

Características de la autoidentificación histórica de la ‘Filosofía de la Liberación’: el papel de la personalidad intelectual¹

Features of the historical self-identification of the ‘Philosophy of Liberation’: the role of the intellectual personality

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Recepción: 29 de agosto del 2022

Evaluación: 12 de noviembre del 2022

Aceptación: 15 de noviembre del 2022



1 Este artículo fue escrito como parte de mi investigación científica acerca de la obra de dos filósofos latinoamericanos de la liberación: A. Roig y E. Dussel.

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Resumen

Este artículo examina las opiniones de los filósofos latinoamericanos en torno al proceso de formación del sujeto de la historia latinoamericana, sus rasgos característicos, así como el papel del intelectual en este proceso. El objetivo principal de este escrito es mostrar la posición del destacado filósofo argentino A. A. Roig, y comparar dicha posición con la de otro conocido representante de la filosofía de la liberación (E. Dussel). En este trabajo se analizan entonces las obras de Roig dedicadas a la interpretación filosófica del proceso de formación y desarrollo del pensamiento nacional latinoamericano. Se establece que en las obras de este pensador la actividad de los pueblos latinoamericanos aparece como la actividad de un único sujeto colectivo de la historia. A lo largo de este análisis se concluye que ambos filósofos (Roig y Dussel) llegan a la misma idea de manera diferente: la identidad intelectual del sujeto colectivo latinoamericano de la historia se basa en la historia de la interacción entre los pueblos de América Latina y Europa, única en su dramatismo e igual para todo el continente. La obra utiliza principalmente el método histórico y bibliográfico, así como el método de análisis comparativo.

Palabras clave: América Latina, dependencia, otredad, pensamiento nacional, filosofía de la liberación.

Abstract

This article examines the views of Latin American philosophers on the process of formation of the Latin American subject of history, its characteristic features, as well as the role of the intellectual in this process. The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate the position of the prominent Argentine philosopher A. A. Roig, and to compare his position with the position of another well-known representative of the philosophy of liberation (E. Dussel). In this paper therefore, Roig's works devoted to the philosophical interpretation of the process of formation and development of Latin American national thought are analyzed. It is established that in the writings of this thinker the activity of Latin American people appears as the activity of a single collective subject of history. During the study, we conclude that both philosophers (Roig and Dussel), come to the same idea in different ways: the intellectual identity of the Latin American collective subject of history is based on the history of interaction between the people of Latin America and Europe, unique in its dramatic nature and same for the entire continent. The work uses

mainly the historical and bibliographic method, as well as the method of comparative analysis.

Keywords: Latin America, dependence, otherness, national thinking, philosophy of liberation.

Introduction

Latin American philosophy is a special phenomenon of the cultural life of the continent. Its characteristic feature is a sharp demarcation and opposition to the Western European philosophical discourse. It makes a critical rethinking of the foundations of the Western European way of thinking, reveals its focus on enslavement, conquest, use of the 'Other'. The totalitarian intentions of Western European philosophy in relation to the 'Other' have led the intellectual elite of Latin America to the need to rethink the history of philosophy, the role of the center and periphery in it and to show their freedom through the justification and actualization of an original way of thinking.

The 'Philosophy of Liberation' generally deals with a very wide range of problems of Latin American reality. However, in this study we focus on the following problem: how independent and original is the 'philosophy of liberation', which is the successor of the 'theology of liberation', whether the Latin American philosopher is a separate subject of intellectual activity, or he is the "voice of the people" articulating his aspirations and aspirations. During the research, we will rely on the content of such works by Roig as *Filosofía, Universidad y filósofos en América Latina* (1981a), *Teoría y crítica del pensamiento latinoamericano* (1981b), *Ethics of Power and Morality of Protest: Latin American Morality in a State of Emergency* (2000). At the same time, Roig's position on the role of the intellectual personality is compared by us with the position of Dussel, as perhaps the most famous "philosopher of liberation" in Russia. Dussel and Roig are the most significant figures of the philosophy of liberation of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, that is why we chose their work. However, unlike Dussel, Roig is extremely little known in Russia. A brief analytical review of his work or mention of him can be found only in a few works of domestic researchers (Demenchonok, 1988, pp. 250-254; Petiaksheva, 2000, p. 68). For these reasons, it seems justified to pay more attention to the analysis of the main ideas of A. Roig, whereas the philosophical views of E. Dussel will be considered only in the context of the comparison of the positions of both Latin American thinkers regarding the peculiarities of the formation of the Latin American subject of history and the role of the intellectual personality in this process.

A. Roig on the formation of the Latin American subject of history and the role of the intellectual personality in this process

Exploring the ‘philosophy of liberation’, we must inevitably choose as our starting point the socio-political situation that has developed in Latin America and has become the environment of its formation. As a result of the conquest, a part of the population of the South American continent was destroyed, and a part was oppressed, including through deprivation of otherness, reduction to categories understandable to European consciousness. Columbus arrived in America in 1492 and only in 1537 Pope Paul III issued the bull *Sublimus Dei*, recognizing the Indians as people who, however, need to be converted to the Christian faith and show them an example of the right life (Pope Paul III, 1537). This clearly shows that the conquest and colonialism is not just conquest and enslavement, it is the assertion of a “good and righteous life”. Being another manifestation of Eurocentrism, this form of dominance is the main subject of study and overcoming in the ‘philosophy of liberation’ on the one hand. On the other hand, it found its expression in the fact that a corpus/array of human sciences appeared, which stand “(...) in positions of superiority of modernity over all other ways of development and consider the act of bringing all cultures to modernity by acculturation as inevitable (...)” (Tlostanova, 2010, p. 143). Understanding this starting point of the whole ‘philosophy of liberation’ is of great importance for analyzing the views of one of its representatives, such as A. A. Roig.

According to Roig, the historical specificity of Latin America –the conquest and the genocide of the indigenous population– is a key moment and naturally generates national thinking capable of autonomous activity, and therefore claiming independence. Roig calls this process an “anthropological a priori” of the formation of a philosophical subject³. In this formation, the philosopher identifies empirical and axiological aspects.

The empirical aspect appears as the disidentification of the subject with the world around him. It enables the subject to assert his own value for himself: “On the basis of the empirical, the subject is established as self-valuable, then it organizes the world into a hierarchy of values, thanks to which experience is only possible (...)” (Roig, 1981b). As Roig notes: “(...) to be a historical subject, it is not necessary to have a great history, you need to have your own history (...)” (2000). Roig calls the specific historical conditions

³ For more information about the concept of “anthropological a priori”, see Basmanov (2021).

of human life “inevitable and necessary spatial-temporal inclusion” (inevitable y necesaria inserción espacio-temporal). It is thanks to her that a person acquires identity (1981b). Roig sees the beginning of philosophy in the empirical subject in the meaning of a specific historical subject (Zavala, 1997).

The “concreteness” of a subject is the expression in it of the features of its historical formation. For Roig, this characteristic of the subject is extremely important, because it shows that the thinking subject is not a manifestation of any universal Spirit. “Concreteness” characterizes the subject as a product of his personal history and the history of his people.

Considering the axiological aspect, Roig borrows some ideas from Hegel, in particular from the Philosophy of History: “A person considered as finite for himself is at the same time the image of God and the source of infinity in himself; he is an end in himself, has infinite value in himself and is appointed for eternity (...)” (Hegel, 2000, p. 351). That is, any person is, despite his finiteness, absolute value. Therefore, Roig considers the process of his ‘self-affirmation’ (autoafirmación) or ‘self-assessment’ (autovaloración) to be an important stage in the formation of a subject. During this process, the protosubject realizes the “absolute value of his own person” for himself. However, we are talking not only about the act of “establishing one’s own value” (“ponerse a sí mismo como valioso”), but also about “realizing the value of thinking about oneself” (“considera como valioso el pensar sobre sí mismo”) (Roig, 1981b).

The moment of ‘self-affirmation’ of the subject is not only the beginning of the existence of the subject of history. This is also the moment of the emergence of philosophical thinking (comienzo del filosofar). Roig believes that one can speak about the formation of philosophical thinking only when there appears “(...) a person who establishes the value of knowledge about himself, striving for self-knowledge. At the same time, the act of self-affirmation is necessarily based on the methods of reason (...)” (1981a, p. 52). In Greece, such a person was Socrates, in Latin America D. F. Sarmiento and H. B. Alberdi.

The axiological aspect of the “anthropological a priori” also describes the communication moment of intersubjective reality. It is about restoring the historical justice of mutual recognition of the autochthonous value and legitimacy of existence between Western and Latin American subjects. Roig believes

that this valuable knowledge about others and about Latinos themselves opens the way for them to freedom and to ultimate independence (1981b).

So, the subject becomes empirical, distinguishing himself from the surrounding world. Further, in his historical experience and in communication with other subjects, he becomes self-valuable. However, the Latin American historical subject in Roig's interpretation has another important specific characteristic: plurality or collectivity.

One of the basic points of Roig's philosophical concept is the assertion of self-worth by the subject (*el ponerse como valioso para sí*). However, at a certain stage, the becoming subject ceases to be individual (*sujeto individual*) and becomes plural (*sujeto plural*): the formula for describing the process of value formation changes –“affirming our value for ourselves” (“*ponernos a nosotros mismos como valiosos*”) (1981b). Thus, we are talking about the formation of a subject in the person of the people (*pueblo*), and not one person. At the same time, in the case of Latin America, Latin American peoples are meant, they act as a single collective subject of history. Recall that the subject becomes self-valuable largely due to intersubjective communication. For Latin American peoples, it was their tragic history of relations with Europe. In addition, the peoples of the continent are united by a single cultural heritage, primarily language and religion.

The theoretical Latin American collective subject of history appears in practice as “we are Latin Americans” (“*nosotros somos latinoamericanos*”). This subject is aware of himself as different from the Western European subject and alien to his rational spirit. It is assumed that theoretical criticism in the philosophy of liberation is conducted on behalf of the ‘Other’, challenging the experience of the ‘poor’, the people representing the historical subject (Petiaxsheva, 2000, p. 81). This historical subject, in Roig's interpretation, is a collective ‘we’ (*‘nosotros’*), a community whose units have a similar self-identification due to a common ‘heritage’ and a dramatic past. It seems that the spirit of such a community has the character of a single and indivisible entity. It is for this reason that one can speak on behalf of many. The idea of ‘we’ is inextricably linked with the idea of ‘our’ (*‘nuestro’*), p.e., ‘Latin American’. The essence of “our Latin American” comes not only from a negative attitude towards non-Latin American, but also has its own content. “In the question of ‘we’ everything becomes clear if the answer is not accompanied by the addition of “we are Latin Americans” but is given from

‘our’ person” (Roig, 1981b). Adding “we are Latin Americans” does not suit Roig, because it contains a negative relationship with everything that is not ‘ours’. The fundamental thing for the concept of ‘Latin American’ is not the distinction with the different, but the action and thinking of the subject as belonging, participating in the ‘Latin American’.

The concept of ‘involvement’ (‘parcialidad’) helps clarify the concept of ‘identity’. It is ‘belonging’ to a single ‘heritage’ that has transformed and become ‘ours’, ‘Latin American’, that makes it possible for the peoples of Latin America to feel like a single subject. Awareness of a certain ‘involvement’ is awareness of a specific Latin American “a priori”. In many ways, it gives rise to the Latin American ‘we’ –a sense of unity not only with the national, but also with the supranational continental community.

A person speaking on behalf of Latin American peoples speaks as if on behalf of a single entity, p.e., on behalf of ‘we’. In his work “Theory and Criticism of the Latin American Way of Thinking”, Roig tries to convey the feeling of ‘we’. “‘We’ are not windowless monads existing in a pre-established world harmony, but we have the ability to open up, it gives us the opportunity to discover ourselves as an acting subject, open to a certain process in which the historical destroys various ontological theoretical constructions and shows us that we are ‘inserted’ (‘insertos’) into a contradictory and unpredictable world. We are aware of ourselves as ‘creating being’ (‘haciendo el ser’), and for us this being is predominantly social” (1981b). ‘We’ is a state in which a part contains the spirit of the whole, and the spirit of the whole does not differ from the spirit of the part. However, this is a state of openness and activity towards the outside world. This state is opposed to the state of the Western mind, which is also active, but closed, because it sees only an object for processing in the environment and regards only itself as a subject. This expresses his one-sidedness towards the world, which unprofitably distinguishes him from the Latin American mind. Thanks to this, ‘we’, Latin Americans:

(...) “as monads” are “inserted” into the process much deeper than thanks to the myths of liberal individualism (...) From the “windows” of our monads, we are not looking at the world alone. It is not a certain ‘I’ who is watching, but ‘we’ are watching, but not “all people” (“todos los hombres”), also looking at the world at the same time as us, but “some” (algunos) belonging to our “difference” (“diversidad”) and “involvement” (...) (1981b).

Previously, the Latin American “monad” was closed as well as the Western one. Its ‘closeness’ (‘cerrazón’) was not ontological, but ideological, and its ‘discovery’ consists in gaining consciousness, thanks to its ‘insertion’ into historical and social processes (1981b). By ideology, Roig means the Western European Logo, which was brought to the continent by many generations of European colonizers. This is the Logos of ‘totality’, in terms of which Latin Americans became slaves, and Europeans became masters; it was he who deprived Latin Americans of their own being and self-consciousness, making them objects.

Thus, the acquisition of self-worth necessary for the formation of a full-fledged subject of thought becomes a collective process for Roig. The subject of history is not an individual, not one national community, but all the peoples of Latin America who have ever been oppressed and who have risen to fight for their own independence and for the independence of the continent. The self-consciousness of the Latin American subject becomes like the self-consciousness of a group, not of an individual. A separate individual, the owner of such self-consciousness, feels himself the creator not only of his personal history, but also of the history of the entire continent. He feels his responsibility and at the same time his strength, because he is a conductor of the will of a huge community of people (2000). As a particle of the collective subject of history, a person acquires historical consciousness, p.e., realizes the importance of his history for his own formation. From this awareness philosophy is born. The personalities who articulate this philosophy speak not on their own behalf, but on behalf of that huge community, of which they are a part of the collective consciousness.

In the construction of his arguments, Roig adheres to Hegelian dialectics. He begins with a separate individual, shows the formation of his self-consciousness first as a subject of individual, purely empirical existence. Further, this individual subject in the process of intersubjective communication acquires awareness of the value of his being and thinking, becomes self-valuable. At the next stage, the individual subject learns a certain content common to each unit of intersubjective reality –cultural and historical heritage–, the collective spirit of Latin American history. Then the Roig returns to the individual again, but at a new level. The individual subject in his external and internal activity expresses and implements the general content of the collective Latin American spirit. At this stage, the juxtaposition of the individual and the general is removed.

Features of the formation of the Latin American subject of history in the philosophy of E. Dussel

Before proceeding to the comparison of the positions of Roig and Dussel in relation to the formation of the Latin American subject of history, we will briefly characterize the views of the latter, highlighting in them those aspects that are of paramount importance in the context of our consideration.

The position of the Argentine philosopher has been changing throughout the entire period of his work. At first, he was inclined to believe that an intellectual should stand at the head of the masses of the people, explain to them the essence of the ruling system, show with the help of his criticism the injustice of the social structure. The philosopher must go beyond the totality of the existing world order: “Beyond the oligarchic culture of the dominant elites, a national culture can be found (...)” (Dussel, 1985, p. 93). The latter, reflecting the foundations of the life of the people, not only forms the framework of national identity, but also the conditions for the existence of a national oligarchy that ensures the country’s dependence on more developed ones. Dussel calls this layer mass culture, which thus combines both national and global principles. The appeal to the former ensures the movement towards liberation, and to the latter –the existence of a class of oppressors. The intellectual opposes mass culture with the help of his main tool– criticism. Dussel uses the term “organic intellectual”. Such an intellectual is necessary for the people, who “alone cannot free themselves” (p. 93).

However, in his later works, the Argentine philosopher concludes that an intellectual cannot “teach”, “enlighten” or “organize” the oppressed. In a certain sense, he himself becomes a student who diligently reproduces in his works the ideas that he received from the people. Dussel refers to Marx’s ideas about the self-organization of the proletariat (Dussel, 2013, pp. 365-373). In this light, the concept of the “organic intellectual” is seen differently. An intellectual should not try to speak for the people, nor should he distance himself from them. Thanks to his critical position, the intellectual goes beyond the boundaries of repressive institutions and finds himself inside the people. Then the “organic intellectual” is not just a liberator, but also a natural part of those whose voice he appears to be. Dussel argues that the intellectual is part of the cultural and historical space in which his thought is created. For Dussel, the thinker is oppressed in the same way as other social groups. He expresses this situation in words: “I am the Other” (Mahvish, 2013). The

Other, oppressed and excluded, is the subject of his philosophy because he himself, Enrique Dussel, thinks of himself as such.

We consider it important to note that the philosophy of liberation in general and the work of these two philosophers can be read within the framework of the philosophy of the decolonial turn. This is especially true of Dussel's work. A few representatives of the philosophy of the decolonial turn interpret and develop his ideas in a certain way. For example, Lewis Gordon believes that the consciousness of the indigenous population of the colonized territories cannot be characterized as either pre-modern or post-modern, but only as "thoroughly modern" (Gordon, 2013, p. 69). For Walter Mignolo, the term borrowed from Dussel turns out to be important – "the geopolitics of knowledge". Based on it, he builds his theory representing the global geopolitical situation as the interaction of central and peripheral groups, where central groups create knowledge, classifications and hierarchy, and manage them, placing themselves at the top of the hierarchy, and peripheral groups perceive this knowledge as the basis of worldview and cognition, and are also classified and integrated into the hierarchy created by the first (Mignolo, 2000, p. 29). Another thinker, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, questions the need for Dussel to apply Levinas' categories in the field of social relations (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 187), but borrows from him the concept of "trans-modernity" (p. 226). It is also worth mentioning Ramon Grosfogel (2009), who draws attention to the problem of the decolonization of knowledge and power, as well as to the political and economic characteristics of the world system. This development of the ideas of the philosophy of liberation can be characterized as epistemological decolonization, but we interpret this development rather as the radicalization of the thought of Enrique Dussel and the philosophy of liberation. In our view of the philosophy of liberation, we adhere more to the views of Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, a well-known representative and researcher of the philosophy of liberation. His position is that the philosophy of liberation should be read as an anti-imperialist discourse, historically developed as anti-imperialist thinking and theory (*pensamiento y teoría antiimperialista*). For him, the ideas of the decolonial turn are a tribute to the *Zeitgeist* dominant in the West (*Zeitgeist dominante*), which do not provide answers to the challenges of modernity facing the peoples of Latin America, while the philosophy of liberation appeared thanks to these challenges and works with them (Fornet-Betancourt, 2017, p. 118).

Conclusion

As a result of the research, we found that both philosophers see the role of an intellectual in being a part, the voice of an oppressed people. The philosopher of liberation in their understanding speaks not on his own behalf, but on behalf of that huge community, of which he is a part of the collective consciousness. Roig and Dussel come to this idea in different ways. Dussel initially saw the Latin American thinker as a separate active subject of the “philosophy of liberation”, but later changed his position. Dussel concluded that the intellectual is oppressed, as well as the people on whose behalf he conducts his narrative. Awareness of this moment is the starting point in the struggle against the totality of the Western European Logos. Roig, on the other hand, describes the genesis of the Latin American collective subject of history as the process of an individual gaining awareness of an indissoluble connection with his own history, awareness of his own uniqueness and the value of his being. Thus, in his opinion, a person acquires the consciousness and mind of a philosopher.

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