THE NEOLIBERAL CHALLENGE: BETWEEN THE
SCIENTIFIC SOPHISM AND THE COMMUNICATIVE
FASCINATION

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Summary: Narrations - even those about current phenomena and trends- require a minimum expositive structure, so that they acquire a sufficient degree of intelligibility. That is a difficult attribute when it is dealt with politico-economic processes with the added pretense of remembering past facts and also learning the lessons of History. However, the conventional “introduction–exposition–denouement” sequence recommended by Aristotle in The Poetic as the ideal order of a tale does not allow to delimit the nature and implications of the neoliberal offensive narratively in the peripheral capitalism.

In this way, the proposal of F. Kermode for a textual analysis through the road “beginning-end-potentiality” makes operative the analysis of the challenges posed by the current return of neoliberalism and it overcomes the descriptive limitations of the Aristotelian method when it is dealt with the characterization and implications both of a politico-economic program of capitalist depth and the economic philosophy that underlies in such a project. Especially, this is true of the current of thought of the most genuine liberal tradition whose practice defers - in the developing economies that make up the successive peripheral rings of the contemporary capitalism- those socio-economic ingredients that could respond to objectives of social emancipation.

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1. THE NARRATIVE LIMIT OF THE NEOLIBERAL RETURN

The exam of the return of orthodoxy is even more complex when we observe the multiple doctrinal sources where a mutation of the original liberal referent is witnessed: from the new classic macroeconomics to the anarco-capitalism. Although it is certain that we are in front of a version of the fable about “vintage wine in new wineskins” it is also right to say that it cannot be hidden that the consolidation of the current trends presents multiple social, political, cultural and economic aspects, the combination of which in specific coordinates of historical time and space make even more inscrutable a multipurpose referent, question already glossed by Ortega (1980, p. 135):

“... from 1780 in Europe all that inflamed and exited was called “freedom”, as the Greeks called “kalon” the most disparate things as long as they coincided in their

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alcoholic effect. The artisan from Paris died behind the barricade screaming: Freedom!,
while in the cathedral of the Seine, a few meters away from the castle where Goethe
worked, Fichte screamed "freedom" from the bottom of his splendid, incandescent,
frantic soul... And the truth is that both: -the artisan and the meditator-- referred
with the same cry to things not very related among themselves."

Indeed, the term liberalism contains a complex semantics that allows a selfish
use of the word and its derivatives, cultivating a selfish obscurantism from, in some
cases, economizing trivialities and, in others, from sophisticated mathematical
developments but, in general, with an inclined practice to the vulgar empiricism and the
selfish use of scientific sophisms and persuasive communicative techniques (cf. some
previous reflections in Garcia Menendez, 1986). As a consequence, along the present
paper we remit ourselves to the conceptual delimitation of the term "neoliberalism"
understood as the global program designed and/or applied in the present historical
phase to negotiate the cycle of accumulation in the peripheral capitalism (in connection
with the neoconservative trend of the central capitalist countries).

On the other hand, the neoliberal calendar widens its platform insofar as it
metabolizes the positive and normative analysis of certain anomalies that acquire
structural range (as the dialectics engendered by the simultaneous development of the
globalization process of the world market and the trends of fragmentation in economic
blocks) although the accumulated experience teaches us that it is not just a mere return
of the orthodoxy at all.

In fact, the current neoliberal politico-economic program is supported by a
scientific paradigm that has not faded away in an irreversible way since 1776, neither
even with the ascents of keynesian welfare state or the centralized planning that
denied, in different degree, the viability of the mechanisms of the so-called free market
to allocate resources efficiently. More than a return of the liberalism, in strict sense, it is
the verification of its permanency, sometimes in a hidden way, but without altering the
genetic load (at philosophical, political, economic levels,...) that provides with vitality
the program in those phases of the cycle in which its participation is inexcusable for the
defense of the reproduction of the capitalist system of which is tributary.

The versatility of neoliberalism to defend a certain socio-economic project is,
apparently, surprising, and it does not hesitate to sacrifice a part of its inheritance to
guarantee the high-priority objective: the reproduction of the order it serves.
Historically, the liberal program has given up since the 19th century the emancipating
part of the legacy of Illustration with the same agility put forward to recover Adam
Smith's invisible hand with the steal mitten of the bloody military coups d'état in Latin
America – during 70’s- in view of the aim of commending to the respective armies the
performance of the historical role of a nonexistent autochthonous bourgeoisie and in
this way to consolidate the guidelines of accumulation and legitimization of the
peripheral capitalism (Garcia Menendez, 1987).
The current neoliberal discourse, in my opinion, has accredited a critical reconstruction of its foundations through an armored hermeneutics that may not be deceived by the fascination produced by the politico-economic discourse. A discourse, the persuasive load of which is also fostered insofar as it is disclosed as an homogenous project (even, the only one viable) in a historical situation in which it is glimpsed the deep weakness of the keynesian question of the economic cycle, the decay of the welfare state and the crisis of the real socialism.

Recovering the expositive proposal of F. Kermode, the critical reconstruction of the neoliberal discourse in the peripheral capitalism -as apologetics of a certain social order and as a program of political and economic action- flows through a narration of social sciences with three unavoidable reflexive stops: from the prophetic announcements since 1945 around “the death of the ideologies” (the beginning) to the current prophecies about the end of History” (the outcome), reaching the threshold of the obscurantist hell (the prospective), in front of which we must not only abandon all hope (warning that K. Marx adopted from Dante) but, besides, we will not be able to forget the old aphorism advanced by Hobbes so caricatured and insulted by the neoliberalism, “... hell is nothing but the truth disclosed too late.”

2. THE DEATH OF IDEOLOGIES

From De Tracy to Marx and Engels, ideology is an ambivalent notion that means both the rationalization of a group of ideas and values on certain social, political and economic system, and its own disguise. Either as a speculation or prevailing practice, ideology is also a communicative phenomenon that is based - in Habermasian words of the Critical Theory of social sciences - on an instrumental distortion that reflects the link between knowledge (included the one accepted as “scientific”) and interest (Habermas, 1982).

The conventional scientific practice, in this sense, continually boasts of not subjecting its postulates to a critical reflection on the interests that guide it, but this elimination attempt is, in itself, an ideological decision. The thought current agglutinated in the present neoliberalism means an ideological system of significance and representation of phenomena of social interest and, simultaneously, the negation of that ideological load. And in this contraposition lies one of the main legitimization sources: the merely technical character of regulation of the economic and seemingly neuter cycle regarding the sectoral, corporate and social class interests. As a technocratic and equidistant tool from the involved agents, it contains a high dose of persuasion on the public opinion that tends to judge the management of the policy-maker as a “healthy” exercise of objectivity and rigor, on the margin. of the “pollution” of ideologies and values (cf. Ricoeur, 1975).

In the overlapping of the economic and political cycles of representative democracies (with independence of their degree of imperfection), there exist
superimposed phases in which neoliberalism is indebted to an electoral support based on the attraction of a message with a strong sophist character. The politico-economic proposal offers its product in the electoral market appealing to the “weberian lucidity”, consisting in denying the existence and the direction of the ideological and axiological vector of statements diffused as communicative phenomena.

In fact, neoliberalism as a leader of the “death of ideologies” becomes a sterile effort of the so-called science-ideology dissociation preached by Weber because a social group without an explicit ideology does not have either “utopia” or potentiality, it lacks political project and if has one it is nothing but a mere opportunity dossier. Unable to be distanced from the immediate thing, its program does not possess a global representation of itself and it is ineluctably condemned to continue a fragmented development in repetitive events and, consequently, historically insignificant.

The neoliberal manipulation of the nexus among the discourses about the “death of ideologies” and the “end of History” is channeled through the communicative phenomena of our time (from computing processes to the subtle networks of mass media). In the first place, computer science sophistication of modern society allows the control and the regulation of the market system to the point that the games of neoliberal rhetoric will become combinations of quasi-complete economic information, capturing in the politico-economic practice the theoretical prepotency of the stream of consciousness of neoliberal thought that preaches the death of “alien” ideologies by means of the consolidation of its “own”, carrying out one of the most characteristic features in the current scientific knowledge (Lyotard, 1989): science as immanence of itself.

In the second place, the fragmentation of reality that neoliberalism makes with the support of mass-media channels does not require to provide evidence on partial events because the instruments that make the process intelligible disappear and a historical process can only be initiated when there is a consecutive development of same. (Baudrillard, 1990).

Besides, the mentioned scientific and communicative fragmentation means a selfish symbolic impoverishment of reality: the neoliberal diagnosis simplifies the main social and economic problems and proposes a program of persuasive action just because it is trivial. In this way, the neoliberal alternative is basically a cynic practice because it declares its theoretical prepotency to present itself as the only viable technical solution in front of the serious economic problems in the present situation of History that, paradoxically, is condemned to its imminent end (García Menéndez, 1989). Without a doubt, this is the critical mass of the discourse of certain intellectuals who, in complicity with the dominant economic and communicative interests, apply a peculiar transitive property of the “death of ideologies” to the “end of History” and of the latter to the unavoidable “universalization of liberalism.”
3. The End of History

D. Bell (1964) proclaimed the agony of ideologies understood as exhausted currents that are substituted by neoconservatism and neoempirism (sic) that the author does not surprisingly consider as ideologies. Neoliberalism adopts this technocratic point of view of the vulgar positivism to define the "ideology" concept by means of the curious diagnosis of its nonexistence.

It is not a catastrophist advocacy of the end of History but rather the beginning of the history of communicative routine that makes tabula rasa of specificity in the description of relevant facts, identifying selfishly the socio-economic reality with the mirror of its simulation. The argumentable sequence leads from "the dying situation of ideologies" to the "irreversible end of History" understood as a result of contrasts of alternative ideological viewpoints.

In the wide range of lineal and cyclical conceptions of the historical passing by of time only the Hegelian point of view postulates its ineluctable end, a paradoxical forecast for whom, as G.W. Hegel, approaches the topic both from the point of view of Philosophy and Science (Hegel, 1960 and 1980). In this thought source F. Fukuyama picks up a contribution in which the end of the cold war and the decay of the real socialism complete an interpretative role similar to that of the French Revolution and Napoleon's campaigns in the Hegelian work.

Indeed and from the neoliberal perspective, the disappearance of the dialectics of blocks does not only represent the breakup of geostrategic tensions but also unequivocal signs of the end of History. A terminal phase in which the dying evolution of ideologies will leave the way to the prophecy of an imaginary Nostradamus that, at the very end of a millennium, announces the progressive universalization of liberal democracy as a kind of government and the extensive domain of the market as a way of allocating the economic resources of society (cf. Fukuyama, 1990 and 1992).

The unifying announcement proposes an authentic historical amnesia and, thus, a somber prospective. A message diffused on the scale of the peripheral capitalism by a growing community of social and educational scientists fascinated by a theoretical system equidistant from the social Darwinism and the trust in the control of politico-economic uncertainty about a well-known future or, in any case, not subjected either to random, or to the risks of alternative ideological and belligerent projects.

The post-historical period led by a totalizing neoliberalism will be nothing but a mere mechanical and perpetual reproduction of itself. Surprisingly, the point of view of F. Fukuyama on the hegemonic future of neoliberalism accepts the well-known Marxist clause that identifies History as the "history of ideologies" and the "history of the fight of classes" and, in short, the absence of both means the end of the first one.

Nevertheless, our reference to the orthodox interpretation is not unaware of the emptiness caused by the reiterated verification (as a communicative phenomenon) of the death of ideologies and the end of History. To fulfill that emptiness, liberalism
makes a wild production of substitute images (about politics, economy, culture ...) and adopts an overelaborate imaginary group although neoliberals — such as Baroque artists — are skeptical and iconoclasts in private.

That analytic fragmentation of reality -product of an a-historical reflection on the immediate thing - that was mentioned in the first part of this paper ends up in being the profuse neoliberal elaboration of quasi-identical images, channeled by mass-media, but that do not show the perceptive transcription of outstanding politico-economic processes but the premonition that that Baroque accumulation of information is the mark, the sign of something - maybe History, maybe the neoliberal program itself- that is, respectively, fated to disappear or susceptible of being defeated the day when the victims of the social and economic cost of the neoliberalism find out, as it happens in the classic chronicles of Tacit about the military campaigns in Gaul, that fighting separately they were all together defeated.

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