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HISTORY FOR EMANCIPATION

EMANCIPATION

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Philosophy and history

Perhaps the most significant expressions of the *philosophy of history* that have obsessed researchers and inspired hundreds of studies were the ideas professed by Hegel, who argued that history has a rational purpose and that it is the judge of such purposes. Since their formulation, these ideas have been the subject of great debate in the scholarly world, in both the speculative philosophy and in the positivist historiography. In the twilight of Hegelianism and its vision of a *system*, Hegel's followers developed various arguments to defend and draw the ultimate conclusions from a thesis that was insurmountable due to its metaphysical nature. It is not surprising that the exhaustion of reason in its historical development justifies domination, since taking control of reality in its universality implicitly entails the need to exercise power.

This entanglement of power and culture is coeval with human civilization itself. Drawing causes and conclusions through myth is already a form of exercising power. Rationalization, as well as explanation, already implies *ipso facto* a form of domination over the strange and its hostile and untamed forces. This has been well understood by Adorno and Horkheimer, who argue that "(...) myth wanted to narrate, name, tell the origin: and with that, therefore, represent, fix, explain" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1998, p. 63). Only human beings have been able to transform nature and transform themselves in the process, an exercise of power that provides them with an order tailored to their needs. Only human beings turn nature into a servant of their taste.

Moreover, domination applies to nature and to human beings, or at least, this is the judgment of history.

To affirm with Hegel that history is the judge of the universal process by which human beings orchestrate the necessary conditions for their freedom, outside of necessity, implies, from the outset, an element of domination. What we have gained in the history of ideas, in the development of science and technology, is not a negligible matter, but rather a whole heritage that reflects the struggles between human beings and nature.

Heritage that, according to the author of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, indicates the bond between *being* and *thinking*, between *essence* and *existence*, i.e. the only being that participates in the totality of *being*, as Heidegger (2001) would say and that can make a judgment as a human being. But making a judgment presupposes a certain violence over things, and a certain politics of truth. Nature does not present providential signs; on the contrary, it is human beings who create patterns and, ultimately, laws that have facilitated our survival as *a universal genus*. In other words, human beings are a part of nature that compels nature itself to speak. A similar opinion can be found in Kojève, who argues that:

(...) the real Being existing as Nature is that which produces Man, who reveals that Nature (and himself) through speech. It is the real Being that thus transforms itself into "truth" or reality-revealed-by-speech and becomes an increasingly "significant" truth as its discursive revelation becomes more adequate and complete. (Kojève, 1982)

Kojève's thesis on the ontological, logical, and dialectical investigation of *being* in Hegel must be understood in accordance with a fundamental distinction that lies in the word. *Being*¹² is dialectical insofar as its revelation is preceded by the negation of its inauthentic aspect. Moreover, its truth, as can be glimpsed, is only accessible to a being

12 For dialectical logic, being is a process that evolves through contradictions that determine the content and development of all reality (Marcuse, 1994, p. 220).

that presupposes a dialectical structure in its consciousness. In simpler terms, statements about *being* and the purification of its truth are carried out in a conceptual order. This is the effort of the concept that Hegel never ceased to teach us throughout his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (2005).

Based on the above, the German thinker is an author of general ontology, insofar as he attempts to explain *being* in its logical and existential order. However, as stated in the first lines, he is an author of a system, insofar as his notion of experience was not exhausted in a noetic resolution, but in an overall vision. In the opinion of Jean Hippolyte (1946), Hegel "(...) considerably broadens the notion of experience, so that the critique of experience extends in Hegel to ethical, legal, and religious experience and is not limited to theoretical experience" (p. 11).

Indeed, throughout Hegel's work, there is not only an investigation of the logical structure of consciousness. In contrast to Kant, who assumed the categories of knowledge to be unalterable and *a priori* given to consciousness, Hegel understood that these were nothing more than the result of its historical development. In collaboration with Hippolyte's exposition, it is easy to glimpse that the author of *Phenomenology* sought to expound both the contents of theoretical and practical reason in their historical unfolding.

Consequently, freedom—the central theme of practical philosophy—is not only a moral framework (whose ultimate goal is the realization of a realm of ends according to Kant -1946), but also an idea that encompasses historical development and has manifested itself in areas where the spirit has come together. Thus, for Hegel, the idea of freedom in its formation has traveled a path from East to West, which in the final analysis was realized in the Prussian state. Here is what Löwith said to clarify the Hegelian view:

In his philosophy of history, the most important steps in the self-liberation of the spirit are found at the beginning, that is, in the East, and, in the end, in the West. Universal history begins with the great empires of the Ancient East, with China, India, and Persia; it continues, through the decisive triumph of the Greeks over the Persians, with the

state formations of Greece and Rome in the Mediterranean, and ends with the Germanic-Christian empires of the Western Nordics. (Löwith, 2008, pp. 56-57)

It is important to recognize the theological aspects inherent in Hegel's work in order to have a precise idea of fundamental concepts such as *spirit* and *freedom*. It is commonplace in 18th- and 19th-century metaphysics (collectively known as German idealism) to conceive of reason as sovereign and free from human affairs. From Kant, through Fichte and Schelling, to Hegel, we find the dichotomy between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom.

The former was governed by the *iron law* (Hegel, 1997) of Newtonian mechanics, while the latter represented free will, proposed by Epicureanism but taken to its ultimate conclusion in Christianity. Hence, it is not surprising that, at that time, the life of Jesus Christ represented not only the realization of the idea of freedom (as in Hegel), but also a framework for morality (as in Kant).

According to Löwith, "(...) the ultimate foundation for Hegel's historical-final construction lies in his absolute appreciation of Christianity, according to whose eschatological faith the end and fulfillment of time appear in Christ" (Löwith, 2008, p. 60). In collaboration with Löwith's argument, one can understand why Hegel made history a sublime article of faith, as opposed to *the* dogmatic *apriorism* of the Church, which promulgated the idea of a spirit that governed over the contingent and singular aspects of the development of peoples. In his own words, Löwith points out that: "(...) that faith is (...) indeterminate; it is a faith in Providence in general, and does not pass to the determined, to the application, to the whole, to the entire course of events in the universe" (Hegel, 2005, p.107).

Contrary to the common assessment of his time, it can be presumed that Hegel made God a *very real entity* in development. To appreciate the decisive influence that this thinker had not only on historiography but also on the aspirations of the revolutionary movements of the 19th century, one need only consider his insights into the development of *the free spirit* based on his dialectical movement. Thus, for

this author, the struggle between the Greeks and the Eastern peoples meant not only the assumption of a government of free men but also the manifestation of reason.

The same would apply to the French Revolution, which, for Hegel, represented the forces that underlie and struggle for the idea of freedom, whose inspiration was certainly the ideas of the Enlightenment. With the restoration of the Prussian state, a reconciliation between faith and politics was achieved, in which Hegel sensed the realization of *the Kingdom of Freedom*. This idea, however, was seized upon by the Young Hegelians—most notably Feuerbach and Marx—who reinterpreted it as an urgent crisis of contemporary consciousness. In conclusion, Hegel's *Philosophy of History* essentially represents an attempt to demonstrate the evolution of reason from its historical moments, which, in Marcuse's words, argues that:

(...) the *Philosophy of History* exposes the historical content of reason. In other words, here the content of reason is the same as the content of history, although by content we do not mean the miscellany of historical facts, but rather what makes history a rational whole, the laws and trends to which the facts point and from which they derive their meaning. (Marcuse, 1994, p. 220)

Everything real is rational, and everything rational is real. This expression, which has often been interpreted out of context, to the detriment of its authentic philosophical value, translates the aspirations of the system that Hegel sought to endow his philosophy with. Hence, the difficulty implicit in interpreting it. We will limit ourselves to pointing out that its meaning is linked to the very concept of history.

The development of philosophy through its own dialectical movement has shown us greater effectiveness in the identity between *being* and *thinking*, between *reality* and *concept*, between *subject* and *object*. It is inevitable that history will, at a given moment, satisfactorily fulfill this identity. Furthermore, this expression implies the aspirations of a system and signifies the development of the forces of the free spirit and their correlation with reality, insofar as the latter facilitates the necessary conditions for their unfolding.

For Hegel, the series of events characteristic of modernity, among which the rise of new science and the legality of the nation-state stand out, represented nothing less than the conditions under which the totality of reason would be orchestrated. Teleology of reason and freedom are the key words for defining the dialectical nature of the absolute spirit, insofar as this concept accounts for totality, since it is the reflection of all the moments prior to its constitution and, therefore, its complete realization. In other words, its constitution is the result of overcoming certain historical moments, which start from nature, move towards conceptual reflection, and return as a spiritual product, both in gnoseological and existential terms.

In the words of Walter Jaeschke (1998), the Absolute Spirit is the “(...) sphere of spiritual life in which the spirit detaches itself from external effective reality, returns to itself and makes itself its object, and precisely to this extent it is absolute: it fits and is free because of this” (p. 39). Although the absolute spirit ultimately represented the being that thinks itself, the identity between object and subject is surprising to observe in the relative esteem that Hegel gave to labor.

In truth, absolute and effective reality are interchangeable terms, but despite Hegel’s metaphysical insights, reality is nothing less than the product of human labor. However, in the context of industrial capitalism at that time, it was Marx who diagnosed the contradictions that had not yet been resolved in Hegel’s totality. These contradictions, developed throughout the work of the thinker of *Capital*, can be summed up in one: the proletariat. In this regard, it is important to consider what Marcuse said:

Truth, according to Hegel, is a whole that must be present in each of the elements, so that if a material element or fact cannot be connected to the process of reason, the truth of the whole is destroyed. According to Marx, such an element existed: it was the *proletariat*. The existence of the proletariat contradicts the supposed reality of reason, since it represents an entire class that demonstrates the very negation of reason. (Marcuse, 1994, p. 257)

Hence, it is not surprising that Marx, as an epigone of Hegelianism, took the realization of this rational totality to its ultimate consequences. In order to achieve absolute freedom, Marx carried out a critical program of the material conditions of human beings within the framework of capitalism. Accepting history as the judge of the processes of freedom, it is important, in accordance with the legacy of this philosopher, to erode the structures that have made the subject a slave and make him the complete heir to history, so that his revolution may be liberation for all. Liberation that implies true domination of society over reality.

History and historical materialism

The idea of *history* in Hegelian philosophy, as seen, essentially presupposes the uninterrupted development of *the absolute spirit*, i.e. the stage at which *being* and *thought* are identified. This does not mean, however, that the contradictions between the forms of knowledge and reality have been overcome. The evolution of *consciousness* throughout history and the true description of *being* was the conclusion Hegel reached after his research on *universal history*. This is the totality, the character of the spirit. In the same sense, the contradictions between *reason* and *reality*, between *essence* and *existence*, were resolved without further ado in the construction of the system. Thus, for Hegel, modernity and all its conclusions were the touchstone for all the sufferings of humanity.

Viewed thus, the dialectical structure of history functions as a panacea for all the disappointments and disagreements that humanity has faced. Under this lens, slavery was nothing more than a preliminary stage in the realization of the idea of freedom. The same would apply to the social relations between the baron and the serfs in a historical formation such as feudalism, whose overcoming represented nothing less than the illusion of autonomy and the unfolding of the productive forces of human beings in capitalism, this was precisely the alienated reality that Marx observed in the 19th century.

The very dialectical structure of knowledge and *being* paves the way for new contradictions. In other words, everything that becomes true in one era inevitably becomes false in the next. Reality in its ontological aspect, in order to become effective, comprises the necessary conditions for its realization and an entirely rational meaning. *Everything real is rational, and everything rational is real*, superbly synthesizes the development of spirit and knowledge. This expression essentially translates the effectiveness of reality, whose necessity is absolute.

Hegel's hermetic totality, therefore, would imply the resolution of all irrational aspects of reality. Thus, despotism as a social fact and dogmatism overcome by the *age of reason* (modernity and the use of science) represented the necessary conditions for the effective reality of the author of *Phenomenology's* era. Regarding the Hegelian thesis, Frederick Engels pointed out:

(...) everything that is real within the realm of human history becomes irrational over time; it is already irrational, therefore, by its destiny, carrying within itself the germ of the irrational; and everything that is rational in the mind of man is destined to one day become real, however much it may still clash with the apparent existing reality. (Engels, 2006, pp. 10-11)

Consequently, everything that was necessary for one era is abolished in a subsequent one. In this light, for the establishment of civil government, the French Revolution presented itself as an absolute necessity. The promise that reason would guarantee the conditions for the realization of the human being in total freedom was at least one of the assumptions on which Hegel indirectly pronounced the *end of history*. Herein lies the controversy and debate reached by the Young Hegelians,¹³ among whom Engels and Marx diagnosed the obstacle to the realization of that totality.

13 The so-called "Young Hegelians" represented a group composed of authors who were completely dissimilar in their theories. However, they all started from a common point: the Hegelian system and its dignity in the context of the revolutions of 1840. Thus, the criticism and dissolution of the Hegelian system carried

Unlike the overcoming of the contradictions between essence and existence achieved in the establishment of civil government, it is difficult not to observe that the state and the law presented themselves as the new instruments of slavery. These are the contradictions that Marx understood as the driving forces of history.

The irresolution implicit in the very structure of reality allows us to infer that history is nothing more than an infinite process, where the *absolute* was, in truth, a theoretical justification for the legality of a certain class consciousness. This is the bourgeoisie, whose legal foothold materialized in civil law, which in turn justified private property and the exploitation of labor based on its jurisdiction.

In other words, what Hegel conceptualized as the ultimate realization of a rational totality inspired by the idea of freedom, was for Marx a moment of alienation. It is certainly the proletariat that is the contradiction forged by the new social relations of civil government. To conceptualize what has been stated, it suffices to point out what Karl Löwith said:

(...) in his real existence, the “free” wage worker is less free than the ancient slave, for although he is the owner of his ability to work and the possession of the means of production is equally justified, and he only alienates a special skill for a limited time, he becomes a slave, totally and absolutely, to the labor market, because his already sold ability to work was the only thing he effectively possessed and had in order to exist in general. (Löwith, 2008, p. 203)

Indeed, freedom for Hegel, in its absolute aspect, although it is an undeniable prerequisite for the authenticity of *being* and knowing, cannot eliminate the idea that its possession became a matter of class. In

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out by authors such as Feuerbach, Marx, Stirner, Bauer, among others, were due to ontological, political, and theological reasons deeply rooted in the historical situation of their time, which, in Marx’s opinion, presented a completely inverted nature. In the words of Löwith: “[...] all of them withdrew from their ties to the existing world or, through revolutionary criticism, sought to subvert the current condition of existence” (2008, p. 11).

Marx's view, this is nothing more than the consequence of an inverted world. On the other hand, the identity between *being* and *thinking*, between *essence* and *existence*, is not resolved in Marx's eyes through a critique of consciousness, but rather through a true revolution of the material conditions of existence in a given era. Hence, for the author of *Capital*, in Hegel's absolute totality, there was no overcoming of contradictions, but a permanence of negation.

In this regard, Marcuse has pointed out that dialectics in Marx takes a critical position insofar as "(...) it characterizes its meaning as 'understanding the inseparability of oppositions in philosophical foundation and as preservation (and not overcoming) of contradiction in the result'" (Marcuse, 1998, p. 87). And indeed, if the problem of validity between *essence* and *existence* translates into the fair correlation between material conditions and the unfolding of human attributes, it is easy to guess that the proletariat, as a universal class, does not possess the necessary means for its realization, much less access to the products of spiritual life. In Marx's words:

(...) the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates, the more worthless, the more unworthy he is; the more elaborate his product, the more deformed the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbaric the worker; the richer the work becomes spiritually, the more de-spiritualized and bound to nature the worker remains. (Marx, 1980, p. 107)

For Marx, the alienation of the proletariat's existence represented the irresolution of the contradictions orchestrated in universal history. Capitalism, as an improvement on the feudal mode of production, has a moment of truth in the development of the spirit, as it allows for autonomy in the deployment of productive forces and freedom of individuality. However, it is undeniable that the very structure of private property and the resulting wage labor produce objects that are not intended to satisfy immediate needs, but rather for the market. Capitalism is understood, according to Marx, as a historical formation where dead things, i.e., commodities, take precedence over existence.

To substantiate this conclusion, the founder of historical materialism began by analyzing the historical conditions of a stage in which human productive forces had reached such a peak that industry and science could guarantee the much-celebrated *realm of freedom*. Likewise, the derogations both at the level of consciousness and in the legality of social relations, arising in a chronological order that goes from reform to enlightenment and culminates in the French Revolution, presented an internal law by which Hegel's thesis was more than proven. However, in their subsequent consequences, such revolutions in both human consciousness and praxis revealed class interests and needs.

Evading moralistic reductions, it is understandable that history holds key moments where necessity and passion exceeded the actual conditions of a given era. Understanding *all that is* requires a historical examination of *the* particular and general *pathos* of an era, insofar as it is nothing but conscious motives and desires that inspire great revolutions. In the words of Engels, human beings, "(...) each pursuing their own ends with consciousness and will (...); and the result of these numerous wills, projected in various directions, and their multiple influence on the outside world, is precisely history" (Engels, 2006, p. 43).

Agreeing that only human beings are the subjects or substance of history is already a good sign for grasping the theory and task bequeathed to us by Karl Marx. Already in his phenomenological analyses, Hegel was able to glimpse the evolution of consciousness from the negation of *being there*. This does not mean that human beings are only human insofar as they transcend the condition of animals, since all spiritual formation, understood in *the strict sense*, namely as the common and historical heritage of all entirely human products (science, art, religion), is nothing but the result of the negation of what remains in identity with itself (nature).

The negation or transformation of nature, in its most original sense, translates the very essence of human beings, given that the desire to transform matter arises from an organic need. In his dissertation on the *dialectic of masters and slaves*, Kojève pointed out that "(...) born of Desire, action tends to satisfy it, and can only do so by 'negation',

destruction or at least transformation of the desired object in order to satisfy hunger, for example” (Kojève, 1982, p. 2).

However, according to Kojève, unlike desire directed toward a natural object, only the desire for recognition over a multiplicity of desires will ultimately determine the revelation of self-awareness, of the Self. Human reality exists insofar as there is recognition and revelation through speech. For all these reasons, such a desire for recognition initially assumes the *dialectical* structure *between masters and slaves*, one of the starting points of Karl Marx’s theory.

The *dialectic between masters and slaves* revealed to the latter thinker the meaning of history. If human beings are defined through the active transformation of nature, it is undeniable that the historical appropriation of the means of subsistence has required, as its ultimate condition, the structural matrix of multiple revolutions. The abolition of the existing world translates, in its entirety, the aspirations to legitimize a new order, whereby the desire for recognition will be equivalent to the appropriation of the means of production. Thus, the history that runs from East to West, according to Hegel, translated this desire for recognition, as the government of all would guarantee the necessary conditions for subsistence.

Which, in the final analysis, meant for Marx the realization of an entirely social reality. Here, in contrast to Hegelian philosophy, as it was nothing more than an imitation of an inverted reality, Marx understood that the abolition of *all that is* would not take place in a *purple haze in heaven*, but in the revolution of existing conditions, whose heart was the proletariat and whose head was historical materialism.

From the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx, 1980) this thinker never ceased to theorize about the revolutionary aspect inherent in dialectics. According to Marcuse, the early writings “(...) in their meaning and goal are by no means purely philosophical, but practical-revolutionary: the overthrow of capitalist society by the economically and politically combative proletariat” (Marcuse, 2016, p. 67).

It would not be surprising that the author of *Capital*, in his project to revolutionize the structures of effective reality, undertook an economic, political, and historical analysis to demonstrate precisely the absolute necessity of turning the irrational into the rational., To discover that behind social relations, as well as the organization of productive forces within the framework of capitalism, lay the true essence of human beings. To understand the meaning that Marx sought to impart to his work, it is important to take into consideration what Kosík professed:

For materialism, social reality can be known in its concreteness (totality) on condition that the *nature* of social reality is discovered, that pseudo concreteness is destroyed, and that social reality is known as the dialectical unity of base and superstructure, and man as an objective, historical-social subject. (Kosík, 1967, p. 65)

By pseudo-concreteness of reality, Kosík means the contradiction between the *nature* of human beings and the material conditions of capitalism. The alienation of the subject within the framework of this historical formation, the worship of objects with exchange values, wages as an element of slavery, and the mass production of objects that are not owned by the proletariat all determine the pseudo-concreteness of social reality.

Analysis in historical and material terms consists of identifying the ontological structures of social beings. Thus, if the transformation of nature has been the permanent condition of reality, it is clear that labor is essentially social. Hence, only the socialization of the means of production is the factor for the true concretization of reality. Herbert Marcuse, in *Phenomenological Contributions to Historical Materialism* (2010) in Martin Heidegger's ontological terms, understands that in its original aspect, *Dasein* and its realization comprise a practical element. In other words, only work and the multiple techniques developed throughout history have enabled human beings not only to take possession of reality, but also to reproduce themselves.

Consequently history, as an element inherent to the essence of human beings, represents the process of transforming the conditions given in nature into a social reality, where human beings not only realize

themselves, but also find themselves. In the words of Marcuse, "(...) this determination of existence is historical, it is circumscribed by the historical situation of existence; the possibilities that concrete human beings have in each case are traced by it, as are their reality and their future" (2016, p. 88). The analysis of historical formations started precisely from capitalism, as its economic categories encompassed, at their core, aspects of previous modes of production. Thus, the critique of political economy represented an effort to demonstrate the rigidity of concepts referring to an alienated, inverted reality.

Thus, wage labor, private property, and capital, in addition to justifying the exploitation of the proletariat, meant for Marx components of prehistoric times, since as a whole they inscribed relations of exploitation and subordination in society, which in the opinion of Marx and Hegel were elements of barbarism. In relation to his own historical method, the author states:

Bourgeois society is the most complex and developed historical organization of production. The categories that express its conditions and the understanding of its organization allow us to understand the organization and relations of production of all past forms of society, on whose ruins and elements it was built and whose vestiges, not yet overcome, it continues to drag along. (Marx, 1953, p. 26)

History carries within it the contents of all epochs, where the Hegelian spirit has come together. Its development bore witness to an internal law that produced it. The contradictions resolved throughout it, as well as the realization of freedom outside of necessity through technification and industrialization, allowed us to assume that its internal law, its meaning, was nothing less than progress. However, the failure to overcome capitalism has led to the possibility of objectifying a common world based on work, and to the complete unrealization of the universal human being.

Only in the full freedom of the productive forces can human beings produce an entirely social reality. Only through historical consciousness can human beings carry out the revolution of the existing conditions of this era, and thereby make reality a true social fact, where

human beings satisfy not only their physical needs, but also their spiritual ambitions. This would mean, in a word, the assumption of *the zoon politikon* (political animal) insofar as “(...) their freedom consists in being-for-themselves in being- other” (Löwith, 2008, p. 211). In short, only human beings *are*, as they produce under the imprint of their own *genus of being*, which is social.

History never ceases to teach us about the series of dominations. Its meaning, beyond corresponding to an internal law based on overcoming contradictions and the illusion of progress, presents as a *document of barbarism*. Or at least, this was Walter Benjamin’s conclusion (Benjamin, 1986). Hence, the emancipation of alienated reality is possible as soon as we suspend the historical dialectic of this document of barbarism, a true article of faith of the oppressive classes.

Walter Benjamin and the possibility of history as an emancipatory practice

Within the heterodox tradition of Marxism, Walter Benjamin is probably one of the most enigmatic and brilliant figures. Not only because his research in the fields of art, politics, and history has achieved a beautiful unity, worthy of such dignity, but also because of his assiduous commitment to the dispossessed, to those who, as *outcasts*, revealed the shadows precisely where everything was cloaked in the aura of progress.

Symptoms of modernity such as Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe have received their due appreciation in Walter Benjamin’s work. Beyond being an art critic, Benjamin possessed the keen intuition to make materialist aesthetics an emancipatory element. For the topic at hand, we will try to find the unity achieved by this author in the aforementioned domains, in order to appropriate his critical and emancipatory component, so necessary for Latin Americans.

Perhaps *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Benjamin, 2015) and *Theses on the Concept of History* (Benjamin, 2008) are

this thinker's most iconic works, in that they convey his critical and revolutionary spirit. Where Walter Benjamin identified the transformations and functions of art in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, he also orchestrated the necessary conditions for art to rise as an instrument for social transformation and emancipatory practice.

Meanwhile, in the second work, he testified to his unshakeable faith in revolution through the powerful element of history. It is in the contents of this work that the first glimpses of emancipation can be found. Thus, *the dialectic in suspense*, a key concept that reflects the possibilities that the dispossessed have in breaking with the mechanical cycle of universal history, Hegelian history, which, in the author's opinion, represented the accumulation of ruins upon ruins.

For Walter Benjamin, historical materialism plays a fundamental role in the redemption of humanity. Recognizing the series of events unfolding throughout history, however simple it may seem, was not an encyclopedic task, but a revolutionary, entirely human one. Beyond reconciliation with reality, in historical terms, according to the Hegelian legacy, Walter Benjamin understood that history as a whole reflected an endless series of oppressions that determine our present.

Hence, contrary to the internal law of history, rooted in progress as understood by Hegel and even Marx, this thinker saw nothing less than a series of catastrophes, the accumulation of which seriously compromised not only the present but also the entire future. In contrast to the ideas of progress of social democracy and its confidence in the laws of history, Benjamin evoked the inexorable need for proletarian revolution, rejecting all passivity and confidence in the dialectical laws of history.

In the second thesis of his work *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin pointed out that "(...) the past carries a hidden index that never ceases to refer it to redemption" (2008, p. 36). By this he did not mean that the need to recover the motives of past revolutions becomes a commitment of our time, insofar as the repeal of a present that denies the proletariat redeems those who previously fought

against it. Thus, by virtue of failed revolutions such as that of 1840, history has an ultra-meaning, namely, to remember the blood of the vanquished. The same would apply in the case of Latin America, as the conquest and the wars of independence glorify the oppressors rather than the vanquished.

Women, men, black, and indigenous peoples were erased from the pages of Latin America's social, political, military, economic, and cultural history, giving rise to a systematic process of ethnic, cultural, and intellectual whitening, downplaying the struggles and intellectual creations of social sectors that were not part of the Creole, white, and intellectual society of the time, subordinating hopes for freedom, justice, and equal rights to the logic and dynamics of internal colonialism.

Napoleon Bonaparte's triumph in the French Revolution and his expansive force in the battles for Latin American independence did not bring redemption for the indigenous peoples, but rather the materialization of the interests of the Creoles, not to mention the bourgeois elite that had settled in this region. Michael Löwy, in his work dedicated to Benjamin, entitled *Fire Alarm*, has pointed out that:

Little by little, I realized [...] the universal scope of Benjamin's propositions, his interest in understanding from the point of view of the vanquished, not only the history of the oppressed classes but also that of women—half of humanity—Jews, Gypsies, Indians of the Americas, Kurds, Blacks, sexual minorities; in short, of the outcasts, in the sense that Hannah Arendt gave to this term, from all eras and all continents. (2003, pp. 45-46)

In fact, official historiography has rescued from the past only those famous figures who represented class values. And the same would apply to the past carved in marble: colossal cathedrals that rise to the sky continue to tell us the story of the oppressors. In this sense, history, insofar as it redeems the vanquished, is a preliminary step toward the revolution of all *that is*.

As seen, the contents inherent in historical materialism in its traditional meaning have been sharply disrupted by Benjamin. In Marx,

historical possibility lies in the ontological foundation of *the universal being*, and its realization through the revolution of the proletariat, while for Benjamin, history, according to what has been stated so far, presents itself in its messianic potentiality, i.e. as the redemption of the vanquished.

Leaving this aspect aside, the *outcasts* mentioned at the beginning of this second section represent the group of the declassed, of all those who were marginalized from any form of rights. In Latin America, it is commonplace in history to observe the denial of rights to both indigenous peoples and African Americans.

History continues to operate in the present. Thus, poverty and violence in these groups are recurring patterns in this document of barbarism, which bears the title: *culture*. Feudalism and modernity brought about profound transformations in the social structures of these groups, whose establishment was often justified in the name of civilization and God.

However, although this concept (culture) originated in Ancient Greece, it came into full use in Roman culture, which has represented the primacy of Western *Ethos* over any other form of culture. In the modernization project that has taken place since the 16th century, and whose greatest theorist could probably be Hegel, there are traces of the West's rejection of any subordinate form of existence. Have the Hegelian absolute spirit and the legitimization of rational government not represented the rejection of any other form of social organization?

According to the assumptions of Walter Benjamin's work, the legality of a univocal culture represents the triumph of the ruling classes throughout history. The products we call spiritual are nothing less than testimony to the ideological and cultural imposition of the West on Latin America. In the seventh thesis of the concept of history, it is stated:

The name given to it refers to cultural goods, the same ones that the historical materialist will find as an observer who takes a step back. Because all the cultural goods that fall within his gaze, without exception, have an origin that he cannot think of without horror. They all

owe their existence not only to the fatigue of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous servitude of their contemporaries. (Benjamin, 2008, p. 42)

In truth, the production of cultural assets inscribed in a particular regime of ideological domination, in addition to presenting a contradiction with the cultural formations inherent to a subordinate group, involves the exploitation of the vanquished, insofar as the great monuments extolling the triumph of civilization over barbarism have been produced by slaves since time immemorial. The same applies to Latin America, since the producers of a large number of ecclesiastical monuments have been mostly indigenous people. Immersing oneself in the history of the vanquished requires creating possibilities to slow down the historical movement which, in the name of progress, has delegitimized all subaltern cultural productions.

Art may well be one of those possibilities, as its contents can illustrate the history that unfolds on the other side of the official one. Thus, Michael Löwy, in his reading of the *Theses on the Concept of History*, understood that “(...) Diego Rivera’s frescoes in the Palace of Cortés (...) in Cuernavaca mark a true turning point in the history of Latin American culture, due to their iconoclastic demystification of the conquistador and the artist’s sympathy for the Indian warriors” (Löwy, 2003, p. 94).

In the same vein, the dialectic postulated by Marx between economic structure and ideological superstructure has been able to demonstrate how spiritual productions (art, religion, philosophy) do not simply emerge from consciousness, but obey the organization of productive forces and modes of production. This scheme, applied by Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, has been able to demonstrate a direct consequence of the capitalist mode of production on the work of art, which stands out for its relevance in the present. It is the mass industry and the mechanisms by which the commodification of art is reproduced.

Thus, cinema, as a tribute to capitalist ideology, stripped the work of art of its contemplative element, turning it into a mere object of

entertainment. In the words of Walter Benjamin, this phenomenon suggests that “(...) the film industry strives to stimulate the interest of the masses through viewers who encourage illusion and speculation” (Benjamin, 2015, p. 49). This phenomenon, on the other hand, suggests the correlation between the capitalist system and the rise of the proletarianized masses.

Understanding the unity between politics, history, and art inherent in this author’s philosophy requires a reflective exercise to find possibilities in the face of the commodification and instrumentalization of all things, including human beings. In his essays on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin analyzed the historical conditions experienced by the poet during the rise of industrial capitalism. His poems are true signs of the emergence of a new class characterized by its large numbers, anonymity, poverty, and automation.

This is the proletariat class and its conditions of existence, which became the *leitmotif* of the French poet. A universal class characterized above all by its inability to harbor experiences that could serve to develop a future project. Instead, the experience of *shock* and the consequent automation of behavior due to factory work represented the hallmarks of these large masses that passed through the district centers (Paris, London, New York), where capitalism had revolutionized past modes of existence. In Benjamin’s words:

Baudelaire speaks of the man who immerses himself in the crowd as in a *reservoir* of electrical energy. And he immediately defines him, describing the experience of *shock* as “a *kaleidoscope* endowed with consciousness”. If Poe’s passersby still cast aimless glances in all directions, today’s passersby must do so in order to pay attention to traffic signals. Technology thus subjected man’s sensory system to complex *training*. (Benjamin, 1968, p. 33)

Beyond the analysis of the material and historical conditions of industrial capitalism, based on literary material, Walter Benjamin found in criticism a powerful element for social transformation, as has been emphasized throughout this section. The exaltation of the prostitute, the thief, the beggar, and the dissolute are four figures that interested

Baudelaire and made up the picture of his *artificial paradises*, where all suffering was purified by the poet's pen.

For Benjamin, Baudelaire's work represented the rebel's attack on bourgeois consciousness. Here we see how art, through its historical criticism, can become a turning point. Consequently, for Michael Löwith, "Benjamin is interested in safeguarding the subversive and anti-bourgeois forms of culture, and seeks to prevent them from being embalmed, neutralized, academized, and incensed (Baudelaire) by the cultural establishment" (2003, p. 93).

In the case of Latin America, it is difficult to deny that analyzing art in terms of historical materialism would contribute to subverting both the modes of existence and bourgeois consciousness. Isn't the work of Pablo Palacios and his army of marginalized people a testament to this? Finally, the purpose of the *Theses on the Concept of History* is to break with the homogeneous rhythm of universal history and elevate the true "state of exception" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 43). In other words, if the norm, based on Benjamin, lies in technical and instrumental progress and the consequent domination of nature and human beings, the state of exception translates the need to interrupt this process, which would otherwise reproduce the patterns of barbarism and slavery.

Indeed, industry and technology have not been elements for the liberation of human beings; rather, it would seem that their destiny is to increase a market crammed with fetishized objects, which, ultimately, have led to the subjection of human beings to superfluous needs. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, in civilization, the "(...) cultivated use of mere instrumental objects (...) has finally become intolerable in itself, and that men are now almost, if not entirely, no longer masters of this apparatus, but rather its functionaries" (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1969, p. 100).

Hence, the critique of history lies in the denunciation of the illusion of progress in its exceptional sense. It is worth noting that if history continues at its homogeneous pace, its sentence would indeed be an inevitable catastrophe. It is undeniable that history contains the con-

tents of all the social, political, cultural, and artistic epochs of humanity, just as Hegelian thought contributed to the academic positioning of the historical discipline of his time. His voluminous work contains countless philosophical ideas about history and constitutes a great intellectual legacy for humanity.

Crucially, Hegel's ideas raise several problems. First, the central category of the philosophy of history posits a universalist character in which the particular histories of humanity depend on History. Second, they supported the discourses of a positivist, exclusionary, and erudite historiography that proposed a theoretical model of History as a universal phenomenon. Third, the universal ideas of History constituted a historiography whose vision denied the "other" and the "otherness," and rendered invisible and excluded all the particular knowledge and histories of humanity.

Hegelian ideas consolidated a historiography of exclusion. However, they also made it possible to establish theoretical positions contrary to those of the time. The existence of particular histories, parallel and excluded by the grand narratives of universal history, formed the basis for a turning point with Marx's critiques of the idealistic, speculative, positivist, and erudite history practiced by circles of Hegelian historians.

Marx identified profound contradictions in the Hegelian model of history, especially between *essence* and *existence*. Unlike the overcoming of the contradictions between essence and existence achieved in the establishment of civil government, Marx noted that the state and the law presented themselves as the new instruments of slavery; contradictions that Marx understood as the driving forces of history. Marx's criticism lies in Hegel's belief in human freedom as rational totality, which in Marxist analysis meant the moment of alienation of the proletariat. Hegelian freedom could only be possible through the new social relations that were founded with the emergence of civil government, and not through the creative capacity of the social consciousness of the human species.

The historical conception founded by Marx conceived of history and social events as a whole immersed in the dynamics of the society in

which they occur and not in the phenomenon of universal history. Marxist thought allows us to understand that history never ceases to teach us about the complex system of domination and barbarism. These ideas were further developed by Benjamin in his famous work *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Benjamin's work is dominated by Marxist thought and a critique of the universalism of Hegelian history. His work opens up the possibility of thinking about an emancipatory practice of history in Latin America. This practice needs to emphasize the "material" aspects and processes of social life as phenomena that explain the transformation of human beings and as a strategy for understanding social dynamism and the "class struggle".

The idea of an emancipatory history requires a critical historiography and, a critical historian who articulates theoretical production and social research with political practice, recognizing the leading role of the popular sectors and their potential as subjects of historical knowledge. In light of these reflections, it must be remembered that all social events, however minor, are immersed in the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics in which they occur.

It is vital to recognize that social events can never be understood in their entirety, especially if they are interpreted partially or simply separated from the context of their production at the whim of the historian. Understanding the contexts and the social events that took place within them must be the main criterion for constructing a critical historiography that confronts the universalisms of the positivist history inherited from Hegel.

It should be noted that an emancipatory practice of history must not only pay attention to contexts and social events, but also to the material aspects and processes of social life, i.e., to the mode of production of material life as a determinant of the social, political, and spiritual processes of human beings.

It is not through ideas that human beings define their consciousness, but rather, it is their *social being* that determines their consciousness. Benjamin understood Marx's formulation very well and worked tire-

lessly throughout his work, which today represents a path for constructing a historiography of the emancipation of *the social being* as an ontological foundation.

Finally, in order to construct an emancipatory historiography, the perspective and voice of the subaltern classes must be acknowledged, and the use of sources and techniques of analysis and social research must be expanded, the results of which will have an impact on representation and collective and popular action. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize that it is real women and men who make, possess, struggle for, and construct history. History does not use human beings to achieve its own ends; we must recognize that it is the daily lives of women and men that construct history; thus, history is nothing more than the activity of women and men who struggle to achieve their goals.