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Democratization

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Martha Tineo Rodríguez: "Justice is the guarantee of peace, and peace can only be achieved together"

Democratization

The Venezuelan non-governmental organization (NGO) Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón (JEP) is "an organization of victims, founded and led by a victim," recalls its general coordinator, Martha Tineo Rodríguez.

Tineo Rodríguez —a lawyer specializing in Human Rights and Forensics— was among the cofounders of JEP, along with Mrs. Rosa Orozco, mother of Geraldine Moreno Orozco, a 23-year-old woman who was killed by members of the National Guard during the anti-government protests that took place in 2014.

On its website, the NGO emphasizes that it was founded "in 2017 as a response to the most serious Human Rights crisis Venezuela has faced in recent decades." However, in a country that is constantly in free fall, experts in the field warn that following the July 24, 2024, elections, abuses perpetrated by the authoritarian regime have worsened to unimaginable levels.

–For many years, various local and international organizations have denounced the human rights situation in the country. However, today it is stated that this situation has worsened considerably. Why?

Indeed, over the past decade, Venezuela has experienced a severe and sustained violation of human rights, in a context of a complex humanitarian emergency —more of a crisis by design, according to various actors— such that both ordinary and extraordinary mechanisms have been activated by international human rights protection systems for its assessment and monitoring. Such is the case of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, an entity that, based on rigorous documentation, has repeatedly emphasized that this constitutes a state policy aimed at systematically targeting sectors of civil society.

In response to this reality, in February 2018 the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) initiated a preliminary examination, covering events from at least 2017, and later moved to the investigation phase —extending the period under review to at least 2014— after determining that there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed in Venezuela. In other words, the threshold of human rights violations has already been surpassed, and now it may be a systematic and/or widespread attack against segments of society, specifically including arbitrary detentions, torture, sexual violence, and persecution. This underscores the gravity of the situation. Nevertheless, despite such scrutiny, the situation unfortunately continues to deteriorate.

One indicator of this is that before July 28, 2024, our organization had recorded just over 300 political prisoners —a figure

that had remained largely stable for nearly the past decade, ranging between 300 and 400, except for specific periods when there was a notable increase, mostly in short-term detentions. In the electoral context, this number rose to over 2,500 people.

Although many of them were released in the following months (between November 2024 and January 2025), these individuals remain subject to judicial proceedings in cases that deny them the right to choose trusted lawyers and the right to defense, proceed without evidence or with manipulated evidence, and in any case continue to restrict personal freedom, as the released individuals are required to report periodically to the courts, are prohibited from leaving the country, and are barred from making statements about their cases, among other restrictions.

Parallel to this already very serious situation, as of November 2025 our organization has identified 1,080 people imprisoned for political reasons. In all cases, the arrests have involved arbitrary detention followed by enforced disappearance, denial of the right to choose trusted legal counsel, among other violations of due process. In many cases, isolation, lack of communication, and prohibition of family contact are added, along with deplorable detention conditions. Most of these individuals endure what we call a preemptive sentence, having spent months and even years deprived of liberty without a trial that actually determines their responsibility for any alleged crime.

–What new practices or elements confirm the worsening of human rights violations in the country?

While patterns such as Sippenhaft —the extension of political persecution to family members— and the detention of women and especially vulnerable individuals are not new and have been

documented by our organization and international mechanisms, the reality is that their implementation has shifted from selective to widespread. So much so, that we currently have records of more than 170 women imprisoned for political reasons, as well as at least four adolescents, neurodivergent individuals, older adults, human rights defenders, and journalists, to name a few groups requiring special protection. This fact alone attests to the worsening of the situation.

In the electoral context, we recorded more than 200 children and adolescents imprisoned for political reasons, and, worse, in some of these cases forced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence were also reported. This was thoroughly documented in the recent report by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission, with the shocking addition of cases of sexual slavery involving adolescents.

Those detained in this context were presented in mass hearings, without individual assessment of their alleged participation in criminal acts. All were charged with the same offenses, pre-classified by the Attorney General. From the prisons, reports have emerged —and, unfortunately, they have occurred— of suicide attempts and physical and emotional illnesses as a result of the torture and cruel treatment to which they are subjected.

Our organization has conducted thorough documentation, applying standards of severity and urgency, and we have identified at least 90 individuals who require specialized and urgent medical attention for illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular, renal, gastrointestinal, and respiratory conditions, among others. These are lives that are seriously at risk.

Another pattern documented since last year, for which we had no previous precedent, is the detention of foreigners and individuals with dual nationality. This may be an attempt to exert pressure on other states regarding their positions on the situation in Venezuela.

–In the specific case of NGOs, how is their work being affected in the country?

Under the premise of the "internal enemy" and due to the exercise of our work —which is a human right in itself— human rights defenders and civil society organizations are also victims of political persecution. The pattern progresses from stigmatization and criminalization to detentions and disappearances, as previously described, and according to our records, at least 11 human rights defenders are currently detained in Venezuela. This policy of persecution is compounded by laws that obstruct or limit the exercise of our work. In other words, this is clearly a state policy.

–What changes or adjustments have you had to make to continue operating on the ground, and what implications does this have for your work?

In our case, as an organization of victims founded and led by a victim, this reinforces our commitment to support victims in filing complaints and making their experiences visible. It is, therefore, a daily practice of overcoming fear and reinterpreting the suffering of thousands, transforming it into the strength to continue activating mechanisms that restore freedom to victims —in the case of political prisoners— and, in all cases (including killings and detentions), seek truth, justice, and comprehensive reparations. Documentation is fundamental to this work, and

much of our effort is focused on it, as well as on building collective memory.

–The UN High Commissioner issues harsh reports on Venezuela, as do other international bodies. Yet the government continues its scorched-earth policy. So, what is the purpose of these organizations and the complaints brought before them?

Unfortunately, these mechanisms have not had a deterrent effect in stopping the persecution; however, they are the necessary avenues to document and accumulate the evidence required for future accountability processes. Without this, we would be abandoning justice and resigning ourselves to impunity, and with it, to the repetition of these crimes. While the timelines of international justice are not the timelines of the victims and their urgent needs, the hope for justice is, to a large extent, what sustains them in the face of such horror.

–I would like you to analyze, in this context, the attacks being suffered specifically by women. While there are precedents as serious as the case of Judge Afiuni, it seems that the assault against women in politics and social activism has increased. Do you share this assessment? Why is this happening?

I could not affirm that there is a gender-based persecution policy. On the contrary, the number of women imprisoned for political reasons is significantly lower than the number of men. Currently, out of 1,080 political prisoners, 903 are men and 177 are women —according to our records— so I believe that, given the exponential increase in the total number of prisoners, the rise in female prisoners corresponds proportionally.

However, I must emphatically affirm that there is indeed a differentiated harm experienced by women, ranging from detention conditions and separation from their families —many of whom are mothers— to other forms of damage. It is important to note that while women may be tortured with the same brutality as men (beatings, among other abuses), they also endure additional cruel treatment and humiliation specifically on the basis of their gender.

–There are women who become victims because their husbands, fathers, or children are detained, but there are also those who directly suffer attacks from the repressive forces. How do you assess this new reality and its implications for Venezuelan society?

In the case of women, as well as adolescents, I emphasize that the harm is differentiated: the impacts of their imprisonment directly affect the entire family and community, striking at the most sensitive fibers of the social fabric and generating increasing fear throughout the population. It is a clear message of cruelty.

–Raising one's voice to denounce abuses does not stop the repressive forces. Perhaps for this reason, some victims prefer to remain silent, hoping that staying quiet might help negotiate or secure better conditions. What can be done in these cases? Is it better to remain silent to avoid further reprisals?

Silence must never be an option, because it only generates greater vulnerability for detainees and deeper abandonment. We understand the immense fear some families feel about speaking out. As we have already noted, entire families are being persecuted —there are, in fact, imprisoned families. In the face of this very

understandable reaction, activists, defenders, journalists, and other members of civil society have a profound responsibility to denounce and make this reality visible. In fact, I can responsibly assert that we have sufficient evidence to believe that the numbers we report for political prisoners are only indicative of a reality that may be far worse— very likely, the true figures are much higher. Insisting on this is precisely a way to help the public grasp the gravity of the situation we are facing.

–Your NGO is called "Justicia, Encuentro y Perdón" (Justice, Encounter, and Forgiveness). How can these three principles be made a reality in the country?

I appreciate this question. As a victims' organization, one of our primary objectives is to ensure that they can obtain justice, which is essential for closing cycles of violence and preventing their repetition. And precisely to make that sustainable, we believe in the need to rebuild social fabric, which is where the idea of "encounter" becomes meaningful. Forgiveness does not mean renouncing justice; rather, it is an invitation to free ourselves from hatred, to heal, and to strengthen ourselves both personally and collectively. Ultimately, this is what ensures that new cycles of violence do not arise, cycles that could emerge precisely from impunity and the consequent risk of victims turning into perpetrators.

Justice is the guarantee of peace, and peace can only be achieved together. Forgiveness without impunity brings us closer to that goal, while hatred drives us away and subjugates us.

Freedom of Expression and Its Role in Defending Democracy

Ángel Zapata

At the beginning of August 2024, the organization Foro Penal reported over 1,102 arbitrary detentions[1] in the context of post-electoral protests in Venezuela. In September of the same year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) condemned this situation and highlighted that at least 152 adolescents[2] were among those deprived of their liberty. Meanwhile, in May 2025, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression[3] reported a "serious and progressive deterioration of the media ecosystem in Venezuela" and noted the growth of what it termed "a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists and citizens seeking to exercise their right to freedom of expression." This report served as a warning to the international community and reiterated the call for the Venezuelan government to respect and guarantee compliance with its international human rights obligations, particularly the right to free expression.

1 Foro Penal is a Venezuelan NGO that provides free legal assistance to victims of arbitrary detention and human rights violations.

2 For more details, see IACHR Press Release 2024/212.

3 For more details, see Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, IACHR Press Release 2025/R088.

The cases above demonstrate that the violation of human rights —and in particular, freedom of expression— in Venezuela is not a new phenomenon. The pattern of violations does not target a specific group; rather, it affects all forms of opposition, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, or level of media exposure. Moreover, reports and press releases reveal harassment, persecution, and the use of force by the State against dissent, aimed not only at controlling the public narrative but also at instilling fear in private spaces, thereby encouraging self-censorship to avoid reprisals. These cases reflect the progressive and systematic erosion of human rights in Venezuela and, consequently, the deterioration of the last vestiges of democracy.

These situations are not isolated; they reflect a structural problem that requires examining the value of freedom of expression in contemporary democracies, with close attention to the Venezuelan case. In this regard, the aim of this article is to highlight the importance of human rights —and particularly freedom of expression— for the defense of democracy. First, we will address some conceptual and normative foundations related to human rights and their relevance within democratic systems. Next, we will analyze the role of freedom of expression as a guarantee of pluralism and democratic oversight. We will also outline the risks that violations of freedom of expression pose to democracy. Finally, we will explore the challenges and strategies that civil society has developed to create spaces for citizen participation, in collaboration with NGOs and international organizations, amid restrictive conditions.

We begin by noting that democracy is not limited to representativeness, elections, or institutional formality; it also encompasses values and practices that enable peaceful coexistence amid plurality. It does not end with electoral

processes; rather, through them, it expands the possibilities for free expression on common affairs without fear of punishment. In this regard, it is worth recalling that democracy is "a pluralist regime that entails acceptance of divergent interests and opinions, organizes electoral competition on that basis, and institutionalizes conflict and its regulation."[4] The author further emphasizes that "there is no democracy without sharp opinions being expressed to resolve disputes." This underscores that any regime claiming to be democratic must not only accept plurality but also create spaces for individuals to express their views, no matter how diverse or complex they may be.

Democracy, in this broader sense, is thus a system that allows individuals to freely express their ideas with the aim of resolving the conflicts inherent in human coexistence. From this foundation, institutions and bodies have been established to promote spaces and set standards that foster peaceful coexistence, providing clear rules of the game that accommodate a diversity of opinions and create institutional frameworks to guarantee and protect them. These standards have been developed as part of the universal and regional human rights protection systems and have subsequently been incorporated into domestic legal frameworks, as is the case in Venezuela, where they hold constitutional rank.[5] We begin with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which seeks to protect not only freedom of speech and thought but also emphasizes that no one should be harassed for expressing, communicating, or researching ideas by any means they choose. Similarly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

4 Pierre Rosanvallon, *La legitimidad democrática: Imparcialidad, reflexividad, proximidad*. Manantial, Buenos Aires, 2008, 36.

5 For further details, see Article 23 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999).

(1966) establishes that no one may be disturbed because of their opinions and reaffirms the right to seek, receive, and disseminate information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of borders or the media used for expression.

At the regional level, the American Convention on Human Rights[6] recognizes every person's right to freedom of thought and expression, which includes seeking, receiving, and disseminating information and ideas by any means and across borders. Even in Advisory Opinion 5/85 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights,[7] these principles are expanded, making clear that the illegal restriction of an individual's freedom of expression not only violates their personal rights but also the rights of others to receive that information. This is known as the dual dimension of freedom of expression: on one hand, its individual character guarantees that no person is arbitrarily prevented from expressing their thoughts; on the other, it recognizes the collective right to access the ideas and opinions of others.

If we revisit the cases mentioned at the outset, it becomes evident that not only were the rights of the 1,102 people arbitrarily detained for expressing themselves about the election results violated, but also the rights of all other citizens interested in accessing those opinions and arguments. This represented a restriction of both individual and collective rights and constitutes a clear example of the erosion of fundamental rights in a country

6 Although Venezuela denounced the American Convention on Human Rights in 2012, with effect in 2013, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights reaffirmed in Press Release 61/2025, dated August 26, 2025, that "the American Convention has remained in force for the State since its initial ratification on August 9, 1977."

7 (IACtHR, 1985).

where standards and institutional frameworks are rendered meaningless in the face of power and arbitrariness.

Continuing with some of the instruments for the protection of rights —particularly those highlighting the relationship between freedom of expression and democracy— we have the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), which recognizes the interdependence between democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. It states that "democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural regime, and on their full participation in all aspects of life." In this way, the declaration underscores the importance of free expression as an essential element for active participation in the collective process of defining the type of political system in which people wish to live —the very exercise carried out by thousands of Venezuelans during the post-electoral protests of 2024. A democratic society cannot be built or even conceived without the possibility of freely expressing opinions contrary to those in power. In fact, the Inter-American Democratic Charter (2001) emphasizes that the promotion and protection of human rights is a "fundamental condition for the existence of a democratic society".

Given this, how do access to information, the ability to express oneself, and the guarantees to do so contribute to democracy? Democracy is also the possibility of exercising citizen oversight over public affairs, thereby strengthening democratic institutions that recognize plurality and encourage ongoing debate. Conversely, the absence of free and informed participation undermines institutional strength and erodes democratic values, mechanisms, and foundations. In this regard, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights states:

> Without effective freedom of expression, fully realized in all its dimensions, democracy fades, pluralism and tolerance begin to break down, mechanisms for citizen oversight and accountability become ineffective, and ultimately fertile ground is created for authoritarian systems to take root in society. [Own translation].[8]

Indeed, this citation describes the scenario that has characterized Venezuela in recent years. In fact, the 2024 Annual Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), in its chapter on Venezuela, highlights the deepening of longstanding patterns of repression through new methods of punishing dissent, including persecution and the erosion of democratic institutions. The post-electoral protests of 2024 triggered what the report terms the "third repressive wave," characterized by the systematic use of fear as a tool of social control, brief enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, and serious violations of judicial guarantees and freedom of expression.

Despite this bleak outlook, there are valuable efforts and initiatives from civil society, NGOs, and international organizations that contribute to the dissemination of information and access to it, promoting spaces for the exercise of fundamental rights and democracy through virtual means. Many of these initiatives operate from exile or via social media, which allow journalists and activists to preserve their safety when traditional channels are inaccessible or too risky due to fear of reprisal.

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8 Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Case Herrera Ulloa (2004, July 2), Paragraph 116.

One example of this independent journalism effort is the creation of the AI-generated avatars "El Pana" and "La Chama," designed to evade censorship and harassment through the virtual news program #OperaciónRetuit, developed as a collaboration between Venezuelan and foreign journalists during the July 28, 2024, electoral process.[9] This project aimed to disseminate accurate information in a context marked by self-censorship in local media and restrictions on digital platforms and social networks. It was an attempt to find a creative way to inform without putting the lives of journalists and press agents at risk.

Investigative journalism has also found alternative avenues to share critical information on issues such as corruption, the environment, and human rights. Notably, the portal Armando.info, formally active since 2014, was founded by Venezuelan journalists and now includes regional collaborations. It represents an effort to report facts and conduct investigations that, if carried out within the country or through national media, would have faced censorship, persecution, and imprisonment.

Similarly, NGOs have contributed not only by disseminating information but also by documenting and reporting human rights violations internationally, relying on regional and universal protection systems. Among these, *Provea* and *Foro Penal* stand out, along with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which have maintained constant monitoring of the situation in Venezuela.

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9 It was an alliance created by digital media outlets such as *El Pitazo*, in collaboration with venezuelan journalists and others from across the region. The significance of the project earned it the King of Spain International Award in the category of International Cooperation and Humanitarian Action.

Meanwhile, international organizations —such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (particularly its Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Opinion and Expression), and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights— have played a key role in investigating, monitoring, and processing complaints regarding human rights violations.

These initiatives emerge to address the violations suffered by Venezuelans in a context where the State has intensified attacks on freedom of expression, tightened media control, failed to meet its international human rights obligations, and systematically dismantled democratic institutions. The persecution of dissent, harassment of those who disseminate information of public interest, closure of communication channels, and arbitrary detentions constitute practices incompatible with a democratic system that respects pluralism and seeks solutions to the country's most pressing problems. Full enjoyment and guarantee of social and collective rights cannot be achieved while civil and political rights are being violated.

In conclusion, it is important to reaffirm that freedom of expression constitutes an essential pillar for the existence and sustainability of democracy. Its restriction, as has systematically occurred in the Venezuelan context, violates not only individual rights but also collective rights, by preventing citizens from accessing the information necessary to exercise oversight over public affairs. The evidence of persecution, harassment, and censorship confirms a process of institutional erosion that undermines not only institutions but also democratic practices and values, fostering authoritarianism, as highlighted by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and documented in the most

recent report of the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.[10]

However, in the face of this scenario, civil society, independent journalism, and national and international organizations have played a crucial role in keeping channels of information and reporting open, even under adverse conditions. These efforts reflect the resilience of an active citizenry that, through communication, documentation, and transnational cooperation, continues to defend democratic principles. Ultimately, the protection of human rights, and particularly freedom of expression, is not only a legal obligation but also an indispensable condition for Venezuela's democratic reconstruction: a risky, yet profoundly valuable endeavor for its people.

Recalling these standards, emphasizing the role of civil society, and reaffirming the importance of defending democracy across multiple spaces is no small matter; it is a reaffirmation of the values, institutions, and practices that Venezuelans aspire to reclaim and live by.

10 The Mission presented a report on September 10, 2025, documenting serious human rights violations and providing an update on the patterns of abuses affecting the population, particularly targeting those in opposition to the government.

Fear, pain, and bad governments

They know my name.
Democratization

"May they not come for me, may they not come for me, may they not come for me" —that has been my litany for over a year in the Venezuela of 2024–2025. We have marked a year of living under an occupying force that becomes more intrusive or oppressive each day, perfects its forms of cruelty daily, and spreads more fear with each passing day. There are so many forms of fear experienced in this country that this, precisely, is the only certainty of living in Venezuela.

In that certainty I've found a kind of "liberation" —or rather, resignation: They know where I am, they know whom I speak with, and no matter how many VPNs I activate, they haven't come for me because, perhaps, I'm simply not useful enough to their system of terror and the quotas demanded of them.

They'll come for everyone, and they have already begun to come for their own. Our country has become like that poem by Martin Niemöller: "When the Nazis came for the communists, I kept quiet; I wasn't a communist..." because in a state of terror, the state itself is not exempt from living amid terror —nor from strengthening itself through it. Today, the Venezuelan society is one of fear and distrust, where people speak in whispers in order to survive, isolated and atomized.

Amidst the rumors and our limited lives, cynical voices have proliferated, because they have found a way to survive learned hopelessness, while only suffering another form of mourning. In the face of all this, trying to resist has become a daily practice, so as not to perish before a system that seeks to flatten every dimension of our lives.

Along these lines, it says much about the Venezuelan spirit that we have refined and discovered forms of resistance, of nonviolent struggle, of peaceful and civic movements to confront a dictatorial system that has modernized its repressive, torturous, and persecutory character toward any living being it perceives as dissident —and even so, not a single armed movement has emerged against the dictatorship. This speaks to the value Venezuelans place on what is necessary to recover and sustain a democracy grounded in freedom.

"Living" in a society based on fear means distrusting everything that isn't yourself. When we remain in this context for so long, we begin to doubt even our own individual capacities, because fear is a kind of dynamite that brings confidence crashing down and breaks our society with its ability to stick to you like glue and sink into your bones like an undeserved cold.

It must be said, then, that the Chavista regime —just like the Nicaraguan and Cuban regimes— because they are founded on fear, are therefore bad governments. By this I don't mean that they are ineffective or inefficient; I mean the bad, the evil, that is "that kind of negative element that we cannot even understand, much less express clearly, and even less explain to our full satisfaction.

Evil is that which challenges and shatters the intelligibility that makes the world habitable..."[1]

It would be an overstatement to claim that there is something purely evil, because not everything that stands in opposition to what we take as such is purely good either. But that does not negate the fact that evil operates, exists, develops, and uses power structures (such as the State and the rest of the formal public institutions) to bring about a world that becomes increasingly difficult to explain and to inhabit.

This evil is distributed along a normal curve, and for that reason authoritarian governments —those that violate human rights— should be judged in a de-ideologized manner. Because fear and evil are capable of leaving their mark on everyone's life, regardless of the cause for which we vote —if we are permitted to vote at all.

For fear to become powerful, there must be some instrument of coercion —and that is pain. Under authoritarian governments, societies are subjected to a range of pains, both physical and emotional, which are useful for atomizing, corrupting, and co-opting in every possible way until they succeed in breaking and harming; this is it has has coercive power.

Although we now live in a world where self-help and therapy are instantly accessible, it is important to reflect on the evaluative weight we assign to pain in order to protect ourselves from the suffering it generates. This requires demystifying it, insofar as suffering is not inexorably destined to lead us to a greater good;

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1 Zygmunt Bauman, *Miedo líquido.* Ediciones Paidós, 1st ed., Barcelona, España, 2021. Own translation.

it does not compete, because no suffering is less valid than that experienced by another person; nor does it stratify, since the pain generated in public life does not make us better or worse individuals relative to others.

Pain, especially when collective, does not come with a practical guide for its complete healing in a standardized way. Collective pain and trauma simply exist, and perhaps most of the time they do not carry a profound lesson.

The collectivization of the above and the social degradation generated by fear therefore demand rigorous study, because such a study is increasingly important: it is capable of addressing how these forces undermine and shape the functioning of the public sphere, and of fostering leadership and societies that are deeply wounded —societies that require diverse and costly processes of political and social repair.

This is urgent because the instrumentalization of pain under a strategy of fear is far too complex to be addressed merely through the "will to effort." This refers to how societies supposedly become resilient simply by deciding to do so —a common trope of our times that generates individual frustration, while obscuring and romanticizing the origins of what causes our suffering.

Fear and pain have no meaning, but resisting them does. To pursue a free life, with reasons to value, we face the complex —but possible— task of understanding our wounds in order to generate public value and develop the capacity to bad governments. Neither Venezuela nor any other society is biologically or socially condemned to pain and fear; it is precisely for this reason that it falls upon us to reclaim a country we can understand.

The New Face of Communism: Totalitarianism with a Vote

Julio Borges Junyent

"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."
George Orwell

1. The Story of Fernando Albán

When we were preparing this panel, we were reminded of something essential: that our words should not be merely analysis or theory, but carry the living mark of our experience. That speaking about communism should not be just an intellectual exercise, but a testimony.[1]

That is why, before addressing the tragedy of communism in Latin America today, I want to open this space with a personal story, one I carry in my skin and in my soul, a story that hurts, but also gives meaning to who we are and what we do.

1 The following text is from a lecture given during a second meeting of victims of communism, organized by CEU CEFAS in Madrid, 2025

I want to talk to you about Fernando Albán, a dear friend, a brother in the struggle, my right hand in the Primero Justicia party. He was a councilman in Caracas, and together we shared many battles, but above all one: confronting Nicolás Maduro's regime with dignity and truth.

It was 2018. In Venezuela, presidential elections were being held, marked by fraud and illegitimacy. The democratic opposition decided not to validate this farce. It was a critical moment. Fernando and I knew that simply rejecting these elections from within the country was not enough; we had to ensure that the entire world refused to recognize them. That was our goal: to plant in the international conscience the certainty that Maduro could no longer be acknowledged as the legitimate president.

We traveled to the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Those were intense days. We met with foreign ministers, ambassadors, presidents, journalists. We knocked on every door possible. We spoke with the clarity of those who have no weapons other than the truth. And we succeeded: the groundwork was laid for Maduro's regime to begin being isolated on the international stage starting in 2019. At the end of that mission, Fernando said he had to return to Caracas for personal matters. We all begged him not to go. We knew his life was in danger. But that was Fernando: brave, responsible, committed. He went back.

They were waiting for him the moment he arrived. The political police detained him at the plane's door. He disappeared after that. Hours later, thanks to the courage of his lawyer Joel García, we learned that Fernando was being brutally interrogated. They beat him until he lost consciousness, shocked him with electricity, suffocated him with a plastic bag, or dunked his head in water until it killed him. They wanted him to

accuse me and other leaders of alleged conspiracies, assassination plots, and acts of terrorism. They demanded a forced confession. But Fernando resisted with dignity.

Two days later, on October 8, an absurd, unbelievable piece of news spread through the media: Fernando Albán had committed suicide by jumping from the 10th floor of SEBIN, Maduro's political police headquarters. Handcuffed. In a controlled building. No one believed it. We all knew the truth: Fernando was murdered. The torture killed him, the hatred of a system that cannot tolerate dignity killed him, the soulless power killed him.

I myself had to call his wife and his children. I will never forget that moment. Telling them that Fernando would not return, that he had been murdered for doing what was right. His death sparked a wave of international outrage. From the European Parliament to human rights organizations around the world, Fernando's voice was present in the outcry for justice. But the regime's cynicism knew no bounds: the very agents who tortured him tried to sell us videos and photographs of his suffering for $4,000. Horror turned into commodity.

Fernando Albán was not a manufactured martyr. He was a real man. A man of action. Of faith. Of family. He loved Venezuela and lived with the conviction that a different country was possible. That is why he fought. And that is why these words are for him. Because his death cannot and must not be in vain. Because communism in Latin America is not a theory or an abstract debate. It is Fernando. It is his absence.

Today, more than ever, we need to look to Fernando Albán and so many like him. We must remember them, name them, make them present. I dedicate this essay to Fernando because in

his memory lives the democracy we fight for. And in his example lies the certainty that truth has a price, but also a promise: that of a free and dignified homeland.

2. Power as a Secular Deity: The Logic of Totalitarianism

An old Soviet joke tells of a customer in a restaurant who, after seeing a splendid menu and being told no to any dish he orders, exclaims: "I thought this was a menu, not a constitution!" The anecdote illustrates a bitter truth: in communist dictatorships, constitutions are façades that promise everything and guarantee nothing.

This essay argues that communism is not merely a political system, but a secular pseudo-religion that seeks earthly redemption. By killing God, it enthrones power as a new deity, promising a utopian paradise through the radical transformation of human beings. This boundless ambition, embodied by "armed prophets" such as Lenin, Mao, or Castro, has always resulted in totalitarian nightmares.

This "political religion" operates along several coordinates. First, it presents itself as the culmination of history, a millenarian utopia that demands the destruction of the present order to achieve a radiant future that never arrives. Second, the Party and its charismatic leader assume a messianic role, becoming infallible redeemers whose word is dogma and whose criticism is treason. Third, it divides the world in a Manichean fashion between "the people" and "enemies," emptying words like "democracy" or "freedom" of their meaning to turn them into rhetorical weapons. Finally, its fundamental method is terror —a system of generalized suspicion designed to paralyze society and annihilate individuality. What distinguishes communism from other

dictatorships is its religious aspiration: it is not content with controlling the body; it seeks to "redeem" the people by decree. As Eric Voegelin said, one cannot redeem man without first destroying his freedom. And, as Camus added, "all totalitarianisms begin with a heresy disguised as science."

3. The Current Face of Communism in Latin America

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many considered communism dead. However, in Latin America it has mutated. Instead of armed revolutions or classic coups d'état, it adopted a subtler strategy: gaining power through the ballot box in order to dismantle democracy once in office. This covert totalitarianism operates through seven main mechanisms:

A. **The Constitution as a Tool for Perpetuation.** Instead of serving as a pact that limits power, the Constitution becomes a malleable instrument to enshrine the leader's indefinite rule. In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez promoted amendments to allow unlimited re-election. In Bolivia, Evo Morales managed to have a controlled court declare re-election a "human right" to override the results of a referendum. The most extreme case is Nicaragua, where Daniel Ortega not only removed re-election limits but also amended the Constitution to appoint his wife as "co-president," subordinated all state powers to the executive, and legalized the revocation of nationality for so-called "traitors to the homeland."

B. **Autocratic Legalism — Law as a Weapon:** These regimes do not govern against the law but through it. They pass legislation with noble-sounding names that conceal repressive purposes. Venezuela's "Law Against Hatred,"

for example, allows citizens to be imprisoned for opinions expressed on social media. In Nicaragua, a "Foreign Agents Law" is used to target NGOs and human rights defenders. Between 2018 and 2024, more than 5,600 NGOs were shut down in that country under legal pretexts. At the same time, laws meant to protect citizens —such as the right to private property in Venezuela— simply are not enforced, leaving the state with unlimited power. The law ceases to be a shield and becomes a club..

C. **Hunger as a Mechanism of Social Control:** The destruction of the economy is not a mere mistake but a deliberate strategy of domination. A population impoverished and dependent on the state is easier to control. In Venezuela, after the decimation of the productive apparatus, the regime implemented the CLAP food boxes, distributed through the "Carnet de la Patria" (Homeland ID Card). This electronic document records a citizen's political loyalty; without it, access to food, medicine, or subsidies is denied. It is institutionalized food extortion, cynically summarized by a former Chavista minister: "The revolution is about keeping the poor, poor, but with hope. Because the poor are the ones who vote for us."

D. **The Mask of Mandatory "Progressivism":** Modern communism co-opts legitimate causes such as social justice, feminism, or environmentalism to impose a singular way of thinking. Under a discourse of diversity, it brutally punishes difference. In Nicaragua, the Ortega regime, which declares itself "Christian and compassionate," has unleashed the worst religious persecution in decades in the region, expelling priests, shutting down over 1,250 charitable organizations, and

sentencing Bishop Rolando Álvarez to 26 years in prison for refusing to remain silent.

E. **The Monopoly on Truth:** A fundamental pillar is the control of information. In Cuba, all media have belonged to the State for decades. Venezuela has followed the same path: between 2004 and 2021, over 200 media outlets disappeared, and hundreds of newspapers and radio stations were shut down through economic strangulation or license revocations. Censorship extends to the digital sphere, with news sites and social networks blocked. To fill the void, a massive propaganda apparatus was created, such as the Telesur network, which functions as the international media arm of Chavismo, spreading disinformation in partnership with outlets from Russia (RT), China (CGTN), and Iran (HispanTV).

F. **Criminalization of Dissent:** In these systems, legitimate political opposition does not exist; it is equated with treason and criminality. Adversaries are not debated —they are neutralized. In Venezuela, most opposition leaders have been barred from holding public office. In Nicaragua, the regime went a step further: in 2021, it imprisoned all opposition presidential pre-candidates ahead of the elections. In Cuba, following the massive 2021 protests, more than 700 demonstrators were sentenced to up to 25 years for shouting "freedom." Dissidents are dehumanized with epithets such as "squalid" or "worm" to justify violence against them.

G. **Exporting the Model and International Alliances:** These regimes do not act alone; they form an interconnected authoritarian bloc. During the oil boom, Venezuela used

initiatives like Petrocaribe to buy diplomatic loyalty across the Caribbean and Central America, giving away billions of dollars in oil. Beyond the region, they forged strategic alliances. Russia became the main supplier of weapons and geopolitical support. China provided billions in loans and, crucially, technology for surveillance and social control (facial recognition, internet censorship). Iran offered assistance in evading sanctions and opaque cooperation. And Cuba, the oldest partner, exported its most prized asset: decades of know-how in methods of repression, intelligence, and torture.

Epilogue: The Resistance of Dignity

After this harsh journey, one must ask: what can we do in the face of this reality? Is resistance and hope possible under a communist totalitarianism? The answer is yes, but only by recognizing that resistance begins in a deeply personal and powerful sphere: **individual consciousness**.

Communism may take different forms, but its essence remains: it despises human freedom and reduces the person to a mere instrument for a utopian end. To resist is, above all, **to assert our irreducible humanity**.

The first form of resistance is not living in a lie: not repeating slogans you don't believe in, not feigning allegiance, not collaborating with injustice. **Living in truth** is the greatest subversive act.

It is also about **caring for language**. Calling a dictatorship what it is, calling a political prisoner what they are. Every just word is a crack in the wall of propaganda. And when this propaganda

is systematically upheld by networks of international power, one understands the critical force of committed denunciation.

To resist is also to **educate and to remember**. The memory of what happened prevents lies from prevailing. Document what occurred, name the martyrs, write the truth, even in the shadows. And above all, to resist is not to surrender one's dignity. Keep your head held high. Dignity is contagious: when one stands tall, another is encouraged to rise.

The battle against totalitarianism is not only political: it is spiritual. Opposing these regimes is not merely a matter of human rights, but of rescuing truth from organized lies. While values are relativized in Europe, in Latin America they are fought for with blood. The silence of liberal democracies is not neutrality—it is complicity. Totalitarianism advances not only when its tanks fire, but when our universities remain silent.

To maintain lucidity and hope—that is already victory, even before the final triumph. For a people who do not surrender internally can never be fully defeated. Freedom, justice, and above all, truth triumph. As Pope Leo XIV expressed in his first words of hope: *evil will not prevail*.

Daemonic Negativity. Sacrifice, *Dóxa*, and Discourse in Jan Patočka

Carlos Contreras Medina

"There are things worth suffering for."
Jan Patočka[1]

I. The Crisis of Discourse: From Aristotelian *Dóxa* to Heideggerian *Gerede*

The philosophy of Jan Patočka emerges as a phenomenological response to the spiritual and political crisis afflicting contemporary European civilization, a crisis that becomes paradigmatically evident in the degradation of public discourse and the consequent closure of an authentic political space. To grasp the radical nature of Patočka's proposal, it is necessary to trace a genealogical path of this discursive pathology, which extends from the classical ideal of the *polis* as a domain of meaningful *speech* to Heidegger's diagnosis of *inauthenticity* in the age of technology. Patočka's proposal draws inspiration from the objective articulated by Husserl in his last major work, The *Crisis of the European Sciences*. As a reaction to

1 Jan Patočka, "What We Can and Cannot Expect from Charta 77", in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, 346.

this "crisis" of rationality that accompanied the rise of positivism, Husserl sought a renewal of the spirit that lay at the heart of Western culture: the spirit of reason. Patočka —perhaps Husserl's last disciple— took on the task of continuing and clarifying this line of thought.[2]

The starting point for this analysis lies in the Aristotelian conception of the polis. Far from being a mere aggregation of individuals, the *polis* is for Aristotle the place where human *praxis* reaches its highest expression,[3] a space fundamentally constituted by *lógos*. In this context, and in contrast to Plato, for the Stagirite *dóxa* is not a mere subjective opinion but the connective tissue of the community —the shared and reputable beliefs that form the basis of public deliberation (*endóxa*).[4] Certainly, *dóxa* attains its full validity only through its articulation with *phrónēsis*: that intellectual virtue that enables the citizen to deliberate correctly about what is good and appropriate for life as a whole, seizing the opportune moment (*kairós*) for action.[5] It is this prudential articulation of *dóxa* that gives rise to the establishment of nómos as a guidance toward ends that cannot be reduced to a "technical" capacity (*téchnē*).[6] In this way, Aristotle presents a public sphere in which discourse is intrinsically linked to ethical judgment and communal life —a space in which "speech" and "action" are oriented toward the good life.

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2 Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002, 2.

3 Aristóteles, *Política*. 1988, 1253a.

4 Aristóteles, *Retórica*. Gredos, Madrid,1990, 1355a.

5 Aristóteles, *Ética a Nicómaco*. Gredos, Madrid, 1985, 1140b.

6 Idem.

Now, the modern condition represents a *pathological* inversion of this ideal. As is well known, Heidegger, in his existential analysis in Being and Time, offers an incisive diagnosis of this decline through his concept of *Gerede* (idle talk).[7] *Gerede* is the improper mode of *Rede* (discourse), the way language manifests in the the ordinary life of the 'one' (*das Man*). In *Gerede*, language becomes uprooted from its grounding in the thing itself (*die Sache selbst*), circulating repetitively and superficially.[8] An apparent understanding spreads, exempting *Dasein* from the necessity of an original appropriation of meaning.[9] Heidegger states that "idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without prior adequacy of the intellect to the thing".[10] This leveled and ambiguous discourse not only closes off the possibility of authentic questioning but also generates a state of uprootedness or lack of grounding (*Bodenlosigkeit*). Paradoxically, this lack of grounding is not experienced as a crisis or insecurity, but as a form of security and self-affirmation: "it is so because it is said so".[11]

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7 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Harper & Row, Nueva York, 1962, 211 (§35): "The expression 'idle talk' is not to be used here in a disparaging sense. Terminologically, it means a positive phenomenon which constitutes the mode of being of the understanding and interpretation of everyday Dasein."

8 Ibid., 212-213 (§35): "Discourse, which is interpretation as it is expressed and spoken, has been torn from the primordial authenticity of the act of understanding... it has been uprooted (entwurzelt)." Own translation.

9 Ibid., 213 (§35): "By remaining in Gerede, Dasein... becomes isolated from its primary and primordial Being-relations toward the world, toward Being-with, and toward its own Being-in". Own translation.

10 Gerede "uproots understanding from its ground" and fosters a comprehension that, by not requiring genuine confrontation with the entity, becomes a barrier to original access. Cfr. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 213 (§35).

11 Ídem: "What is said in speaking as such spreads in ever-widening circles and acquires an authoritative character. Things are as they are because 'one says so' (man sagt es so)... By its very nature, Gerede is a closing-off,

This pathology of discourse is precisely what Patočka identifies as a dóxa without phrónēsis, an automated truth that confuses circulation with validity and procedure with justification. The modern public sphere, dominated by the logic of technical optimization, is stripped of the temporal density of judgment regarding ends, laying the groundwork for the "inhospitality" of the absolute technical world. Patočka understood that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, despite its valuable insight into direct experience, was in many respects inadequate for the task of a "renewal of reason".[12] Husserl remains anchored in Enlightenment thought regarding the notion of "reason" that he seeks to renew. Patočka, on the other hand, proposes a renewal that, while recognizing the intrinsic value of an "ancient" understanding of reason, considers it necessary to revise this notion in light of contemporary critique. This is one of the reasons why the Czech philosopher turns to the work of Heidegger. Heidegger provides him with a thematic exploration that emphasizes the importance of the historical dimension for understanding the temporally situated "being" of the human.[13] In this way, the contemporary crisis can be understood as part of an ontological *trajectory* within the very structure of how language manifests the world and constitutes the public. Patočka's intervention is therefore not a mere call to ethics, but a phenomenological counter-movement seeking to ground a new —truly authentic— mode of public speech.

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since it obstructs any new investigation and any dispute over what has been assumed and transmitted." Own translation.

12 Findlay, *Caring for the Soul*, 3. Patočka considered Husserl's pursuit of a universal philosophy within the Cartesian tradition to be inappropriate for a "renewal" of reason.

13 Idem.

II. The Phenomenology of Existence as Movement

In response to the crisis of discourse and the closure of the political space, Patočka develops a fundamental ontology that serves as a framework for his response. His theory of the three movements of human existence represents a radical critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity, which, in his view, persists both in Husserl's[14] transcendental phenomenology and in Heidegger's existential analysis[15]. Patočka redefines existence itself not as a static thinking substance (*substantia cogitans*), but as *movement*,[16]

14 Jan Patočka, "Nachwort des Autors zur tschechischen Neuausgabe (1970)", in Die natürliche Welt als philosophisches Problem, cited in James Dodd, *The Heresies of Jan Patočka: Phenomenology, History, and Politics,* Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 2023, 37: "We can no longer accept the interpretation of the 'phenomenological reduction' as an absolute reflection that would lead to an absolute and apodictically certain foundation of the world in transcendental subjectivity." Own translation.

15 Jan Patočka, "Cartesianism and Phenomenology", in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, 321: "We can doubt whether Heidegger's fundamental ontology is also suitable to serve as an ontological projection of a science or sciences of man. [...] Certainly, a fundamental ontology makes possible an understanding of human life both in its fall into inhumanity and in its moral reach; but does what it offers provide a sufficient basis for a philosophy of man in community, in language and custom, in his essential generativity, his tradition, and his historicity?" Own translation. See also, Jan Patočka, cited in James Dodd, The Heresies of Jan Patočka, 65: "It seems that Heidegger's analysis renders his ontology of existence excessively formal; although praxis is the original form of clarity, it never takes into account the fact that original praxis is necessarily, in principle, the activity of a bodily subject, and that embodiment must therefore have an ontological status that cannot be identical to that of the body encountered as present here and now." Own translation.

16 Jan Patočka, "The 'Natural' World and Phenomenology", in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings,* 277: "Our purpose is to attempt a

based on a radicalization of Aristotelian *kínēsis*[17] and Heideggerian temporality.[18] These movements are not chronological stages[19] nor psychological categories, but dynamic and co-present ontological structures that constitute the human existent's *being-in-the-world*.[20] Patočka seeks to explore the possibilities of human being in a way that is neither speculative nor abstract, but can be "descriptively exhibited."[21]

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philosophy that takes movement as its basic concept and principle." Own translation.

17 Jan Patočka, unpublished manuscript, cited in James Dodd, *The Heresies of Jan Patočka*, 64: "To understand the movement of human existence, we need to radicalize the Aristotelian conception of movement. The possibilities that ground movement do not have a preexisting bearer, no necessary referent that remains statically at its base; rather, all synthesis, all internal interconnection of movement, takes place solely within it." Own translation.

18 This radicalization consists in "filling" the formal structure of Heideggerian temporality with the concrete reality of corporeality. Movement is not merely an abstract temporal projection, but the physical dynamism of a body relating to the world. It is the body that translates the formal structure of Heideggerian "for the sake of" (*worumwillen*) into a concrete task. Cfr. Jan Patočka, "Supplement (1970)" cited in James Dodd, *The Heresies of Jan Patočka:* 153: "What establishes the link between the 'for the sake of' and what follows from it as our concrete task remains unresolved in Heidegger's scheme. I believe that the link resides in the embodiment of life: what I can do is determined by what my corporeality allows me to do, and that must be assumed before all free possibilities." Own translation.

19 Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*. Open Court, Chicago, 1998, 147: "[It is not] a trinity of undifferentiated moments, but rather a trinity of movements in which our life unfolds." Own translation.

20 Idem: "To understand existence as movement means to grasp man as a being in and of the world. He is a being who is not only in the world, as Heidegger says (in the sense of understanding the world), but who is himself part of the world's ongoing process." Own translation.

21 Findlay, *Caring for the Soul,* 36. Patočka appropriates Heideggerian ontology but insists that its constructs can be demonstrated descriptively, grounded in concrete experience.

The first movement of human existence is that of **anchoring–acceptance** (*Verankerung–Annahme*). It is the primordial and pre-reflective mode of being rooted in the world through the body. This movement describes the individual's placement within a family, community, and tradition; it is the being received into the "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*), into the sphere of immediate existence. It is a fundamentally affective movement, oriented toward the past, which establishes the world's habitability by sedimenting habits, expectations, and a pre-rational familiarity with the environment. This movement is tied to "lived corporeality," the notion that human life is a bodily as well as a noetic existence.[22] Without this anchoring, which makes the preservation of life possible, the other movements would be impossible. The second movement is that of **defense–(self-)extension** (*Verteidigung–Selbsterweiterung*). It corresponds to the sphere of labor, production, and self-preservation. This movement organizes life through instrumental reason, technical mediation, and the assumption of social roles and functions. It is the mode of existence characterized by Heidegger's *das Man*, where the human being projects itself into the world through its works in order to secure its subsistence. When this movement becomes absolute or all-encompassing, as occurs in modern technological civilization, it leads to *alienation*, to the total functionalization of existence, and to the domination of the inauthentic discourse of *Gerede*. Life is reduced to the management of resources, losing any orientation toward a totality of meaning. In its absolutized form, this movement embodies the crisis of rationality identified by Husserl, wherein the methods of the exact sciences become the sole legitimate access to reality.[23]

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22 Ibid., 44. "Lived corporeality" is key to Patočka's conception of existence as movement, understanding humans as beings "in and of the world."

23 Ibid., 19. Husserl's critique of scientism begins from the premise that transferring ontological validity to the constructions of science lies at the root of the crisis of Western rationality.

The third movement is that of **breakthrough–truth** (*Durchbruch–Wahrheit*), or "transcendence." This movement represents a radical rupture with the closure and security of the second. It is not a mere continuation, but a "break" (*Erschütterung*) that shakes the existent out of its immersion in functionalized life. It is defined by a state of "uninterrupted problematization" of existence, a critical distancing from what is given that opens the human being to the question of the meaning of the whole. It is the movement of *freedom*, in which existence no longer understands itself from the standpoint of mere survival, but through a confrontation with its own finitude and a responsibility for the whole. This movement, as will be seen, finds its fundamental ethical articulation in *sacrifice*.

The conception of existence as movement is, in itself, a cosmological–ontological thesis. The modes of being described by Patočka are not merely ways in which human beings act, but ways in which existence *is*. Likewise, the instrumentalism of the second movement is an ontological mode, not just a pattern of behavior. Consequently, the passage to the third movement is not a simple change of attitude, but an *ontological event*: a fundamental restructuring of *being-in-the-world* that enables, as will be seen later, a new conception of the political.[24]

III. Sacrifice as Foundational Negativity: the Ethical Articulation of the Third Movement of Existence

The argumentative core of Patočka's practical philosophy lies in his conception of sacrifice, which functions as the ethical articulation of the third movement of existence. Far from being a *nihilistic act*, sacrifice will reveal itself as a "foundational negativity" that gives rise to an authentic existence and a genuine

24 James Dodd, *The Heresies of Jan Patočka*, 21.

political community. To unravel its complexity, it is imperative to analyze the distinction Patočka draws between "sacrifice for something" and "sacrifice for nothing." "Sacrifice for something" remains trapped within the instrumental and economic logic of the second movement. It is an act of exchange: one gives something up in order to obtain something else —whether security, glory, the nation, or a positive ideal. This type of sacrifice, although it may appear heroic, does not break with the calculation of means and ends that defines technological civilization.[25] In contrast, "sacrifice for nothing" is a radical act that renounces this logic entirely. It pursues no positive or objectifiable goal; it is a sacrifice that expects no benefit in return, neither in this world nor in another. It is the giving of one's own life, or one of its dimensions, in the name of that which is most valuable: the whole. A whole that can never be possessed or turned into an object. By transcending all particular content, this act opens existence to a universal horizon of meaning.

This conception of sacrifice functions as a direct critique of modernity and technoscience. The modern technological project, which Heidegger analyzed under the concept of Gestell (enframing), reduces all reality, including human life, to a calculable, manageable resource available for manipulation. Within this framework, life is defined by its utility and its capacity to be secured and prolonged. Sacrifice, as an act irreducible to calculation and to the logic of self-preservation, "represents a persistent presence of something that does not appear in the calculus of the technological world."[26] It is the moment when the existing confronts its own finitude, with the truth that life is not the

25 Ibid., 200. "Traditional" sacrifice, even when cynically employed in propaganda, is invoked to reject the meaninglessness of loss.

26 Jan Patočka, "The Dangers of Technicization in Science According to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to

supreme value, and that "there are things worth suffering for".[27] Resistance to human finitude, in the form of the promise that victory in war will protect us from death, thus becomes a means of justifying ideological domination.[28]

Here the deep connection between Patočka's ethics of sacrifice and Heidegger's critique of inauthentic discourse becomes apparent. *Gerede* operates by creating a false security, a sense of grounding in the "it is said" that conceals the radical *Bodenlosigkeit* —groundlessness— of existence. "Sacrifice for nothing" functions as an ethical–political antidote to this false security. By rejecting all the positive and instrumental foundations offered by the second movement, sacrifice actively embraces the very groundlessness that *Gerede* passively covers. This "nothing" for which one sacrifices is not a nihilistic void, but the negation of the instrumental logic of what is given.[29] By responsibly assuming this abyss, the existent transmutes a

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M. Heidegger: Varna Lectur*e, 1973", in Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, 337.

27 Jan Patočka, "Two Charta 77 Texts", in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings,* 346. This statement, made in the context of political dissent, reveals the ethical core of his thinking: human life recognizes its dignity when it is oriented toward values that transcend mere survival.

28 Findlay, *Caring for the Soul*, 38. Political ideology, by systematizing life in the name of an idea (such as that mere life is more meaningful than free life), uses resistance to finitude to justify domination.

29 Simas Čelutka, "Politics, Morality and Nothingness: On the Coherence of Jan Patočka's Reflections on Sacrifice," *Metajournal*, 2024. The "sacrifice for nothing" is the awakening of a spirit of problematization and incessant questioning, a power of negativity.

passive condition of *falling*[30] and *inauthenticity*[31] into the active ground of freedom. The negativity of sacrifice does not eliminate groundlessness; rather, it *transforms it into the very terrain from*

30 In the existential analytic of Being and Time, "falling" (*Verfallen*) has no moral or theological connotation, as in the idea of a "fall" from a state of grace. It is an ontological term that describes a fundamental and everyday mode of being of *Dasein* (the being-there, the human existent). Falling is *Dasein's* tendency to become absorbed in the world of its occupations and in "being-with-others" in an inauthentic manner. This state of being is characterized by an immersion in the impersonal "one" or "they" (das Man), where *Dasein* loses its singularity and is guided by public opinion, superficial curiosity, and ambiguity. It is not that *Dasein* ceases to be or becomes separated from itself; rather, falling is a mode of being in which *Dasein* flees from itself and from its own finitude, losing itself in the familiarity and safety of the everyday world. Cfr. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 220 (§38): "In them and in the connectedness of their being, a basic kind of the being of everydayness reveals itself, which we call the entanglement [*Verfallen*] of Dasein. [...] As an authentic potentiality for being a self, Dasein has initially always already fallen away from itself and fallen prey to the "world."

31 For Heidegger, the terms "authenticity" (*Eigentlichkeit*) and "inauthenticity" (*Uneigentlichkeit*) are not moral judgments about how one ought to live. They are ontological concepts that describe two fundamental modes of *Dasein's* being. The root of both terms is the German word eigen, which means "own" or "proper to oneself." Thus, the basic distinction is between a mode of being in which *Dasein* is "its own" and a mode in which it is not. Inauthenticity is not an inferior or "false" state, but the everyday and default mode of being of *Dasein*. Authenticity, for its part, is a modification of this everyday state —a "making oneself one's own" that arises from a confrontation with the fundamental structure of one's own existence. Cfr. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 369-370 (§64): "Dasein is authentically itself in the mode of the primordial individuation of reticent resoluteness that expects anxiety of itself. In keeping silent, authentic being-a-self does not keep on saying "I," but rather "is" in reticence the thrown being that it can authentically be. [...] Care does not need a foundation [Fundierung] in a self. Rather, existentiality as a constituent of care provides the ontological constitution of the self-constancy of Dasein to which there belongs, corresponding to the complete structural content of care, the fadical falling prey to unself-constancy."

which responsibility and an authentic political community can arise.

IV. The Politics of *Daimon*: the Solidarity of the Shaken and the Care of the Soul

The political consequences of Patočka's ethics of sacrifice are realized in his concept of the "solidarity of the shaken." This is not a political community founded on a shared identity, a positive program, or an ideology, but on a *common experience of crisis and rupture*. It arises on the "front line," whether that of war or the existential confrontation with a totalitarian power —a place where the illusions of security of the second movement collapse. It is the community of those who have been "shaken" out of their everyday complacency and have confronted the radical problematicity of existence. This solidarity, therefore, is not based on "something" (positive) that its members have in common, but on the *shared loss* of all solid foundation. It is a solidarity built in the midst of persecution and uncertainty.[32]

The political action of this community is described by Patočka as "*daimonic*," in a clear allusion to the Socratic *daimon*. Its function is not to construct positive programs, but, like Socrates' daimon, to speak "in warnings and prohibitions".[33] Its role is fundamentally negative[34] and critical: to resist the closure of meaning, to oppose

32 Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. Open Court, Chicago, 1996, 135.

33 Platón, Apología, 40a-c; 41d. Cfr. Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History,* 133-136. The reference to the Socratic daimon is explicit and underscores the apotropaic and critical function of this form of politics.

34 Within the framework of Jan Patočka's phenomenological philosophy, the concept of negativity, articulated centrally in his text *Negative Platonism*,

the totalizing force of modern power that seeks to eliminate all problematicity. It acts as an "anti-*Gerede*" political mechanism, constantly reintroducing the question of meaning into the public sphere and breaking the *continuum* of inauthentic consensus. It is a *spiritual authority* that does not impose a new order, but preserves the conditions for deliberation by keeping the question of significance open.[35]

This political vision is rooted in the original reappropriation of the classical heritage undertaken by the Czech philosopher, articulated through the concepts of "negative Platonism"[36] and the "care of the soul"[37] (*epimeleia tēs psychēs*). Patočka's "negative

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constitutes a fundamental category for understanding human existence. Far from connoting a nihilistic stance or a claim about the absence of meaning, negativity represents the ontological capacity of human beings to distance themselves from and disengage with the immediacy of the given world (*die Gegebenheit*). It is not a negation of being, but the condition of possibility for a genuinely free and responsible life. Patočka defines human existence through this capacity to adopt a critical distance toward what is pre-established, whether the facticity of the material world or socio-cultural conventions. This "negation" is a movement of transcendence that interrupts the subject's absorption in unreflective life —the "movement of acceptance"— and opens a space for questioning and the search for meaning. It is, in essence, an act of freedom that "shakes" inherited and unquestioned meanings, forcing the individual to confront the problematic nature of their own existence. The similarity with Socrates' attitude is inescapable.

35 Findlay, *Caring for the Soul,* 85.

36 Cfr. Jan Patočka, "Negative Platonism: Reflections Concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics—and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It", en *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989)

37 For Patočka, the "care of the soul" is the fundamental inheritance of Socratic–Platonic thought and the notion that defines the spiritual essence of Europe. Far from being an ascetic practice or a metaphysical concern for an immaterial substance, the care of the soul is an existential stance: a way of life oriented toward truth and responsibility, opposing

Platonism" represents a crucial methodological innovation that allows him to construct a post-Heideggerian political philosophy on classical foundations. Rather than accepting Heidegger's critique of Plato as the origin of the "forgetfulness of being," Patočka reinterprets the Platonic *chōrismós* —the separation between the sensible world and the world of Ideas—not as an ontological gap between two "supposed" realms of entities, but as the very phenomenological structure of human freedom. This "separation" is the capacity to transcend the immediately given, to distance oneself from the world in order to interrogate it as a whole.[38] In this non-metaphysical reading, the Platonic Idea is no longer a supra-sensible entity, but the "symbol" of this transcendent freedom that allows us to see in what is given "something beyond what is directly contained in the give."[39] Negative Platonism would be a "philosophy purified of metaphysical pretensions."[40]

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a merely biological or unreflective existence. In turn, the care of the soul entails living in a state of constant "problematicity," which involves abandoning the security of pre-established answers and accepting that existence is fundamentally an open question. Patočka identifies Socrates as the paradigmatic figure of this attitude: a man whose entire life was a continual examination of himself and others, demonstrating, as is well known, that an unexamined life is not worth living. Cfr. Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe,* Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002, 71.

38 Johann P. Arnason, "The Idea of Negative Platonism: Jan Patočka's Critique and Recovery of Metaphysics", *Investigaciones Fenomenológicas* 2004, 4. In Patočka's reinterpretation, the realm of ideas becomes a "symbol" of human freedom, understood as the ability to transcend the world and grasp it as a totalizing horizon.

39 The Platonic Idea, stripped of its character as a supersensible object, becomes "the origin and source of all human objectification". Cfr. Jan Patočka, "Negative Platonism", 199. Own translation.

40 Eddo Evink, "The Relevance of Patočka's «Negative Platonism»", in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology: Centenary Papers,* ed. Ivan Chvatík y Erika Abrams. Springer, Dordrecht, 2011, 67. Own translation. Jan Patočka's critique of metaphysics is not a total rejection of the philosophical tradition, but a crucial distinction between classical

The "care of the soul" is, then, the concrete ethical and political praxis of this freedom. It is not a private introspection, but a way of life, modeled on Socratic dialectical activity, consisting in a responsible and constant examination of one's own principles and the common opinions of the *polis*.[41] The care of the soul is the act

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metaphysics and what he calls the metaphysics of modernity or "positive metaphysics." His objection is aimed fundamentally at the latter, which he identifies not so much with an explicit philosophical system, but with the global project of modern science and technology seeking absolute, calculating dominion over the totality of being. Patočka maintains that original metaphysics, that of Plato, arose from the experience of freedom and wonder, from the "problematicity" of existence. It was an open search for meaning. However, over the course of history, this search degenerated into attempts to construct closed systems that claimed to offer a definitive and objective explanation of reality. It is in modernity that this impulse reaches its most dangerous culmination. Modern metaphysics, according to Patočka, is "positive" because it aims to know and dominate the whole through the summation and analysis of its parts. It manifests in science that reduces the world to a set of quantifiable and manipulable objects, losing sight of the horizon of the "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*). This science, despite its anti-metaphysical proclamations, becomes the most radical form of metaphysics by postulating that the only reality is that which can be objectified, measured, and controlled. For Patočka, this project of technical domination is a form of "titanism," a will to power that forgets human finitude and the inexhaustible nature of being. In this sense, his critique aligns with those of Husserl and Heidegger on the crisis of European sciences and the danger of technology (Gestell). Patočka denounces that this modern metaphysics of power and force leads to a "dehumanization," in which human beings themselves become yet another resource to be managed. His proposal of "Negative Platonism" is precisely an attempt to recover the original impulse of philosophy —the care of the soul, life within problematicity— as an antidote to this metaphysics of domination characteristic of the modern era. Cfr. Jan Patočka, "Negative Platonism", 177; Jan Patočka, "The Dangers of Technicization", 331.

41 Cfr. Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 87. Care of the soul "is the attempt to embody what is eternal within time, and within one's own being." It is not a pale intellectualism, but an existential practice.

of *living within problematicity*, of resisting dogmatic certainty, and of keeping open the question of justice and truth.[42] The "solidarity of the shaken" is, in essence, the care of the soul elevated to the form of a political community. It is a politics that denounces the tragedy of divorcing power from truth; that offers no security, but assumes the responsibility of living in exposure, without the refuge of pre-established certainties.[43] In this way, Patočka manages to build a bridge between the Socratic call to justice and contemporary critique of metaphysical foundations, offering a suggestive resource for thinking about politics after the end of metaphysics.[44]

42 Cfr. Ivan Chvatík, "The Responsibility of the 'Shaken': Jan Patočka and His 'Care for the Soul' in the 'Post-European' World," in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Erika Abrams, Springer, Cham, 2017, 263.

43 Ibid., 270.

44 Findlay, *Caring for the Soul,* 7.

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