

THREE REPRESENTATIVE PHILOSOPHERS OF LIBERATION

by

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In view of the constraints imposed by the title of this essay and by our limited space, I have chosen to focus on a few themes from the works of two leading philosophers of liberation, Enrique Dussel and Juan Carlos Scannone, S.J.¹ My third choice is Horacio Cerutti Guldberg, an ex-philosopher of liberation and a representative critic of this movement among progressive Latin American intellectuals.² All three philosophers are Argentine (as the philosophy of liberation movement emerged officially in Argentina in the early 1970s). Only Scannone continues to work in Argentina; Dussel and Cerutti, like many other Argentines, left their country in the later 1970s due to the political repression.

This paper, which is offered as an introductory appraisal of the work of these three thinkers, has a thematic rather than a historical orientation. I will focus, among other things, on some theoretical implications of bringing the new category "pueblo" into the discourse of philosophy. The entry of the philosophy of liberation into the international philosophical scene has been accomplished through the incorporation of new categories (such as pueblo) into previously existing conceptual systems. The intellectual movement most deeply affected by these changes so far has been the field of phenomenology. As I see it, one major accomplishment of the philosophy of liberation has been the politization of phenomenology. One of the categories most deeply affected has been that of subjectivity. The human being, subject of knowledge, subject of activity, is no longer described as situated anywhere-at-all in the world (as Heidegger's term

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for human being, Dasein, seemed to imply). We are now dealing with a culturally situated subject, a Latin American subject, who has a particular ethnic identity, that is, a subject who is part of a people (pueblo). This radical demand to insist on the ethnic identity of the human being is one of the keys to understanding the achievements and limitations of the philosophy of liberation. The other is to keep in mind the ambiguity of the term "liberation." Historically, it has been put ~~to~~ many different, even contradictory uses.

DUSSEL ON ALTERITY AND ANALECTICAL REASONING

Enrique Dussel, author of the recently published Philosophy of Liberation (Orbis, 1985), is a leading advocate of the philosophical movement bearing this title. A highly polemical thinker, he combines in his work the influence of several important intellectual movements -- among them, the Catholic patriarchal tradition, with its dualistic world view of good versus evil; a certain Germanic and French outlook on reality derived from thinkers such as Hegel, Heidegger, and the French phenomenologist of Jewish extraction, Emmanuel Levinas; an interest in Marxism and psychoanalysis in issues dealing with politics and sex; and, finally, a passionate search for connectedness to the Latin American people. This latter relationship to the people is expressed in his work through the use of religious, patriotic, and literary symbols. The effect of all these influences on his philosophical theories is highly complex and often contradictory.

The philosophy of liberation, as elaborated by Dussel, rests on four essential cornerstones whose theoretical constituents are: (1) the doctrine of Alterity; (2) the analectic method of reasoning; (3) the introduction of the pueblo into the philosophical discourse as a specific symbolic representation of wisdom and justice; and (4) the idea of the philosopher as an "organic" intellectual, by which is meant a philosopher who is a kind of "double" of the people, always thinking that when he speaks, he speaks for them. These fourfold principles are like a "filter"

through which Dussel necessarily interprets the meaning of liberation. If any one of these principles or ideas is missing in the work or in the arguments of a philosopher, Dussel disqualifies him or her as a contributor to a philosophy of liberation. His approach is both emotional and dogmatic. To illustrate this point, I will limit myself to a few comments regarding the doctrine of Alterity.

For Dussel, the human being in the world is situated in a totality (or system),³ from which he or she needs to be redeemed through an action that will let him or her exit this totality.⁴ Outside the totality there lies the realm of alterity. Man is, on the whole, totality, while God is alterity, but man can share in the realm of alterity if he "opens" himself up to God as the wholly Other. The meaning of life consists in serving the Other and in fighting the enemies of the Other, who are on the side of the "totality." In the positive sense, the Other is the God-substitute, the pueblo, the child, the Third World.⁵ And, miraculously, the Other (who represents God) is always right. To be an Other one has to be distinto (distinct) from the totality. Those who fail to adopt this separatist position have no conception of what it means to be distinto. They interpret otherness as merely difference (*diferencia*), which, according to Dussel, is a category entirely encompassed by a totality.⁶

Since so much hinges on this, how can one distinguish between what is truly distinct and what is merely different? How does one know the difference between an Other, in whose service one must live, and a mere other, who has no consciousness of alterity? In the case of God one would assume this distinction is clear. In the case of everything and everyone else, one has to make an effort to conceive of oneself as being outside the totality or "world." Dussel introduces categories such as "internal" and "external" transcendentality to solve this problem.⁷ Once liberated, I would exist in a relationship of external transcendentality to the totality. But if I am oppressed, as he takes the majority

of people to be, then only by separating myself from myself (that is, only by separating a part of myself from the rest of me, which is still either oppressing or oppressed) can I be saved. Service to the Other in need is the key to the path of liberation.⁸ Service to the point of giving one's life for the Other is heroic. The Other is represented in his work through the general image of the Latin American and Third World peoples, oppressed by imperialism, yet seeking their liberation.⁹ The poor, women of the popular classes, and children are also paradigm cases of the Other who must be served, and who must (of course) serve God and His prophets in return.

Dussel's doctrine of alterity is mystical, patriotic, and emotional. I find many arbitrary interpretations of the term "Other" in his work. For example, he claims that marriage respects the maxim of alterity, whereas divorce does not.¹⁰ Abortion, he claims, is always a totalitarian act -- it is filicide.¹¹ To be liberated, women may work or fight for the revolution, but they cannot control what goes on in their own bodies. Their life, as everyone else's, is determined by service to those in need, who must always be other than oneself. The face-to-face ethical relationship Dussel adopts from Levinas is intrinsically hierarchical. Every face to face encounter involves the possibility of subordinating oneself to the Other, who represents a revelation (epiphany experience) of the word or power of God. Politically, the aim is to convert the oppressor by placing him (or her) face to face with the oppressed, whose appearance will be so moving as to hopefully make the oppressor cease his practice or policy of exploitation. While it is legitimate to fight for one's self-defense or for one's own cause, ethically speaking this action is not theoretically justified unless one conceives of one's cause as Other (than the totality's), and so on.

In the sphere of logic, Dussel also follows a sublimated ethical mandate to serve the Other, which he calls the "analectical method." This method always

introduces the plight of the people in need of liberation into whatever philosophical discussion is at hand. Analectics is placed in contrast with dialectics, which Dussel has characterized throughout most of his work as totalitarian, and therefore unacceptable.¹² Most recently, as his dialogue with Marxism advances, Dussel has moved his analectical method inside dialectics, but in such a way that he can quickly take it out again if things don't work out. Analectics is now a moment of "internal transcendental" within dialectics.¹³ Like the magisterium of the Catholic Church, Dussel is strongly opposed to dialectical and historical materialism as philosophical theories. In his Latin American publications on the liberation of women, he has also criticized feminism for its Western and secular values. While he often speaks of revolution in his work, condemning North American imperialism, at times quoting Cuba's President Fidel Castro, and celebrating Nicaragua, I agree with those who take Dussel's thought to be essentially nonMarxist, if not antiMarxist. The opposition between liberation and oppression elaborated in his work reminds one much more of the Augustinian struggle between good and evil than of the Marxist notion of the final struggle (la lucha final) of the international working class against capitalism.

THE PUEBLO AS SAPIENTIAL SUBJECTIVITY: SCANNONE'S VIEW

Ideologically more conservative and explicitly traditional than Dussel, yet more consistent in his use of language and logic is the Argentine Jesuit philosopher Juan Carlos Scannone. Addressing the question "What do we understand by 'pueblo'?" Father Scannone suggests two distinct meanings:

1. "Pueblo" designates the communitarian subject of a common historical experience, that is to say of a culture and a common destiny.... It therefore designates a collective historic-cultural and ethical-political subject, conceiving this subject as organic community. In this semantic context "pueblo" articulates itself with the concepts of

"history," "culture" and "nation," and cannot be determined socioanalytically but only historically. This is how we speak of the Argentine people, the Aymara people

2. "Pueblo" is used at other times to designate collectively those who are only "pueblo," those who only have what is "common," who are merely "Juan Pueblo," that is to say, those who do not enjoy a condition of privilege in society and who are structurally oppressed by those who unjustly have such a position of privilege. They are those who occupy the base of the organic community of the people as nation, but they are the most backward when one looks at who participates in the material or immaterial goods of the community (such as wealth, power, knowledge, etc.). In this way, language [use] opposes "pueblo" to "power elites" or one speaks of "pueblo" to refer to those majoritarian sectors of the *non-privileged* [my emphasis] which, for this reason are called "popular" ("populares"). This second meaning [of the term "pueblo"] comes close to the understanding of pueblo according to the socioanalytic category of "class" which is used frequently to analyze social conflicts.¹⁴

Scannone argues that the national and cultural ethos characterizing what is common in a people is embodied in the popular wisdom rather than in the values of the privileged sectors of the population: "... we speak of pueblo in this second sense inasmuch as it is the *privileged place* [my emphasis] of condensation and greatest transparency of the values and the cultural ethos of the people taken in the first sense."¹⁵ Note that in these definitions, the pueblo passes from a position of non-privilege (its situation relative to the power elites in the second sense indicated above) to a position of privilege (the pueblo as the "privileged place" or depository of common cultural values). Another way of stating

Scannone's point would be to say that in the philosophy of liberation, the pueblo passes from background to foreground (in terms of the attention it will receive for its rightful concerns), and that its cultural value shifts from negative (according to the values of the ruling class) to positive (according to a theory of liberation).

Given Scannone's sympathetic attitude toward the pueblo, it would appear that his descriptions of it contradict or challenge directly the view of the pueblo held by the ruling class. Yet, someone might argue that they do not. For the ruling class may not be averse to wanting the pueblo to be just this: merely pueblo, like Juan Pueblo -- simple, humble people, all the better if they believe in God and are satisfied with their "popular" identity, as long as they do not cross class lines. Scannone's notion that the pueblo (as non-privileged) is the most explicit carrier of a culture's values may threaten some sectors of the ruling class, but not all of it. For example, if it is part of the ethos of the people to believe that praying to a saint or to the Virgin will cure their ills, this type of culturally "authentic" practice would not threaten the "power elites." At the moment our question is: does Scannone see the philosophy of liberation as offering the pueblo a sense of identity other than one that ties it to the religious beliefs of its past (its ancestors), as practiced within a determinate culture?

Although there is room for debate here, as I see it, Scannone's argument does not change the identity of the pueblo significantly from the conception of the pueblo already held by the ruling class. Working with the same or with a similar conception, however, he does try to make the pueblo's needs more visible to the "oppressors." He also attempts to revise drastically the identity of the philosopher, in terms of a change of attitude to be manifested toward the people in theoretical investigations. That is to say, from a condition of marginality or nonexistence in the discourse of philosophy, now the pueblo is to take on a

privileged position, as the people's concerns become the object of the philosopher's study. We are back at the issue of the politization of phenomenology discussed above. I have argued that while it is an important move to bring the pueblo inside phenomenology and the philosopher of liberation deserves special praise for this, one cannot complete this hermeneutical task adequately unless sufficient attention is given to the issue of the conceptual parameters regulating the portrayal or representation of the identity of the people within this type of discourse.

In the philosophy of liberation, one finds that the identity given to the pueblo is really a reflection of the new identity assumed by the philosopher, and conversely. In Scannone's work, the philosopher's new identity appears to be that of a mediator. The philosopher articulates conceptually the relation between the faith of the people and the rest of culture which may be "alienated" from this faith. Like Dussel, Scannone views the philosopher as a type of organic intellectual who follows, in the conceptual order, "the rhythm of the genuine popular wisdom."¹⁶ In this spirit he makes it clear that: "The subject of a sapiential thinking (el sujeto del pensar sapiencial) to which we have been referring is the pueblo, the people we are in the universal community of peoples. From this it follows that the sapiential subject in whose service a philosophizing that is genuinely Latin American ought to stand, is the Latin American people."¹⁷

These remarks show a limit case of the philosopher's desire to introduce the category "Latin American people" into phenomenology. The new identity of the people and of the philosopher are such that it is difficult to draw the boundaries between the two. Each one becomes the double or echo of the other. One problem arising from this hermeneutic circle is the way ethnicity and religion are conceived. There is an underlying assumption in Scannone's view that to be fully "authentic" from a cultural point of view, a Latin American model of reality must

also be Catholic, or at the very least, Catholic-compatible. As a result, to be a fully authentic philosopher (let us call him or her by the adjective "organic," not just "authentic"), one must subordinate oneself to the beliefs of the people, which are Catholic-compatible beliefs. Departure from this norm is considered a deviation from authenticity. In an effort to escape "foreign" doctrines which "invade" the cultural ethos of the Latin American people, I perceive here a new doctrine, possibly just as invasive but less easy to criticize, for to do so would amount to being both unreligious and unpatriotic.

ABOUT "POPULISM" AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

So far I have not focused on the dreaded term "populism," with which Horacio Cerutti Guldberg, one of the original contributors to the philosophy of liberation and now a critic of this school of thought, characterizes the major thrust of this intellectual movement.¹⁸ It is not my task here to enter this particular controversy (one in which Dussel has defended himself with vigor),¹⁹ but only to point to a different conception of the term "pueblo" in the discourse we have been examining.

In a historical study of the philosophy of liberation movement in the 1970s, Cerutti argues that in its majoritarian sectors the philosophy of liberation is, politically speaking, populist and antiMarxist, while epistemologically, it tends to adhere to an authoritarian and circular logic. He brings these charges together (as I have categorized them) by means of his own classification of two basic currents in the original philosophy of liberation movement -- one populist, and the other critical of populism.²⁰ In the first group he places Dussel and Scannone, while in the second, he situates thinkers such as Leopoldo Zea, Arturo Andrés Roig, and himself.

Cerutti argues that many premises of the philosophy of liberation as articulated by Dussel, Scannone, and others regarding the people as the subject of

philosophizing, as well as some other arguments we have not considered here, were politically compatible with the populist premises of the Argentine Peronist movement. Some of the features of the philosophical theory making possible this compatibility with Peronism (as with any other authoritarian system) are an emphasis on faith and emotion rather than reason, the belief that the people can be liberated from oppression by some saviour type figure, and a strong dependence on arguments based on authority (the authority of the church, of the native culture, and so on). In this philosophy, argues Cerutti, liberation is always mediated by an Other, resulting in the curtailment of the people's power to think and act for themselves. Basically, I agree with this set of Cerutti's criticisms.

Cerutti also claims that one feature of the philosophy of liberation's populist sector is its antiMarxist character. It argues that the category "people" is much richer than that of "class," thus taking the latter as a restriction in terms of getting at an understanding of the popular wisdom. He shows that despite its sometimes Marxist sounding rhetoric, advocates of the philosophy of liberation have been known to be explicitly antiMarxist. Focusing on some of Dussel's earlier writings, he quotes the latter as saying:

Marxism is ontologically incompatible not only with the Latin American tradition but with the metaphysics of Alterity. It is not merely an economic sociopolitical interpretation, it is also an ontology, and, as such, it is intrinsically incompatible with a metaphysics of Alterity. And, let it be said incidentally, with a Christian theology. What is not incompatible [with Christianity], however, is what might be called 'socialism' 21

Cerutti cites another of Dussel's texts:

Shall we opt for the Marxist way, where one has to kill the other as oppressor, in order for us to become the new oppressors? [Or] shall

we opt for a philosophy in alterity? Liberation is a reconstitution of the other as other, without killing him, just converting him. This would mean a totally different (distinto) way, another program... politically this might be formulated as a socialism, but a socialism which is unlike any other. In this way it would be a socialism born among us and, by (of this virtue) native and Latin American (criollo y latinoamericano).²²

These texts, among others, indicate that Dussel originally thought of the philosophy of liberation as an antiMarxist option, although not necessarily an antisocialist option, for Latin America. I believe what Dussel was trying to get at -- and continues to crusade for to this day -- is, as he himself stated in this early text, a different kind of socialism "un socialismo distinto". (here I will invent a fictitious but suggestive etymological observation: dis-tinto, that is, not too dark or red [tinto], not materialistic). As the years pass, his vision of Christian socialism has become more radical, yet still not so radical as to lead him to reject a dualistic religious metaphysics or a belief in the superiority of the analectical method over dialectics, principles that have remained at the very essence of his thought and which are presupposed in his current reading of Marx.

Epistemologically, Cerutti is sceptical of the phenomenological method (at least as employed by the populist sector), arguing that the latter begins by taking certain unexamined symbolical representations of "the people" into the philosopher's discourse. He charges that these images and symbols are analyzed and elaborated at length, but they are not "decoded" in terms of their ideological structure, which often turns out to be the same as that of the established system that the philosophers believe they are criticizing. If this is correct, the "pueblo" as introduced into the philosophical text would not differ ideologically from the "pueblo" as the ruling elites think of it -- basically, a Christian people, often helpless and in need of employment or other assistance. Marxists would claim

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here that to introduce a significantly different ideological-theoretical conception of the people into the philosophical discourse, the category "class" would need to come to the foreground, so as to give conceptual shape to the representation of the people-in-struggle for their liberation. While Cerutti opts for a critical, poststructuralist Marxist methodology (in contradistinction to phenomenology) as the best theoretical tool available for investigating the problematic situation in which Latin America finds itself today, I believe each of these methodologies, if pursued intelligently and with awareness, can take an active role in unmasking ideological blindness and other cultural "idols" standing in the way of scientific and social progress.

CONCLUSION

The critique of the philosophy of liberation which I have just offered is not meant to be a criticism of the branch of knowledge known as the theology of liberation. Nor does it cover those Latin American philosophers who, like Leopoldo Zea, use the term "philosophy of liberation" occasionally and broadly, to mean the defense of the national sovereignty of Latin American countries in the sphere of culture, or the affirmation of the history of ideas in Latin America. The philosophy of liberation as developed and disseminated by Dussel is a third claim to knowledge, separate from the other two.

The theology of liberation, if I am not mistaken, is concerned with the issue of serving the needs of the community of Christian believers, great numbers of whom are poor and oppressed, over and against serving the needs of their "oppressors." It is a tool whereby the people can use their faith to work for them, rather than let it be used for the benefit of the exploiters. Whereas the theology of liberation depends on a condition of subjective faith in God, the discipline of philosophy begins and ends with human knowledge. If one is looking for an analogy to the theology of liberation at the philosophical level, I suggest we

would not find satisfaction in a theory that replaces human knowledge with certain "truths of faith" like the doctrine of Alterity. What we need instead is a theory in which human knowledge functions as an important and autonomous tool for the liberation of people from oppression. For this reason, the quest for an objective knowledge replacing prejudices of all kinds is a sine qua non of a genuine liberation theory. In my view, theories such as Dussel's, which thrive on a mix of emotion, religion, and patriotism, are most likely to work against liberation, precisely because they end up reproducing irrationality and cultural prejudice rather than eliminating them. Such seductively emotional theories have led to the oppression of peoples in the past, and there is no reason to believe that in this particular case, despite the good intentions of the philosophers in question, the situation would be any different. For this reason, those who, like myself, have a feminist vision of liberation which is both secular and internationalist, will find our views on freedom directly contradicted by any argument resting on the emotional triad of God, the people, and patriotism.

NOTES

1 Dussel's recent works include: La producción teórica de Marx: un comentario a los Grundrisse (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1985); Philosophy of Liberation, trans. A. Martinez and C. Morkovsky (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), first published as Filosofía de la Liberación (Bogota: Universidad Santo Tomás, 1980); Filosofía Ética Latinoamericana, Part III (Mexico: Edicol, 1977); same series, Parts IV and V (Bogota: Universidad Santo Tomás, 1979 and 1980); Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana, Parts I and II (Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 1973); De Puebla a Medellín: una década de sangre y esperanza (Mexico: Edicol, 1979); and Religión (Mexico: Edicol, 1977). Several chapters of Part III of the Ética, together with an introductory essay, are published separately as Liberación de la Mujer y Erótica Latinoamericana (Bogota: Editorial Nueva América, 1980).

Scannone's works include: Sein und Inkarnation, Freiburg-München, 1968; Teología de la liberación y praxis popular (Salamanca, n.d. available); Sabiduría popular, símbolo y filosofía (Buenos Aires, 1984), as well as numerous articles.

In this paper, where no English translation of the material quoted is available, the translations from the Spanish are my own.

2 Horacio Cerutti Guldberg is the author of Filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), as well as numerous articles.

3 Philosophy of Liberation, op. cit., pp. 21-23 and 40-43. Hereafter cited as PL (1985).

4 "The ultimate level of ethical existence is the ethics of the religious project [as directed toward] . . . the totality of the system" and "Ethics, as we defined it above, is the reference of the totality to exteriority" Etica, V, op. cit., p. 87.

5 PL (1985), p. 44.

6 Ibid., p. 42.

7 Ibid., pp. 47-48.

8 Ibid., p. 64.

9 Ibid., p. 44.

10 "The couple becomes indissoluble when, joined by freely electing the procreation of the child, it is [sic] no longer the erotic fulfillment of the Other as a sexual other in a lasting friendship, but in the child they are [sic] consecrated in fecundity as the indivisible metaphysical origin of distinction [sic]"; "Adultery is the fulfillment of the sexual embrace with a man or a woman pertaining to another couple, with the mother or father of another child; it is . . . the destruction of the profoundly human sense of sexuality." Etica, III, op. cit., p. 117.

11 PL (1985), p. 90. Dussel also condemns radical feminism in his work, calling it perverse: "The homosexual feminist ends up summing up all perversions . . ." Etica, III, p. 117.

12 PL (1985), p. 42 and passim.

13 Ibid., p. 160.

14 Juan Carlos Scannone, S.J., "Religión del pueblo, sabiduría popular y filosofía inculturada," in III Congreso Internacional de Filosofía Latinoamericana: Ponencias (Bogota: Universidad Santo Tomás, 1985), pp. 276-77. Hereafter cited as CIFL (1985).

15 Ibid., p. 278.

16 Ibid., p. 290.

17 Ibid., p. 289.

18 Filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana, op cit., passim. Hereafter cited as FLL (1983).

19 See Enrique Dussel, "Cultura latinoamericana y filosofía de liberación, . . . más allá del populismo y del dogmatismo," in CIFL (1985), op cit., pp. 63-107. See also "La cuestión popular," in the final pages of Dussel's La producción teórica de Marx, op. cit., pp. 400-413. This last essay is reprinted in Cristianismo y Sociedad, No. 84, 1985, pp. 81-90.

20 Both the populist and the critical sectors are subclassified by Cerutti according to their epistemological features. The populist sectors, which he claims are characterized by the ambiguity in the use of key terms such as "pueblo" and "liberación," are subdivided into (1) a populism of concrete ambiguities and (2) a populism of abstract ambiguities. Most problematic about the first group is that, though more concrete in what it means by liberation, it was more compatible ideologically with Peronism (though not aware of it). The second group, Cerutti observes, avoided this specific problem by employing a more abstract discourse, yet its very abstraction meant that the arguments on liberation could be applied to the benefit either of the right or of the left, depending on the context and circumstances. Cerutti places Scannone in the first and Dussel in the second of these two groups. Over and against the "populist" sector, Cerutti names a second group of intellectuals, whose work is critical of populism. This group is also subdivided into two parts: (1) a historicist sector, where he places the influence of the Mexican Leopoldo Zea and the work of the Argentine Arturo Andrés Roig, and (2) a problem posing sector, where he situates his own contribution.

21 FLL (1983), p. 255.

22 Ibid.

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