



Latin american critical thinking. Fundamental concepts

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When Dr. Ricardo Salas Astrain invited me to participate in the presentation of the book *Latin American Critical thinking. Fundamental Concepts*, he suggested that I should do it "from the *perspective* of the Jesuit Latin American Group of Philosophical Reflection". I will try to comply with his wishes, however I am conscious that my words are entirely my own responsibility and do not commit the Group. Furthermore P. Eduardo Silva, Dean of this Faculty, is also a member of the Group and could represent it much better than I.

Nevertheless I will try to point out the coincidences of *focus* which exist between the initiative so admirably brought to life in this work, and the philosophical work of our Group. First of all –and above all– I will take into account the Presentation which Salas himself drafted for the work, and which he was kind enough to show me prior to its publication. I am sure that an attentive reading of his three volumes would also bring to my attention many points of convergence in content, which I am unable to mention because I have not as yet been able to read them in their entirety.

With regard to the Jesuit Group, Jean Ladrière, who in Leuven (1996) presided over

a Workshop on the first four common works of the Group –now there are nine– said that it was proposing a new way of philosophising *over historical action*, in that it was trying to think *philosophically* –and therefore with universal human validity– about the current historical-social reality of Latin America. In principle I would agree with this appreciation by Ladrière, but with one correction and one addition. The correction: that it addresses not only action but also the historical *passion* of our peoples; and the addition: the Group did not remain only in the first phase of the hermeneutic circle: "think reality", but also and most importantly it addresses the second, namely to think *from* the same historical action-passion and *from* the *ethical-historical* answers which it *elicits* from the thinker and thinking - *all* the great questions and problems of philosophy, both traditional and new.

Well now, I consider that the work which we are presenting today is situated in this same *hermeneutic circle*, probably with more emphasis on its second phase. The compiler, commenting on why he added the epithet "Latin American" to the title "Critical Thinking", stated in his *Presentation* that "this emphasis does not result from the mere fact of being born or living in Latin America, but to draw attention to an *epistemological*

intentionality in this geocultural framework, in the vital anchorage of its concerns". In my terminology I would say that Latin America is not considered in the work as a (mere) geographical locality, but –above all– as a *hermeneutical* and in this sense *epistemological place*. A hermeneutical place for a manner of philosophising –and thinking in general– which, without renouncing the *universality* which it owns, remains conscious of its Latin American historical, cultural and social *rootedness*, and thus conceives this universality as *situated*, to use the happy formulation of Mario Casalla.

As I have mentioned above, the Jesuit Group of Philosophers is situated in this same intellectual *tessitura*, proposing a philosophy which is universally valid, but which is *incultured* in our America, in other words its *context* and its *whence* is Latin America.

To this common characteristic of the book and the reflection of our group, two others are connected, to which Salas also alludes in his Presentation: firstly the interplay of "*various hermeneutic rationales*", "including that of Latin American Social sciences, Philosophy and Theology"; and secondly, its relation with a certain "ethical-political posture".

With respect to the first, it is precisely the merit of the work which we are presenting that it is dedicated not only to philosophy but to "*critical thinking*" in general. And furthermore to expounding it not by simply *juxtaposing* –in their different voices– the epistemologies and hermeneutics of the various sciences, but entwining them in a genuine *inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue*. Now the Jesuit Group was also obliged –in its attempt to philosophise *from the reality* of Latin America and *for* its transforming service –to exercise its philosophical reflection through an interdisciplinary dialogue, not only with the various sciences of society, history and culture, but also –since its members are Jesuits– with a reflection of faith, in other words theology. However other approaches to reality were also not infrequently brought into play, for example Latin American literature; poetical, political and religious symbolism; and even the mystic, in every case respecting

the hermeneutic proper to each dimension and discipline. Thus we lead to a mutual enrichment of each, through both reciprocal criticism and reciprocal fecundation.

With regard to the second –that is, the ethical-political posture– the very fact of assuming a determined *hermeneutic option* implies a certain *pragmatic* moment and a certain practical attitude –*existential, ethical and ethical-political*– which, in the case of the Jesuit Group, is that of "service to the faith and the promotion of justice", as the Company of Jesus defines its mission today. But this service and promotion are such as not to blur the *autonomy* of philosophical thought, rather they free it and stimulate its growth. For this is a struggle for the humanization and liberation of man from the social reality of our Continent, especially of the marginalised and socially excluded, in line with the preferential option for the poor. This is also a *philosophical and theoretical* option, which opens us to the whole truth about man and which implies *criticism* of our own suppositions.

I expect that a similar "ethical-political posture" and respect for scientific autonomy might also be found in many of the contributions to the present book, whether they be philosophical or set in the framework of other sciences. For as its very name indicates, it deals with *critical* thought, and with thought that is intentionally *Latin American*, within the *modus operandi* of the respective sciences.

And from here derives another coincidence between this work compiled by Salas and the intentions of the work of the Jesuit Group. The Group, after presenting in its first two joint works –fruit of the first phase of the hermeneutic circle– a sort of *philosophical-fundamental horizon*, incultured and contextualized in Latin America, went on to address what Hegel calls "*Realphilosophien*" ("philosophies of the real"). In its third common book it began to develop the second phase of the circle. Thus it devoted its efforts primarily to a philosophy of social, economic and political aspects, and later, in its last two works, to a philosophy of religion, all with a Latin American focus.

Finally, this year it will return to the problem of social and institutional justice in the Continent.

Now one of the objectives of this work *Latin American Critical Thinking* is to present not only the themes but also the interdisciplinary *categories and theories* which have been developed in Latin American thinking over recent years, whether they be *original, newly-minted* notions, categories and concepts, or a *re-reading and re-interpretation* of some of those inherited from the classical, modern or contemporary philosophical tradition, in a fecund intercultural dialogue. In this development and re-development of categories the work again coincides with the contributions of our Group.

In the *intercultural* focus which I mentioned just now we may find another convergence between the two. With respect to the Jesuit Group at least, although it consists mainly of Latin American thinkers or those who have been rooted in Latin America for most of their lives, it nevertheless also includes three permanent guests who are

not Latin Americans (at present, Universities in Spain, Portugal and Rome), who ensure a certain intercultural critical input.

To finish, I would like allude to a final point of intertwining, also remarked on by Salas in his Presentation when he refers to the "problem of a philosophy and a line of thought as a *perspective on liberation*", which "goes beyond the agreements or disagreements of each of the theoretical-practical propositions which brought it about in a specific country". In both cases we are dealing with the *whole* of our America and—even allowing for the obvious divergences and legitimate differences— a species of *family of options* in thinking, and, as he says, a single "*intellectual tradition* rooted in a history of emancipating practices and ideas".

We are part of this tradition and of this family of theoretical options. The volumes which we present today constitute a new and important contribution to these, which today not only remain *alive and fecund*, but are also very *promising for the future*. Thank you very much.