

INTERVIEW WITH RAÚL FORNET-BETANCOURT: INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE FACE OF POST-TRUTH

INTERVIEWEE: RAÚL FORNET-BETANCOURT

Aachen, Germany

INTERVIEWER: RAÚL LINARES-PERALTA

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SHORT CURRICULUM VITAE



Raúl Fonet-Betancourt, born in Cuba, holds a PhD in Philosophy from the Universities of Aachen and Salamanca. He obtained his habilitation doctorate from the University of Bremen.

He is also an honorary professor at the University of Aachen and an honorary professor at the National University of San Marcos in Lima. He is currently he is director of the ISIS Institute in Eichstätt and of the International School for Intercultural Philosophy (=EIFI) (www.eifi.one).

Among other distinctions, he has received the Karl-Otto Apel International Philosophy Prize, an honorary doctorate from the University of Zulia in Venezuela, and the Universitätsmedaille from the University of Eichstätt. He is the founder and director of *Concordia. International Journal of Philosophy*. He is the initiator and coordinator of the North-South Philosophical Dialogue Program and the Dialogue with Cuba Program. He is also the initiator and coordinator of the International Congresses of Intercultural Philosophy. He is a member of the *European Society of Culture*.

His works include: *Estudios de Filosofía Latinoamericana* (Mexico 1992), *José Martí* (Madrid 1998); *O marxismo na América Latina* (São Leopoldo, Brazil 1995), *Modelle befreiender Theorie in der europäischen Philosophiegeschichte* (Frankfurt/M. 2000), *Transformación intercultural de la filosofía* (Bilbao 2001); *Transformación del marxismo en América Latina* (Mexico 2001); *Filosofía e interculturalidad en América Latina* (Aachen 2003); *Crítica intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana actual* (Madrid 2003); *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural* (Aachen 2004); *La interculturalidad a prueba* (Aachen 2006); *Interculturalidad y religión* (Quito 2007). *Frauen und Philosophie im lateinamerikanischen Denken* (Barcelona 2009); *Tareas y Propuestas de la Filosofía Intercultural* (Aachen 2009); *La philosophie interculturelle. Penser autrement le monde* (Paris 2011). *Interculturalidad, crítica y liberación* (Aachen 2012); *Interkulturalität und Menschlichkeit* (Aachen 2013); *Filosofía y espiritualidad en diálogo* (Aachen 2016); *Elementos para una crítica intercultural de la ciencia hegemónica* (Aachen 2017); *Con la autoridad de la melancolía. Los humanismos y sus melancolías* (Aachen 2019); *Tradition, Dekolonialität, Konvivenz* (Aachen 2021), *De la soledad* (Granada 2023).

His works have been translated into Korean, French, English, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish and German.

INTERVIEW

VERITAS NEWSLETTER: In his work *Crítica intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana actual* (*Intercultural Critique of Contemporary Latin American Philosophy*) (Madrid: Trotta, 2004), he engages in dialogue with some of the most renowned Latin American philosophers: Enrique Dussel, Arturo A. Roig, Juan Carlos Scannone, Luis Villoro, and concludes that their analyses suffer from a kind of 'intercultural deficit'. Almost 20 years later how would you assess the current situation of Latin American philosophies?

Raúl Fornet-Betancourt: Thank you for the question; and I am especially grateful that it asks me about the current situation of philosophy in Latin America in the plural. Well, as in other regions of the world, the development of philosophy

in Latin America follows a course marked by an undeniable diversity of approaches, perspectives on the resolution of the issues under discussion and, of course, the personal positions or convictions from which these reflections are made. It is therefore appropriate to speak in the plural of 'Latin American philosophies'. Without going into detail about this plurality of philosophy in Latin America, I would say, to begin my answer on this point, that this plurality obviously branches out into multiple manifestations, but that, in my opinion, it can be "grouped" into two broad lines that mark the poles of the central tension that characterises, always from my point of view, philosophical life in Latin America today. I am referring, on the one hand, to the line that, for the sake of brevity, I will call the traditional line, which works from the conviction that Latin American philosophy is the daughter of Western philosophy and that, consequently, its work must obey the effort to contribute to the development of the tradition from which it comes and from which it has received its fundamental questions and methods of research. And, on the other hand, I am referring to the line that, also for reasons of brevity, I will call the contextualising line, which understands that philosophical thinking must always be articulated as a way of thinking that finds its questions and methods in the corresponding contexts or worlds of life in which it develops, it being understood that these worlds are not "mute" but represent orders of life and human coexistence that challenge us with their memories and narratives of the search for meaning and hope. Within each of these two lines, there are naturally very different emphases that are a true reflection of the aforementioned plurality. I will continue my answer by limiting myself to the plurality of the second line mentioned and, within it, highlighting only one of the emphases that shape it, namely that represented by Latin American intercultural philosophy. Sticking to this field, then, and responding directly to the question, I would say that in the last 20 years this aspect of Latin American philosophy has contributed substantially to the movement to open up philosophical reflection to the cultural diversity of the American subcontinent, by promoting practices of philosophising based on and with indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, or new popular cultures emerging in social movements where very diverse traditions intersect. It is significant that this process of transformation of philosophy in Latin America has achieved clear consequences even at the formal level, say, in the institutionalization of philosophy or the institutional structures that form the framework for the academic study of philosophy. I am referring specifically to the creation of degree programs, such as master's degrees, diplomas and even doctorates, which focus on the perspective of interculturality. Three representative examples of this positive change are: The "Doctorate in Intercultural Studies" at the Catholic University of Temuco, in Chile; the "International Diploma in Interculturality" at ODUICAL (Organization of Catholic Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean) and the "Carlos Astrada Chair of Intercultural Philosophy" at the University of Buenos Aires, in Argentina. This, in turn, has led

to a sharp increase in publications (doctoral theses, books, monographic issues on intercultural philosophy in philosophical journals, etc.) in recent years. In summary, we can therefore say that the "diagnosis" of the "interculturality deficit" would have to be revised to a large extent today, at least as far as the recent development of this "face" of philosophy in Latin America is concerned. At the same time, however, it must be said that this 'recovery' in the field of interculturality goes hand in hand with a process of the opposite sign within what I called earlier the traditional line. Here, there is a growing concern to bring philosophy "up to speed" with international standards of academic excellence, which ultimately leads to the strengthening of habits of imitating patterns from the "North", both systematically and methodologically.

B.V.: It could be said that one of the main problems facing Latin American philosophies is the search for a cultural identity of their own in the context of what has been called the 'crisis of modernity'. In this sense, there has been a return to the traditional knowledge and ancestral cosmologies of the 'indigenous peoples', in many cases harshly criticising the official ideology of 'mestizaje' (racial mixing) that has served to legitimise nation states.

How can the tension between modernity and tradition be managed from the perspective of intercultural philosophy? Does it make sense to speak of an 'alternative modernity' or even of a coexistence between 'multiple modernities' (pluriverse of meaning) without being accused of being postmodern or relativist?

R.F.: Let me make an observation: when we now talk about "Latin American philosophies" and say that one of their central problems "involves the search for their own cultural identity," I think it is important to bear in mind, against the backdrop of what was said earlier about this plural, that we are now referring specifically to the group I called the contextualising line. For it is the philosophies that fall within this group (for example, the philosophy of popular wisdom, liberation ethics or the philosophy of Latin American history – which could be illustrated with the names of Juan Carlos Scannone, Enrique Dussel and Leopoldo Zea, respectively – clearly show that their approaches and perspectives are imbued with what Carlos Beorlegui has called 'an incessant search for identity' (Cf. Carlos Beorlegui, *Historia del pensamiento filosóficos latinoamericano. Una búsqueda incesante de la identidad*, publications of the University of Deusto, Bilbao 2004). Taking this observation into account, I would say that, in effect, Latin American philosophies, in the sense of philosophies contextualised in their worlds of life, are philosophies that are characterised, in much of their reflective effort, by the search for forms of expression for their own cultural identity, and that this search for an expression of their own and from their own has led precisely to criticism of the commitment of nation states, since their first manifestations as independent states, for a modernity that I would call reduced modernity because the modern horizon to which Latin American nation states resort for the "modernisation" of institutions, including

public education, is that of a Central European and positivist modernity, centred on the cult of "progress". The problem, then, is not so much modernity as its reduction and reductive application, which leads to the exclusion of other traditions, precisely because they are considered unsuitable for following the course of progress. This is clearly illustrated by Sarmiento's well-known dichotomy of 'civilisation and barbarism', which places civilisation on the side of the progressive modernity of the 'North' and identifies barbarism with the Spanish heritage and, of course, with that of the indigenous peoples. In light of this historical process, intercultural philosophy strives to show that the conflict between modernity and tradition is, on closer inspection, a false conflict. In its view, there is no conflict between modernity and tradition, but rather between traditions. This means that modernity must also be seen as a tradition or, rather, as a turning point in European history in which not a single tradition, *the* modern one, was born, but rather several ways of seeking new paths were opened up. In this sense, the Baroque and Romanticism, for example, have been understood as other forms of modernity. It follows, for intercultural philosophy, that dialogue with so-called modernity, at least from the historical experience of Latin America and the demands for recognition of the indigenous peoples present there, must be approached as a dialogue between traditions that offer references of meaning or, what is more, that present themselves as indicators of sources of meaning for life and coexistence. This dialogue, in order to be real, requires, as an indispensable condition, precisely the coexistence of a multiplicity of traditions —whether they are understood as modern or not is secondary. The decisive factor is that they are seen as contemporary in coexistence. And intercultural philosophy adds the following point: that dialogue between traditions that recognise their contemporaneity in the world must aim to overcome indifferent coexistence between them, because it is understood as a true encounter, that is, it does not remain an exchange of words but advances towards a deepening of the other's words and one's own, and with that, also towards common ground where mutual correction cannot be ruled out. In other words, for intercultural philosophy, it is not the recognition of the multiplicity of traditions that leads to relativism or postmodern "anything goes" positions, but rather the isolation of traditions in their respective horizons. And that is precisely why it advocates dialogue as a way to avoid isolation and the pretence of self-sufficiency, which means advocating a dialogue where each person *appears* before the other to give reasons for themselves and listen to the reasons of the other. Hence, in this *appearance* of traditions, paths of mutual understanding, common growth and, with it, the affirmation of common values can be opened up.

B.V.: We are particularly concerned about the rise of radical challenges to modernity. At the same time, we are aware of the existence of the 'colonial wound' caused by the modern civilising project. From an intercultural philosophy perspective, do you think that 'enlightened values' and the 'promises of modernity'

can continue to be invoked as an 'emancipatory horizon' in the Latin American context? If so, which elements do you think can continue to be effective and which would be better to dispense with?

R.F.: In response to this question, if I have understood its underlying meaning correctly, the first thing to say is that intercultural philosophy is not understood as one of the manifestations of decolonial thought. Rather, it develops along the lines of Latin American anti-imperialist thought and in dialogue with Latin American liberation philosophies, which are traditions that, in my view, offer a much more nuanced critique of modernity than some decolonial authors do with their somewhat Manichean approaches. That said, the second thing to say is that intercultural philosophy, precisely because its program, so to speak, is the search for an itinerant universality that is achieved through the dialogues of all humanity, argues in favour of the need to resonate "enlightened values" in other traditions such as those of Latin America. And it is in this space of resonance that we must decide, or rather discern, what should be set aside or taken on board as a meaningful perspective that can contribute to moral, political and social improvement, etc. In this vein, I believe it can be said that there are values or regulatory ideas that are discussed and argued for within the horizon of European traditions, and I express it this way so as not to reduce it to so-called European enlightened modernity, which should not be lost sight of in intercultural dialogue. For example, justice, recognition, tolerance, peace, ecumenism, without forgetting, on a more concrete level, the humanist idea of the perfection of the human being.

B.V.: *For several decades now, within the framework of the intercultural philosophy that you propose, the 'North-South Dialogues' have been developing, in which such significant encounters as, for example, that between Enrique Dussel and Karl-Otto Apel have taken place. One of the central points of this debate was to discuss the meaning and possibility of articulating a 'universal ethic' from which to find answers to current global problems such as, in our case, global warming or future pandemics such as that caused by SARS-CoV-2. Are the necessary conditions currently in place for a truly intercultural 'universal ethic' to be articulated?*

R.F.: I do not feel authorised or qualified to answer such a wide-ranging question. I will therefore limit myself to summarising my impression based on my experience in the seminars of the aforementioned North-South Dialogue Program. This program of philosophical debate, which has certainly been considered the first manifestation of a direct, "face-to-face" dialogue between two representative currents of philosophy in the "North" and the "South", began in November 1989 in a cultural and political environment marked directly and fundamentally by two very different events. I am referring, on the one hand, to the resurgence of hopes for a new world order with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War; and, on the other, to the assassination of Ignacio Ellacuría and his companions in El

Salvador. These two events were experienced at that initial moment as calls to intensify the search for universal ethical criteria for dialogue as the only response capable of stopping violence and restructuring political coexistence in the world. Moreover, Ellacuría's example as a "mediator" between the opposing forces and the example of the "peaceful revolution" in Eastern Europe were interpreted as historic support for philosophy's effort to draw ethical lines of universal understanding with a view to organising a just world order. More than three decades have passed since then, and although the North-South Dialogue Program remains faithful to its initial call to seek a global ethic from an intercultural perspective, my impression is that, in the intervening period, historical conditions have become more adverse, due to other factors, such as the fragmentation of the sense of common belonging, the subsequent singularisation of the struggle for difference, or the militarisation of international politics. If this impression is correct, I believe that the articulation of a universal intercultural ethic would have to begin with the task of awakening the consciousness of common belonging or, if you prefer, the consciousness that human beings, wherever they are born and grow up, are born and grow up as members of 'humanity'. But this is nothing new. It is the ancient idea of the unity of humanity.

B.V.: In this same vein, we consider the attempt made by the theory of communicative rationality to reach consensual solutions through horizontal dialogue to be very valuable. However, as Foucault denounced, the relationship between knowledge and power is reflected both in the non-neutrality of the spaces that foster these dialogues and in the hierarchies that have been established de facto between the different participants in the discourse (cultural capital). How can we think about the relationship between truth and power and the possibility of consensus from an intercultural philosophy perspective?

R.F.: Here we are faced with the famous "force of things" which, in this case, is the silent force of the power structures that, in fact, drive social coexistence and, within it, especially coexistence and dialogue between cultures. Intercultural philosophy is sufficiently "realistic" to recognise this fact and deduce from the structural asymmetries to which it leads that an intercultural search for truth cannot take place within that framework, since a truly intercultural search for truth requires symmetry between those who seek the truth. It follows for intercultural philosophy that rethinking the question of the relationship between truth and power requires, first, a critique of the asymmetries sanctioned today by the so-called real course of the world and history and denouncing those asymmetries, using a term from Ignacio Ellacuría, as places that do not give truth or that distance us from the truth. In short, at this first stage, intercultural philosophy proposes working towards the suppression of asymmetries. I would like to take this opportunity to recall, in the context of this question, that this was precisely the central theme of the IV International Congress of Intercultural Philosophy, held in Bangalore, India, in 2001. (Cf. Raúl Fonet-Betancourt (Ed.), *Interaction and Asymmetry between Cul-*

tures in the Context of Globalization, Frankfurt/M 2002). Secondly, intercultural philosophy seeks to clarify the task indicated in the first point, emphasising that the relationship between truth and power, precisely in today's unbalanced world, must be addressed, clarified and redefined in the struggle for justice. Without a framework of fair relations, both nationally and internationally, it is not possible, in my view, to conceive of the relationship between truth and power from a normative perspective that allows us to understand that power, especially when we understand it as the political power to organise human coexistence, must be exercised through the 'observance' of at least certain 'truths'. On this point, which I will allow myself to insert at the end of my response, the text of Karl-Otto Apel's presentation at the VI International Seminar of the North-South Dialogue Program is illuminating. Cf. Karl-Otto Apel, "Das Problem der Gerechtigkeit in einer multikulturellen Gesellschaft," in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt (ed.), *Armut im Spannungsfeld zwischen Globalisierung und dem Recht auf eigene Kultur*, Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, Frankfurt/M. 1998, pp. 106-130.

B.V.: Another current social phenomenon is what is known as "post-truth". How would you characterise this phenomenon?

R.F.: I will be very brief here because, although it may be controversial for some, my opinion is that the current phenomenon of "post-truth" should be seen as just another of the ideological movements that are shaking our times. I mean that I see it as a movement that responds to the interests of opinion groups that find it convenient to promote, for their own purposes of domination, indifference to the fundamental values that have served us until now as cardinal points in guiding our thinking and actions. I also understand this indifference as the basic condition for carrying out a covert axiological supplantation in our current societies.

B.V.: Some authors argue that this phenomenon is a sign of the 'death of truth'. To what extent is or can such a statement be true? Is it possible to live without truth?

R.F.: Such an assumption seems absurd to me, as well as contradictory. For what claim to validity could the announcement of the "death of truth" have if such a proposition does not seek to announce a new "truth"? And as for the possible certainty of the assertion of the death of truth, I would like to offer the following thought: If truth is one of those questions, ideas, values, or whatever we want to call it, that has most persistently accompanied all of humanity throughout its history, I do not believe that any generation has the authority to issue its death certificate, not only out of respect for the history of the search for truth by past generations, but also out of respect for the constitutively open nature of the historicity of the contemporary world in which we live today. As long as there is historical openness and possible futures are visible, there will be time for truth to emerge or for us to obtain it as one of those "things" that time can bring. In reference to the last aspect

of the question of whether it is possible to live without truth, my answer is no. I believe that, if we are referring to a meaningful human life -which means living in harmony with nature and our fellow human beings and being open to the transcendental dimensions of reality- truth, at least as a horizon that motivates us to keep going, is indispensable to us. But, more specifically, life, precisely as coexistence, needs the memory of truth because in our daily lives we need trust, authenticity and reliability.

B.V.: How has post-truth affected or could it affect the relationship between cultures?

R.F.: If post-truth ideology gains influence in today's world, I believe it would have a negative impact on dialogue between cultures because it would obviously mean that the search for common ground and recognition of what *truly* unites us, despite our differences, would disappear from the encounter between cultures. And without this question in the relationship between cultures, it would be, as I pointed out earlier, a relationship in which, under the banner of 'anything goes', what is promoted, whether we like it or not, is indifference towards the other. In other words, the ideology of post-truth would have, at this level of intercultural dialogue, the disastrous consequence of declaring any attempt at ethical judgement of cultures impossible or meaningless.

B.V.: What can or should philosophy contribute to post-truth? And more specifically, how can we respond to this phenomenon from the perspective of intercultural philosophy? Is there any criterion of truth from its coordinates to which we can cling in the face of post-truth?

R.F.: I believe that one of the contributions that philosophy in general can and should make in response to the phenomenon of post-truth is precisely to teach us to deal critically with this relatively new concept of post-truth. How? Well, for example, following Ignacio Ellacuría's idea of places that give truth, through a phenomenology of the places in today's world that challenge us with the truth that is made in them and that call us to join in the task of making truth manifest in and from human history. This phenomenology would be the best way to show that post-truth certainly has its places in this world, but that it should not therefore be considered a reflection of what is happening throughout the world, that is, that it is a phenomenon that, at best, is partial, and that, therefore, its generalisation or extrapolation gives us what in Marxist language is called a "false consciousness" of the world. Showing this would be really important today as a task of philosophy in general. And in its more specific aspect of intercultural philosophy, it should be noted that, in the face of post-truth ideology, the practice of a dialogue between cultures is emerging, the dynamics of which reflect a central concern for arriving at a knowledge of one's own and others' that can be shared as true, that is, as a knowledge that reveals to us what we really are or are called to be. In this sense,

intercultural philosophy does not propose any formal criterion of truth, but through the experience of its dialogical practice, it can affirm, in the face of post-truth, that the very facticity of the dialogues in which we engage reveals that we are not resigned to the world ceasing to be a place where truth resonates.

Thank you for collaborating with *Boletín Veritas*.