

SECTION III - PHILOSOPHICAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRAXIS: .MARXISM, LIBERATION , PHILOSOPHY, ET AL

Philosophy and Praxis (Provisional Thesis for a Philosophy of Liberation) by Enrique Dussel

Presenting a thought in English which originated in Spanish is difficult not only due to the language but much more due to the different points of view of the philosophical thinking of North Americans and Latin Americans, the daily realities of the two being so far apart.

I. Philosophy and Ideology

Philosophy is not only thinking demonstratively or scientifically. It is also thinking critically and dialectically, since it can think its own principles. On the one hand, philosophy is not only to know (*kennen*) objects or to have ontic knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) of the understanding (*Verstand*), but it is also an ontologic or metaphysical knowledge (*Wissen*). Since it is a metaphysical knowledge (*Wissen*), it always has reference to praxis; because of its origin and destiny, it is also wisdom.

The inevitable reference to praxis, as we shall see, praxis understood in its fundamental meaning (as *Lebenswelt*, *tà éndoxa*, as the total structure of the actions of an epoch) places philosophy on an ideological level, if by ideology is understood the systematic whole of ideas which explains, justifies, conceals or critiques the said praxis. All theoretical exercise has its own *autonomy*, but only a *relative* autonomy. Concerning "relative," philosophy makes reference to the concrete historical totality from which it emerges and into which it returns, the fundamental or everyday praxis.

Even in the case of the greatest philosophers, it is impossible to avoid a significant share of ideological "contamination." For example, Aristotle attributes to "nature" the origin of the historical-political difference of the free man and the slave. For Thomas Aquinas, man is superior to woman; domination of the male over the female (sexually, economically, politically, and pedagogically) is justified, and it "contaminates" all the reasoning of Thomistic moral philosophy.

To say that ideological moments "contaminate" philosophical reasoning does not mean that such reasoning is invalidated. It only indicates that it is a human, fallible, finite, perfectible discourse. That is to say, it is not an "absolute knowledge" (*Wissen*). This is so because its reference to praxis points to the concrete historic action, unfinished and ambiguous.

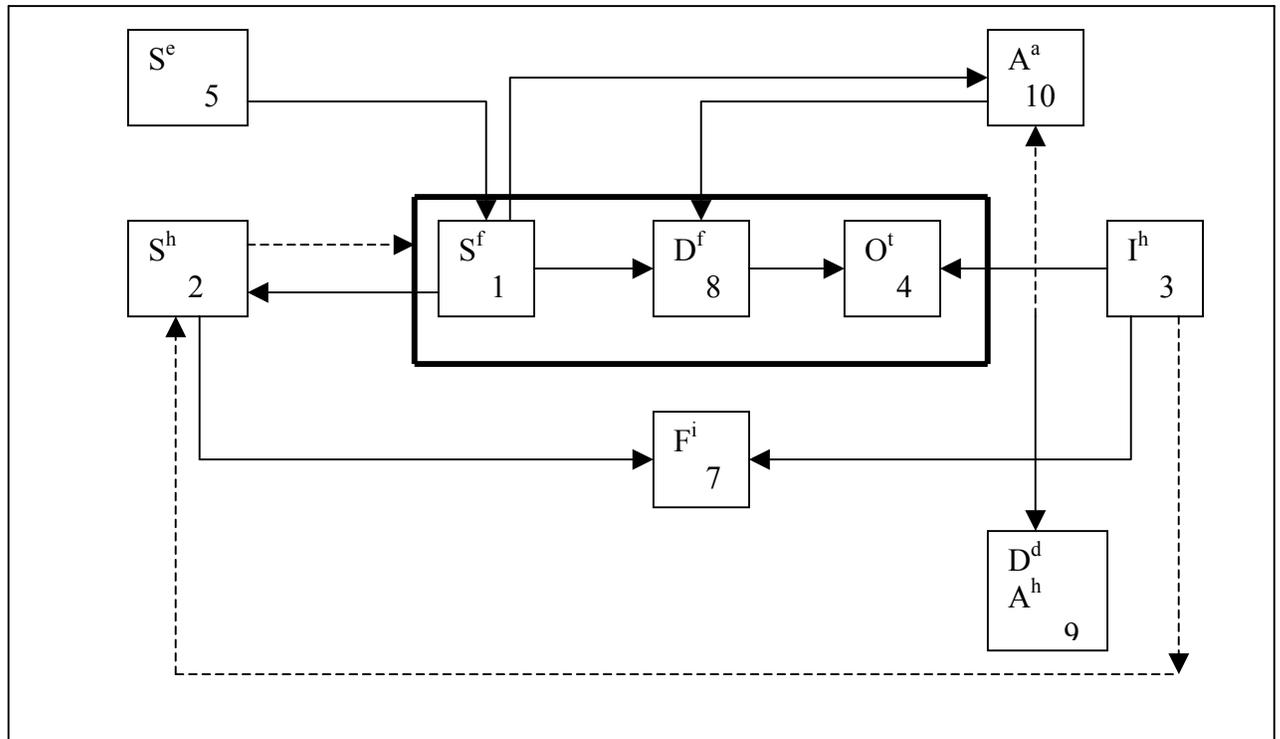
2. Dialectic between philosophy and praxis

Philosophy finds itself relatively determined by praxis. It is neither an absolute determination nor an absolute autonomy. These types of determination touch all the instances of theoretical exercise.

2.1. Determinations on the Part of the Subject, Interests and Goals

The philosopher or subject of philosophical thinking (S^f) is not an "absolute I" as Fichte claimed, but a finite subject, conditioned, relatively determined by the everyday world to fundamental praxis, joined necessarily to a historical subject, to a social class, to a people, to a subject of basic practices. Philosophical subjectivity (S^f) clings to and depends upon (arrow a) the historic subjectivity (S^h) which carries it. The *ego cogito* (I think) is first of all an *ego laboro* (I work), *ego opero* (I do), or *ego desiro* (I desire) of a group, of a people. It is true that one can make an abstraction and consider only the relationship subject-object (that which is indicated by *t*), but it is only an abstraction, that is, taking the part for the whole (the philosophical subjectivity for the practical overall reality: *p*).

ESQUEMA 1



In the same manner, as proposed by classical thinking, the human end (*beatitudo, télos*) is the object of tendency (*bonum*) or of appetite which is identified with being (*esse*). Today we would call such an end a practical "interest" or a project of a social class (to which the philosopher by his *position* belongs). The "interest" situates the theory in a practical manner in two ways: because (arrow *b*) it establishes the relevance or pertinence of the thematic object (*O'*) to be thought philosophically, or because (arrows *c* and *a*) it also grounds, as a project, the practical totality of the class, nation or group which constitutes the historic subject that situates itself "under" the philosophical subject.

Since the "being" (*esse*) is identical to the "interest" (*bonum*), it is the foundation of intelligibility and pertinence of the thematic object (*O'*) which, moreover, must be thought about because of tactical exigencies of the praxis itself. Throughout history, the themes of philosophy have sprung forth primarily because of the practical exigencies of the age in which the philosophers lived. If Hegel started his ethics or his philosophy of right in the following manner, it was because the fundamental capitalist praxis clearly determined it, not in an absolute manner, but sufficiently.

Right is in the first place the immediate *exterior Dasein*, which freedom gives itself in an immediate way, i.e. possession (*Besitz*), which is property-ownership." (*Philosophy of Right*, N 0. 40.)

That is, the thematic object that was imposed on Hegel as first in his practical philosophical discourse and as the first determination of "free will" is property, the immovable source of the capitalism which remains faithfully expressed in his philosophy.

2.2. Methodic and Categorical Exigencies

Praxis determines philosophy, although not absolutely, in a much more intimate manner in the constitution of the discourse itself, be that because of the method chosen, or be it because of the necessity of constructing adequate categories which respond to the practical *a priori* totality. In effect, if one chooses a reformist praxis or one of affirming the system, one will discard critical, holistic, or dialectical methods; and one will claim to discard them because they are naive, non-scientific, and invalid. A Karl Popper with his methodical proposal of "falsifiability" of great precision falls, nevertheless, into superficialities in his work, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, where he confuses dialectics with the predictability of future events. In the same manner, from the point of view of a practical option, the world (*Welt*) comes to be identified with "the sum-total of reality" (*Die gesamte Wirklichkeit*) so

that one declares later on "Feeling (*Gefühl*) the world as a limited whole-it is this that is mystical."¹ For this reason *beyond* the world, "It is impossible to speak about the will in so far as it is the subject of ethical attributes."² With this idea philosophical ethics is impossible; and as "the *sense* of the world must lie outside the world"³ as that about which nothing can be said, one has to keep quiet on these topics. All of these ant dialectical, antiholistic thoughts are perfectly coherent to a praxis that reproduces the system. They are the philosophy of domination or of justification of oppression because they are antiutopic-utopia here understood as the project of liberation of the oppressed in the present system. It is a perfectly ideological scientific objectivity.

The adoption of a dialectical method is demanded by a praxis of radical commitment to the oppressed. The radical criticism is not exercised over the "parts" of the system; it confronts the "totality" in its entirety as a totality. If one "cannot speak about this" (*man nicht sprechen kann*), one would have to silence, by assassination, millions" and millions who cry out "I am hungry!" Does this "proposition" make sense? Whoever believes that it does not have meaning, let him stop eating so that he can feel (the sensation) in his corporality the wound of hunger which has no *rea/ity* because it is found "beyond" the system.

In the same manner, certain categories such as "substance," for example, cannot permit a critical philosophical analysis of certain concrete historical situations of praxis. On the contrary, the category of "totality," the fundamental category of dialectics, or of "exteriority"⁴ allow for a more adequate discourse by means of a necessary radicalization of meaning in the most *materia/ sense*.⁵

One ought not discard certain psychological or temperamental blocks (such as fear of losing a professorship, of being expelled from a country, or of being discriminated against) which arise from the praxis, which interfere intrinsically with the philosophical discourse itself. Affective-erotic subjectivity always articulates itself with the social structures.⁶

2.3. Hegemonical Philosophical Apparatuses and Relative Autonomy

One fundamental aspect in the relation between philosophy and praxis is almost always avoided. There is no philosophical "practice" without the "apparatus" for instruction and learning. Needing to create a "consensus," the dominant classes organize hegemonical ideological apparatuses. Philosophy plays a *central* role in the dominant ideological formation and within the hegemonical apparatuses.⁷

From what has been said, we can conclude that all philosophy is determined by its dialectical relation with praxis. It is clear that philosophy

has its own *autonomous* theoretical status since no one claims to negate the specificity of the theoretical philosophical discourse. But such autonomy is not absolute (*simpliciter*) but relative (*secundum quid*). In concrete, historical, integral reality philosophy is "relative to" praxis because of its *subject* (that is to say, the philosophical movement, apparatus, class, nation, epoch, etc.) and the interests of those historical subjects. Philosophy is also relative to praxis because of the *thematic* objects, the *method*, and the *categories* used. Not to keep in mind these conditions of possibility, these relative determinations, is to make of philosophy a complete abstraction (*totum abstractum*), an ideological fetish which will be placed as the center of the hegemonic apparatus of the dominant classes of the developed countries. Thus a national and worldwide consensus will be created which will justify the actual capitalistic exploitation in the so-called "free" or "occidental and Christian world."

3. *Exigencies for a Philosophy of Liberation*

We call "Philosophy of Liberation" the strictly philosophical discourse, the scientific-dialectical knowledge (*Wissen*) which gives thematic priority to the praxis of liberation of *the oppressed*. These oppressed are considered historically and socially as a class, geopolitically as a nation, sexually as repressed by the male ideology and practices, pedagogically as alienated and completely enclosed by an idolatrous fetishism. *Philosophy* of liberation also gives priority of origin and foundation to the liberation of philosophy from the naivete of its *absolute* autonomy as a theory. "Philosophy of liberation" is a theoretical knowledge (*Wissen*) articulated historically and concretely by the praxis of liberation of the oppressed, a fact that comes first as a condition of possibility of thinking. Far from thinking that "all philosophy is a criticism of language"⁸ it affirms that philosophy is a criticism of oppression and a clarification of the praxis of liberation.

3.1. *Exigencies for a Philosophical Theory of the Praxis of Liberation of the Oppressed*

The oppressed as "origin" and "space" which gives rise to the critical-liberating philosophical discourse indicates that it is a practical, ethical discourse. The "point of departure" of this still "possible" discourse is the human situation produced by the praxis of domination. That is, the "*practical conditions of possibility*" of beginning a *true* discourse makes philosophy of praxis the first philosophy (*prima philosophia*). It is not a philosophy of any praxis whatever but of the praxis of liberation, the criterion or absolute tribunal of the *truth* of the discourse. Liberating

orthopraxis permits a relevant philosophical discourse which discovers here and now *reality*.

The oppressed are the *poor* in politics (person, class, nation); the *woman* in the masculine ("*machismo*") erotic; and the child, the youth, the *people* in the pedagogy of cultural domination. All the problems and topics of logic, philosophy of language, anthropology, and metaphysics acquire *new* light and *new* meaning viewed from the *absolute* and nevertheless concrete criterion (the contrary of universal) that philosophy is the weapon of the liberation of the oppressed.

Sub lumine oppressionis, from the viewpoint of the oppressed, all ideology or "philosophy of domination" allows a glimpse into what it conceals, the domination. Surpassing the *horizon of being* of the system, philosophy of liberation accedes to the exteriority of the other (the oppressed *as other* than the system, and of the system as a whole), to the fount from which proceeds the light of being (the *Erkenntnisquelle* of Schelling). Schelling who was, in effect, Hegel's teacher and post-Hegelian had indicated that "beyond" the *being* (of all systems) one can find the Other; "the originating cause is free"; "the Lord of being (*Herr des Seins*) is a much higher and more appropriate notion than the one that says that God is being itself."⁹ In the totality of the systems (against the one that thinks that "God does not reveal *in* the world"),¹⁰ in the world, the absolute Other reveals himself *through* the oppressed. The very body, the corporality, the "flesh" of the oppressed (his hungry, tortured, violated "flesh") when it is exposed (as the hero is "exposed" before the firing squad) within the system, is a subversion of the order and the law which alienates him. It is the revelation of the Absolute in history as an "epiphany," not only a "phenomenon," an epiphany through the poor. The face (*pnim* in Hebrew, *prósopon* in Greek), the person of the poor, his carnal corporeality, "flesh" (*basar*) is itself the originating word (*dabar*) from which arises the philosophy of liberation, which does not think words but thinks *reality*.

Thus when the oppressed who struggles against the death that the system assigns to him begins through the praxis of liberation the struggle for *life*, *novelty* erupts in history "beyond" the *being* of the system. A *new* philosophy, a positive one, necessarily makes its appearance. The novelty is not original nor primarily philosophical; it is original and primarily historical and real; it is the liberation of the oppressed. It is secondarily a philosophical theory as a strategic "instrument" or weapon of liberation itself.

3.2 *Exigencies on the Part of the Subject, His Interest, and the Thematic Object*

In the philosophy of liberation the conscious, organic, real articulation of the philosopher with the "historical subject" (class, feminist movements, or

culturally oppressed people) is a decisive question. The concrete "organizational" articulation is a condition *sine qua non* of the philosophizing of liberation (arrow *e*). It is not an "experiment" that has to be accurately conducted some times. It is a permanent *way of life*, integrated into the everyday life of the philosopher under penalty of repetition, ideologization, loss of reference to the truth of reality, that is, to the actual, always changing historic manifestation of reality. The empirical subject (S^e) who can be a member of the oppressed classes or a petit bourgeois by origin, is called to the vocation of organic philosophizing on liberation, as a conversion to critical thinking (indicated by arrow *d*). The person of the philosopher thus enters into a space of risk, anxiety and danger in a new *life style*: to be philosophical subject (*c*). To "be" a philosopher of liberation can mean losing one's liberty in prison, enduring the pain of torture, losing one's professorship at the university, and perhaps being killed, given the situation in the continent.

To be "organic" (arrow *e*) with the historical subject means to resolutely acquire a "class position" with the oppressed people; it means to become involved and to form part of the popular movement of the farmer or the working class or of marginal groups, in the movements for the liberation of the nation, or of women, or for popular ideological, racial and cultural struggles.

The philosopher expresses "philosophical discourse" (D^f) of liberation about pertinent themes which must be grounded theoretically as far as the highest levels of abstraction in order to give to the political concrete analysis all its practical effectiveness. Only thus would it respond, on the one hand, to the necessity of clarifying to the utmost degree the "class consciousness" (*g*) of the oppressed, and on the other hand to the explicit philosophical formulation of the "ideological formation" (F^i) of these classes. Philosophy of liberation is, to be precise, a philosophy which responds to the implicit contents of the ideological formation of the oppressed and, in the last analysis, to the interests of their class, nation, sex, etc. Philosophy of liberation is, then, a "weapon" of the oppressed; it thinks and clarifies the most urgent themes; it organizes its already given rationality; it explains its articulations; it transforms itself into a standard of the "ideological struggle" against the "dominant discourse" (D^d) and against its hegemonical apparatuses (H^a). Of course, the philosophical anti-discourse also needs to start promoting its own antihegemonical apparatuses, such as schools of philosophy, publications (books, magazines), symposia, and movements. These anti-hegemonic apparatuses are the ones that receive the violence of persecution and the infinite sadism of the oppressor .

The struggle (arrow *f*) between philosophy of domination and philosophy of liberation manifests on the theoretical level the violent class struggles which the dominator starts in Latin America. On this level, as on others, the

philosophy of poor countries would need the solidarity of the philosophers of the wealthy countries, who are responsible with their countries for what their transnational corporations, their political figures, and their armies cause outside their country's boundaries.

3.3 Regarding Method and the Categories

We have seen in 2.2 some of the exigencies of this level. We shall mention now other aspects. In the first place, if the dialectical or ontological method is accepted as the appropriate one to discover the meaning of the functional parts of the system—a problem avoided by logical neopositivism, sociological functionalisms, and different philosophical positions—philosophy of liberation gives particular importance to the *analectic* moments of the dialectical movement. In its essence, the dialectics of the dialectical method consists of the rational movement which passes from the "part" to the "whole" or from a whole to the concrete whole which includes it. But the possibility of such *passage*—not the "Holy Thursday of reason" as Hegel used to say, but the "Easter of reason"—becomes possible nevertheless not only because of the negation of the negation in the totality (moment of negativity) and not even because of the affirmation of the totality (which would be not to "surpass" it without a radical metaphysical and not merely an ontological surpassing [*Aufhebung*], but because of the *affirmation* of the *exteriority*, that is more essential than the negation for a philosophy of the oppressed as an originating and later a liberating fulfillment.

For example, the liberation of Nicaragua, as a process which *passes* from a nation dependent on the United States to a free country (from a first totality to a second totality) happens not only because of the negation of the oppression produced by capitalism in the said nation (negation of the negation). Nor is the process liberating only because of the affirmation of the democratic bourgeois potentialities of Somozist Nicaragua. The liberation occurs also, metaphysically speaking, because of the affirmation of what Nicaragua is as *exteriority* of capitalism *as a totality* (what Nicaragua is, as an origination from the pre-capitalist but humane, heroic, and historic past; and what Nicaragua is today as a *project* capitalism, a real Utopia not contained even as a potentiality within the bourgeois Somozist Nicaragua).

The *analectic* moment of the dialectical method (ana-dialectical method) gives absolute priority to the project of liberation of the other as *new*, as another, as *distinct* (and not only as a difference in the identity of the whole).¹¹ In the last analysis, one can affirm that the analectic moment of dialectics is founded on the *absolute anteriority* of the exteriority over the totality, even to affirming the priority of the Other as creative origin over creation as a work, as a finite and therefore perfectible totality. The

metaphysics of creation is the ultimate foundation (*Grund*) of the political historical liberation { the social revolutions }, the erotic liberation of women, and the pedagogical liberation of the child and of the people. Because "beyond" being {if *Sein* is understood as the horizon of the totality} *there is* reality; there one can find Reality in its most consistent, future, and utopian limit: anthropological exteriority { the other, the needy, the poor) or absolute exteriority {the Other, the Creator who appeals to the system through the epiphany of the poor when the system becomes lulled into a fetichistic, anti-dialectical "normalization").

In the same manner, a category such as "face-to-face," which measures all practical human relationship as the origin and the end of history, gives sufficient light to interpret the injustice or the alienation of the other as mediation of the project of the whole, from the immediacy where one lets the other be other than oneself in his real, metaphysical exteriority. From the experience of respect and service to the other as other is judged every human political, pedagogical, or erotic relation of "reifying instrumentalization" of the other as mediation for my / our project. The relevance or pertinency of both, the method and the categories used, depend on the articulation that the philosopher has with the praxis of liberation {indicated summarily in 3.2).

3.4 *Political Space, Repression and Antihegemonic "Apparatuses"*

Latin America today finds itself in an exceedingly complex situation. Now it experiences the agonizing pains of giving birth to a new historical era in the continent. Philosophy of liberation is a theoretical and strategic product of a profound revolution which encompasses all our countries. To philosophical thinking it is innate to express itself within a certain "space" of minimal liberty.

Philosophy of liberation is *repressed* today in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Haiti, San Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The critical philosophical discourse has a *growing* political "space" in Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Santo Domingo, and Panama, given the crisis of the military dictatorships and the opening up to certain types of social democracies. The road is difficult; a past of long oppression or of a lack of critical thought makes the way difficult. It seems, on the contrary, that the political "space" for philosophical thinking is "closing" in Colombia, where the military each day make their presence felt more in national life as movements of farmers and workers emerge.

Philosophical discourse of liberation has a possibility of being exercised in countries with *relative freedom* such as Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico. In Cuba's *socialist* process, the Nicaragua's, in the near future,

philosophy of liberation has to think on topics different from those in other countries where this revolution is still a future event.

A fundamental question in the socialist Latin American countries is that of being able to formulate a "new theory of religion." This theory takes off from the Marxist discourse itself where *atheism* as antifetichism and *materia/ism* as a last instance of worship (to offer to another a *product* of work) permits religion to be situated as praxis and infra-structural work, as a positive and liberating structure. This question is a strategic one for the Latin American revolution because it would allow all the people to be impelled with a profound religious consciousness into the liberating process, not only not denying its ties to religious transcendence but also relying on it to furnish absolute motives for the revolutionary praxis.

4. *Towards an International Division of Philosophical Labor*

"Philosophy of liberation," as philosophy of the oppressed and for the oppressed, is not only a task for thinkers of the countries of the Third World. In the United States it is possible to exercise a philosophy of liberation from the experience of the oppression of the people by a system of consumption where the rationality of *profit* is beginning to show its true irrationality, from the suffering of the Black and Hispanic minorities; from the humiliation of the women not yet liberated, and very specially from the ideological manipulation which conceals from the citizen what the "Empire" does outside its boundaries to poor people whom it impoverishes even more. In Europe and in the countries of the "center" philosophy sometimes turns upon itself and reduces its task to justifying itself (philosophy of language, logic, etc.) without thinking through the great issues relevant to the final years of the twentieth century. In Asia and Africa philosophy concerns itself with other topics of liberation (dialogue with ancient cultures, authenticity, and the question of neocolonialism). In Latin America, with differences from country to country, we have already sketched some thematic spheres within the diverse political "spaces."

In conclusion, *an international division of the philosophical labor*, assigning to diverse groups and countries distinct tasks, would permit us to begin a fruitful dialogue where uniformity of themes would not be demanded nor would certain thematic objects be spurned because they are not relevant *to us*. Respect for the other's situation begins by respect for his philosophical discourse.

NOTES

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 6.45, p. 13.

2. *Ibid.*, 6.423, p. 72.
 3. *Ibid.*, 6.41, p. 71. In this way it is impossible to pass complete judgment on the capitalist system as a whole, the task of dialectics. The reformist choice, made by Popper and Wittgenstein, finally justifying capitalism by claiming to demonstrate the impossibility of a way out (the critique of utopia and socialism finally limits itself by its impossibility), becomes methodically antidialectical.
 4. See Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere* (Berlin: Gruyter, 1965) and Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, an Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne U. Press, 1969).
 5. By "matter" or "materialism" we understand not the indemonstrable affirmation that all is eternally *cosmological* matter (see Engels, *Dialektik der Natur* [Berlin: Dietz, 1951]). This would be a *naive* materialism. We take "matter" and "materialism" in the practical-productive meaning; nature as *matter* (that with which) of human work. The "I work" is the *a priori* constituent of "matter" as a practico-productive (and not a cosmological) category. In this sense *material determination* (never absolute) is an instance which can never be left out of any historical anthropological consideration. On the other hand, "matter" refers to the Hebrew notion of "work-service-cult" (*habodáh*). See my work that will soon be published, *Filosofía de la producción* (Mexico, 1980).
 6. See Leon Rozitchner, *Freud y los límites del individualismo burgués* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1972).
 7. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 10 (XXXIII), 11, No. 13 (Rome: Einaudi, 1975), vol. I, p. 1250.
 8. Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, 4.0031, p. 19.
 9. "Erlanger Vortrage," in *Werke*, V, pp. 305-306.
 10. See Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, 6.432, p. 73.
- II. For terms such as "analectic," "distinct," "difference," "Identity," etc., see my *Filosofía ética latinoamericana*, vol. I, Chap. III, and vol. II, Chap. VI.