Juan José Tamayo, Luis Alvarenga, eds.

Ignacio Ellacuría. Utopía y teoría crítica. Valencia: Triant Humanidades, 2014.

Pp. 195. Pb, 17 euros.

In commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the murder of the Spanish-Salvadoran Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuría, together with five of his confreres, a domestic worker, and her child, by an elite corps of the Salvadoran army, various books and articles about this outstanding figure of Latin American liberation theology and philosophy were published in 2014. This anthology, edited by the Spanish theologian Juan José Tamayo and the Salvadoran poet and philosopher Luis Alvarenga, is one of the most inspiring of them. The seven essays published in the volume originated at a conference of the holders of the different chairs named after Ignacio Ellacuría in Spain and Latin America, held at the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas in San Salvador (whose rector Ellacuría had been) in 2012.

As Tamayo and Alvarenga state in the introduction, the book aims at a “pluridimensional” reading of Ignacio Ellacuría’s enormously rich legacy—which comprises several thousand pages of theological, philosophical, and political texts—approaching it from different angles, and with special attention to its utopian and critical dimensions.

The term “pluridimensional” makes explicit reference to Herbert Marcuse’s classical study *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). In fact, fostering a dialogue between Ellacuría’s theoretical perspective and “critical theory,” as represented by the so-called “first generation” of the Frankfurt School (Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse) is the second explicit aim of the anthology.

In their essays, José Manuel Romero, Ricardo Ribera, and Luis Alvarenga make clear that there exist good reasons to ascribe Ellacuría to critical theory, not only because Ellacuría himself gave lectures about Marcuse at the Jesuit university in El Salvador, but because his perspective shares many of the basic intuitions of critical theory, such as the hermeneutics of suspicion, a concern with emancipation, the use of dialectical methodology, a reflection on the relationship between theory and practice, and the awareness of the historical and social conditions of academic work. All three authors also point out, however, that Ellacuría, has something important to contribute to critical theory, especially with regard to the blind spots of the Frankfurt School: the implicit eurocentricity of its perspective and the lack of reflection about the relationship between critical thinking and religious traditions.

To establish a dialogue between critical theory and religious traditions, although in a somehow “heterodox” way, constitutes a third topic common to

the essays of this volume. Carlos Molina and Luis Alvarenga locate Ellacuría within the tradition of philosophers like Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Giorgio Agamben, Roque Dalton, and Slavoj Žižek, who combine the social and political dimensions of the messianic and utopian traditions of Judaism and Christianity with a Marx-inspired critique of society. According to the authors, critical theory needs such messianic and utopian horizons to avoid “the danger of getting stuck in [...] immediate factuality” (14) and turning defeatist because of the lack of immediate results. The subtitle of the anthology expresses this intent of bringing “critical theory” together with “utopia”—a perspective not easily granted at first, given that in 1967 Marcuse himself offered a public lecture in Berlin on “the end of utopia”, but which finds its justification in the fruitfulness of the connection between “prophetic criticism” and “utopic horizons” in Ellacuría.

Against the background of these analyses, a fourth common aim of the essays of the volume can be identified: the attempt to recover the critical potential of Ellacuría’s utopian thinking to criticize and to transform the current global “civilization of capital” into a “civilization of work” or “shared frugality,” as Héctor Samour puts it. The example of Ellacuría proves that this transformation is impossible “without an attempt of historicization, understood as *incarnation*, contextualization and historical determination” (94) of theoretical claims. An effective critique of society cannot remain a matter of privileged scholars with guaranteed social safeguards in academic ivory towers, but must be willing to take serious risks, in some cases even the risk to lose one’s own life.

The essays of Antonio Senent and Alejandro Rosillo deserve special mention for their meritorious intention of applying Ellacuría’s critical-utopian perspective to the area of law—something Ellacuría himself regarded as a necessary task. By using Ellacurían concepts and categories to criticize the predominant positivistic perspective in this domain, and to develop instead a “critical theory of law” and human rights, the two authors shed light on an area of Ellacuría’s oeuvre often neglected by philosophical and theological investigations.

Some theses raised in the essays might need further discussion and clarification (such as Ricardo Ribera’s account of Ellacuría’s dialectics and its relation to the dialectics of Hegel and Marx; the critical character of the thought of Xavier Zubiri, Ellacuría’s philosophical master—denied by José Manuel Romero but affirmed by Juan Antonio Senent—or the supposed “heterodoxy” of Ellacurían thinking, according to Carlos Molina). All the essays, however, succeed in offering both surprising and insightful perspectives on crucial

aspects of Ellacuría's theoretical work, and in bringing it into a creative dialogue with actual philosophical, theological, and jurisdictional debates.

The anthology as a whole has to be regarded as one of the most extraordinary philosophical studies of the legacy of Ellacuría published in recent years. It gives eloquent witness of the vitality of both the legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría and critical theory in the Spanish-speaking world. Moreover, it demonstrates the capacity of some of the contemporary representatives of Latin American liberation philosophy and critical theory, not only to remember and analyze but also to reformulate and actualize these traditions creatively in order to confront the challenges of the modern globalized village, in which—despite the often announced “end of history”—repression, exploitation, and injustice have still not disappeared.

The book convincingly demonstrates why the core possibilities of Ellacuría's thought remain of high topicality today, and why his legacy must not fall into oblivion, but rather must inspire further investigation.

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DOI 10.1163/22141332-00301005-35