemporal realm posited asymptotically distant to the temporal and transitory was an impediment to the radical interpretation of finitude. For Nietzsche, rather, each ephemeral elapse of time was an eternity in its uniqueness; and it received its radical existential interpretation as a constituting moment of a unique life-trajectory. Indeed, how can eternity be grasped if not temporally? How can it be grasped if not as a perpetual "now"?

⁴ Although Kant had claimed to have made the pure intuition of internal sense, time, the ground of the pure intuition of external sense, space, he in fact, Bergson argued, grasped time spatially, that is he in fact modeled internal sense on external sense, thus reducing the internal world of consciousness to the external world of nature. By grasping psychological facts through juxtaposition, by giving causality the same sense and the same role in the internal and external worlds, Kant had reduced the real self that as pure duration is free, to a symbolic self that is projected onto space as succession and is free only to the extent that, as part of the noumenal world, it exists outside of space and time. Indeed, for Bergson, time was not grounded on consciousness, but rather consciousness on time; and time was not juxtaposition, but *durée réelle*.

human being is passively always already open to the being of things, to being in generality. Heidegger's existential reformulation of the ancient question of being uncovers time as the transcendental horizon for the interpretation of the meaning of being. Indeed, it is with Heidegger that the horizon of consciousness gives way to the horizon of time.

[7] When modern theologies have grounded themselves in the Heideggerian idea of time as the horizon for the interpretation of the question of being, the problem of the limits of theological knowledge has been formulated either as the philosophico-anthropological problem of the *a priori* aperture of the human spirit-consciousness to the "luminosity of being," or as the existentially-empirical problem of finite being's anxiety vis-à-vis the "ultimate concern." God-as-limit has been posited as the absolute being. And the problem of transcendence has been grasped as the problem of the ecstatic presence of the totality of being. These are the foundations of the philosophical theology of Karl Rahner and Paul Tillich.

Becoming

[8] Heidegger understood being as ecstatic presence, as the "thereness" of the "now." But being is also "what-is-not-yet." Being also becomes. It is true that, in some sense, Heidegger's idea of *Dasein's* "thrownness," of *Dasein's* "futurity," of its being "ahead-of-itself-already-in-the-world," or Tillich's idea of "ultimate concern," in some way, brings forth the problem of becoming. It is true that the ontological structure of *anxiety* that grounds all existentialist doctrines is, in some way, a gesture towards the question of what-is-not-yet. But, in the final analysis, the problem with all existentialisms is that they grasp the anticipation of the becoming of being from the point of view of the present. Indeed, the problem with all existentialisms is that they grant normative leverage to the present.⁵

[9] With modern philosophy, however, the problem of becoming would emerge as the problem of *history*. The problem of becoming as the problem of history would be developed from two perspectives: From an *evolutionary* perspective, on the one hand, and a *phenomenological* perspective, on the other.⁶ But G. W. F. Hegel would develop a form of thought that would radicalize the way of

⁵ That this is the case is clear from the negative role anxiety plays in existentialism: Anxiety is understood to be non-being, the negation of the present. And this is why it could be said that all existentialisms aim to overcome anxiety by making present the totality of being. Heidegger's idea of "care," his idea of primordial time as the "making present" of time, Tillich's "courage to be," or even Rahner's "luminosity of being" exemplify existentialism's reification of the present. This reduction of becoming to being is as old as Western philosophy. Parmenides – one of the Pre-Socratics that most influenced Heidegger – concluded, in *Fragments* VI and VII, that becoming does not exist. He argued that the problem of becoming is a problem of the relationship between being and non-being; but, because being is, and non-being is not, being as such has no becoming. Being, Parmenides believed, is completely static. Plato repudiated this view in the *Sophist*. Non-being, he argued, in some way is, which is to say that non-being has a *logos*. To say that something has non-being, in other words, is to say that it is other: The other, otherness is the *eidos* of non-being. Becoming for Plato is thus the movement of the *logos* understood as the dialectic of being and non-being, the dialectic of same and other. Aristotle understands the problem of becoming, not as a dialectical unity, but as a physical unity. What constitutes the unity of being and non-being in the physical unity of things? This is the question that drives Aristotle's inquiries. Becoming is thus strictly speaking not a passing from being to non-being, or from non-being to being, but rather a passing from one way of being to another way of being. Becoming, in other words, Aristotle argued in *Physics* III, is a change; it is the actualization of the potential being of real things (Zubiri 1989). The Christian creationist horizon would add a new dimension to the Platonic and Aristotelian positions regarding the problem of becoming (Zubiri n.d.).

⁶ The evolutionary perspective grasped history as a continuation of nature. The order and harmony of nature was transposed onto history. The conflicts and struggles of history were in this way "naturalized." This perspective can be traced back to the French Physiocrats, the utopian socialists, and the Anglo Common Sense school. The phenomenological approach understood both nature and history as part of some greater phenomenological process. If

thinking about becoming and history. The Hegelian dialectic not only attempted to push beyond the tension between the natural and historical sciences – the tension between the naturalization of history and the historicization of nature – but would also attempt to push beyond the tension between science and philosophy – the tension between the becoming of history and the history of becoming. Hegel takes the problem of becoming and history to the heart of the problem of thought: With Hegel the problem of thinking about becoming and history becomes the problem of the becoming and history of thinking. Indeed, with Hegel the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy interlock as one. Although the Hegelian dialectic would be critiqued for its ontological presuppositions, it would come to have radical epistemological and methodological implications for Western thought. Indeed, after Hegel the problem of grounding a science could be understood as the problem of the self-formation of that science, the problem of the becoming of that science in history.

[10] When modern theologies have grounded themselves in the Hegelian horizon of becoming, the problem of the limits of theological knowledge has been understood as the problem of what-is-not-yet. God-as-limit has been posited as eschatological hope. And the problem of transcendence has been grasped as the problem of the actualization of eschatological hope in and through sublation. These are the foundations of the political theology of J. B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann.

Language

[11] Postmodern thought is grounded in the linguistic-turn.⁷ The three basic coordinates of postmodern thought – the plurality of particulars, alterity, and difference – emerge in and through the turn to language. The first in the sense that one discovers finitude by coming-to-terms with one another as other, as alter, as revelation: “[I]n its expressive function language precisely maintains the other – to which it is addressed, who it calls upon or invokes. To be sure, language does not consist in invoking him as a being represented and thought. But this is why language institutes a relation irreducible to the subject-object relation: the revelation of the other. In this *revelation* only can language as a system of signs be constituted” (Levinas: 73).

[12] The second in the sense that it is always a plurality of particular beings that negotiate language: “The other called upon is not something represented, is not a given, is not a particular, through one side already open to generalization. Language, far from presupposing universality and generality, first makes them possible. Language presupposes interlocutors, a plurality. Their commerce is not a representation of the one by the other, nor a participation in universality, on the common place of language. Their commerce . . . is ethical” (Levinas: 73).

[13] And the third in the sense that the difference that exists between self and other can either be overcome through conversation or simply be deconstructed. The positive role of language as *conversation* and its negative role as *deconstruction*, from these two views emerge the two conceptions of language that have constituted the linguistic-turn in the human sciences: namely, the *hermeneutic* and *poststructuralist* conceptions of language (Gadamer; Derrida).

the evolutionary perspective reduced history to nature, the phenomenological perspective reduced nature to history to the extent of the “phenomenon.”

⁷ By “linguistic-turn” we mean a paradigm shift in the human sciences that grants language primordial ontological, epistemological, and methodological status. Indeed, the paradigm shift to language, in a word, means that, whether we like it or not, we are all dependent on language, we are all constituted in and through language: Culture and the unconscious function like a language; society is grounded on communication (i.e., language); historical experience is linguistically transmitted, and the like.

[14] When modern theologies have grounded themselves in the postmodern horizon of language, the problem of the limits of theological knowledge has been grasped as a problem of difference, whether this is a difference that, grasped from the hermeneutic conception of language, can be overcome through conversation, or whether this is a difference that, grasped from the poststructuralist conception of language, resists all symbolization and must be deconstructed. God-as-limit has been posited as Other. And the problem of transcendence has been grasped as the problem of the analogical rupture of the Other in and through difference. These are the foundations of the public theology of David Tracy and the poststructuralist theology of Jorg Rieger.

The Critically Oriented Theological Sciences of Liberation

[15] In the late 1960s, theology for the first time understood itself as a “critically oriented science.” Indeed, the radicalness of the Latin American theologies of liberation stems from the fact that they were never satisfied with the practical cognitive interest of the historical-hermeneutic sciences – that is, they were never satisfied with the interpretation of the meaning of transcendence grasped through the restricted category of *praxis*. The theologies of liberation, rather, establish a theological knowledge that is “interested” in the “making” of transcendence. In other words, the theologies of liberation generate a theological knowledge that theoretically aims to grasp the invariance that exists between the Kingdom of God and the socio-historical conditions of misery, and praxeologically aims to overcome this invariance through the making of transcendence understood as the making of “better” history. This theological knowledge has been possible only to the extent that transcendence has been grasped through the category of social labor (i.e., the dialectic of *praxis* and *poiesis*, interaction and labor, language and work). In so far as the theologies of liberation have posited social labor as the very conditions of possibility for the making of transcendence (i.e., the making of “better” history), we say they have labored under an interest in the making of liberation – that is, they have labored under an “emancipatory cognitive interest” (Habermas; Mejido).

[16] Unlike the historical-hermeneutic theological sciences, the theologies of liberation do not situate themselves within the limits of the Kantian horizon of consciousness. They do not formulate the problem of the limits of theological knowledge as the Neo-Kantian problem of the historical interpretation of the essence of Christianity, nor as the Neo-Scholastic problem of the speculative affirmation of the noumenal object. The theologies of liberation do not understand God-as-limit to be a transcendental ideal existing outside of space and time, nor do they understand transcendence as what asymptotically correlates the infinite and the finite, God and world. That the theologies of liberation push beyond the historical theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Transcendental Thomism of Joseph Maréchal is clear from, for example, Jon Sobrino’s observation that while the European and North American theologies labor under the “first” Enlightenment, that is the earlier Kantian and Fichteian project that had as its aim the liberation of reason from dogmatism, the theologies of liberation labor under the “second” Enlightenment, that is the later Left Hegelian project that had as its aim the liberation of the human being from the socio-historical conditions of misery.

[17] The theologies of liberation do not labor under the Heideggerian idea of time as the horizon for the interpretation of the question of being. They do not formulate the problem of the limits of theological knowledge as the philosophico-anthropological problem of the *a priori* aperture of the human spirit-consciousness to the luminosity of being, nor as the cultural problem of what undergirds and gives ultimate meaning to the situation. The theologies of liberation do not understand God-as-limit as the horizon of being, nor do they understand transcendence as the ecstatic presence of the totality of being. That the theologies of liberation push beyond the philosophical theology of Karl Rahner and Paul Tillich is evident from, for example, Juan José

Tamayo's claim that while modern theology has moved within the realm of "logology" the theologies of liberation have moved within the realm of "praxeology."

[18] The theologies of liberation do not situate themselves within the Hegelian horizon of becoming. They do not formulate the problem of the limits of theological knowledge as a problem of what-is-not-yet. The theologies of liberation do not understand God-as-limit as eschatological hope, nor do they understand transcendence as the actualization of this eschatological hope. That the theologies of liberation push beyond the political theology of J. B. Metz and Jürgen Moltmann is poignantly illustrated by Rubem Alves's distinction between political theology's "language of hope," that is, the expression of a future hope that negates the present, and liberation theology's "language of freedom," that is the making the future hopeful by proclaiming the negation of the present.

[19] The theologies of liberation do not labor under the postmodern conception of language. They do not formulate the problem of the limits of theological knowledge as the hermeneutic problem of a difference that can be overcome through conversation, nor as the poststructuralist problem of a difference that must be deconstructed. The theologies of liberation do not understand God-as-limit as Other, nor do they understand transcendence as the anagogical rupture of the Other. That the theologies of liberation attempt to push beyond both the public theology of David Tracy and the deconstructive theology of Jorg Rieger is evident from, for example, Enrique Dussel's critique of those systems of thought that fail to provide a radical alternative to global liberal democratic capitalism.

[20] The theologies of liberation are not satisfied with the Kantian horizon of consciousness, the Heideggerian horizon of time, the Hegelian horizon of becoming, or the postmodern horizon of language – in a word, they are not satisfied with the practical cognitive interest of the historical-hermeneutic sciences, they are not satisfied with the interpretation of the meaning of transcendence grasped through the restricted category of intersubjectivity. The theologies of liberation, rather, sublimate the practical and technical cognitive interests in an emancipatory cognitive interest that methodically interlocks knowledge and interest: They generate a theological knowledge that is "interested" in its own liberation – a liberation achieved through the liberation of socio-historical misery, through the making of "better" history. The theologies of liberation, in other words, generate a theological knowledge that, as a system of thought, theoretically aims to grasp the invariance that exists between present historical conditions and the Kingdom of God, and, as a social movement, praxeologically aims to overcome this invariance through the transformation of history into the Kingdom.

[21] The eruption of the theologies of liberation marks the most radical theological crisis of modern theology. From the point of view of the problem of knowledge, the radicalness of this crisis can be gauged in terms of the degree to which the theologies of liberation push beyond the historical-hermeneutic reduction of those three problems that have constituted and driven modern theology: namely, the problem of the limits of theological knowledge, the problem of God-as-limit, and the problem of transcendence. The historical-hermeneutic theological sciences epistemologically reduce the theological enterprise to a science of interpretation. They ontologically reduce God-as-limit to ideation, to conceptual meaning. And they reduce the fundamental mediating problem of transcendence to praxis understood as interaction. Against the epistemological reduction, the theologies of liberation grasp the theological enterprise as a critically oriented science of transformation. Against the ontological reduction, the theologies of liberation grasp God-as-limit as a physical reality. And against the reduction of transcendence to praxis, the theologies of liberation now grasp transcendence through social labor understood as the dialectic of praxis and poiesis.

[22] Indeed, the theologies of liberation do not ground themselves in the horizon of consciousness, time, becoming, or language, but rather in the horizon of historical reality. They do not formulate the problem of the limits of theological knowledge as a problem of the historical or speculative consciousness, anthropological or cultural aperture to being, what-is-not-yet, or difference, but rather as a problem of liberation from the socio-historical conditions of misery. The theologies of liberation do not understand God-as-limit as an ideal, being, hope, or other, but rather as the Kingdom. And the theologies of liberation do not understand transcendence as what asymptotically correlates the infinite and the finite, the ecstatic presence of the totality of being, the actualization of eschatological hope, or the anagogical rupture of the Other, but rather as the transformative-making of the Kingdom in and through historical reality. Table 1 summarizes the eruption of the critically oriented theological sciences of liberation as a pushing-beyond the limits of the historical-hermeneutic theological sciences.

[23] Yet, since the beginning the radicalness of the theologies of liberation was dissimulated. Both detractors and avatars of the theologies of liberation contributed to this dissimulation: Detractors mistook the emancipatory interest of the theologies of liberation for a vulgar materialism and put forth the “blackmail” that any radical emancipatory project that attempts to push beyond the coordinates of liberal-democratic capitalism would lead ineluctably to “totalitarianism.” And, failing to fully understand their project as a critically oriented science, liberation theologians were never able to adequately elucidate the problem of a Marxian social theoretically oriented theory of knowledge as the implicit foundations of the theologies of liberation. And thus, as a consequence of this problem of “obscure foundations,” liberation theologians were never able to formulate and implement a coherent and effective liberationist emancipatory project.

Table 1: The Eruption of the Critically Oriented Theological Sciences of Liberation

	Knowledge-Constitutive Interest	Horizon	The Problem of the limits of Theological Knowledge		The Problem of God-as-Limit		The Problem of Transcendence	
The Historical-Hermeneutic Theological Sciences	Practical Cognitive Interest	Consciousness	Historical/Speculative Consciousness	Science of Interpretation	Ideal	Ideation	Asymptotic Correlate	Interaction (Praxis)
		Time	Aperture to Being		Being		Ekstatic Presence	
		Becoming	What-Is-Not-Yet		Hope		Sublation	
		Language	Difference		Other		Anagogical Rupture	
The Critically Oriented Theological Sciences of Liberation	Emancipatory Cognitive Interest	Historical Reality	Liberation	Science of Transformation	Kingdom	Physical Reality	Transformative-Making	Social Labor (Praxis and Poiesis)

[24] Only a return to the foundations of the theologies of liberation can overcome this historical dissimulation. We propose to realize this return through a retrieval of Ignacio Ellacuría's *Philosophy of Historical Reality*.

Ellacuría's Philosophy of Historical Reality

[25] The fundamental task of *Philosophy of Historical Reality* is to put forth historical reality as the ultimate manifestation of reality, as the proper object of philosophy. Ellacuría develops the concept of historical reality as the synthesis of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic and Xavier Zubiri's radicalization of Scholastic realism. Historical reality is physical, not conceptual; material, not ideal; concrete, not abstract. Historical reality encompasses the material, biological, individual, and social moments of reality. And when it is considered in its totality, as a dynamic and differentiated structure of its moments, functions, and relations, historical reality forms a transcendental system – intramundane metaphysics. But what exactly constitutes the radical nature of the Ellacurían task? The answer to this question is implicit in Ellacuría's synthesis: The radicalness of the fundamental task of *Philosophy of Historical Reality* is its attempt to overcome the idealism of Western thought, not as an abstract intellectualized project, but to the extent that this idealism has, on the one hand, impeded the development of the Latin American philosophies and theologies of liberation, and, on the other, to the extent that it has ideologically legitimated the hegemony of liberal-democratic capitalism as the latest moment of the dialectic of the Americas.

[26] Because we are more or less familiar with the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic,⁸ we will move directly to the Zubirian horizons, and see how it is an attempt to overcome the idealism of Western thought. This will allow us to then see how Ellacuría's synthesis pushes beyond, indeed is a radicalization of the Hegelian-Marxian and Zubirian horizons.

The Zubirian Horizon

[27] How did Zubiri understand the idealism of Western thought? Why was this idealism a problem for him? And how did he attempt to overcome it? These are the questions we must seek answers to if we are to begin to understand Ellacuría's appropriation of Zubiri.

[28] Zubiri understood the idealism of Western thought as the eclipse of the primacy of reality. This eclipse manifests itself in modern philosophy as four false substantivizations: Things do not exist in space or in time as Immanuel Kant argued; rather, as the New Physics has confirmed, things are spatial and temporal. Intellection is not an act of consciousness as Edmund Husserl maintained. There is no consciousness; there are only conscious acts. And reality is not a moment of being as Heidegger argued. The real being, the *esse reale* does not exist; what exists is being as a moment of reality, *realitas in essendo* (Zubiri 1994). The eclipse of the primacy of reality was a problem for Zubiri because it had led to the reduction of things to facts (i.e., *positivism*), the reduction of reality to efficiency (i.e., *pragmatism*), and the reduction of truth to this or that situation (i.e., *historicism*) (Zubiri 1994). Zubiri attempts to overcome the eclipse of the primacy of reality through a *radicalization of Scholastic realism*, that is through a "return" to a Scholastic realism that does not stop at the critique of that voluntaristic tradition that had reached its apogee with Kant, but continues to push beyond the return "to the things themselves" (Husserl) and the return to the being of things (Heidegger), in order to achieve the primacy of reality. Philosophy for Zubiri, in other words, does not ultimately concern itself with objectivity or being, but with reality qua reality. Philosophy is not phenomenology or ontology, but rather metaphysics.

[29] Zubiri develops his radicalization of Scholastic realism as, on the one hand, a critique of the *entification of reality* (*entificación de la realidad*; the reduction of reality to being), and, on the other, a critique of the *logification of intelligence* (*logificación de la inteligencia*; the reduction of intelligence to the *logos*), both of which pave the way to understanding the human being as the *animal of realities* and

⁸ Hegel understood the idealism of Western thought as Transcendental Idealism, that doctrine developed by Kant and radicalized by F. W. J. Schelling and J. G. Fichte. Transcendental Idealism was a problem, Hegel argued, because it reduced reason to the abstract universality of self-consciousness, the substantiality of spirit to the subjectivity of the subject – a reduction that manifested itself, for example, as the subordination of metaphysics to mathematics, and as the subordination of the "ethical life" to individual morality. Hegel attempts to overcome Transcendental Idealism by phenomenologically grasping the self-formation of thought as it is mediated by the unfolding of being, which thought itself, as a moment of this unfolding, uncovers. This is the Hegelian dialectic, which is not a method but an ontology: Indeed, the structure of thought for Hegel is dialectical because being itself is dialectical. We could thus say that for Hegel the idealism of Western thought ultimately manifests itself as the illusion of immediate knowledge. The dialectic is what brings to the fore and also overcomes the problem of the mediation of knowledge. Only when knowledge is dialectically grasped as it is mediated by its self-formation will the spurious linearity of scientific advance achieve a genuine circularity. Marx, on the other hand, understood the idealism of Western thought as the philosophy of identity (which included the Hegelian system). The philosophy of identity was a problem Marx argued because it reduced nature to mind – a reduction that manifested itself, for example, as the subsumption of the "species-being" under the "abstract citizen," and through the fallacious, "Robinson Crusoe assumptions" of the eighteenth-century political economists (e.g., Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Thomas Malthus). Marx attempts to overcome the philosophy of identity by turning the Hegelian dialectic "right side up": Instead of grasping the self-formation of thought as a moment of the unfolding of being, Marx grasps the self-formation of the human species as it takes form in and through the *synthetic activity of social labor* (Habermas: 25-42).

history as the *traditive transmission of a mode of being in reality*. Let us unravel a bit these four moments of Zubiri's corpus.

[30] As the first moment of Zubiri's radicalization of Scholastic realism, the critique of the entification of reality is the attempt to ground philosophy beyond consciousness and being in reality qua reality. Reality for Zubiri is the *de suyo que consiste en dar de sí*, it is what it is actually, but it is also what it is in the process of becoming. Zubiri engages these two characteristics of reality (i.e., the *de suyo* ["in its own right"] and the *dar de sí* ["giving of itself"]) in *Sobre la esencia* and *Estructura dinámica de la realidad*, respectively.

[31] In *Sobre la esencia* it becomes evident that Zubiri's radicalization of Scholastic realism takes the form of a return to the problem that oriented Aristotle's metaphysics: namely, the problem of the relationship between the radical structure of reality and the nature of essence.⁹ The idealism of Western philosophy as the desubstantivization of reality manifests itself, according to Zubiri, through the decoupling of substance and essence. Although this decoupling was already lurking behind that distinction between essence and existence introduced by Christian philosophy as a way of coming to terms with the idea of a creation *ex nihilo*, it crystallizes with Descartes' dualism between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. Laboring under this dualism, Descartes laxly relates essence and substance through the *potentia Dei ordinata*, the "rational" power of God. From here emerges the idealism of essence that undergirds the voluntaristic rationalism that reaches its apogee with Kant (Zubiri 1998). *Sobre la esencia* is thus an attempt to overcome this idealism, an idealism that, as we suggested above, Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's existential analytics of *Dasein* could not overcome. Indeed, *Sobre la esencia* is an attempt to reintegrate essence and substance by returning to the idea of essence as the structuring physical moment of the substantivity of a real thing. This return, which implies the overcoming the desubstantivization of reality, is achieved through a radicalization of Aristotle's idea of essence.

[32] Essence, Zubiri tells us, moreover, belongs to two different orders of reality: Essence can be understood as what makes a thing "such" a thing, that is as that group of notes that are necessary and sufficient for making a thing "such" a reality ("*tal*" *realidad*). In this sense essence belongs to the *order of suchness (el orden de la talidad)* (1998). But essence is not only that according to which something is "such" a reality; it is also that according to which something is real pure and simple. In this second sense essence belongs to the order of reality qua reality, that is, it belongs to the *transcendental order (el orden transcendental)* (1998). Transcendentality is the character of reality as such, that is, as *de suyo*; and essence is precisely what constitutes this transcendental function of reality, that is it is what constitutes reality in the order of the *de suyo*.¹⁰

[33] *Sobre la esencia* was hailed as watershed, but critiqued for being too "static." In order to counter these critiques, Zubiri delivered in 1968 – six years after the publication of *Sobre la esencia* – a series of eleven lectures entitled *Estructura dinámica de la realidad*. In these lectures (which were posthumously published under the same title) Zubiri focuses not on reality as a *de suyo* but on reality as a *de suyo* that consists in *dar de sí*. "Reality," Zubiri writes in the Prologue, "is not only what it is actually; it is also,

⁹ Aristotle understood essence to be the "whatness" (*quidditas* in Latin) of a substance (*substantia* in Latin), and a substance in turn to be that "which-lies-beneath" and "supports" the accidents of a real thing.

¹⁰ But this essence as a reality *de suyo* does not only have transcendental properties; it also has a threefold transcendental structure: Essence is i. *de suyo suya* in its own mode; ii. it is, *de suyo*, an interiority in exteriority, according to different dimensions; and iii. it is *de suyo* closed or open to its very character of reality. The latter, the open essence, is the intellective essence of the animal of realities.

in one way or another, in the process which, in a more or less vague way, we could call becoming. Things become, reality becomes. Here we attempt to enter into this problem” (Zubiri 1989: 7).

[34] Thus the critique of the entification of reality now takes the form of a critique of the ontologization of the problem of becoming. Becoming is not an ontological problem, it is a metaphysical problem, a problem of reality qua reality. Zubiri develops this difference by refuting three misconceptions: First, the idea that becoming most radically consists in the movement from being to non-being or from non-being to being; second, the idea that that which is becoming is a subject; and third, that becoming ultimately consists in change. Against these three misconceptions – being, subject, and change – Zubiri opposes the three nomenclatures that constitute the title of *Estructura dinámica de la realidad* – namely, reality, structure, and dynamism. Indeed, the problem of becoming is not the problem of determining the different ways in which the being of things are subject of or subject to change. It is rather the problem of determining the different ways in which reality as a structure is dynamic, that is the different ways in which the different structures of reality *dan de sí*.¹¹

[35] As the second moment of Zubiri’s radicalization of Scholastic realism, the critique of the logification of intelligence is an attempt to push beyond the modern problem of epistemology; it is an attempt to elucidate the primordial intellective process prior to the *logos*. Indeed, against the traditional view,¹² Zubiri argues that human sensing and understanding are not at all opposed. On the contrary they constitute a single and unitary act of apprehension, the *sentient intelligence*. Sensing consists formally in “apprehending the real in impression” and understanding “consists formally in apprehending the real as real” (Zubiri 1980: 12). The apprehension of real things as sensed is a sentient apprehension, that is an apprehension of reality in the order of suchness as “such” a reality, while the apprehension of real things as real is an intellective apprehension, that is the apprehension of things in the transcendental order as *de suyo*. Thus the sentient moment of the act of apprehension, according to Zubiri, is impression, and the intellective moment is apprehension of reality: “Intellection is a mode of sensing, and sensing in the human being is a mode of intellection” (1980: 13).

[36] There are, moreover, three modes of apprehending things in the sentient intelligence, says Zubiri: Through *primordial apprehension* we impressively apprehend that a thing is *real*, that it is its own reality. Through the *logos* we impressively apprehend that a real thing is *in reality*, that it exists among other real things. And through *reason* we impressively apprehend that a thing is real *in reality itself*, that it is a moment of pure and simple reality. Zubiri engages these three modes of apprehending respectively in the three volumes of *Inteligencia sentiente – Inteligencia y realidad, Inteligencia y logos, y Inteligencia y razón*.¹³

¹¹ Zubiri distinguishes six dynamic structures of reality: i. causal dynamism, ii. dynamism of variation, iii. dynamism of alteration, iv. dynamism of sameness (*mismidad*), v. dynamism of its-ownness (*suidad*), and vi. dynamism of conviviality (1989: 71-275).

¹² Zubiri explicitly repudiates what he argues is the dualism between sensing and understanding that, since the time of Parmenides, has undergirded all reflections on knowledge. The dominant view since Kant has been that the senses provide the intelligence with a manifold of impressions that are then conceptualized by the understanding. Even if we accept this dualism, Zubiri argues that it has never been made adequately clear what sensing or understanding are formally (1980).

¹³ There is no priority of knowing over reality or reality over knowing, Zubiri tells us. They stem from the same root. And this is not due to the *de facto* conditions of philosophizing, but to the intrinsic conditions of both knowing and reality: Reality is the formal character by which something is apprehended as *de suyo*; and knowing is to apprehend something as *de suyo*. Thus Zubiri rejects the point of departure of the critical philosophy that reached its apogee with

[37] Reality as a *de suyo que consiste en dar de sí* and intellection as a sentient intelligence are the two pillars upon which stand Zubiri's idea of the human being as the animal of realities. An essence can either be transcendently *closed* or *open*, Zubiri tells us. The human reality is the only intramundane reality that is transcendently open; all other realities are transcendently closed. A transcendently closed essence is *de suyo* "en sí" ("in itself" in its own right) and "nothing more." That is, it is *de suyo* only materially; it only *belongs to itself* (*se pertenece*); its aperture to reality (if it is a living reality, i.e., a non-human living organism) is only stimulative. The transcendently open essence that is the human being, by contrast, is "en sí" such that his/her *de suyo* is not simply a function of the notes s/he has and "nothing more," but s/he is, in addition, a function of the proper character of reality. The human being is open to reality qua reality; s/he is *de suyo* "formally and reduplicatively" ("*formal and reduplicativamente*"). S/he has that specific way of belonging to her/himself that consists in *possessing her/himself* (*poseerse*) in her/his own proper and formal character of reality. From here, the human being is not the "shepherd of being" as Heidegger argued, but the *animal of realities*. Ultimately, the animal of realities, says Zubiri, does not concern her/himself with the meaning of being but with the *taking charge of reality* (*hacerse cargo de la realidad*). Indeed, in and through the taking charge of reality things present themselves to the animal of realities not as a *medium*, that is not as a system of stimuli, but as a *world* (*mundo*), that is, as the transcendental of reality as *de suyo* (1998; 1989; 1963).

[38] The animal of reality realizes her/himself by living with things, with other animal of realities, and with him/herself. But, s/he is not only "with" ("*con*") all s/he lives with; s/he is also "in" ("*en*") reality. The animal of realities, Zubiri argues, realizes her/himself in reality. S/he needs all the things with which s/he lives with because s/he needs reality. Indeed, real things, in addition, to their real properties have what Zubiri calls the *power of reality* (*el poder de lo real*). The animal of realities can realize her/himself only in and through this power of reality; and that force by which the power of reality dominates and moves the animal of reality to realize her/himself is *empowerment* (*apoderamiento*). This empowerment in and through the power of reality Zubiri calls *religation* (*religación*). Indeed, the animal of realities is not "thrown into the world" (Heidegger) but *relegated* to reality. Being relegated to reality, religation is the condition of possibility of all revelation, of all positive religion (Zubiri, 1994; 1975).

[39] The third and final aspect of Zubiri's radicalization of Scholastic realism we will address here is the idea of history as the *traditive transmission of a mode of being in reality*. History, Zubiri tells us, is a process of genetic transmission (*proceso de transmisión genética*). That is, the psycho-organic characteristics that constitute the phylum of the animal of realities are genetically transmitted. But this genetic transmission is not sufficient to install the animal of realities in life to the extent that, as we just saw, by virtue of her/his sentient intelligence, the animal of realities opts (via free actions) for different forms of reality – s/he takes charge of reality. From here Zubiri argues that, in

Kant. That is he rejects the idea that in order to secure legitimate knowledge of reality one must begin with a critique of the faculty of knowing. While the fact that Zubiri published his trilogy on intelligence after he had already published two major works on the question of reality (namely, *Sobre la esencia* and *Estructura dinámica de la realidad*) is not intended to be an endorsement of the idea that reality has priority over knowing, it is, however, as Zubiri himself notes, intended to be a repudiation of critical philosophy. *Inteligencia sentiente* is not a "science of knowledge," it is not what modern philosophy has referred to as "epistemology"; it is rather a study of the act of knowing itself, a study of intellection, a *noology*. In this sense what we referred to above as Zubiri's radicalization of epistemology is in fact a critique of the substantivization of knowledge in and through the idea of "consciousness"; it is an attempt to get "underneath" or "behind" epistemology in order to elucidate that act of knowing that grounds knowledge itself. While knowledge is not a physical part of intelligence, the act of knowing itself is; which is precisely why Zubiri's reflections on intellection is a return to that common root from which stem knowledge and reality (1980: 9-11).

addition to the transmission of psycho-organic characteristics, in addition to heredity, history is also the handing-over (*engtreaga, parádoxis, traditio*) of a mode of being in reality. Indeed, history for Zubiri is neither pure transmission nor pure tradition; it is a *traditive transmission (transmisión tradente)* of a possible way of being in reality (1974).

The Ellacurian Synthesis

[40] “Our discussions of Hegel, Marx, and Zubiri,” writes Ellacuría in the Introduction to *Philosophy of Historical Reality*, “have been by no means trivial for they tease out, and, in a certain sense, prepare the ground for what we are arguing here is the object of philosophy” (1990a: 30). Hegel, Marx, and Zubiri prepare the ground for the elucidation of historical reality as the proper object of philosophy to the extent that they understand the object of philosophy to be the real and physical (and not logical and conceptual) unity of all things – that is, in other words, to the extent that each, in his own way, attempts to overcome the idealism of Western thought. Hegel and Marx, against Transcendental Idealism and the philosophy of identity respectively, grasp this real unity through the *dialectic* as what uncovers the illusion of an immediate knowledge that abstracts from the totality of things. While Zubiri, against voluntaristic rationalism, phenomenology, and the existential analytics of *Dasein*, grasps this real unity through a *radicalization of Scholastic realism* that returns to the primacy of reality, and thus uncovering the entification and logification of the totality of things.

[41] But, while the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic and the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism pave the way for the grounding of historical reality, the actual grounding of historical reality as the object of philosophy, the fundamental task of *Philosophy of Historical Reality*, is the synthesis of the Hegelian-Marxian and Zubirian horizons. Indeed, as we have already suggested, the radicalness of the fundamental task of the Ellacurian project stems from its attempt to radicalize the Hegelian-Marxian and Zubirian efforts to push beyond the idealism of Western thought. In order to better understand the Ellacurian synthesis we ask, first, what is the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism without the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic? And, second, what is the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic without the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism?

[42] What is the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism without the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic, and in particular the Marxian idea of the synthetic activity of social labor? Zubirian realism without the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic is the speculative formulation of historical reality as a moment of the formal question of reality. It is a push toward the primacy of reality as a theoretical task that fails to grasp itself as an intellectual moment of historical reality in-the-making. It is a theoretical task that abstracts from the fact that it itself is an intellectual practice that is involved in the making of historical reality. The Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism in the absence of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic is, in other words, the failure to grasp the fact that history as the traditive transmission of a mode of being in reality takes form in and through the synthetic activity of social labor. Indeed, it is the failure to reflectively grasp the fact that all questions of reality, as intellectual moments of the synthetic activity of social labor, take form in and through and contribute to the making of the traditive transmission of a mode of being in reality.

[43] What is the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic without the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism? The Hegelian-Marxian dialectic without Zubirian realism is the obfuscation of the static and dynamic aspects of reality. It is the reduction of the structural dynamism of reality to the logic of contraries as a principle of movement. It is the predominance of mediation and negation of reality over reality as a *de suyo que consiste en dar de sí*. Indeed, Hegel and Marx without Zubiri is the suturing of the aperture of reality by the formal logic of the dialectic.

[44] We could thus say, in other words, that Ellacuría attempts to overcome the Zubirian speculative conception of reality by appropriating from the Hegelian-Marxian horizon the idea of a *critically-oriented philosophical science*, and he attempts to overcome the Hegelian-Marxian suturing of the aperture of reality by appropriating from the Zubirian horizon the idea of *historical reality*. From here the Ellacurian synthesis is the idea of a *critically-oriented philosophical science of historical reality*. Indeed, the fundamental task of *Philosophy of Historical Reality* is the grounding of a *critically-oriented philosophical science* that has as its object, but is also mediated by, *historical reality*.

[45] Ellacuría's appropriation of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic can best be understood as an attempt to develop a *social theoretically oriented theory of knowledge* that pushes beyond Zubiri's "ontological assumption of a structure of the world independent of the knower" by grasping the knower and the structure of the world as mediated by the synthetic activity of social labor (Habermas: 43-63). With the insights of the Hegelian-Marxian horizon, Ellacuría, on the one hand, uncovers to what extent Zubiri's idea of historical reality remains within the limits of "traditional theory," and, on the other, pushes into the realm of "critical theory" with the idea that the knower is always involved in the making of historical reality (Horkheimer). Indeed, Ellacuría's philosophy of historical reality is not driven by the *technical* cognitive interest of the *empirical analytical sciences* (Habermas: 309). Nor is it driven by the *practical* cognitive interest of the *historical-hermeneutic sciences*. It is driven rather by the *emancipatory* cognitive interest of the *critically oriented sciences* (Habermas: 310). That is, philosophy of historical reality, like psychoanalysis, does not seek to *explain* or *interpret* the world, but rather to *transform* it through a *historical praxis* that aims to "*hacerse cargo de la realidad*" ("engage reality"), "*cargar con la realidad*" ("tarry with reality"), and "*encargarse de la realidad*" ("take charge of reality") (Ellacuría 1975).

[46] But this critically-oriented philosophical science has as its object and is mediated by a historical reality that is "open and innovative per excellence." This critically-oriented philosophical science is a science of the *animal of realities* that is made possible only to the extent that the animal of realities is always already *relegated* to the transcendental power of historical reality. Indeed, the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism adds the dimension of *relegation* to the idea of a critically-oriented philosophical science. Only because the historical praxis that is generated by the critically-oriented philosophical science of historical reality is always already relegated (through the animal of realities) to the transcendental power of historical reality is it possible, on the one hand, to address the question of what "ought" this historical praxis be, and, on the other, to claim that this historical praxis is related to a reality that is not strictly intramundane.

[47] Historical reality is open, open to the future. This is why there emerges the problem of what ought to be made, the problem of how we ought to make the aperture of historical reality (the classical problem of how we ought to order society). For it is clear that some historical realities are more open (that is, more just) than others. It is clear that, in the realm of potential freedom that is history, there always exists the choice of making or not making historical reality open – that is, of making or not making historical reality just. Indeed, the freedom to make can be actualized as making historical reality unjustly close in open itself, or more specifically, as unjustly closed or sutured for some (Ellacuría 1990b). In this horizon of what ought to be made is situated the Ellacurian problem of ethics: namely, the problem of the making of liberation through the making of "better" history, that is the problem of how ought one exactly "*hacerse cargo de la realidad*," how ought one exactly "*cargar con la realidad*," and how ought one exactly "*encargarse de la realidad*."

[48] All moments of reality are transcendental to the extent that they participate in the *dar de sí* of reality. If the transcendental of, for example, natural reality is the process of nature as actualized in and through mutations, the transcendental of history is the freedom to make as actualized in

and through the making of what ought to be made. But, because historical reality is the ultimate manifestation of reality, its transcendentality is at the same time the transcendentality of reality as such, the transcendentality of intramundane metaphysics. In other words, the transcendentality of historical reality is also the transcendence of reality to “what is not necessarily nor exclusively intramundane,” the transcendence of reality to the extramundane. Going back to that second excerpt we alluded to above: “If there exists such a thing as an aperture to transcendence this would be history.” Indeed, for Ellacuría the aperture to transcendence is the aperture of history, such that the problem of the making of the Kingdom interlocks with the problem of the making of better history, the problem of grace interlocks with the problem of the ought, the problem of soteriology interlocks with the problem of ethics. “*Hacerse cargo de la realidad*,” “*cargar con la realidad*,” and “*encargarse de la realidad*,” have now an eschatological function. This is the point of departure of the critically-oriented theological sciences of liberation. Ellacuría elucidates this point of departure in the Conclusion to *Philosophy of Historical Reality*:

God’s immensity, novelty, and mystery are made fully manifest only in the totality of historical experience. There is a personal experience of God, but the fullest reality of God has made itself present, and can make itself present only in historical reality . . . It should not be forgotten that all major religions have spoken of a God of the people, of a people that moves through history – This, however, as it is known, does not exclude the singularity of the one that reveals God. There can be a God of nature, there can be a God of the individual person, of subjectivity. But, above all, there is a God of history, which, again, does not exclude material nature or personal reality . . . There are those that say that God is a human invention and there are those that say that religion is a purely historical phenomenon that is either necessary or alienating. These opinions point to a certain truth, for God appears after the person and in the course of history. God is not the object of an intramundane philosophy even though history can discover in the intramundane not only a formal transcendence, but also a transmundane and transhistorical reality, a reality whose real transcendence, however, belongs to the world and to history (1990a: 601-2).

[49] Indeed, grounded on the Ellacurían synthesis, that is on the idea of a critically-oriented philosophical science of historical reality, the critically oriented theological sciences of liberation generate a theological knowledge that is “interested” in its own liberation – a liberation achieved through the liberation of socio-historical misery, through the making of “better” history. The critically-oriented theological sciences of liberation, in other words, generate a theological knowledge that, as a system of thought, theoretically aims to grasp the invariance that exists between present historical conditions and the Kingdom of God, and, as a social movement, praxeologically aims to overcome this invariance through the transformation of history into the Kingdom.

[50] The radicalness of the Ellacurian synthesis of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic and the Zubirian radicalization of Scholastic realism is, as we suggested above, an attempt to overcome the idealism of Western thought to the extent that this idealism, on the one hand, has understood theology within the limits of the historical-hermeneutic sciences, and, on the other, has legitimated global liberal-democratic capitalism, the latest moment of the movement of violence and domination that is the dialectic of the Americas (Ellacuría 1988). For Ellacuría the theoretical problem of grounding the critically-oriented philosophical science of historical reality, the system of thought – a problem that is generated by the epistemological rupture with the historical-hermeneutic and empirical sciences – is realized praxeologically by the critically-oriented philosophical science of historical reality, the

social movement, as making an existential-empirical rupture with the basic coordinates of the latest moment of the dialectic of the Americas.

[51] Indeed, our “return” to Ellacuría has served to bring forth the problem of the historical dissimulation of the theologies of liberation. But this does not suffice: Though the theologies of liberation are not reducible to the historical-hermeneutic sciences, they are not, however, exempt from the epistemological demands of the current situation, namely, the “postmodern condition” (Jameson; Harvery; Eagleton; Hardt and Negri; Žižek 2000). Indeed, our “return” to the foundations of the theologies of liberation must be completed by a “reconstruction” of these foundations in light of the postmodern condition. But what would such a project entail?

[52] We end these reflections with a thesis for a future essay: The project of reconstructing the foundations of the theologies of liberation in light of the postmodern condition requires that we take the Ellacurian synthesis through the linguistic-turn, but *without reducing it to the hermeneutic conception of language*. Or, stated in positive terms: We see the possibility of a linguistified corrective to the Ellacurian synthesis in a turn to, on the one hand, the poststructuralist conception of language, and, on the other, the idea of psychoanalysis as a critically-oriented science (Marcuse; Habermas; Deleuze and Guattari; Žižek 1999). Indeed, we see the possibility of a linguistified corrective to the theologies of liberation in *poststructuralist psychoanalysis understood as a critically-oriented science*.

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