

Title: **The Role of Philosophy in the Globalized World**

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Introduction.

The argument in this paper is that philosophy has a very important role to play in the Age of Globalization. This claim about the importance of philosophy, however, is not entirely new. After all, throughout history philosophy has been understood to provide enlightenment and address questions and issues that improve the lives of persons. Philosophy, in short, has enriched both persons and societies. And although globalization has altered significantly almost every facet of the world, the fundamental task of philosophy has not changed. As Adorno notes, a philosophy that is not overcome by grand systems, first causes, an objective or autonomous reality, and other abstractions still has a role in even the most rationalized society.¹

Nonetheless, anyone who has been teaching lately, or is committed to social activism, recognizes that the public has been receiving a very different message. Persons are informed regularly nowadays, from the highest circles of education and government, that they should be realistic and pragmatic. In other words, they are told that they must strive to adjust to the prevailing social or economic conditions, rather than engage in fruitless speculation about a better and more humane world. For example, carping about the need for social change, or protesting publicly against certain policies, is simply dismissed as irrelevant and unproductive.

But how does philosophy fit into this scenario? Remember that the early Greeks claimed the heart of philosophy is wonder, or thaumazein. The point is that those who philosophize engage in the serious examination of various aspects of life that are often taken for granted. In this respect, philosophers are involved in a process of critical self-reflection and exploration;

¹ Adorno, Theodor W., Critical Models. NY: Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. 5-27.

philosophers are thus released from the grip or weight of reality. The end product of philosophy, furthermore, is touted to be illumination, self-mastery, and escape from servitude. In this respect, an authentic existence is the aim of philosophy, rather than a pragmatic or reified consciousness.

This intersection of the necessary and the possible is referred to by Walter Benjamin as a "disruptive moment." His point is that philosophy predicated on wonder blurs the boundary between these two realms, and thus the conditions are created that make change possible. Once the necessary is infused with possibility, in other words, there is nothing about reality that demands recognition and submission. As Max Horkheimer declares, critical philosophy can help "salvage relative truths from the wreckage of false ultimates."²

Although some philosophies have rejected this critical heritage, philosophy has had a creative and dramatic impact in society. For example, political revolutions have been inspired by critical philosophy, along with new ways of thinking about education, religion, and social exchange. Supported by such a philosophy, ideas that were once thought to be imaginary, and thus impossible to achieve, have been made into reality. As Marx once noted, the head of a true revolution is always philosophy. And as Leopoldo Zea always noted, a reflexive and critical philosophy can engage the world productively and forge a new, more relevant social order.

But nowadays the value of this sort of thinking has been called into question. Instead of critical or utopian, valid thought is assumed to mimic closely reality and convey accurately the details of this encounter. And given this almost obsession with attunement and reportage, philosophy has become a liability. In point of fact, within this context critical philosophy is a distraction, indicative of youthful idealism and immaturity, and contributes nothing to society.

² Horkheimer, Max, Eclipse of Reason. London: Continuum, 2004, p. 124.

What has contributed significantly to this marginalization of philosophy is the world-view that sustains the current perspective on globalization. This viewpoint, known as neo-liberalism, has no use for the flights of fantasy that philosophy is presumed to incite.³ Despite the individualism and freedom that neo-liberals covet, critical philosophy is considered to be dangerous. According to the neo-liberal paradigm, those who desire enrichment should become fixated on how the world operates, rather than question or doubt the veracity of reality. Specifically, rational and enlightened persons should focus on the market and how wealth is created.

This call for the reactivation of critical philosophy is consistent with Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's call for philosophy to become more worldly, particularly in Latin America.⁴ His point is that philosophy is needed now more than ever to address issues related to ethnic diversity, oppression, and the creation of more tolerant and inclusive societies. Philosophy, therefore, should move beyond the usual concern for philosophical problems or puzzles, and begin to deal seriously with pressing social issues.

In this regard, Enrique Dussel claims that philosophy can again be very liberating.⁵ For this to happen, however, philosophers must no longer engage in first philosophy; in other words, they must stop trying to establish a universal ground for knowledge and order. What he wants, instead, is that philosophy be initiated from where everything begins and ends, that is, in the world. When understood in this way, philosophy can extricate persons from a range of institutions that no longer reflect the aims and desires of their creators. Philosophy, in other

³ Houtart, Francois, Crisis del neo-liberalismo. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional del Colombia, 2003.

⁴ Fornet-Betancourt, Raúl, Crítica intercultural de la filosofía Latinoamericana actual. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2004.

⁵ Dussel, Enrique D., Introducción a una filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana. México: Extemporáneos, 1977.

words, can help to bring about the end of the widespread alienation that currently plagues modern societies. Philosophers, as Marx declared, can begin to change the world.

What philosophy can do, specifically, is address problems that have accompanied the current phase of globalization. In this regard, the market has spawned concerns that philosophy is well equipped to address, and thus can set the world on a different course. The critical side of philosophy, therefore, can be directed to examining the claims about globalization that have beguiled humanity.

The Ontology of the Market.

The centerpiece of the neo-liberal theory is the market. The belief is that every aspect of a society would be improved with a good dose of the discipline that is imposed by this mechanism. Economic proposals and performance, as well as ideas, will be refined and enhanced by the competition that is spawned at the marketplace. What is assumed by this position, however, is that the market is fair and just, and thus the best arbiter of social affairs.

But in order to perform adequately this function, the market must be assigned a unique ontological status. Specifically, this device must be perceived as autonomous and thus universal, so that the usual social biases and prejudices are purged from economic and other interaction.⁶ Given this unique position, all market outcomes are presumed to be rational and unaffected by political, personal, or other distractions. For this reason, the market is trusted in many circles as the only means that can produce regularly accurate and reliable results.

But how is this image created? In somewhat unflattering terms, the status of the market is established through a form of philosophical chicanery. That is, this autonomy is maintained

⁶ Hinkelammert, Franz J., "La economía en el proceso actual de globalización y los derechos humanos." In El huracán de la globalización, compilador Franz Hinkelammert. San José: DEI, 1999, pp. 239-249.

because of dualism, or the assumption that the human presence can be overcome in the pursuit of knowledge or order. With the knower sequestered from what is known, and values severed from facts, the autonomy and objectivity of the market are guaranteed. Franz Hinkelammert, for example, refers to dualism as a process of abstraction, whereby the universality of the market is secured through self-denial.⁷

But what does he mean specifically by the term abstraction? Simply put, persons begin to ignore that the market is thoroughly embedded in culture, and thus reflects certain values and commitments, so that this device acquires a patina of objectivity and universality. And once this sleight of hand is complete, the market can begin to acquire the seigniorial status necessary for it to be treated as unbiased and capable of transcending social positions, perspectives, and conflicts.

As a result of this philosophical maneuver, the market is allotted the stature usually reserved for something divine. Accordingly, there is no longer any competition among values in a society that is governed by the market, because the worth of everything is determined by this mode of allocating resources. For this reason, writers such as Hinkelammert and Serrano argue that the market has now risen to the level of a "Total Market."⁸ In this sense, the market has penetrated into every sphere of social existence, even the most personal realms, and has the power to subvert alternative values and challenges. As a result of this influence, social life is thus easily homogenized.

As Serrano has described, the market begins to be treated as a unique but superior moral realm, due to the influence of dualism. Indeed, any factor throughout the Western tradition that

⁷ Hinkelammert, Franz J., Cultura de la esperanza y sociedad sin exclusión. San José: DEI, 1995, pp. 238-239.

⁸ Serrano Caldera, Alejandro, Los dilemas de la democracia. Managua: Hispamer, 1995, p.11; Hinkelammert, Franz J., Crítica de la razón utópica. Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2002, p. 176.

has had autonomy similar to the market, could serve as the ultimate referent for knowledge and morality. Severed from human contingencies, the market can thus be envisioned as universal, like God or Plato's Ideas, and able to govern without restraint. In this respect, the market is a part of a well known, but problematic tradition. The market, stated simply, represents reality, while everything else is demoted to the level of mere appearances.

Hence a new form of absolutism has been introduced into society, according to Serrano. Not long ago kings, other tyrants, and states were imagined to be all-powerful, but this sort of power is passé in today's world.⁹ Nowadays these sources of authority are considered to be mythological, unreasonable, and anathema to democracy. Nonetheless, neither absolutism nor mythology has vanished. In the modern world, the market has become the new master, the new source of social control.

The liberty that neo-liberals value, accordingly, is curtailed seriously by the vehicle they have invoked to regulate society. As with many similar proposals, persons are left to confront and fall victim to an institution of their own making. But because of dualism, or separation as Marx called it, this truism is overlooked. And in the end, the alienation of persons increases, only this time in the name of rationality and free choice. For in reality, the market would be diminished seriously in stature if volition had any significant impact on the operation of this device. Subjectivity, in short, would compromise the universality of the economic logic assumed to be indigenous to the marketplace.

Globalization and Daily Life.

At this juncture, the important issue is: How does the metaphysics of the market affect everyday life? How does globalization, accordingly, influence how persons view themselves,

⁹ Serrano Caldera, Los dilemmas, p. 11.

society, and the future? As will be discussed, the market has widespread but subtle implications that are consistent with the autonomy of this device, and therefore diminish the quality of human action and the range of freedom that is encouraged.

The first consideration relates to the perspective on history that is conveyed. Most people nowadays believe that globalization is inevitable and cannot be avoided. Furthermore, the economic advances that are attendant to this trend are assumed to be reasonable, progressive, and beneficial to humanity. Soon all markets will be integrated, according to advocates of globalization, and thus everyone will prosper because of the increased efficiency and discipline that will be imposed on the entire economic process.

Neo-liberalism, accordingly, is predicated on a version of history that is similar to that proposed by Hegel. That is, the economy is presumed to be the outgrowth of both long and short cycles, which tend to generate the refinements that are witnessed eventually at the marketplace. Therefore, the market does not represent one mode of regulation among others, but rather embodies the epitome of economic development and rationality.

Given this portrayal of the market, traders who hope to be successful have no other alternative but to pay attention to the signals that indicate how buying and selling can be optimized. Those who are not vigilant, or simply unskilled, will overlook or misinterpret these markers, and thus will not take advantage of crucial economic opportunities. Without a doubt, those who win at the market are essentially very sober individuals.

Veteran traders, accordingly, tend to be realists. They are not interested in dreams or arcane moral arguments, but focus on trends in the market and current economic facts. Dreaming is for philosophers, while realists make money. Those who succeed at the market, therefore, are pragmatic and try to accumulate hard data in order to make correct decisions.

Deviating from the signals of the market--through wishful thinking or acting on emotion--can spell quickly economic disaster.

In addition to this epistemological issue, a particular view of human intelligence is also conveyed by the market. Because of the emphasis that is placed on market signals, intelligent traders can identify quickly these signs and formulate efficiently buying and selling strategies. Their minds, accordingly, are not muddled by theories or academic exercises, but rather are attuned to benefits and losses.

Traders, therefore, are adept at calculating. Input is gathered and organized as quickly as possible, so that likely trading scenarios can be evaluated and rapidly implemented. Intelligent behavior is not necessarily critical, or involved in self-examination, but is indicative of the ability to process quickly and accurately input and generate output. The mind is thus a calculator.

In the end, the message is that persons who succeed at the marketplace are flexible and adaptable, and thus respond effectively to events. They are not distracted by utopian visions, and thus do not adhere to rigid dogmas, but want to understand how the world currently operates. They gather data, acquire technical skills, and make logical decisions. And speculation simply has no role in this process.

Obviously, philosophy has little to contribute to this style of economic analysis, unless philosophizing is reduced to logic and calculation. But clearly wonder is troublesome, as a result of blurring the boundary between interpretation and reality. This mode of philosophy, as far as market realists are concerned, introduces fuzziness, uncertainty, and error into trading. Critical philosophy is simply anathema to making sound judgments.

But perhaps most problematic is that traders must act as individuals, for social ties only limit a person's ability to take advantage of opportunities. Family bonds or community, for

example, may restrict physical movement and other aspects of effective search strategies.

Political or other commitments, likewise, may reduce the competitiveness of a person.

Exhibiting moral qualms at the market will likely inhibit persons, precisely when ruthlessness is necessary to succeed.

What is diabolical about this social imagery, however, is the message that other persons are a threat to an individual's freedom. The world is thus portrayed in an atomistic manner, with sovereign persons pursuing their own aims with little regard for anyone else. Any relationships, accordingly, are simply tactical and designed to enhance economic gain. In the end, persons are left in a world that is fragmented and anomic. Persons are adversaries who strive to minimize any human connection, or what Marx called their "species-being."

Clearly moral or ethical sentiments are peripheral to the market. Ethics is simply a luxury for those who do not have to compete daily to survive. Critical philosophy, accordingly, might raise concerns about poverty or exploitation, for example, which only confuse those who must maintain their competitive edge. In a social Darwinian sense, poverty is the result of unsuccessful trading, and thus is not the concern of successful individuals. Perhaps a few religious zealots, who are not embroiled in the market, can be left to address the collateral damage that results from trading.

Philosophical Questions.

Many critics nowadays argue that globalization is neither rational nor progressive. Neo-liberal policies, they illustrate, have widened the gap between the rich and the poor, encouraged the destruction of the environment, and made most persons more insecure.¹⁰ As a result of these

¹⁰ Dierckxsens, Wim, Del neo-liberalismo al poscapitalismo. San José: DEI, 2000.

changes, persons have launched massive protests against the IMF and World Bank. Their point is to influence policy making, while promoting alternative strategies of development.

The question at this juncture is how can philosophy aid these projects? In general, what critical philosophy can do is demonstrate that the current trend of globalization is founded on questionable premises. And once this realization is promoted, establishing alternative realities might be possible.

To begin, critical philosophy can reveal the dubious claim that globalization, along with the market, is autonomous. This proposition is based on a philosophical maneuver, or dualism, that has been seen as flawed since the writing of Kant. The idea that the human presence can be sequestered from knowledge has little credibility in contemporary philosophy, not to mention twentieth century physical sciences. What makes more sense, according to these critics, is that all phenomena are embedded in human action and contingent. Some writers refer to this activity as praxis, while others say language games. Their conclusions, however, are similar: the validity of knowledge is tied to particular modes of interpretation, or human intervention.

Consequently, epistemological claims are thoroughly political; that is, as declared by Stanley Fish, when a particular proposal is elevated in importance, others are obscured.¹¹ With respect to globalization, the implication is that this economic stage is no more inevitable than any other. Neo-liberal policies, in other words, reflect certain political commitments and economic preferences, rather than an a-historical telos that embodies the will of humanity. Rather than transcendent, history is immanent to social discourse. History, as Walter Benjamin says, is a mosaic that is spread latterly and can be rearranged in any number of ways.¹²

¹¹ Fish, Stanley, Doing What Comes Naturally. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.

¹² Benjamin, Walter, Illuminations. NY: Schocken Books, 1969.

With the foundation of globalization undermined in this manner, a new image of rational behavior is revealed. Rather than pragmatic and mimetic, rational action must be inventive. Deprived of an autonomous raison d'etre, persons must now make themselves in order to meet their own needs. In this way, history becomes synonymous with the numerous human projects that constitute any society.

Globalization can thus be redefined or abandoned altogether, without violating the laws of reason. Accordingly, alternative logics of development, as they are sometimes called, are not automatically predicated on illusions, impractical, and impossible to implement.¹³ A post-capitalist logic, accordingly, is not necessarily indicative of utopianism and unworthy of serious discussion.

What a philosophy that begins with wonder can do is illustrate that no style of knowledge is complete and constitutes an autonomous system. Gödel made this discovery perfectly clear. And because knowledge is tied to human intervention, nothing that emerges from this praxis is foreign to persons or inherently impossible. There is nothing that prevents the initiation of a new future, therefore, but other contingencies, although they may claim to be omnipotent.

A critical philosophy, in the end, can open the world to new possibilities, while revealing that persons have the burden of making the future. Persons are thus capable of far more than merely mimicking reality, but can reinvent social existence through their imagination. However, rather than simply contrasted to reality, as is the case with Appadurai, imagination is now understood to be the foundation of any reality that becomes paramount and is accepted as normal.¹⁴ Imagination thus sustains history rather than something ethereal or eternal.

¹³ Houtart, Francois, "Las alternativas al modelo neo-liberal." In El otro Davos, coordinado por Francois Houtart y Francois Polet. México, DF: Plaza y Valdes, 2000, pp. 66-85.

¹⁴ Appadurai, Arjun, La modernidad desbordada. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina, 2001.

As should be noted, such a utopian vision does not constitute a rejection of reality, which would subvert the legitimacy of any new proposal. In short, this sort of reaction to institutional demands could be dismissed simply as irrational. What is being suggested by utopian, instead, is that all realities are at their root imaginary, and are put into practice through arduous effort. In other words, all realities emanate from specific visions. Therefore, the term utopian suggests that no-one is a realist, because no reality exists sui generis. Those who support globalization are thus no more realistic than those who contend that a more humane, less alienating economy is feasible.

Without the strictures imposed by realism, anything is possible. In this regard, the admonition of the surrealists should be acknowledged by those who oppose globalization. Specifically, do not be intimidated by reality, because what is considered to be real is neither absolute nor ultimately legitimate. A particular rendition of reality may have dire consequences, particularly for specific classes of persons, but this outlook is not invulnerable to critique and change.

What maybe most necessary, however, is that philosophy dispel the viability of atomism. As Heidegger once wondered, how has such an untenable principle gained such universal acceptance? After all, persons live in a world, and thus are not atoms, with or without windows. In other words, persons are not enclosed on themselves, but instead seem to be fundamentally connected to one another. Their fates seem to be tied together; there seems to be no escape from others. So, rather than hell, as Sartre noted, others are neighbors or *compañeros* and share a common destiny.

In this sense, the social imagery conveyed by the market is illusory. Persons do not act alone, but always in the presence of others. What has been called the ideology of market

individualism is a distortion. Accordingly, others do not limit a person's freedom--as if individualized freedom was ever possible--but are co-participants in any decision. What this discovery means, as noted by Leonardo Boff, is that persons should exhibit care for one another.¹⁵ This concern, however, is not charity, something optional, but a fundamental interest in others who are implicated in one another's actions. In fact, he says that "we are care"; in other words, persons are ontologically related to others without domination.¹⁶

As intended by liberation theologians, persons are all a part of a similar community. And members of a true community to not cheat, exploit, or discriminate against one another. Additionally, no member of such a community would tolerate the mistreatment of others; members are always vigilant and bare witness to such behavior. What the market has done, simply put, is to destroy any sense of community, where persons gladly protect and foster the growth of one another. What persons do, instead, is accept that domination is logical and necessary, because they are individual agents with no social responsibilities.

The market is thus the wrong imagery for use in building a responsible community or nation. Indeed, any effective response to globalization must be collective, so that no-one is left behind or marginalized. Therefore, new imagery is needed that suggests persons are "freely associated," or connected without dominance. When persons are understood to be complementary, and not basically antagonistic to one another, a society can be integrated without eliminating diversity. In this regard, philosophy can help restore an ethical dimension to social life that is not ethereal, i.e., designed to assess ultimately the rationality of personal choices, but related to the non-atomistic, direct experience of others.

¹⁵ Boff, Leonardo, El cuidado esencial. Madrid: Trotta, 2002.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

Conclusion.

What a critical philosophy can encourage is that persons begin to think differently about themselves and others, not to mention social reality, so that a new relationship can be established with globalization. In some circles this new association is referred to as globalization from below. But the point of this oppositional strategy is not merely to rationalize or legitimize globalization from a new location. For example, rather than from above, global changes will be justified now from below. With respect to redirecting globalization, such a shift is insufficient.

Taking philosophy seriously, instead, can subvert the prevailing global imperative. In point of fact, due to the intimate metaphysics that is revealed--with globalization embedded in the human community--neo-liberalism does not have an autonomous and preordained destiny. The future of globalization is thus uncertain and can be defined in any number of ways, including ones that might be considered impossible at this moment. And because the human presence is an unfinished project, the current rendition of globalization does not have unquestioned legitimacy. Now neo-liberal inspired globalization must compete for recognition with other possibilities, without any guarantee of success.

Following this philosophical maneuvering, persons no longer have to confront globalization and shepherd this process either from above or below. Instead, globalization is understood to be invented and can be redirected to the benefit of all of humanity. The problem is that those who benefit from the current rendition have told everyone else that other economic or cultural options are impossible. Nonetheless, the goal that lies ahead is for persons to put into practice the philosophical insight that reality has an imaginary base that can be rethought or reinvented. In this way, to paraphrase Marx, persons might begin to remake reality, only this time as a collective action and as they please.

But critical philosophy does not constitute simply the negative backdrop of this emancipatory project. Rather, philosophy can supply a new vision of the future; an alternative outline of a new social reality can be the product of critical philosophy. In fact, without such an informative perspective, social critique is aimless and planning flounders. Philosophy, in this sense, enables persons to think anew about themselves, their relationships to others, the nature of daily interaction, and morality. And these new images are the backbone of any new social project.

But consistent with the imperatives that are issued by the market, much of social planning that is undertaken today is bereft of critical philosophy. Furthermore, this theoretical activity is considered to be something academic and divorced from daily affairs such as hunger and violence. Most community activists, after all, desire concrete initiatives and straightforward talk. Yet without critical philosophy, critique and action are unconsolidated and impotent. True agents of social change, therefore, must not fall prey to the market and diminish in importance the philosophical activity that can provide a framework for effective critique and planning.

In this sense, philosophy does not compromise, misdirect, or dilute action, but supplies the conceptual context necessary for action to be effective. The question, therefore, is how to use critical philosophy in a constructive manner to envision and implement an alternative, more humane social reality. In this sense, the neo-liberal project, as a philosophical position, can be critiqued and transcended. And although this new imagery will only become a reality through arduous effort, political and otherwise, the realization of this alternative outlook will not likely occur without the direction given by critical philosophy. The point, accordingly, is to begin philosophizing in this critical and revolutionary manner, in order to facilitate the onset of a new world.