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Contemporary Approaches in Philosophical and Humanistic Thought

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This book is dedicated to Jose

Qu'est-ce qui se passe en ce moment? Qu'est-ce qui nous arrive? Quel est ce monde, cette période, ce moment précis où nous vivons? [...] Qui sommes nous, à ce moment précis de l'histoire?

Michel Foucault,
Le sujet et le pouvoir

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Introduction

ALBERTO FRAGIO, JOSEFA ROS VELASCO*

This collaborative work brings together a series of essays focused on exploring contemporary thought. The aim of the book is to undertake a review of the current methodologies, approaches, and theoretical assumptions in philosophical and humanistic thought, asking: which contributions are remarkable for their cultural significance and critical stance? What innovations have been produced in last few years? What new tools and methodologies have been made available for intellectual work and problem solving? Which new disciplines and issues have been incorporated into philosophical and humanistic studies? How should the humanities be produced in the twenty-first century? These are just some of the topics addressed in this volume. The book is organized into three sections: I) History, Historiography and Rhetoric; II) Economics and Political Theory; and III) Archaeology, Geography and Philosophy. The first section present contributions discussing the ethics of memory in the works of Jan Assmann and Hayden White, including the new political rhetoric being applied in historical studies. Chapter 1, “History or Memory. On Topicality of Jan Assmann’s Phenomenology of Cultural Memory” by Roberto Navarrete Alonso (The Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), deals mainly with the Egyp-

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tologist Jan Assmann and the relevance of his contributions to cultural theory on two of the most pressing issues of our times: religious fanaticism taken to the extreme of terror and the question of cultural identity in a globalised world. For this purpose, the difference between history and memory is analyzed in the context of the so-called *Historikerstreit* (Historians' Quarrel) about the public use of history. This dispute laid bare the collapse of the ideological paradigm of history that characterized intellectual debate in the 1960s and 1970s. The Marxist idea of a false consciousness as the fundamental component of social reality had to be replaced with that of a "collective memory" in order to explain the configuration of group identities. The chapter expounds Assmann's reflections on the transition from collective memory to cultural memory, a means of ensuring the survival of the remembrance of a significant event for the community. Finally, the author emphasizes the role of time in this transition, as well as the political potentialities of cultural memory (and oblivion) in the context of the current humanitarian crisis and its relation to religious fanaticism.

By contrast, Chapter 2, entitled "The Ethic-Political Commitments in the Writing of History. Hayden White's Formalism and the Holocaust Problem" by Rafael Pérez Baquero (University of Murcia), helps us to think about theory of historiography by observing it from an analytical perspective. Any theory in this field must confront the problems inherent in dealing with extreme case studies like the Holocaust. As Wulf Kansteiner remarked in his essay "From the Exception to Exemplum: The New Approach to Nazis and The Final Solution", this event has become an icon of violence that stands as a philosophical reference point for 20th century. In this sense, by attempting to deal with this issue we observe the re-emergence of the classical issues that plague the philosophy of history, albeit with an added element. A few such examples are the questions surrounding the objectivity of historical representation, the influence of the historian's perspective in his account of facts, and the lack of distance of the historian investigating his present. This chapter deals with the implicit problems that historical representations

of the Holocaust might pose in terms of these longstanding issues. In particular, the compatibility between the historical interpretation of the Holocaust and some of the assumptions of historical narrativism are analyzed. In his works *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* and *The Texture of Memory*, American linguist and Hebraist James E. Young criticized the pretenses of fidelity and objectivity in representing the Holocaust. From his point of view, the debates surrounding the possibility of producing an accurate historical narration of the facts is mired in contradiction. As a goal, this is simply beyond the scope of the historian, given that the knowledge of a historical fact is rooted in the metaphorical and tropological structures that organize each text. Throughout these essays, James E. Young applies the poetic structuralism of Hayden White to the problems of representing the Holocaust. White himself also proposed one of the most controversial and original theories regarding 20th century history. Indeed, White's poetics of history has become a totemic work that has to be either rejected or used as a point of departure in the study of a historical text. Thus, this chapter looks to delve into the possibilities of White's formalism and, in doing so, introduces a contraposition between his theoretical model and the challenges that it involves for the representation of the Holocaust.

Chapter 3, "Political Rhetoric. New Trends in Historical Studies in Romania" by Nelu-Cristian Ploscaru (University of Iasi – Romania), focuses on Romanian historiography in terms of political rhetoric. Political rhetoric represents an instrument for administering and promoting the discourses of public prestige. In this sense, it exhibits a peculiar feature of modern elites and may be considered as an historical source of the dominant ideological tropes and the power struggles. That is to say, political rhetoric is a landmark of the elements of continuity and rupture from the "market" of the ideas in a society. In contemporary studies, rhetoric is no longer understood merely as the art of oratory or the manipulation of consciousness but, primarily, as a means of verbal and symbolic communication in modern society. This chapter deals with the latest research into this

area, observing the social function of language as one of the most powerful instruments of social change, offering it both meaning and legitimacy. The author suggests that political rhetoric should be analyzed in the context of the emergence of the public and public opinion as an essential referent of the political act, considered a new source of legitimacy. He considers that the new role of political rhetoric reflects a crisis of the traditional forms of legitimacy and the emergence of a new one, forged in the battle for power in the context of the reconfiguration of the political institutions.

The second section of this book, “Economics and Political Theory”, attempts to shed light on the recent contributions in these fields. In particular, Chapter 4, “Current Trends in the Political Economy of Development: New Institutional Economics (NIE), Theory of Capacities and Degrowth” by Daniel Peres Díaz (University of Granada), looks deeper into the growing importance of the recent institutional developments or “governance reforms”, both in the field of literary theory and among those international governmental organizations charged with determining national development models. In this context, the new institutionalism approach focuses on the quality of political institutions in order to explain the development rates of states. This approach is west-centric and disregards particular, local variations, resulting in “institutional monocropping”, a mistake when attempting to improve development. In response to this, the paper raises several criticisms of this approach, focusing on other factors such as the culture, people, and the environment. Indeed, the author proposes that this topic must be placed at the forefront of political debate and provoke public participation. Therefore, he suggests an analysis of the main trends in the political economy of development from a critical perspective in order to disassemble the orthodox views of political economy. Against hegemonic discourse, human development assumes that the developmental process must be deliberative; that is, must be based on consensus, participation, and democracy. In addition, the concept of “degrowth” helps us to understand that the concept of development must transcend the equivalence between

growth and development to focus instead on the eradication of the “new poverties of development”. Combining all of these elements of analysis, the author maps out the key issues around which the political economy of development is situated today.

Closely linked to the previous topic, Chapter 5, “The Development of the Concept of Populism in Laclau’s Political Theory” by César Ruiz Sanjuán (Complutense University of Madrid), undertakes a review of Ernesto Laclau’s concept of populism from its first iteration in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* to its final formulation in *On Populist Reason*. The common thread running through this analysis is Laclau’s approach to hegemony, the development and progressive articulation of which demonstrates not only the potential but also the inherent limits of Laclau’s concept of populism in its various formulations. Certainly, the theory of hegemony does not appear in a clearly expressed form until *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, written in collaboration with Chantal Mouffe. However, even in the very first work, we already encounter the concept of the hegemonic formation of identities that is so fundamental to Laclau’s theoretical development. Here, Laclau argues that popular forces must be articulated in relation to class positions that are derived not only from the economic structure of society, but also from associated political and ideological relations. Nevertheless, in the later development of the theory of populism in *On Populist Reason*, the concept of “the people” is not associated with the concept of class; indeed, Laclau rejects this essentialist view. This break is first encountered in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in which Laclau rejects the fundamental Marxist doctrine that the economy remains the sole determining factor, arguing instead that social agents are not constituted by their class position. In this work one finds a tension between the developing theory of hegemony and the concept of populism. However, both theories merge in Laclau’s later works, becoming completely integrated into a definitive formulation of the theory of populism. According to this approach, populism is seen as a hegemonic project that contains principles of equivalence and difference and aims to create a dichotomization of so-

cial space. Laclau thus specifies the conditions for the existence of “the people” from the creation of a chain of equivalence, which consists of unmet social demands unified around a nodal point. This unity is expressed through the role of a populist leader, who embodies totality and appears as the representative of the people. Such leadership is essentially discursive in nature, and is based on a process of identification with the people on a fundamentally emotional level.

In Chapter 6, “The *Thereness* that We Are. Judith Butler on Performative Ethical Life and Narrative Identity”, Nuria Sánchez Madrid (Complutense University of Madrid) essentially attempts to highlight the Hegelian underpinning of Judith Butler’s key assertions on human identity and the universal right to citizenship through a discussion of most of her more recent writings regarding popular demonstrations and the occupation of public space. The author first tackles Butler’s project by sketching out a new Hegelian frame of reference, one capable of denouncing and dissolving ethical violence and grounding what the author ventures as the “performative ethical life”. Moreover, the author focuses on the connection between the narrative identity of self and the aesthetics of *thereness* shaped by Butler’s theory of political performativity. Finally, Sánchez Madrid addresses Butler’s claim of an “unchosen” and “pre-contractual” bodily community that challenges politics to denounce the neoliberal production of precarity, rejecting the declaration of human beings as non-human.

The third and final section, “Archaeology, Geography and Philosophy”, is devoted to shedding light on the role of space in contemporary philosophical and humanistic thought. Chapter 7, “Historiographical Implications of the Introduction of Archaeology in Contemporary Societies’ Studies” by Óscar González Vergara (University of Murcia), explores the consequences of the introduction of archaeology as an academic discipline for the study of contemporary industrial societies. The author also looks to adapt the archaeological methodology to meet of a study of increasingly globalized societies, allowing for the recognition of interpretations known to other disciplines,

such as history, geography or anthropology, whilst also allowing for the analysis of man from a different perspective. As with any other social or humanistic discipline, the application of archaeology to the analysis of industrial and contemporary societies raises a series of problems and reflections that sometimes involves a changing of the mindset of society and of modern man himself making possible a different kind of historical narratives. Using contemporary archaeological heritage as a vehicle the author concludes by stating the need for a paradigm shift if we are to improve contemporary understanding of contemporary industrial societies. With this change, contemporary archaeology, understood as a discipline of a traditionally multidisciplinary profile, can thus help to advance our analysis of the various historical and cultural realities of contemporary society.

Chapter 8, “*Hic sunt leones*. New Perspectives for an Ontology of Ancient Geography” by Timothy Tambassi (The Research Institute of the University of Bucharest), begins with a consideration of innovations in online cartographic visualization that have sparked a revolution, breaking down traditional divisions between browsing and searching, thematic layers, web content, spatial processing and geographic datasets. Situated at the intersection between geographic computing and web-based information technology, these rapid developments cannot be precisely categorized by any single body of academic literature. A variety of terms is in use for one or another aspect of this domain: from *web mapping* to *neogeography*, *social cartography* to *geoweb*, *webGIS* and *volunteered geographic information*. In this context, there has been a proliferation of geoinformatics projects focused on the ancient world in which a comparison between ancient and contemporary geography is required and for which philosophy can play a fundamental role, specifically in terms of an ontology of geography and theory of spatial representation. The author considers all of the above in pursuit of a twofold object: The first is to outline the connection between geography and philosophy from the point of view of contemporary ontology and establish a distinction between classical and non-classical geographies; something that might con-

stitute a useful tool for thinking about the spatial representation of the ancient geography. The second aim is to achieve a clear understanding of the philosophical problems that ancient geography may raise, starting with the basic question “What is the scope of this particular science?”, before then moving to tackle more specific methodological and representational issues. The author maintains the fundamental idea, advocated by Arnaldo Momigliano, that learning to see the world through the eyes of ancient populations might deeply influence the contemporary debates, in particular those regarding the conceptualizations and representations of geo-informatics.

Chapter 9, entitled “Philosophical Cosmology Today” by Marco Russo (Università di Salerno – Italy), calls for the return of a philosophical cosmology as an essential tool for understanding the present. Indeed, globalization is closely linked with the concept of world, but what such a concept really means is far from clear. However, it is possible to observe a distinct lack of interest in questioning the nature of the world. Indeed, *Worldlessness* is a paradoxical feature of the global age. In an attempt to explain why this is the case, the author attempts to sketch out an account of 20th century philosophers re-addressed the notions of what the world is. Taking up the arguments of three representative authors, Husserl, Heidegger, and Arendt, Russo suggests how the three classical axes of cosmological thought – the Earth, the Heaven and the Cosmopolis – might be renewed. A philosophical cosmology today would consequently contain the following interlaced focal points: 1) an analysis of our existence as Earthly creatures, of our embodied experiences of space, time and environmental media; 2) the metaphysical idea of phenomenal totality, together with its secular heritage of images, myths and theories; 3) cosmopolitanism as an ethical-political doctrine for peaceful coexistence and a balanced world that avoids becoming merely a contrived, post-national conception of the state and instead seeks to establish a concrete anthropology of globalized man.

The final chapter, “Legitimacy, Self-affirmation and *deificatio*: The Modern Age as Definitive Epoch” by José Luis Vil-

lacañas (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), undertakes a deep review of German philosopher Hans Blumenberg's (1920-1996) famous book *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*. Professor Villacañas suggests an insightful understanding of the Modernity that opens new horizons not only for history, philosophy and religion studies, but also for understanding the historical development of contemporary science and capitalism.

In brief, this volume seeks to provide the public with a scientific monograph that contributes to a better understanding of the contemporary philosophical and humanistic thought. The book was conceived in the context of both the Mexican DSA-SEP program "Apoyo a la incorporación de nuevos Profesores de Tiempo Completo" (UAM-PTC-521, 2015-2016) and the Spanish Fellowship FPU (Formación de Profesorado Universitario) associated with the research project "Biblioteca Saavedra Fajardo de Pensamiento Político Hispánico IV: Ideas que cruzan el Atlántico" (FFI2012-32611). We would like to thank to the GIPEL Research Group at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, and the HIST-EX Research Group at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CCHS-CSIC Madrid). We would like to offer special thanks to Prof. Dr. José Luis Villacañas Berlanga, Prof. Dr. Javier Moscoso, and all those who have made this book possible. The publication of this book was supported by the Departamento de Historia de la Filosofía, Estética y Teoría del Conocimiento at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid.

