

# Argentina: The Philosophical Resistance to the Conquest of the Soul<sup>1</sup>

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## Historical context

In 1976, a terrible dictatorship was established in Argentina, even before Foucault (2007, p.265) claimed with crystal clarity that the fundamental difference between classical liberalism and neoliberalism was the substitution of the *homo economicus*—related to the exchange—by the *homo economicus* as entrepreneur of himself (lecture delivered on 14 March 1979); and also before Margaret Thatcher confirmed Foucault's analysis stating that: "Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul." In the same year, Milton Friedman received the Nobel Prize in Economics. The explicit purpose of the Military Junta was to promote a profound cultural transformation, based on the premise that the causes of the alleged "underdevelopment" were not so much economical but cultural and political.

Nevertheless, as García Delgado and Molina (2006) pointed out, the problem is not related to a sort of inevitable structural poverty, due to the culture of our people. It is a matter of a decline in society, produced by the policy orientation of the dictatorship. Until then, the income distribution was similar to that of the countries from Southern Europe with an almost frictional unemployment. Until the *coup d'état*, Argentina had a poverty rate of 8% and the best distributive structure of income in Latin America. However, 1976 was a turning point; the surge of the neoliberal model promoted a process

of over-indebtedness, wealth concentration, unrestricted opening of markets with an unfavorable exchange rate for national industry, labor flexibilization, with the insertion of a competitive globalization of “savage capitalism” that “strengthened the asymmetries and transfers of resources from the periphery to the center. This concept differs from thinking about inequality as a problem related to culture, corruption and poor institutional quality.” (García Delgado and Molina, 2006)

Despite the overwhelming adverse evidence, it is still commonplace to blame all the ills of our society on that culture, the maximum expression of which would be Peronism. In fact, the great majority of disappeared people during the dictatorship were Peronist political, trade union, and social leaders. The motto of the Ministry of Economics during the dictatorship was “towards a change of mentality.” The current Argentine situation, in terms of advances of neoliberalism as well as resistances to it, cannot be understood without referring to the dictatorship. In Poratti’s words,

the *coup d’état* of 1976 does not only put an end to a government, a political system and project, but also to a ‘world’ in which Argentinians were living at least from the independence project of 1810. In those days, there was not an abrupt differentiation between generations and, in many aspects, people could identify themselves, diachronically, with a historical line beyond the particular generational characteristics. (Various authors, 2009)

These aspects go along with others that appeared in other areas, such as the implementation of new computer and communication technologies and, as a consequence, individual and social fragmentation. The impact of these technologies on daily life was decisive to the emergence of what some authors, like Sloterdijk (2002), called “mass individualism.” No doubt, this is a necessary factor in explaining the rise of the neoliberal subjectivity in developed countries. Yet, in Argentina, the existence of political, social, trade-union, and ecclesiastical movements based on popular roots, with solidarity as a fundamental value, hampered the conquest of the “heart and soul” in 1976; and they are still now an obstacle to be overcome by sectors interested in imposing a neoliberal model. It is impossible to explain any isolated phenomenon of popular resistance to the hegemonic attempts from neoliberalism without analyzing the common conceptions and understandings found in Argentina. Indeed, the popular culture substrate in Argentina is made up, mainly, by the confluence of different cultures: Andean, Guaraní

Indians, Afro, and Criollo (native). All of them are characterized by their relational and solidarity conceptions, intrinsically opposed to a subjectivity that conceives the individual as an entrepreneur of himself/herself.

### **Cultural traditions and neoliberal subjectivity**

In recent years, we have observed a retrieval of those subjectivities considered as the matrix of our culture. In this respect, it is worth noting the importance that some lines of thought developed some decades ago—such as philosophy and theology<sup>2</sup> of liberation—were rebuilding. At the same time, new theoretical approaches like the decolonial perspective are emerging and gaining presence in several disciplinary areas, such as philosophy, literature, social sciences, political sciences, economy, and history. It is remarkable to note the boom of these perspectives despite the opposition of the traditional academic spaces, and of a great part of the mass media. This chapter attempts to point out some of the distinctive characteristics of these theoretical approaches. To understand them in depth, we will compare them with European philosophies. For the sake of brevity, only an outline will be presented trying to help us to understand reality, but it cannot account for the whole reality.

#### *Different philosophies*

In the famous thesis XI on Feuerbach, Marx stated that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” If we accept that social reality is largely a discursive construction, we should conclude that the action of interpreting the world is, in turn, a way of constructing and, therefore, of changing the world. Moreover, as there is no zero point—a place out of the world from where it could be interpreted—every interpreter is the product of previous interpretations. Hence, when the philosophy of European matrix is referred to as “the” philosophy, the intention is to establish a *peculiar way* of conceiving and constructing the world as if it were the *unique valid way* of doing philosophy, forgetting or ignoring other philosophical perspectives. It is worth nothing that, reciprocally, when we mention the Andean, Tupí-guaraní or Bantu philosophy, for instance, we are not referring to a “pure essence” that should be rescued from oblivion; because we, the interpreters of those other lines of thoughts, are already “influenced” by the European philosophy in which we have been educated. Therefore, there is

no pure or “uncontaminated” thinking, and far less in Argentina, where foreign invasions and migratory flows—and, therefore, cultural contributions—from many areas have been coming for at least five centuries. Impositions, resistances, dialogues, and cultural crossings of every type generated—and are still generating—diverse ways of knowing and producing reality. To do philosophy in Latin America in general, and in Argentina in particular, does not consist in copying uncritically the academic production of the North, or in romantic attempts to rescue the roots of a native philosophy. It consists in thinking about what we are not: Westerners with a presumed right to dominate the Earth in the name of God, owners of reason, of democracy and market; or descendants of the native peoples with arcane knowledge, intended to save the planet from predatory capitalism.

This particular way of being places us in a good position to understand and assume that every thought is a situated thought because the gravity of ground not only involves things but also thoughts. In Kusch’s words:

... the ground, conceived in this way, is not a thing, or something that can be touched, but it weighs. It is the only answer to the question about the culture. The issue is to ask about the meaning that the supposed universality has for those who do not understand the problem. There is no other universality than the condition of being fallen on the ground, no matter if it is on the Andean highlands or the jungle. (Kusch, 1976).

It is not about the ground/fundament on which we are (which would lead us to an essentialist thought), but the ground where we *are* being,<sup>3</sup> a ground without which any relationship with the others and the cosmos would be possible.

Regarding the ways of doing philosophy, the European matrix is a philosophy that comes from various academic fields. Philosophy became a profession like any other one; and, as a profession, it belonged to the domain of a technique. For this reason, the academic philosophy tends to privilege the technical aspects (*how* to philosophize) over the experience-based aspects (*about what* to philosophize), contributing to generate the illusion of the possibility of thinking in a “pure” form, disregarding any relation to a certain time and space. As Kusch (1976) stated:

This transference of the problematic to the visible field  
– with the help of the technique – provides us certain

capacity for handling the means and reality, contributing precisely, to the loss of the act of philosophizing. It can be helpful when doing philosophy that is not the same as philosophizing; because the former is reduced to a myriad of techniques accumulated over time in the Western world where technique was created. Thus, philosophizing is nothing more than the handling of a technique, and therefore, the professionalism of the philosopher becomes encrusted, self-sufficient, and useless in America ... a sterile activity or better said, sterilized and aseptic due to academic reiteration.

### *The problem of the fundament*

The problem of the fundament—of things, politics, law and society—is where we can strongly notice that thinking is, always, a geo-culturally situated thinking; and, thinking the world is, in turn, to participate in the construction of the world. In effect, when the modern subject asks themselves why they are the entity rather than “nothing,” they note that there is no an ultimate fundament of reality, that things and ourselves might not have been. Then, that subject (conqueror and owner, belonging to the European cultural matrix) tends to think that everything is *absurd*, that nothing makes sense. Instead, the Latin American people tend to think that if there is no fundament, then their existence is gratuitous (*gratuit*) and, therefore, can or cannot be meaningful; but the important matter is that things and people are-being (be-being<sup>4</sup>). The notion of gratuitous implies an attitude of gratitude as it happens, for example, in the Andean cultures in which they thank the *Pachamama* and *Inti*<sup>5</sup> by holding ceremonies in which ritual offerings are given because of the blessings received (Estermann, 1998).

Since the average European considers their existence as substantial, it is difficult for them to think the substance as derived from a relation: that which does not have a substantial existence does not exist. This is the conclusion drawn by some intellectuals who try to philosophize, based on the findings of quantum physics: if there are no elementary particles (atom or whatever), there is nothing. According to one of Houellebecq's (1999, p.79) characters: “we should renounce to a concept of elementary particle having intrinsic properties when there is not any observation. In this case, a profound ontological vacuum has to be faced, ... renouncing definitely to the idea of an underlying reality.” Why not think that if there is no substance it is because there

is a relation; or, likewise, if there is no fundament, it is because there is gratuitousness? Unlike the main streams of European thought, the Andean, Bantu, and Eastern philosophies have no problem in accepting this fact (Dussel, 2001).

To shed light on this concept, we present the following example: the ecosystem is, for a European, either a sum of entities with a substantial existence that are related one another (a tree plus another tree, plus a river, plus the air, plus the earth, plus the animals... and so on), or it is conceived as a sort of mega-substance (*Gaia*, *Gea*) in which things, plants, fish, birds, minerals and ourselves are only parts of that great substance. Instead, in Andean metaphysics, things exist because they are in a relation: the *Pachamama* is not a substance that exists by itself—it is itself a relation (Estermann, 1998), a relation that is prior to substance. Similarly, in Bantu philosophy, a child has to be educated by the entire people, and a tree needs the whole ecosystem—to use the Western category—to grow. In other words, the child and the people exist, but not substantially but in relation, as the tree with respect to the ecosystem, and reciprocally.

Nowadays, societies are aware of the lack of a substantial fundament—a lack of fundament that goes beyond the mere uncertainty—assuming the radical contingency of the individual and life in common. In sum, they discover the radical contingency of the entire existence: it is the entity, but it could be the nothing too. Although several thinkers have been pointing out this matter for some time, only now these concerns are being addressed since they characterize the metaphysic *élan* of our hegemonic societies. All societies have a way of approaching the being and existence: the mentioned *élan* is not exclusive of the Europeans. Probably, the most radical question regarding the being has been made within the European matrix, since the most radical question concerning the nothing has probably also been European (Casalla, 1998). The fact is that, for other peoples, like Latin Americans, these questions have never concerned themselves so much, precisely because, for them, things *are not*, they *are-being*.

*“The rose is without ‘why’; it blooms simply because it blooms.”* If this phrase by Silesius touched Heidegger so much, it was not because in other regions nobody had posed this matter. On the contrary, it was because people tend to think more about what worries them than about what is taken for granted. Therefore, the concern about the fundament is a characteristic of those metaphysical *élan* who believe that what does not have fundament is absurd. But it is not a characteristic of those who think that what does not have fundament, is just because it is gratuitous. In fact, the entire Western philosophy cannot be included

in this model. However, we accept the validity of *geo-cultural and epochal paradigms*—as Scannone (2005) called them—which would exert more or less influence on the spirit of the times, depending on the different authors' perspectives.

*The neoliberal dilemma: Individualism or collectivism*

Classical authors of neoliberalism, such as Hayek, Nozick, or Popper, pose a basic dichotomy: either what exists (the *substance*) is the individual or what exists is the collectivity. One or the other: there is no such thing as a superior synthesis of this antagonism. For that reason, every concession made to the collective, even in terms of “social justice,” is only the beginning of a road that leads to serfdom (Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 1944). In political terms, the option would be liberalism or socialism. Latin American popular thinking does not share the Western obsession about finding in everything and to everything the essence or substance; instead, it is part of the philosophical traditions that consider relations prior to substance. From this viewpoint, it is possible to find adequate concepts to describe some Argentinian political alternative positions, which are generally and hastily defined as “populist” because they do not fit in the molds predetermined by classical liberalism, neoliberalism, or socialism within the European matrix.

*Society and individual from a relational perspective*

Indeed, from a relational perspective, it is possible to affirm that the people, the community, exist without denying the individual and vice versa. However, dominant European thought struggles to accept this concept. They would say that, if a relation exists, it is because there is “something” (substance) that relates to another thing. This explains why so many excellent contemporary political philosophers exert themselves to find the fundament of society and politics. When they do not find it, instead of accepting that things are just like that, they end up denying society and politics. If there is no fundament, it means that there is gratuitousness. Philosophical thought opened to other ways of understanding reality—such as the assumption of fraternity as the main concept to tackle politics and society—shows how sterile the obsessive search for a fundament is.

The category “relation” prior to substance is how our peoples understand the world and society. This does not mean that they support an “anti-substance” thinking. They consider that there are things and

that they have their substance, but assume that substance derives from the relation and not the other way around.

It is worth insisting that these ideas are the philosophical expression of knowledge and practices that peoples express more experientially than theoretically. In Alejandro Moreno's words (2005),

a man of the people is not a being in the world but an *experiential relation* that exists. It is not subjectivity, rationality or individuality but relation. In the relation, singularity, rationality and subjectivity deconstruct and construct – but not reconstruct – themselves.

It is not about overcoming the antinomy of collectivity versus individual, but to make explicit the permanent tension between them. Society is not the addition of subjects/substances, neither is the individual just a part of a mega-subject.

In this respect, a critical and non-naïve analysis of popular thinking, such as that developed by Kusch (2008), leads us to understand some prevailing conceptions of Argentinian popular sectors. Along with their load of resistance to individualistic, competitive and entrepreneur neoliberal subjectivity, they have the potential to resist and to propose that is worth analyzing. Clearly, naïve standpoints that consider all that is popular/Latin American as good, and everything modern/European as bad should be avoided. This type of approach does not have empirical validity, theoretical sense, or ethical foundation, so is not worth analysis. However, it is important to consider those aspects of popular thinking that give us the basis for examining the contemporary situation of Argentina. That said, this popular/relational conception adopts the ideals of modern democracies synthesized in the liberal trilogy of liberty-equality-fraternity, but re-signifies them by placing fraternity at the top of the reflexion.<sup>6</sup>

Romulus and Remus, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Tupi and Guarany, Manco Capac and his brothers: all around the world, we find myths of origin related to struggles among siblings, especially between brothers, that sometimes end up in fratricide. The daily experience of any parent of two or more children can confirm that siblings fight with each other. However, against all evidence, mothers insist on telling their children not to fight, but to love each other as siblings. Moreover, when two friends want to express that their relationship is very close and strong, they say that they are like brothers.<sup>7</sup>

The point is that sisterhood/brotherhood or fraternity may be understood in two different senses: what it actually is and what we think

it should be. In the first case, the struggle among siblings shows us a fact: the horizontal relationships encourage the conflict. In the second case, what we have is a desire: to avoid the conflict so that everyone can be happier. If the fraternity concept is extrapolated from the domestic field to the public one, when mentioning universal fraternity, we refer to either: a) the original condition of society—there is no father and no mother—therefore, conflict is always present, in a latent or manifest way; or b) the invoke of an ideal, an unattainable goal—a harmonious society in which everyone can freely display all their potential.

Accordingly, fraternity has two faces like Janus: one face looks with hope to the future we should construct, and the other one alertly observes the past from which we have been constructing this present. One face dictates an order; the other describes a datum. Paradoxically, the realistic face gives us the datum (the “given”) that nothing is given in advance and, consequently, everything is a matter of constructions that are never definitive; but they are the dynamic result of struggles and consensus, of dialogues and impositions. This conception both harmonious and conflictive is part of the most rooted political ideologies in Argentina, such as Peronism and radicalism, so difficult to understand in other countries.

Every extrapolation from the private to public arena has its risks and issues. For this reason, many people have discarded this concept as a useful political category. Hence, it should not be forgotten that fraternity is a catachresis: it does not refer to family. The temptation of thinking it as a metaphor is very strong. That is why its meaning is often trivialized. However, it is so profitable for understanding political ideologies and the practices of our social, union movements that it is worth running the risk of using it with the due precautions. The first risk is that, within a family, the verticality that parents established tends to dissolve the conflict. Instead, in the public field, there is not, and there has never been a father or mother: there is no person or group that may exercise “naturally” the parent’s role of establishing the law or of dissolving every antagonism. Universal fraternity warns us that life in common is a construction that depends on us, a primary and ideal reality to be reached: in the tension between these two ends, the collective existence is constructed, which does not allow any naivety. It shows us that we are people in its double sense: as *populus* or harmonious totality of those “above” and those “below”, of patricians and plebeians<sup>8</sup>.

Life in common is a collective construction. We are definitely not beautiful souls capable of living in a world free of conflicts once the “others” have been annihilated, the bastards that do not allow us to enjoy

this perfect world. There is no option: we have to take responsibility for ourselves. This is where fraternity may cause a disturbance. In consequence, it is set aside in comparison with “strong” principles such as liberty, equality, or justice. The problem is that those principles refer to “what ought-to-be,” while fraternity forces us to confront “what is,” what we are, or what we are being. Liberty and equality are no longer attributes of the substance “man” to become goods that can be obtained, kept, or lost. This fact disturbs those right-wingers who believe that societies are “naturally” stratified, as well as those left-wingers of enlightened vanguards who consider the subalternized people as children to whom they have to explain their condition of subjugation and to show the means to emancipate themselves. It also annoys others who prefer to ignore their responsibility hoping that “someone else would do something.” Fraternity forces us to face the fact that we are always necessarily responsible: we must respond to the others. If someone knocks at the door and there is an adult in the house, they would be the one to answer; but, as there is no adult, even our silence, our option of remaining silent is indeed an answer. All the same, it is rather ineffective because we cannot live always in silence and inside our houses, afraid of who may virtually knock at our doors. The excluded people from the feast knock at the doors of the satisfied who enclose themselves in private neighborhoods and build walls along the highways they commute back and forth from the city. Yet, the poor, the indigenous, the afro-descendants, the marginalized of every kind still knock at their doors every time they are left outside. From this perspective, fraternity leads us to re-think society and, thus, to resignify liberty, equality, and justice.

### *Liberty becomes liberation*

According to this relational perspective, liberty cannot be thought as a fixed status, but as a process. We “are” not free as if it would be a part of an apparent nature or human essence; but we are being more or less free as a result of struggles, agreements and consensuses that are always unstable. The history of Western thought shows a constant concern in relation to the defense of individual freedom from the power of institutions, especially political and religious ones (but not so much from the economic institutions) and, in consequence, power is considered the opposite of freedom. In contrast, from our point of view, power is the opposite of impotence, and liberty is the result of a process of power construction, particularly with respect to economic

and financial powers. As freedom is not a fixed status, but a part of a process, thus, freedom becomes liberation.

In other words, if we omit our unavoidably fraternal human condition, we may think that our freedom has been provided who knows by whom and since when, and that “your freedom ends where my nose begins.” In this case, to be completely free, the only inhabitant in the planet should be me, being the rest of the people the limit, the obstacle to the full and absolute exercise of my freedom. However, with fraternity we notice that it works otherwise. History indicates that liberty and particular liberties are conquered and kept by fighting shoulder to shoulder with others. Therefore, it is not a matter of possessing a substantial attribute, but of being part of a collective process. There are always references to life and to what is in common/ and to life in common, not to the being, but to the *be-being* (*estar siendo*). It is not a matter of finding a supposed “essence” of liberty, but of understanding that the definition of liberty, as it happens with every political concept, is a construction that results from a play of power, which, when considered assuming our fraternal condition, will bring to light elements of a strong heuristic and performative nature.

### *Equality as social justice*

The continuity and ubiquity of conflict and the supremacy of relation over substance show that it is not possible to achieve a “state of equality,” a society which is “essentially” equal. Instead, from this perspective, it seems more proper to understand this longing or desire for equality as struggles for social justice. We do not define social justice here. The same as what truly matters—love, freedom, time, life or space—social justice cannot be grasped or restricted within the boundaries of a conceptual definition. However, we will try to describe the prominent dimensions of social justice with respect to fraternity.

### *Distributive justice*

The social democracies of the middle of the last century, and the most widespread discourse of international agencies have privileged indicators such as the Gini coefficient and other similar indicators to “measure” social justice. Nevertheless, social justice cannot be reduced to a mere equality or equity with respect to wealth or income distribution. Considering the huge current inequalities of wealth and income, democracy and life in common are at risk in our planet.

However, distributive justice is not enough to achieve social justice; two other dimensions are also required.

### *Acknowledgment*

A homosexual man or woman, indigenous native, afro-descendant person, a Jew or a Latino can have as much money as a white and heterosexual man, but they are going to be discriminated against because of their ethnic condition, religious choice, or sexual orientation. Their rights would not be acknowledged *de jure* or *de facto*, and thus, they become victims of an injustice. Since this topic has been sufficiently analyzed by political theory and philosophy and, more precisely by cultural and gender studies, we will not expand on it.<sup>9</sup>

### *Contributive justice*

The professor, the executive, the retired public servant who receives a good pension and every year is honored does not suffer injustice from the two above-mentioned dimensions. Neither does the unemployed worker who receives an allowance or the businessman's wife who "lives for the family." Nevertheless, they know that they can contribute much more to society in general in several ways, not only economically or financially, but they do not have the opportunity to do it. This dimension, called "general justice" by medieval philosophy, was forgotten by Western modernity, because it considers the individual as a substance instead of a relation (with oneself, the others and the cosmos). We are referring to the dimension of social justice that consists in ensuring each one the right to their self-realization through their contribution to the others' realization.

Modern philosophy and science have an evident incapacity to notice this constitutive dimension of human beings (Mate, 2011). For that reason, they tend to reduce the need to do something for others to the previous dimension (seeking recognition) or to a form of narcissism. However, this is not the case: we all know people who dedicate their free time to work as volunteers without anyone knowing it. Someone who knits warm clothes to give to charity anonymously or those who donate money in secret are examples of it. But beyond these clear cases, a doctor who saves a life, do they not feel satisfied because of the mere fact that they have saved a life? Or is it the eagerness for recognition that drives them? In fact, it is not necessary to give more examples of this independent dimension of justice since the reader

has surely experienced sometime the feeling of being happier giving than receiving.

To sum up, if we adopt the hegemonic conception of freedom, we can easily understand power as the opposite of liberty. However, thinking about power in terms of liberation will lead us to interpret power as a necessary instrument for generating a social change. For that reason, the classical tension between liberty and equality dissolves away in Argentine popular political thinking, because liberation/process (not liberty/state) is conceptually assumed as the path to social justice.

An aspect to consider regarding social justice in Latin America in general, and in Argentina in particular, refers to the democratization of access to desired goods. That is, broadly speaking, the enjoyment of elites is linked to the non-enjoyment of the majority. That is part of a game generally accepted. In terms of a Republican song during the Spanish Civil war, it would be as follows: “Time is coming up / to turn the tables / for the poor to eat bread /and the rich just shit.” However, this is not what popular political parties from this region propose. They claim that the rich should still eat their bread, and that the poor should eat bread of the same quality, seated at a similar table and drinking the same wine as the rich. This is unbearable. This disrupts the rules of the game, which states that in order for a person to enjoy themselves, another should have no joy. For that reason, the first statement that the neoliberal rulers express is that “the party is over.” “They made you believe that you could live like that forever” is an expression repeatedly affirmed by “anti-populism” politician and social communicators.

### **Subject, people, state: toward a continental post-neoliberalism**

Universal fraternity entails the absence of a parent that provides meaning to life; meaning is the result of conflicts,<sup>10</sup> struggles and agreements among siblings. It is the result of a hegemonic construction, and not a pre-existing fundament. The fundament of society as such does not lie in anything stable; it is not a “substance,” it is constituted by the relational interweaving, which is, obviously, dynamic and contingent. In that dynamic, some sectors impose their conception of reality as “the reality” or, at least, as the right and true conception. Nevertheless, politics, economy, sexuality, as well as equalities and disparities, are not given by nature. Nothing is established once and for all. It is also about accepting that the field of *the political* cannot always be based on

dialogue—which is, instead, always recommendable for the field of politics and policies. The political field is founded without fundament.<sup>11</sup>

In core countries, there is always someone who believes that the problem of the absence of fundament can be solved through dialogue and consensus in relation to political decision-making processes. If we forget, indeed, the conflictive dimension of fraternity, we may easily end up taking the naïve stance that holds that “every conflict may be channeled if the parts involved defend their interests with intelligence.” This would be possible if the parts concerned were able to defend their interests wisely, but—as history and daily experience show—conflict tends to cloud the intelligence and, frequently, it is replaced by the most destructive passions. However, this is not the main obstacle for the channeling of conflicts. In fact, there could be an impartial third party that stays reasonable, and somehow manages a solution beneficial to all concerned. The problem is that nobody actually knows their own interest. There are a lot of tales and myths about the bad luck of those who have their desire fulfilled. That desire which we think is “in our own interest” is hardly such. Generally, it is the interest of hegemonic sectors of society.

Unfortunately, it is not true that “people understand each other by talking and can come to satisfactory agreements with all parts concerned.” This is not so, because, to make that possible, it would be necessary that all of them: a) know what they really want; b) know how to express effectively what they want; and c) that others understand fully that demand (Žižek, 2013). This problem escalates when we refer to collective demands instead of individual wishes: the undetermined third party takes part there. Thus, even if some people know what they really want through a deep knowledge of their selves, and the other person could understand and satisfy their demand through an open and sincere dialogue, there will always be others directly or indirectly affected by that decision.

The neglect of these aspects leads to the minimization of contemporaneous political, social, and economic conflict, becoming a matter of public debate in which people try to agree on propositions and definitions in order to achieve agreement and consensus. The bad news is that this matter is far more complex. The trap of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology of consumer capitalism—instead of traditional liberalism linked to a capitalism characterized by accumulation—is to make us believe that we always know what we want and that such wish emerges spontaneously from inside of every person. Yet, there is also good news: conflict is not a synonym of a “struggle to the death,” it is what makes us live in a certain society. An example that may be helpful

to explain the core of this thesis: without rivalry among football teams, that sport would not exist. The problem is that, in a society, there is not minute zero—a starting point—a previous moment to the match in which rules could be agreed. Instead, we are constantly playing according to rules that are imposed by those who have the power to do so; this is how hegemony functions. It is true that the lack of rules would be worse: the law is always an imposition of the strongest, but even they must somehow pretend that they are complying with the law. The inexistence of law is equivalent to the constant and explicit fulfillment of the mere will of the strongest.

The abovementioned leads us to pose the problem of the state. From Hobbes onwards—including the outstanding contribution of Hegel—as societies secularize, the state gradually takes the place of God. A God modeled on image and likeliness of the modern subject: male, one, sovereign, omnipotent. In consequence, if God is One and only secondarily Triune, the state is also One in first place and Triune in second place (the separation of power into three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial). God is sovereign; it is *super omnes*, it is over everything, *ergo* the state is sovereign. God is omnipotent, the state is omnipotent. In this context, the reference to popular sovereignty is a matter of mere demagoguery that lacks any fundament.

However, if instead of considering God as One, unique, exclusive, excludable, *super omnes*—a God of a totalizing totality—God is thought as Triune (a God that is a relation rather than a substance in the way the Latin American popular religiosity conceived it), and the state is considered a relation, new horizons can be opened. Up to now, sovereignty has been regarded as an attribute of the state. On the contrary, considering the state as a relation, sovereignty appears to be also constitutive of such relation and not an attribute of the substance. By this perspective, the sovereignty of the state can be understood “internally” (*ad intra*) as the relation among the three elements that make it up: territory, population and government. Thus, the government’s interaction with the people can be analyzed in terms of popular sovereignty; and when government and people interact with the territory, it can be studied in terms of ecological sovereignty.

From this standpoint, a state is, “externally” (*ad extra*), more sovereign when it is better connected to other states. Nowadays Argentina, to be truly a sovereign country, needs to interact closely with the countries of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). There is no true chance of being really sovereign without a relation with other states. This does not mean that there will not be conflicts among the

state members of a supranational organization. A fraternal conception of sovereignty does not suggest that states must behave properly with the others. It is just that no one can take the place of the parent because relations are horizontal; asymmetrical but horizontal relations, in the same terms as relations among siblings are constructed.

The foundational ideal of the leaders of the independence process, such as San Martín, Artigas, and Bolívar, was to construct a united Latin America. It was not a whim, an abstract idea suggested by academicians, or the result of an ideology: it was an ideal consistent with the most profound understanding and feeling of our peoples. In that context, there was not then or now any other more effective way of facing the interests contrary to the full realization of every person and people.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Translated into English by Lidia Unger, María Mercedes Palumbo, and Laura Celina Vacca.
- <sup>2</sup> One of the best-known expressions (though not the only one) is the popular theology of liberation which is in the basis of the doctrine established by Pope Francis (Cuda, 2016).
- <sup>3</sup> The verb “to be” (*ser*) is a particularity of the Indo-European languages that dramatically hampers the dynamic and unstable comprehension of the existence perceived, for instance, in the notion—widely used by Kusch and the Latin American philosophers—of “be-being” (*estar siendo*). Kusch (1922–79) is intentionally quoted here because he is one of the “damned philosophers.” Just the reference to the author during dictatorship—and even later—meant the exclusion from the academic field. Any internet search is enough to show the significant increase in interest in this author and in many others related to the “philosophy of liberation,” such as Enrique Dussel, Juan Carlos Scannone, Arturo Andrés Roig, Mario Casalla, Carlos Cullen, and Armando Poratti, just some of the Argentinian philosophers more representative of the different perspectives in this line of thought.
- <sup>4</sup> According to Kusch, *estar siendo* is the concept that defines the Latin American mode of existence. It must be noted that the term *estar siendo* is untranslatable to English; “to be-being” is the most accepted interpretation in the academic field. Likewise, the idea of *ser* (to be)—as the concept that defines the European mode of existence—is untranslatable in non-Indo-European languages.
- <sup>5</sup> *Pachamama* would be equivalent the Western concept of ecosystem and *Inti*, of the sun, but, in both cases, the reference is related to relational and complementary entities and not to substances, people or “things.”
- <sup>6</sup> It is understood as fraternity/sorority, given the importance that the popular thinking assigns to the complementarity principle. Within this principle, the masculine cannot be thought without the feminine, or vice versa (Estermann, 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> Strictly speaking, it is a catachresis—a figure of speech, a sort of metaphor. This expression refers to a word used with a different meaning from its original one, with the purpose of describing something that lacks a special name. For example, when we say the “neck” of a bottle or the “arm” of an armchair, we are not talking about the “neck” or the “leg” in the original sense, like the neck or leg of a living

being. For a detailed analysis of the implications of the concept of fraternity, see Del Percio (2014).

- <sup>8</sup> Briefly, *plebs* refers to a part of society composed of the poorest, but curiously, this term has the same etymology as *pleno* (full), *plenitud* (plenitude). We may ask ourselves whether this etymology is leading us to think about plenitude in relation to lack, and harmony in relation to conflict.
- <sup>9</sup> For an excellent critique on policies of recognition of indigenous people and Afro-Americans promoted by international organizations, see Gómez Michel (2014).
- <sup>10</sup> Regarding conflict as constituent, see Marchart (2009, p.126).
- <sup>11</sup> For an introduction to the “post-foundational” thinkers, especially “post-structuralists,” see Stavrakakis (2010) and Marchart (2009). With respect to the problem of the fundament in the Ancient Greeks from an Argentine popular philosophy point of view, see Poratti (1993).

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