

TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGY OF LIBERATION: A CRITICAL THEORY OF RACE AND THE FATE OF DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT – The article argues that the fate of democracy and the future of liberationist thought in Latin America are bound to a self-understanding of the correlative concepts of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity. In order to recast a Latin American philosophy of liberation, we must revisit thus autochthonous accounts of Marxist analysis and critical theory in their very genesis and phenomenological production of meanings.

KEYWORDS – Critical theory. Latin American democracy. Liberation. Phenomenology. Race theory.

ABSTRACT – O artigo argumenta que o destino da democracia e o futuro do pensamento liberacionista na América Latina dependem de uma autocompreensão dos conceitos correlativos de raça, etnicidade e identidade cultural. A fim de reformular o que seria uma filosofia latino-americana da libertação, é mister revisitar versões autóctones da análise marxista e da teoria crítica na sua própria gênese e produção fenomenológica de significados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE – Democracia latino-americana. Fenomenologia. Libertação. Teoria crítica. Teoria racial.

I

Let me begin with a couple of quotes from European travelers in Latin America. The first one stems from a French traveler, Louis Agassiz, who went to Brazil in 1865 on a scientific expedition:

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Let any one who doubts the evil of this mixture of races, and is inclined, from a mistaken philanthropy, to break down all barriers between them, come to Brazil. He [sic] cannot deny the deterioration consequent upon an amalgamation of races, more wide-spread than in any other country in the world, and which is rapidly effacing the best qualities of the white man, the Negro, and the Indian, leaving a mongrel nondescript type, deficient in physical and mental energy (apud SKIDMORE, 1974, p. 32).

The second quotation comes from Swedish travel writer Fredrika Bremer's 1851 journal during her stay in Cuba:

"I am told here that nothing but severity will answer in the treatment of slaves; that they always must know that the whip is over them; that they are ungrateful people... It is amid circumstances such as these that one may become enamored of the ideal communities of socialism, and when men such as [Amos Bronson] Alcott seem like the saviors and high-priests of the earth... How beautiful appear to me associated brotherhoods on the earth, with all their extravagance of love, when compared with a social state in which human powers are so awfully abused, and human rights trampled under foot!" (apud HAHNER, 1998, p. 76f.)

The contrasting views expressed here typically highlight the Eurocentric approach to the problem of the Latin American Other, either to depreciate the Native, indigeneous peoples, enslaved Africans, and mixed-race inhabitants of the subcontinent or to thematize the Other of imperial domination and colonial conquests. Hence, like Maria Graham, Flora Tristan, and other European women who traveled to Latin America in the 19th century, Bremer succeeds in critically overcoming what Mary Louise Pratt has dubbed the "imperial eyes" model and its self-other dichotomies, as their travel writings unveil an interesting cross-fertilization of class, race, and gender perspectives, paving the way for transculturation, hybrid cultures, and the hopes for egalitarianism, mutual recognition, and the celebration of diversity in the very search for cultural identity (PRATT, 1992).

A Latin American phenomenology of liberation will seek precisely to rescue these race-gender correlates which were somewhat neglected or downplayed by the original, first-generation writings on liberation, so as to pave the way for the future of liberation and deliver its promises of emancipatory democracy. While critical race theory started from a critique of liberalism (DELGADO and STEFANCIC, 2000), its US American-oriented analyses have inevitably been also targeted by Latin American liberationist thinkers, even as they tend to get closer to a critical-theoretical account of liberation. In this sense, critical race theory stands somewhat closer to critical legal studies than to liberationist approaches to critical theory in Latin America, in spite of

the Marxian-inspired class reductionisms that tend to eclipse race and gender conflicts in the latter (UNGER, 1986). In this brief paper, I am not as much interested in revisiting the archeology of race theories in Latin America as calling into question some North Atlantic, paternalist approaches to Latino and Hispanic identity overall and the rendering of Latin American philosophy as just another Department of State scholarly accomplishment. After all, as Gracia remarked, “Latinos and non-Latinos belong to different social groups, but these groups are not homogeneous and should not be regarded as foreign to each other,” insofar as “they are not like nations” (GRACIA, 2008, p. 210). Therefore, in this paper I am rather focusing on the Latin American recasting of a critical-theoretical account of liberation that takes the phenomenology of sociality and the social phenomena of racism, racialization, and race relations seriously. Even though Latin American Liberation Philosophy has systematically dealt with the question of the Other from its beginnings in the 1970s, the preferential option for the poor and the Marxist analysis employed by liberation theologians and philosophers in the 1960s throughout the 70s and 80s tended to eclipse gender, racial, ethnic, and environmental issues, which only came to the fore in the 90s and in this new century. Witness the developments of public discussions and debates on the scope of liberationist thought which have been taking place in different editions of the World Social Forum from 2001 through 2010. The shift from economic determinism towards cultural, social, and ecological analyses that take into account problems of race, ethnicity, gender, environment, and sustainability broadly construed characterizes the kind of phenomenological, perspectival approach to Latin American philosophy that I am proposing here. I am thus dividing my brief presentation on Latin American Philosophy in three main axes, namely, Philosophy of Race, Liberation Philosophy, and Critical Theory. Let me formulate, from the outset, the guiding thesis of this essay: the fate of democracy and the future of liberation in Latin America are bound to our own self-understanding of the correlative concepts of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity – and as much could be said of the gender and environmental correlated conceptions. This is both an empirical, historical constatation and a normative statement, and even though I cannot elaborate on this thesis here, I am assuming that a social, phenomenological perspectivism succeeds in reconciling cultural relativism with both normative and agonistic accounts of morality, analogous to the approach suggested by Alcoff’s “Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment” (BERNASCONI, 2001, p. 267-283). Furthermore, I only emphasize the first person plural in order to stress the Latin American perspective we are speaking from, as opposed to a supposedly neutral, universalistic standpoint often

adopted by philosophers when dealing with race problems in American and European societies. Even as we realize that “democracy”, “race”, and “Latin America” are themselves European inventions, one cannot talk about “race” without a systematic hermeneutics of suspicion toward its Eurocentric origins, interests, and ends (BERNASCONI and LOTT, 2000). In phenomenological terms, both the *arché* and the *telos* of any theory of race translate and betray geopolitical, economic strategies of domination. From the very start, I am thus fully endorsing the premise that no account of race can be dissociated from a critique of power and a social, historical ontology of ourselves. This simply means that a Latin American philosophy of race is inevitably bound to both politics and social psychology, or, in Foucauldian terms, to power and subjectivation. It is my contention here that a Latin American account of race and racial relations must go beyond the *dialogues de sourds* between modernists and postmodernists and the ongoing debates between liberal, republican, procedural, and communitarian accounts of democracy and self-other relations. My working hypothesis is that the social, political gaps that one finds in most otherwise interesting proposals can be filled in by a phenomenology of liberation that takes both a philosophy of race and critical theory into account. What I have dubbed elsewhere the phenomenological deficit of critical theory allows thus for a phenomenological recasting of a philosophy of liberation, precisely at the level of a weak social constructionism that mitigates and mediates some of the too-strong, objectivist claims of Marxism in liberation philosophy and some of the too-weak, subjectivist “representations” of postcolonial and cultural studies. In this sense, the future of liberation philosophy in Latin America hinges upon the very fate of democracy, itself bound to the ups and downs of globalized capitalism in developing societies. Insofar as there is no ontological commitment to an essentialist universalism in globalization, liberation, ethnic studies or world ethics (*Weltethos*), I prefer to think here of a pragmatic perspectivism in semantic, phenomenological terms.

II

Even though one might be careful enough to avoid any dogmatic definition of race and ethnicity, I must confess in a straightforward gesture that I am adopting a weak social constructionist version that fits quite well into social scientists and historians’ approaches to Latin American identity and culture. As George Reid Andrews put it bluntly, “race is not a scientific fact but a social, cultural, and ideological construction” (ANDREWS, 2004, p. 6). Of course, from a philosophical

standpoint, it would be, however, too simplistic to simply eliminate “race” from any scientific talk about natural history, social evolution, and ethnology. This is neither meant to simply discard whatever importance biological, genetic variables might have for some scientific analyses nor to merely equate race and ethnicity, but within the perspective of a social philosophy, I am committed here to a weak social constructionist that reflects a pragmatic, phenomenological perspectivism. I believe that a Latin American philosophy of race aims at both deconstructing racial democracy myths (which is in itself a deconstruction of scientific, historical conceptions of race) and liberating narratives (deconstruction of Eurocentric myths of liberation, including democracy, liberalism, and socialism), without being reduced to any aristocratic, libertarian or nihilistic view. In this sense, I think liberation philosophy recasts Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault’s hermeneutics of suspicion in normative-agonistic terms that take into account the mixed blessings of critical theory both in the agonistic, negative dialectics of first-generation exponents (Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Bloch, Marcuse) and in the normative claims of social philosophers of the second and third generations (Habermas, Honneth).

I think that Andrews has correctly understood the peculiar, paradoxical contribution of the Latin American ethnic, racial makeup in terms of the idea of mixed race and miscegenation, which has been evoked not only by European travellers but also by the very proponents of a certain Latin American identity. If Bartolomé de las Casas, often regarded as the patron saint of liberation, exemplifies the universalistic strain within the synthetic paradigm of race, and José Martí the particularistic, revolutionary one, José Vasconcelos combines these approaches in his utopian project of a cosmic race. Even if we don’t regard “utopian” as “Romantic” in a pejorative sense, I agree with Carlos Fuentes’s critical take on Latin American, self-deceptive racial myths, epitomized by José Enrique Rodó’s *Ariel*: there is indeed a tendency towards reverse prejudice, either to demonize Anglo-American or to romanticize Iberian-Latin influences. The myth of racial democracy can be thus evoked here in order to make sense of *mestizaje* (racial mixing)¹ and the deconstruction of purity, as there is obviously no such a thing as a pure mestizo. Among Latin American social pathologies relating to myths of racial purity, the most intriguing ones were the whitening and browning that reflect Latin American self-understandings of their own identity and difference

¹ I am using the term “mestizaje” (Portuguese, *mestiçagem*; French, *métissage*) to allude to all possible mixed-racial combinations so as to comprise not only European and Amerindians, but also Africans and mixed-raced groups.

problems. Still, we must grant that both Las Casas and Martí engaged in moral projects that were ultimately political and emancipatory. As Vacano pointed out, “the belief that beneath apparently accidental and superficial dissimilarities lies a basic human sameness that although it may lie dormant must be made explicit, is a particularly Latin American conception of race” (GRACIA, 2007, p. 2). It is also a notion that borders on the concept of a people or ethnicity: for Martí a race is not only defined by its phenomenal characteristics, but by its cultural, historical life. Therefore, the essence or what others might call the universal substance or underlying set of properties is the same for all races, if one thinks of the “human race” broadly construed. Martí does not elaborate on this point, but it seems that a spiritual and moral desire to be free is what is common to all men. We can easily infer that most Latin American accounts of race ultimately refer to a philosophical anthropology and humanist conceptions. The dramatic and traumatic encounter of Iberian and other European colonizers and travelers with Native, indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans in Latin America was not only decisive for the emergence of racially mixed identities but also for the spectacularization of tropical, anthropofagic subcultures and the consolidation of a self-identity of exotic cannibalism. I agree thus with Velazco y Trianosky in that “to be a mestizo [in Latin America] is clearly not to begin from the experience of racelessness. In this respect the Latin American struggle to liberate oneself and one’s community through the subversive reinterpretation of mestizo identity is much more akin to the struggles of African Americans than it is to the in-between experience faced by Hispanic immigrants to the United States” (VELAZCO Y TRIANOSKY, 2010, p. 295). Furthermore, a Latin American philosophy of race challenges the hyphenated-American and typically state-regulated immigration-oriented conceptions of racial policies meant to reflect and determine imaginable identities (CORLETT, 2003, p. 72f).

Because of variously conceiving of a pure race or pure conceptions of race, racism will inevitable arise. Hence, the deconstructing motif of mestizaje or mixed race proves to be a quite pervasive one as a countermovement, as it were, to inevitable surges of racism. In effect, most Latin American philosophers would agree that Latin American identity seems to favor such a privileged conception of mixed races through the very contingencies that led to the development of mestizos, mulattos, morenos, pardos, zambos and all kinds of mixed-racial combinations in the subcontinent. In this sense, Linda Alcoff has rightly attacked Samuel Huntington’s controversial remarks about Hispanics and Latin American immigrants having to become like Anglo-Americans

in order to accomplish the American Dream.² As Stephen Satris also denounced, racial supremacy unveils the white qua pure as opposed to the colored other (ZACK, 1993, p. 54). After all, the Other will always be a threat whenever one takes ethnic identity as an exclusivist view of homogeneous, fixed cultural traits or ritual features such as religious, customs, daily practices. In effect, if there is anything universal – not necessarily eligible for a Kantian ideal of universality – it is racism or racist conceptions of race, regardless of scientific and ideological justifications (BERNASCONI, 2001, p. 12ff). The Rawlsian distinction between concepts and conceptions (to oppose his own conception of justice as fairness to competing concepts of justice, such as folk concepts of a sense of justice and theoretical accounts) has recently been evoked by Joshua Glasgow's *A Theory of Race* (2009), which sought to recast the normative grounds of the semantic-ontological problem of race, by propounding Racial Reconstructionism as a third-way substitutionism between the Anti-Realism of eliminativist conceptions of race (i.e. that we should eliminate race-thinking entirely, e.g. Appiah, Blum, Corlett, Zack) and the Realism of anti-eliminativists who advocate some form of Racial Conservationism (Du Bois, Outlaw, Sundstrom, Taylor). According to Glasgow, "the race debate is about whether to eliminate or conserve contemporary, public, folk racial discourse". In order to make sense of folk concepts of race, however, specialists in racial theory tend to rely on what historical experts mean by "race" (GLASGOW, 2009, p. 42). In order to avoid normative and empirical gaps between the thick semantics of scientific, biological accounts and the thin conceptions of social constructionists, Glasgow resorts to a Rawlsian reflective equilibrium that seeks to strike a normative balance between our theoretical, categorical, and possible case intuitions to warrant modifications in our theories (for example, when evident mixed-race identities push us to eliminate the one-drop rule), and vice-versa, as our policies and practices are affected by our theoretical conceptions. Even though I find Glasgow's proposal of a Folk Empirical Theory highly original and seducing, I believe that its semantic indeterminacy of race leaves much to be desired. Even if one grants that it is not a matter of simply replacing one term with another, say, politically correct, in order to denounce racial slurs and various forms of racism, there remains the semantic-ontological problem of the social interactions and use of language in intersubjective, everyday

² Samuel Huntington, *Who are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), p. 243, apud Alcoff, Linda Martin, "Comparative Race, Comparative Racisms," in *Black Ethnicity/ Latino Race?* edited by Jorge Gracia, Cornell University Press, 2007.

practices, dealings, and communication – what has been identified, since Husserl and Schutz, with the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) and practical interplays of the familiar and the strange (*Heimwelt* and *Fremdwelt*) in a phenomenology of sociality, thoroughly cultural and historical (STEINBOCK, 1996, p. 198). It seems that a crucial social, phenomenological deficit betrays thus the normative gap between Glasgow's articulation of ontology and semantics – to my mind, a frequent blind spot in many analytic accounts. Whether racial terms purport to refer to natural or social kinds, so that the ontological is said to be prior to the normative, whether the semantic is manifest prior to the ontological and our task mainly consists in establishing normativity and finding an adequate ontological and semantic framework, so as to eliminate biological pretensions and semantic distortions, we still have to face the social reality of racism. It seems, instead, that racism must be tackled from the three fronts at once: ontological, intersubjective, and semantic-linguistic. This is precisely what I have dubbed a phenomenological correlation that takes the three perspectives as conceptual framework references to map and address the question, which Glasgow has correctly raised: what do we mean by race today? As it could be argued in terms of a philosophy of liberation, we cannot simply discard historical, empirical conceptions of race, however wrong and misleading they were, precisely because of our commitment to moral normativity. In my own understanding of human reality, history has taught us both particularism and universalism, both cultural relativism and moral normativism. History does teach us some great, valuable things, of truly moral value, but, echoing Arnold Toynbee's dictum, we are bad students of history. In order to reread the making of Latin American identities from history's underside, we must revalue all values, as it were, precisely because no value was positively given in the first place (ALCOFF and MENDIETA, 2003, p. 407 ff.). No one in her sound mind dares to call into question today the moral evils of racism as historically recorded in genocides, slavery, ethnic persecutions, and monstrous events such as European pogroms and the Holocaust (*Shoah*). One cannot fix the moral errors of the past but we all (Latin Americans, Americans, Asians, Africans, and Europeans alike) can responsibly avoid repeating the same historical, moral errors. This certainly hinges upon a moral view of the world, as Nietzsche suspected, but this poses no problem, as I am assuming that moral realism, in the least analysis, cannot be sustained: there are no moral facts, only moral interpretations. Anti-realism in ethics and political philosophy can be thus said to be correlated to the historical realism of events and social institutions. *Mutatis mutandis*, a weak version of social constructionism is anti-realist to the extent that it refuses universalism,

it resists essentialism, and it refers back to the empirical realism of particular, historical facts and social ontology. To quote Naomi Zack's take against biological racism, "there are no scientific facts about race that support the ordinary concept of race. There are historical facts about 'race' as a social concept" (ZACK, 1993, p. 10).

III

As pointed out in the first part of my paper, folk conceptions of race – in Latin America, in the US and elsewhere – assume, in our common lifeworlds, that there are whites, blacks, Asians, and indigenous peoples (usually identified as Indians, Native Americans or Amerindians, in Latin America). *Grosso modo*, geographical, historical, and cultural (especially, ethnic and linguistic) features would be decisive here. Color perceptions might vary, but color does play a decisive role – especially in Latin America – and it has often been more associated with biological as opposed to social, ethnic features. Hence, gradual variations in things like skin color, hair texture, or bone structure, although not allowing for a neat distinction of human races, seem to refer to something real or natural (biological features, such as dark vs. light skin) as opposed to racial prejudice, discrimination, racism, which betray the social construction of racial concepts and are also to be found in self-identity and self-understandings of race, such as in US-American and Latin American conceptions. By stressing the paradoxical self-perceptions of *mestizaje* and racial ideologies of whitening and browning in Latin America, I think that we can now better understand my strategy in recasting a deconstructing view of liberation philosophy. It is generally assumed that the philosophy of liberation emerged with the publication of five volumes on the ethics of Latin American liberation, written by Enrique Dussel between 1970 and 1975 (*Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana*). According to Dussel, we can divide the historical conception and developments of Liberation Philosophy in four main periods, following the European invasion of the 16th century (DUSSEL, 1996, p. 2):

1. The critique of the conquest (1510-53): "implicit" Liberation Philosophy
2. The philosophical justification of the first emancipation (1750-1830)
3. The "third Liberation Philosophy being articulated now" (since 1969)
 - 3a. Antecedents: José Carlos Mariátegui, the Cuban Revolution of 1959.
 - 3b. First explicit phase: from 1969 to 1973 ("stage of constitution")
 - 3c. Second phase: from 1973 to 1976 ("the stage of maturation")
 - 3d. Third stage: from 1976 to 1983 ("the stage of persecution, debate, confrontation")

4d. Fourth stage: “up to the the present... the stage of growth and response to new problematics” – where Mendieta, Alcoff and others have situated the political-philosophical problem of liberation vis à vis critical theory (ALCOFF and MENDIETA, 2000; MENDIETA, 2003a). My own self-understanding and critical appropriation of liberation philosophy is to be situated right here, at the intersection of Latin American liberation with the semantic, pragmatic transformations of Critical Theory from its first utopian, negative critique of technological, capitalist domination towards the theory of communicative action and recognition to be found in Habermas and Honneth. In effect, to the extent that it systematically seeks “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (HORKHEIMER, 1982, p. 244), the social philosophy of praxis associated with the Frankfurt School, known as Critical Theory (*Kritische Theorie*), as opposed to “traditional” theory, can be fairly characterized as a liberationist critique of totalitarianism and late capitalism’s structures of oppression and social pathologies. It is no wonder that several thinkers relating to the Frankfurt School, such as Benjamin, Bloch, Fromm, and Marcuse, exerted indeed a decisive influence upon Latin American liberation theologians in their struggles for recognition amid military dictatorships and authoritarian violation of human rights in the 60s, 70s and 80s. The arduous paths leading from authoritarian to democratizing lifeworlds in Latin America attest to the normative thrust implicit in the so-called “transition to democracy,” whose structural transformation properly deserves to be described and understood in critical-theoretical terms as an alternative to both revolutionary and reformist models. On the other hand, as Bresser-Pereira has argued, it remains to be shown, elsewhere but particularly in Latin America, how one can get actual democratic institutions, an egalitarian political culture and a democratic ethos without presupposing a capitalist, bourgeois revolutionary process (just like the English, American, and French revolutions led to the establishment of economic and political liberalism in these countries). (BRESSER-PEREIRA, 2009) That being said, the so-called Marxist analysis used by liberation theologians and philosophers must be critically reexamined, beyond the facile polarizations of Cold War ideologies. In effect, the grassroots movements associated with third-world struggles for liberation transcended theological circles and Latin American territories, as attest the educational, social, and political activism led by Paulo Freire, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Frantz Fanon, and then metal worker leader Lula da Silva (Brazil’s current president). The liberationist appropriation of Frankfurt thought is

quite problematic, to say the least, and the equation of the theological movement with a supposedly relevant “philosophy of liberation” is, to my mind, as misleading and problematic as the idea of a Christian philosophy. Nevertheless, some of the first-generation liberation theologians were also trained as philosophers and did write and publish seminal works on a certain philosophy of liberation. Enrique Dussel, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Juan Carlos Scannone were among the most important representatives of such a constellation. Other thinkers, such as Leopoldo Zea, Augusto Salazar Bondy, Arturo Roig, and Horacio Cerutti could be also mentioned, but I am particularly interested in Ofelia Schutte’s contributions to an ongoing intercultural, interdisciplinary conception of liberation philosophy, which tends to depart from Dussel’s post-Heideggerian, Levinasian reformulation of a Marxist ethics of liberation and takes into account recent developments in Latin American philosophy of race and ethnicity, esp. in light of the contributions by Linda Martín Alcoff and Jorge Gracia. I am deliberately leaving Eduardo Mendieta as I tend to side with him in my critical-theoretical approach to the phenomenology of liberation (MENDIETA, 2003b).

From a Latin American liberationist perspective, we must inevitably start from a given historical, social condition of oppression, colonization, and domination. The social ontology at issue, as Dussel reminds us, is to be thought, as it were, *in der Praxis*, both in its material, economic conditions and in its historical, existential openness toward social transformation, as already thematized by Marcuse’s utopian project of liberation, successfully combining a Hegelian reading of Marx with a post-Heideggerian reading of alterity (esp. Levinas and Sartre). “Liberation”, as Dussel and the earlier liberation thinkers pointed out, emerges first of all as a radical hermeneutic, semantic turning-point within the Latin American social reality that drastically changed after the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959. In order to counter communism, there were military coups all over the subcontinent, with a little help from the CIA and US national security ideologies. In fact, many of the greatest phenomenologists in Latin America were forced into exile because of military regimes that took power in Argentina (1962-1963, 1966-1973, 1976-1983), Brazil (1964-1985), Chile (1973-1990), and Uruguay (1973-1985). The most important cultural movement in Latin America in the second half of last century was thus closely tied to peasants and grassroots, social movements which sought to resist military authoritarianism. Many Continental thinkers related to phenomenology (such as Sartre, Levinas, Ricoeur, and Foucault) or to the Frankfurt School (Benjamin, Bloch, Marcuse, Apel, Habermas) were then evoked

by liberation thinkers in the 60s, 70s, and 80s (Alves, Gutiérrez, Boff, Dussel). It is very interesting to recall that Foucault's lectures on biopower and biopolitics in the 1970s were then articulated (some of them, for the first time, in several talks he gave in Latin America), as he attempted to investigate how racial struggles, race wars, and racial discourses were used by governmental institutions to manage entire populations as another systemic form of normalization. Even though Dussel mentions some of Foucault's archeological and genealogical contributions to critical analyses in Latin American struggles for liberation, he seems to dismiss them, together with Habermas's critique of ideology, as still belonging to European analytic and dialectical conceptions that failed to bridge theory and praxis, as neither takes into account the Marxian continuum between social life and economic conditioning, particularly reified in alienated labor and false consciousness.

As I have shown elsewhere, the critique of late capitalism and the ongoing democratization of emerging societies and developing countries remain a complex process that has engaged diverse segments of civil society (DE OLIVEIRA, 2004). Now, I think that Dussel has correctly identified some of the difficulties inherent in the Habermasian systemic-lifeworldly paradoxes of modernity. I also believe that Dussel has convincingly refused to embrace a Foucauldian-like postmodernist demonization of social institutions. However, I am not convinced that his ethics of liberation has sufficiently explored some of the very problems that both Foucault and Habermas unveil in their respective attempts to account for the contradictions and paradoxes of modernity, in order to make a case for liberation in systemic and lifeworldly terms. For one, Dussel seems to avoid dealing with the normative and sociological deficits that Habermas and Honneth have rightly spotted in the first-generation accounts of critical theorists, namely, the very idea of a democratic ethos that is missing in most egalitarian accounts that tend to downplay individual freedoms and civil rights. On the other hand, both Foucault and Habermas have offered insights into the technological transformations that have revolutionized our geopolitical, juridical views of society, socialization, and power relations. Finally, both Foucault and Honneth have renewed a pragmatist approach to self-development and intersubjective accounts of alterity and recognition that allows for interesting rapprochements with psychology and ethnology.

I thus fully endorse Ofelia Schutte's critical theory of liberation as she sets out to "understand the relationship between liberation, cultural identity, and Latin American social reality from the standpoint of a historically rooted critical philosophy" (SCHUTTE, 1993, p. 1). In effect, for Schutte the quest for cultural identity is precisely what brings about

a philosophy of liberation, whose ultimate goal is “to provide methods of critical analysis and models for practical action [... so as] to defend the cultural, political, and economic integrity of the people of the region” (SCHUTTE, 1993, p. 173f.). Furthermore, beyond the properly social, political dimensions of liberation Schutte argues for a view of liberation that “reaches also into the personal”, including thus “a psychological and existential component to the liberation process” (SCHUTTE, 2004, p. 184). Hence Schutte critiques Dussel's totalizing, dualistic approach to the task of liberation (according to which the Other's morally good alterity must overcome the absolute evil of the dominating Totality). Schutte ends up unmasking the supposedly radical thrust of its liberatory program, as it unveils a metaphysical, idealist, and essentialist conception of power, akin to Mariátegui's economic determinism in his approach to “the problem of the Indian,” as the problem of race is not properly thematized in philosophical terms. Dussel seems to go a step further but remains somewhat hostage to the materialist Marxist analysis insofar as the oppression of the Amerindian belongs to a broader framework of systemic oppression.

Now, Dussel has of course revised his own position, following Schutte's critical remarks, and as it was pointed out before, there have been substantial shifts within liberationist thought so as to include environmental, ethnic, race- and gender-related issues in their discussions on liberation. I firmly believe that, insofar as it remains bound to the fate of Latin American democratic institutions, the future of liberation must take the deconstructing path of a critical, social philosophy of race whose normative and empirical fields of interdisciplinary, intercultural research hinge upon the phenomenological correlation of a social ontology, an intersubjective theory of alterity, justice, and recognition, and a moral grammar of liberation. After all, a normative-democratic model of liberation is not necessarily opposed to an agonistic one, insofar as it is to be accomplished not only by social movements from below (such as the landless workers and the liberationist ecclesial communities) let alone by governors, the elites or intellectuals, as it were, from above, but ultimately by civil society as a whole and its reflective commitments to solidarity and networks of social cooperation. It is in this sense that different social philosophers such as Foucault, Habermas, and Honneth can contribute to our own search of a new way of doing social phenomenology. It is thus by undertaking anew the radical hermeneutic turn inherent in Liberation Philosophy, by deconstructing liberation both in a pro-active, constituting and in a passive, historically-constituted sense, that a Phenomenology of Liberation seems to be in order in Latin America today. In effect, to a certain extent, one cannot speak of Latin American philosophy in the same

way that we usually refer to, say, French, British, German or American philosophy, as both the factual and modal claims that “there is or there could be a characteristically Latin American philosophy” remain under suspicion (NUCCETELLI, 2003, p. 524). As Gracia pointed out, it turns out that the phrase “‘Latin American philosophy’ (*filosofía latinoamericana*) in Latin America is taken to be inferior, weak, and derivative, in comparison with ‘European’ or ‘American’ philosophy” (GRACIA, 2005, p. 415). And yet it seems reasonable to speak of Liberation Philosophy as one of the best and most original samples of Latin American philosophy – in the way, say, one might refer to Cartesian rationalism, British empiricism, German idealism or American pragmatism as established schools and trends in these countries. Therefore, the moral and political philosophy proposed and developed by several neo-Marxist and social thinkers in Latin America constitutes an important chapter in the formation of Latin American identity, hence the importance of taking race and ethnicity seriously. As we take into account Schutte’s perspectival and Gracia’s metaphysical approaches as non-essentialist takes on race and ethnicity, not only in Latin America but also in the US, we may as well move towards what would be a Pan-American conception of Hispanic or Latino identity, or a Latino pan-identity in the very quest of liberation. If a wide reflective equilibrium allows for such a pan-ethnic identity within different comprehensive views, say, of mixed-raced Native Americans, Amerindians, Afro-Latin, African-Americans, mulattoes, zambos and others, we come full circle in our own attempt to establish the correlation between ontology, subjectivity, and language. Since race and ethnicity do not have fixed contours, as they change over time with the very dynamics of cultural, demographic, and social transformations, we may speak of diasporic, hybrid conceptions of race and ethnicity that not only overlap on many occasions but also influence each other, even as they point to their paradoxical indeterminacy (BENHABIB, 2002, p. 194; GARCIA CANCLINI, 1995, p. 14). It is not so much a semantic problem or a realist predicament of sorts – whether biological or social kinds – that could be made reducible to ontological or linguistic commitments (*ethnos*, *genos*, nations, tribes, and peoples), as it is fundamentally a social problem that entails intersubjective thinking, normativity, and a critique of power. As a classical example we might evoke here the so-called three-race account found in the Hebrew Biblical story of the Sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth), that was later appropriated by racist, ideological narratives such as Gobineau’s, along the lines of Foucault’s contention that the race war “is not a clash between two distinct races...[but] the splitting of a single race into a super-race and a sub-race” (*Il faut défendre la société*, in FOUCAULT, 1997, p. 61).

IV

Now, the phenomenological deficit of critical theory ultimately unveils communicative networks and lifeworldly practices that resist systemic domination, as we have learned from Foucault's critique of power, especially in light of his recently published *Cours au Collège de France* on subjectivation and recasting Habermas's and Honneth's readings. Hence, this phenomenological deficit holds both for Honneth in the dynamics of recognition and for Habermas, in his recourse to communicative action. In order to settle ongoing struggles for liberation and recognition neither liberal nor socialist proposals for social peace (contractarian, procedural, communitarian, agonistic and others) seem to sufficiently account for the phenomenological tensions between identity and difference, sameness and otherness, the abstract and the concrete, the familiar and the alien, parts and whole (HONNETH, 1991). This is precisely what we have characterized as concrete tensions between private and public interests, material and ideological relations, theoretical and practical intents, in a word, what Honneth has characterized as "social pathologies," following Marx's highly original approach to the existing contradictions, shortcomings, and inequalities in the capitalist societies of his own times. (HONNETH, 1996) A phenomenology of liberation must thus carry out the radical hermeneutic, deconstructive thrust of its emancipatory project in the following programmatic terms:

1. Insofar as it realizes and fulfills itself *qua* static, genetic and generative phenomenology, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology may be regarded as a proto-hermeneutics, paving the way to Heidegger's hermeneutic turn.
2. Only by means of a phenomenological hermeneutics can we rescue the fundamental sense of ontology, so as to avoid ontic and essentialist reductions, insofar as human modes of being (i.e., pertaining to *Dasein* as *In-der-Welt-sein*), actions and activities overall (*praxis*) cannot be reduced to a mere theoretical presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) or "poietical" readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*), like other beings in nature (stones and living beings) and fabricated (artifacts, artworks, and human-made things), so that our world-disclosing techniques and practices toward worldless and poor-in-world beings foster our own development and self-understanding, as we relate to ourselves and to our environment. Human environment is essentially social, historical, and cultural, hence a correlation of self-understanding and technique underlies the ongoing domination of nature and struggles for recognition as an interplay of the will to power.

3. Deconstruction is a radical hermeneutics: since there is no such a thing as a transcendental signified we are always already situated in relation to the very moments of signification in our social reproduction through social representations, symbolic, cultural, and theoretical concepts and philosophemes (in Derrida's Nietzschean terms, metaphoricity, *différance*).
4. The main task of a Phenomenology of Liberation is to think the unthought-of in the very impossibility of justice (assuming that justice to come, *justice à venir*, is the quasi-Messianic motif of ongoing struggles for liberation) within the limits of the possible (power). The social utopian horizons of liberation cannot fulfill or exhaust democratic, egalitarian claims and struggles for mutual recognition, beyond self-deceptive mechanisms of social control and technologies of the self.
5. By effecting a rapprochement between the procedural conceptions of a *reflective equilibrium* (J. Rawls) and the *lifeworld* (J. Habermas) we aim at a hermeneutics of normativity correlated to the facticity of a democratic ethos inherent in a pluralist, political culture, capable of integrating semantic and pragmatic aspects of a diversity of practices and codifications (*modus vivendi*) that subscribe to possible, actual, and imaginable *overlapping consensus*es, especially when dealing with universalizable questions of human rights and public policies.
6. We can thus seek to revisit the conception of a postnational, democratic ethos, including its different versions of *deliberative democracy* (Rawls, Cohen, Fishkin, Habermas) so as to recast the (Habermasian) problem of *juridification* (*Verrechtlichung*), beyond its original pejorative, negative sense, associated with the economic, financial, and administrative reductionisms that one might find, say, in a neoliberal, corporate globalization qua technical, systemic colonization of the lifeworld. A phenomenology of liberation rehabilitates in formal-pragmatic terms a positive juridification insofar as it articulates a social ontology with intersubjective struggles for recognition and a grammar of liberation, beyond the reification of labor and productive relations (Habermas, Honneth).
7. Following Foucault, Apel, and Habermas, the three paradigms of ontology, subjectivity, and language are said to be co-constitutive and interdependent, insofar as they account for the problem of the social reproduction of the modern, rationalized lifeworld through the differentiated models of a sociological descriptive phenomenology, of a hermeneutics of subjectivation, and of a

formal-pragmatic discourse theory. Just as a Kantian-inspired “transcendental semantics” accounts for the articulation of meaning (“*Sinn und Bedeutung*”, in Kant’s own terms) in the sensification (*Versinnlichung*) of concepts and ideas as they either refer us back to intuitions in their givenness (*Gegebenheit*) of sense or are said to be “realizable” (*realisierbar*) as an objective reality (since ideas and ideals refer, of course, to no sensible intuition), a phenomenological-pragmatic perspectivism recasts, by analogy, the phenomenological, hermeneutical semantic correlation (*Bedeutungskorrelation*) between ontology, subjectivity, and language without presupposing any transcendental signified, ontological dualism (or *Zweiweltentthese*), or binary relationship between subject and object, theory and praxis, oppressors and oppressed. And yet the very irreducibility of the hermeneutic circle, together with the incompleteness of its reductions inherent in such a systemic-lifeworldly correlation, seems to betray a quasi-transcendental, perspectival network of signifiers and language games. The modern phenomenon of juridification (*Verrechtlichung*) turns out to be a good example of this new version of the same problem of accounting for the normative grounds of a critical theory of society. Habermas’s wager is that his reconstructive communicative paradigm succeeds in overcoming the transcendental-empirical aporias through a “linguistically generated intersubjectivity” (HABERMAS, 1987, p. 297).

V

My ongoing research in social phenomenology has sought to articulate the normative and empirical claims inherent in a Latin American philosophy of liberation that takes racial discourse into account. As I pointed out, the myths of racial democracy play a decisive role in the formation of ethnic identity in Latin America and remain paramount for the consolidation of a truly egalitarian democracy. Gilberto Freyre’s 1933 seminal book *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (ET: *The Masters and the Slaves*) has been hailed as the most representative work on Brazilian identity ever, opening up endless debates on collective self-esteem, self-understanding, and race relations in Brazil, esp. racial mixture, the quasi-romantic idealization of the mulatto (*pardo*, *moreno*), and the so-called myth of “racial democracy” – even though there is no occurrence of the term in this book. Beyond its immediate context of the contemporaneous discussion on regionalism versus universalism following the Modern Art Week in 1922, Freyre’s analyses contributed to new, comparative

readings of slavery systems and racism in the Americas. One particular upshot of the racial democracy myth is the ideology of whitening and the concomitant practice of miscegenation or race mixture, described by many scholars as the primary pillar of white supremacy in Latin America, particularly in Brazil (TWINE, 1997, p. 87). According to Twine, the whitening ideology “was originally coined by the [Latin American] elite to reconcile theories of scientific racism with the reality of the predominantly nonwhite population of their country” toward the turn of the 19th century. Thus Afro-Latin American children are systematically disempowered as they learn not to talk about racism, regarded as a taboo subject for discussion with their parents and peers (TWINE, 1997, p. 153). It was such a perverse circle that racial democracy has been fueling for decades throughout generations and it was only recently, especially after the end of military dictatorships in Latin America, that middle-class and the average citizen began talking about these social pathologies. Most Latin American citizens have certainly been socialized into a racist, paternalist political culture, so full of contradictions and shortcomings when compared to the normative, regulative ideals of the democratic, egalitarian yardstick. And yet, this making of a political culture is only sustained to the extent that Latin Americans also produce and reproduce such a culture. The shift from a hypocritical racial democracy towards a truly pluralist democracy has in effect been the only way out of the elitist pseudoliberalism of both military and civilian calls to “modernize” Latin America. Just as the aestheticist regionalism and nationalism of the modernist movement of the 1920s gave way to a technocratic, nationalist modernization in the 1950s and 1960s only to highlight the oligarchic, hierarchical relations of power that made Brazil one of the most socially and economically unequal nations of the planet, a moral revolution from below alone can secure the rule of law for all and call for a public, democratic distribution of primary goods. If Brazil remains too far from a well ordered society and public participation in the bargain processes is still remote from vast, excluded segments of the population, the political thrust of social movements meets a fortiori the normative criteria of a concept of democracy that defies and transgresses any corrupted, systemic “power that be” for the sake of the people. The egalitarian premises in Affirmative Action procedures can do precisely that, whenever one has to be reminded that the outcast in Latin America discover their own identity as citizens, rights-bearers or as end-in-themselves only when they become visible in the public sphere and get talked about in the media. Hence a radical critique of racial relations, state, and society is not necessarily opposed to the normative ideals of a philosophy of liberation.

In full agreement with Andrews, I believe that because race does matter in Latin America “black activists, aided by black and white scholars and intellectuals, lobbied intensively for the addition of racial data to recent Brazilian, Costa Rican, and Uruguayan censuses and are currently lobbying for their addition to censuses in Colombia and Panama”. National population census have been carried out in most Latin American countries every ten years, on a regular basis, since the 1980s and 1990s. In Brazil, the first census was taken in 1872 and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics has been performing national censuses every 10 years since the 1930s –the next one will be carried out this year. It is very interesting the way public discussions about race and color have contributed to deconstructing the myth of racial democracy in that country and consolidating its social, democratic institutions, especially insofar as they unmask racial inequalities and subtle forms of racism. Affirmative action has come to the fore of ongoing debates opposing different camps across the complex spectrum of positions that denounce cultural browning, whitening ideologies and Europeanization. These social pathologies, crystallized in racist and racialized conceptions, betray the relevance and the inescapability of race in public discussions about inequalities in Latin America. The empirical findings of censuses, polls, and surveys point to this inevitable social construct and its key role in shaping democracy. As Andrews put it, “If race truly did not matter – if it did not play a powerful role in determining how much education one receives, what kind of job one works at, how much salary one earns, even how long one lives –we would not need these data” (ANDREWS, 2004, p. 206 f.).

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