CHAPTER 3

Are There Emancipatory Threads between Utopia and the Dialectic in Latin America?

A crucial function of dialectical philosophy is to make explicit what is implicit in the emancipatory activity and thought of masses overcoming an oppressive, exploitative reality as they construct and concretize their utopias in Latin America. When philosophy is able to do that, when it can express itself, not as an imposition, but as indigenous to the masses’ activities, then it becomes an energizing power in their hands. There is nothing automatic in such a process. It doesn’t occur by spontaneity alone. Rather, it takes the active participation of revolutionary thinker-activists, including intellectuals indigenous to the struggle, who recognize both the creativity of the masses and their own responsibility to work out theory anew for their age: a unity of praxis, utopia and the dialectic. I wish to suggest some threads between utopia and the dialectic that can assist in such a unity, as well as point to incomplete pathways, traps along the way.

1 Preliminary Note: The Dialectic of Universal-Particular-Individual Reaching toward Utopias-Projects-Masses

In Chapter 2 we developed the relation between universal, particular and individual as follows:

Universal «--- ---» Particular «--- ---» Individual

\[\text{negation}\quad \text{negation}\]

[movement of 1st and 2nd negation in both directions]

When we examine how utopia is practiced in Latin America we see utopia concretized as project (proyecto) by masses, individuals in collectivity (social individuals), as an organization for life (organización para la vida). For instance, a territory, and with it the right to autonomy of a group—their utopia—is defended by occupation of the land, and/or a march—their project—against the government, the state, which wants to give a nature-destroying concession to a mining company, or build a road through a natural reserve. In working out the project (of resistance) they have created organization, an organization for life.

Utopia «--- ---» Project «--- ---» Masses (in self organization, communitarian)

(Organization for life)
Without arguing for any one-to-one relation between Utopia and the Dialectic, we can see important parallels. This is so because the dialectic is not only in the thought of a Hegel or a Marx, but is in life itself. In fact, life itself is the only “proof” of the relevance for the dialectic today.

That said, we want to examine two key moments in the Hegelian dialectic that can help us approach the question: How Do a Latin American Concept of Utopia and the Dialectic of Absolute Negativity Speak to Each Other? First, is the transition between the Practical Idea and the Absolute Idea in The Science of Logic. We would argue that this speaks to the relation of practice and theory within Latin American social movements. Second, are the final three syllogisms in the Philosophy of Mind (Spirit): Here, following Dunayevskaya, who saw in these final paragraphs of Absolute Mind (paragraphs 574–577) a dual movement—the unification of the movement from practice that is itself a form of theory with the movement from theory that is itself rooted in philosophy—we would ask, where is the manifestation of this dual movement in Latin American reality, that is, Latin America’s “entrance into the new society”?

II The Challenge in Practice and in Theory: Will Latin America Arrive Only on the Threshold of a New Society, or Enter into the Realm of Absolute Liberation?

The Hegelian journey of Spirit is a determination to unite Notion (the Idea) and Reality—a journey toward absolute liberation. When there is a contradiction between Notion and Reality, Hegel argues that reality is not authentic, but is only Appearance. He is not privileging the Idea over Reality; rather he is holding forth the power of the Idea because the Idea (Notion) in the dialectic is Freedom. Hegel critiqued the view that “true thoughts are said to be only ideas,” that is, only subjective, and wrote of the Idea as the objective or real Notion. It is Appearance that is “the untrue being of the objective world,” (Hegel, 1969: 756) while the Idea is “the unity of the Notion and objectivity” (756). Our reality in Latin America is unfree, full of contradiction, and in this sense not authentic; not in concert with the fullness of what it means to be human, to be in human liberation. The power of utopia in America Latin as Idea, as Notion, is in its relation to objectivity, in its ability to move people, be transformative in determining their actions, its potential to bring into unity the utopian vision (the idea) and reality.

What Hegel was searching for in the two final chapters of Science of Logic, “The Idea of Cognition” and “The Absolute Idea,” was the manner whereby the Notion and Reality, subjective and objective, can be united. The movement from the Idea of Cognition to the Absolute Idea was a striving to unite reality