

THE PRINCIPLE OF IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE LIVING SUBJECT NATURE

We present in this article (i) the description and definition of what we call principles of impossibility related to the practical reality based on Hinkelammert's thinking (ii) and a summary of the main ideas of Dussel and Hinkelammert in regard to life as criterion of practices, this paper presents an argumentative strategy for the grounding of the principle of life which has been discussed specially by the two mentioned Latin-American thinkers. We support our argumentation in these two mentioned thinkers, since they have offered relevant arguments with regard to that what we call non-circumventibility, which is the starting point for the formulation of what we shall show as principles of impossibility. The aim of this strategy is, on the one hand, (iii) to show another way to found the universal validity of life both of the subject and nature as a criterion of the practices, and on the other, to ground and formulate a principle for the practical sciences from which its universality could be acknowledged, namely, the principle of impossibility of the living subject and nature.

I. Principles of impossibility of the practical reality

In this paragraph I will concentrate on the principles of impossibility, as Franz Hinkelammert has basically drawn them in his *Critique of utopian reason*¹, even though they are retaken in other forms along his work. It must be noticed that he founds them on the discussion with some of the most prominent social thinkers of the 20th Century, namely, the anarchist, conservatist, neoliberalist, and Soviet thinking as well as the critical rationalism of Karl Popper.

These principles, which are founded firstly by Hinkelammert through a critical review of Poppers thinking, show on the one hand the limits of practical action and, on the other, they act as a presupposition for the social sciences, as long as they continue thinking of practices. Here, Hinkelammert reformulates the principles that Popper call logical impossibilities. That is to say that, what Popper states as logically impossible, is not as such, but empirically. Hinkelammert refers to the following place in *The Poverty of historicism*:

The term 'society' embraces, of course, all social relations, including all personal ones; those of a mother to her child as much as those of a child welfare officer to either of the two. It is for many reasons quite impossible to control all, or 'nearly' all, these relationships; if only because with every new control of social relations we create a host of new social relations to be controlled. In short, the impossibility is a logical impossibility. (The attempt leads to an infinite regress; the position is similar in the case of an attempt to *study* the whole of society – which would have to include this study).²

Here, Hinkelammert shares Popper's point, namely, that it is impossible to have a whole control of the social relations. However, he points out, this is not a logical, but an empirical impossibility¹. This is not only a slight difference of terms, but a fundamental definition from which analytical laws of the empirical sciences are derived², so that these kind of impossibilities are presupposed in scientific knowledge. For instance, when Einstein points out that the thermodynamic laws derive empirical relations from the impossibility of the construction of a *perpetum mobile*³. Here, Hinkelammert refers to Einstein to show the function of something that is impossible but from which you could derive the empirical relations. Einstein states:

¹ See Hinkelammert, F. *Crítica de la razón mítica*...pp.25.

² Ibid, pp. 54)

³ Cf. Ibid, pp. 48.

[principle theories] employ the analytic, not the *synthetic*, method. The elements which form their *basis* and starting-point are not hypothetically *constructed* but empirically discovered ones, general characteristics of natural processes, principles that give rise to mathematically formulated criteria which the separate processes or the theoretical representations of them have to satisfy. Thus the science of thermodynamics seeks by analytical means to deduce necessary conditions, which separate *events* have to satisfy, from the universally experienced fact that perpetual motion is impossible.³

This is, however, contrary to Popper's position which considers the impossibility as something utopian as such and, therefore, unattainable. Hinkelammert shares this and, in contrast to Popper, gives the impossibility an epistemological function, namely, as an inevitable support for the construction of the empirical reality. Thus, the impossibility opens up the framework of the possible in the empirical reality. Hinkelammert shows this by considering not only Einstein's point, but also Popper's, even though Popper does not see the epistemological function that the impossibility possesses and to which Hinkelammert does give⁴.

These kinds of impossibilities, moreover, are not strictly related to the natural sciences to which Hinkelammert refers at first. They are related to the social sciences as well, and this is one of the efforts that Hinkelammert wants to make explicit for social relations. That these principles are shared by the natural and social sciences arises from the fact that they are derived from the empirical reality in which the social lives together with the natural. The common point between these two spheres is that the given reality, the empirical reality, is finite and imperfect and full of contradictions. As such, one could think of the laws of the thermodynamic whose fulfillment is possible just under ideal conditions as well as of the contradiction between imagined social scenarios and their realization. In both cases the contradiction between the ideal and its realization are present, even though the ideal is presupposed for the construction of the empirical reality. At this point, we are not at any other thing than Hinkelammert's critique of utopian reason⁵.

Thus, as we can see, the way of inferring this kind of principles does not come directly from a moral reflection, but from a description related to the empirical reality. They express, through statements, impossibilities that are not yet explicit, which builds their core. They are moreover discovered through the reflection of the experience. The statements are the principles of impossibility. That is to say, through these principles a situation related to the empirical reality from which, as a starting point, the limits of the empirical reality are recognized (like for example the impossibility to construct a perpetuum mobile.) This starting point allows the establishment of empirical relations⁶.

From this, Hinkelammert comes to one of his main concepts: the feasibility of the realization of practical ends, whereby *utopias* are considered as a whole. These ends have to be interpreted as a dimension that is beyond the given and beyond the present time. Any end from a concrete one up to the realization of new kinds of social relations, is the practical realizations of our projected thinking and our projected will. To this extent, utopia is not something utopistic, but utopian. The utopias, seen as we draw, are not something merely metaphysical; rather they are immanent to the empirical reality. Moreover, these ideas, which are naturally socialized through a public language, make the construction of the empirical reality possible.

Against this background, Hinkelammert states these principles to highlight the limits of the realization of aims. One of them he finds in what he draws as feasibility which is intrinsically related to the subject as such. The feasibility of the realization of ends implies having in account the subject in its real constitution and in its real capacities as well. Moreover, the subject is considered here as a finite being with material needs that are intrinsic to it. Therefore, and now in connection to the sketch above, the realization of ends or even utopias could not go beyond this fact, namely, the subject in its finite constitution. Under these terms, Hinkelammert understands the term of *conditio humana*.

With this term of feasibility, Hinkelammert makes a critical revision of some of the prominent

social thinking which influenced the construction of institutions and argued that they presupposed a concept of subject that goes beyond the capacities of the real subject⁷. This means, conservatism, neoliberalism and the socialist thinking, in particular presupposed an ideal concept of subject which was taken as the real subject as such. In other words: the aforementioned forms of social thought consider, in their theoretical framework, the subject as one that could go beyond its *conditio humana*.

Thus, we have neoliberalism that, on the one hand, proceeds from the assumption of a subject with any material needs, and only with preferences, and, on the other hand, shows a state of equilibrium between supply and demand to which the real subjects, expressed under the terms of free market, should approximate with any consideration to its capacities and its practical limits. So we could see, the neoliberal thinking states the realization of an ideal situation, such as the realization of equilibrium, and presupposes in the empirical reality a subject that could go beyond its practical human limits⁸. This is, moreover, what could be considered in fact utopist. That is: the realization of an ideal situation with any consideration to the subject that makes the social realities possible, namely, the human being in its *conditio humana*.

Hinkelammert draws the principles of impossibility as general principles. That means: as principles from which the scientific knowledge is possible. Therefore, he proposes one of them related to the feasibility of the realization of practical aims. We take this principle to be one of the many related to the practical reality⁹. This means: the founding and formulation of such principles linked to practical reality allow, on the one hand, to find the limits of the practical actions, and on the other, to formulate presuppositions for the practical sciences. Even though we have already shown one important principle, we assume that there could be many others, insofar as their objectivity can be proved. Here, the condition that we see for their universal acceptance is that they should express a non-circumventibility (this means: ineluctability) of the practical reality, or the so called social reality¹⁰.

The non-circumventibility, a term which we take from the transcendental pragmatics of Karl-Otto Apel¹¹, consists of showing the impossibility to go back from something. In the case of the transcendental pragmatic, the non-circumventibility is the language and with that the communication with others (intersubjective act)¹². We do not go into this problematic, though we share this point of Apel's. We want, however, under the support of Hinkelammert's and Dussel's contributions, to ground and show the non-circumventibility of the living subject and nature, as we shall draw it in the last paragraph. It should not be understood as an ethical principle as such, but as a presupposition of practical issues or even as their starting point. This means, it is not something whose acceptance is forced, but it is provided in the pragmatic act, even there is attempt to deny it.

We link it to the above mentioned principles, in that we could express through them these kinds of non-circumventibility. That is to say, they state explicitly, on the one hand, the boundaries of the acts and practices, and on the other, they act as a presupposition of knowledge, as we have just mentioned. Thus it has been emphasized that these principles are considered as belonging to a set in relation to practical reality. This means: as a principle of impossibility of the practical reality from which the subject cannot go back, for they are already immanent provided in the practical reality¹³.

Under this argumentation, we shall offer, in the last paragraph, the formulation of a principle of impossibility of practical reality, namely, that of the living subject and nature. This is related to the principle of life which has been present in the critical Latin-American thinking and specially grounded by Hinkelammert and Dussel. In the coming paragraph, we concentrate on both grounding and argumentation regarding to the life of the subject and of nature as a criterion of practical acts. Thereafter, we go to our own formulation that intends to offer a more precise grounding of this criterion through the formulation of a corresponding principle of impossibility.

II. The grounding of life on Hinkelammert's and Dussel's thinking

Life is one of the most prominent elements that has been shown by the Latin-American critical philosophers as a criterion from which practices, institutions and ideologies have to be assessed¹⁴. Life is naturally a material criterion that complements the formal criterion of reason which has been developed and grounded by the western philosophy. Life as a topic has not been exclusively discussed by the Latin-American critical thinkers. On the contrary, it has been also present e.g. in Western thinkers and philosophers that have reacted against the abstract and cold reasoning, such as Marx, Nietzsche, Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin, among others¹⁵.

The contributions of the Latin-American critical thinkers, in my view, is that they develop their critique to reason in the sketched sense and in its mean-end mode, this means in the sense of the strategic reason in light of the imposition of the neoliberal system, whereby it began in Latin America. This element gave the Latin-American thinkers the element to review the Western reasoning in the two mentioned modes from another view¹⁶. The subject (considered as human being) and nature stand at the center of their contributions. We now present, as it has been mentioned, two foundations related to the justification of life as criterion of the reality and reason, that of Hinkelammert and Dussel.

Hinkelammert's argumentation related to the justification of life as a criterion both of practices and knowledge, ideologies and alternatives to the given world, is present along his entire work. His critical analysis is even rich when he makes it from this criterion. In the context of the sketch above on the principles of impossibility, we want to refer here to a few places that show the objectivity of life as a criterion of practices.

The first one is when he states that life is not an end as such, but the possibility to have ends to reach¹⁷. This statement is found in the context of Hinkelammert's criticism to the strategic-instrumental rationality which is linked to the mean-end rationality. He argues that this type of rationality places at the center of its own rationality concept the efficiency to reach goals, which implies that an act is "rational", as long as it finds the right means to reach an end. Thus, to consider a rational act or action implies assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the means to reach some goals. Nevertheless, in the scheme of this type of rationality the role of the subject is just to apply the right means for reaching the ends, and this is another way to affirm that, into this framework, the subject plays as another mean that contributes to get the aims and even as one that could have preferences, whereby it does not appear as a living being with material needs¹⁸.

If we come back to the statement of Hinkelammert, namely, that life is the possibility to have ends, we see, that it is related to the possibility of something, in this case, to the possibility to have aims. This means, the strategic-instrumental reason presupposes the life of the subject and of nature after all. Without a living subject and a nature, any end could be reached in the long run.

If the means-ends rationality does not place at the center of its schema the subject and the nature as living entities, then it becomes a kind of practical mechanism in which any imaginable thing (in the sense of the above sketched impossibilities) could be realized without consideration to the living subject and nature; which means, at the same time, that this mechanism makes possible its destruction through the destroying of the subject and nature. So, we have a mechanism that places the reaching of goals at the center of its schema and takes the strategic-instrumental reason as the reason as such, and the negative effects that affect directly the subject and nature are taken simply as non-intentional effects¹⁹.

Against this, Hinkelammert states that material rationality, which has been excluded by the current prominent social thinkings, has to be retaken, since it allows to place the living subject and nature at the center of the rationality. Nevertheless, this rationality, that Hinkelammert calls reproductive rationality of life, is compatible to the strategic reason. This is to say: both rationalities are compatible and both must be articulated in order to get the necessary conditions for the reproduction of

subject and nature life.

Although one should think, this Hinkelammert's argumentation is an economic or sociological one. It can be seen, on the contrary, that we are at the grounding level of life as a meta-criterion that makes possible any possible act, any possible practice, any possible system. Life is not something particular to a kind of society or community, but, in Dussel's words, as we point out below, a mode of reality that makes possible any kind of reality. In Hinkelammert's view, this is, however, not present in the main stream social thinking such as the neoclassic economical theory, the property right theory, the public choice and the theories inspired on the neoliberal thinking, like the rational choice theory²⁰. These theories have at the center neither the subject nor nature. They have at the center just the analysis of means in relation to ends and profits, and they have, moreover, influenced the public decisions at the local and the international level as well.

The second place, to which we want to refer in Hinkelammert's work, is when he formulates a kind of principle of impossibility related to the life of subject and nature. Along the *Critique of utopian reason*, we do not see a kind of principle related to the life of subject and nature, although Hinkelammert, in my view, presents all the elements to such an elaboration. A kind of principle that is not presented in his other works either. As we have just seen, life as a possibility to have ends, is formulated in the form of a possibility/impossibility. This means: Hinkelammert thinks of life in these terms. Nevertheless, there is a place where he formulates a kind of principles of impossibility in relation to the life of the subject and nature, namely, in his *Ethik und Utopie*. There, we find the following formula:

A society whose productive relations appear as incapable to reproduce the concrete life of human beings and that of nature, destroys itself and is not sustainable in the long run. In order to survive, it must make its productive relations compatible with these conditions of surviving for the reproduction of the concrete living and therefore to transform them (Author's translation²¹).

This statement is formulated in the form of a principle of impossibility and is presented in the context of describing Marx's critique to capitalism. With it, Hinkelammert tries to make explicit Marx's critique to capitalism. In fact, Hinkelammert calls this statement “law”, which has to be understood as a social law. This law refers to Marx's following statement as well: “Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the labourer”²².

Although the principle above is just an explicitness of Marx's critique to the capitalist social relations, Hinkelammert formulates, in my view, a principle of impossibility in the sense that we have here presented. His principle could have also been called a principle of impossibility, as we have described it, but instead of that, he calls it law, in the sense of an empirical social law. Here, it is important to remark the justification of the principle, namely, through the derivation of that which is necessary for practices (in the form of single practices or in their whole form as a society) in the long run. This is to say: in regard to the life of subject and of nature, Hinkelammert states a principle that is universal, as long as it cannot be refuted. For this, you should prove that any future practice or action is possible without the living subject and nature.

And if we continue accepting that practical reality is made of these practices and actions that can be institutionalized later, then we should accept that life constitutes objective reality. Thus, we have Hinkelammert's statement that “social law” is useful for the social sciences in order to deduce practices that make possible the society and knowledge development related to it as well.

Another justification of life as a universal criterion for practices and the grounding of its principle, which we now want to present, comes from Dussel's philosophy. The reference to life,

specially from the victims and excluded's life, is permanent along his work. Below, we want to concentrate on the late Dussel, whereby he grounds and postulates his principle of life from a current context and debates. We take, therefore, the Dussel's second *Ethics of Liberation*²³ for our exposition.

There, he has grounded life as the material moment of the ethics both in its positive side into the given practical order and in its negative face into the construction process of new practical orders which comes from the negativity of the practical system, the victim and the excluded²⁴. We refer below directly to this material moment of his architectonic because of the purpose of the present paper, but we should just mention in short that this material moment is articulated in the framework of his architectonic with the formal moment, the intersubjective validity, and, in certain ways inspired by Hinkelammert's contributions, with the feasibility moment. This colligation is presented in the positive system and its negativity (the critical principles).

Now, in this second architectonic, inspired in part by Zubiri²⁵, Dussel states that “the life is a mode of reality of human being” and it refers to the concrete life of the human being. Dussel points this out as follows:

Human life is a 'mode of reality'; it is the concrete life of each human being from which reality is faced, constituting it from an ontological horizon (human life is the preontological point of departure of ontology) where the real is actualized as practical truth [...]

Human life is never the 'other' of reason; rather it is the absolute intrinsic material condition of rationality [...] I will defend then that human life is the source of all rationality, and that material rationality has human life as criterion and ultimate 'reference' of truth and absolute condition of its possibility.²⁶

Dussel refers here to the fact that the subject interprets the objective reality from its condition as a living being. The fact that life is a mode of reality means that the subject exist as living subject, because it can also exist without being physically present, for example in the memories of other subjects. Then, this is to say that from that fact the real (that which is discovered in the long run and can later become objective reality) is faced by the subject. In this process, the subject discovers the means that make its existence possible in reality. This is what Dussel means above by the term “practical truth”.

On the other hand, he states that life “is the source of all rationality”. This is compatible to Hinkelammert's point, that the rational, in their view, is what makes it possible to produce, to reproduce and to develop human life. Thus, for instance, a mean that is used for that end could be determined as “rational”, only if it makes the production, reproduction and development of human life possible. In other words: the rational character of something has to do with the possibility to develop the subject's life. This Dussel's point contrasts with the rational theories of action that place at the center of their concept the utility and preferences of the subject. Naturally, the human being has to live first in order to decide what to do or not to do, what to buy or not to buy, even to have the chance to prefer.

These kind of theories presupposes a subject without needs. Therefore, as Hinkelammert also does, Dussel proposes to have a concept of material rationality that could have at its center human life as criteria of the practices, and now related to the practical sciences, as criteria of practical and scientific truth. We find this in Dussel's words in the following way:

Human beings access the reality that they confront everyday from the ambit of their own lives. Human life is neither a goal nor a mere mundane-ontological horizon; human life is *the mode of reality* of the ethical subject⁴ (that is, not that of a stone, of a mere animal or the Cartesian angelic “soul”), which gives content to all of its actions, which determines the rational order and also the level of its needs, drives and desires that constitute the framework within which ends are fixed. The “ends” (with reference to Weberian formal instrumental reason) are

⁴ In the context of Dussel's Ethics is the “ethical subject”. For me and in the context of the present paper, it is the subject as such.

'put in place' by the exigencies of human life. This is to say, insofar as the human being is a living entity, it constitutes reality *as objective* (for practical or theoretical reason) in the exact measure in which it is determined as the mediation of *human life*.²⁷

On Dussel's sense, life is the condition of possibility of the human existence and is related to three moments: its production, its reproduction and its development. So, the human acts have as a point reference one of these three moments and, ultimately, each act has as its practical reference, these three moments as whole. Thus, life is a material⁵ criteria of ethical acts.

Now, Dussel argues the material criteria in relation to a community, in which the human being stands and seeks its way of being. He points out the material criteria as follows:

The one who acts humanly has as content in the act, always and necessarily, some mediation for the self responsible production, reproduction and development of the life of each human subject in a community of life, as the material fulfillment of the needs his or her cultural corporeality (the first of all being the desire of the other human subject), having as ultimate referent all of humanity.²⁸

Life, as a mode of reality, is the place from where the subject interprets its given reality and in which it exists. This given reality is naturally institutional, socialized and normative. Many examples about human practices could be provided and through them it could be shown that they are more or less related, at least, to one of the three mentioned life moments or to the three at the same time. Against this background, Dussel formulates a universal material principle which finds into the architectonic of his ethics. That is to say: since life makes the practices and actions possible, there is a requirement for a universal practical principle that makes ethical acts possible. Then, Dussel proposes its formulation in the following terms:

The one who acts ethically *ought* (as obligation) to produce, reproduce and develop self-responsibly the concrete life of each human subject, in a *community of life*, and inevitably out of a cultural and historical 'good life' (from the subject's way of conceiving happiness, with a certain reference to values and to a fundamental way of comprehending being as an ought-to-be, and for that reason also with a *rightness* claim) that is shared instinctually and solidaristically, having as ultimate reference all of humanity. In other words, this is a normative statement that makes a practical truth claim and, further, a universality claim.²⁹

This principle, which is formulated in terms of "ought to", is articulated furthermore with the two positives principles of the intersubjective validity and the feasibility moment. The practical application of these principles makes the act with the goodness claim possible. The goodness claim belongs, according to Dussel, to institutions and practical systems as well, since they are built of practices and actions. Therefore, these principles are "the *conditions* of ethical *possibility* of the norm, actions, subsystem, institution, or ethical system, and the *frames* that frame such 'possibilities'"³⁰. Dussel exemplifies the fulfillment of such acts through Rosa Luxemburg's thinking.

[...] one cannot undertake 'any action' -or use any means or choose any ends, and so on- one can only decide, provide a discursive foundation regarding only 'those' actions that are 'possible' (founded or applicable) within the narrow frame delimited by such principles. In an amazingly accurate way –at the level of strategic organization- Luxemburg points out that 'principles' delimit and contain criteria 'both regarding (a) at the ends [Ziele] to reach, (b) as well as the means of struggle, and finally, (c) the forms of struggle. These three levels of strategic-instrumental reason define the horizon of mediation'³¹.

Thus, an institutional decision or a decision within a practical system (the practical order) regards also

⁵ Material in sense of content in distinction to the formal.

the goodness claim³². This is to say: not only at the level of the individual acts, but also at the level of the community in its institutions, there are decisions with the goodness claim, as long as they affect the human being. The passage from an individual act to the institutional decisions is the relevant passage in the sense of the recognition of an institutionalized community in which the subject is already existent.

After displaying the two above groundings of life as criteria together with its belonging principles, we should mention the differences that we see in both foundations. Hinkelammert's foundation is placed fundamentally in the context of an epistemological debate with some of the most prominent social theories of the last century from which some of them, moreover, influenced the grounding of institutions and practical systems, while Dussel's grounding is located basically in the context of a discussion on ethics. Nevertheless, both proceed from the assumption that life is a "condition" of possibility to act in the coming time or in the future. In other words: Any human act and any kind of reality presupposes the life of the subject and of nature.

Another difference between them, in my view, is that the life of nature is more present in Hinkelammert's thinking, while Dussel concentrates on the human being, and the nature seems to be put aside, although he has taken up this topic in a recent work³³, while Hinkelammert has the nature present all through his work and maybe because of Marx's quoted statement in regard to the capitalist production.

Against this sketched background, we concentrate in the next paragraph to give another argumentative strategy to ground the principle of life of the subject and the nature. Though it is inspired by Hinkelammert's and Dussel's thinking, we intend to contribute to this debate with more arguments. For it, we will present a principle in the form of a principle of impossibility that aims to show the objectivity of the life of the subject and of nature in a more precise way.

III. The principle of impossibility of the living subject and nature

In my view, both Hinkelammert and Dussel have displayed enough arguments along their works that support the thesis that the life of the human being and nature are factual conditions to make any kind of practical reality possible. This could be seen when Hinkelammert states, for instance, that life is the possibility to have ends. This is present in Dussel's philosophy when he affirms: "as the human being is a living entity, it constitutes reality *as objective*"³⁴. We do not want, naturally, to reduce their contributions to these two arguments, but, in my view, they synthesize an important point, namely: the non-circumventibility of human beings and nature life.

They present the life of the human being and of nature as a factual presupposition for the acts and practices within a community as the condition of possibility for any kind of practical reality, as we tried to show it. Nevertheless, in our view, through the term of non-circumventibility, which we take firstly from Karl-Otto Apel's transcendental pragmatic, we can express the fact that we cannot go back from the situation that the subject must live in order to develop any kind of practical reality. Not only the subject (or human being in Dussel's words) but also nature are already living and in order to develop, create and transform practical realities they must continue living. And these two facts are exactly un-circumventible. Or how could we go back from this factual situation?³⁵

Certainly, Dussel considers the human being as a living entity when he states: "insofar as the human being is a living entity, it constitutes reality *as objective*". However, we find in Dussel's philosophy a lack of consideration and recognition of nature as a living entity as well. In our view, and now with Hinkelammert, we regard the life of both living entities: the subject (or human being) and nature. This specificity of the human being, as a living entity, is, by the way, present in Dussel's philosophy, while we find in Hinkelammert's thinking the terms of practical subject and living subject (*sujeito vivo*), for instance.

Now, from this non-circumventibility we could think of a principle that could contain it. This means: a principle that just could express it explicitly. This step is possible and legitimate if we accept, that it is objective and therefore universal. This principle is, however, not a moral principle, but a principle that outlines just the starting point of the practices and the construction and transformation of a practical reality. This principle is, more over, any statement which pretends to describe all practical relations as a whole, for they express just the limits from which we interpret, know and act in the practical reality. Its support point is exactly the non-circumventibility. Another problematic is how we formulate the principle to make it visible. And here, we have at least, two proposals.

Hinkelammert and Dussel have displayed principles that are different from each other, though they are perfectly compatible. Both principles were already described and mentioned above. With regard to Dussel's principle, we should firstly notice that it is formulated in the context of a discussion on morals and ethics in way of an "ought to". Of course, we share the point that from the sketched background, we can derive an ethical principle, but we also guess that this belongs to a second moment. In contrast, we are seeking a principle that contains and expresses the objectivity of the already mentioned non-circumventibility. That is to say, we want to go to a more basic level. In other words: what we seek, in contrast to Dussel's proposal, is the formulation of a principle that can act as a practical and epistemological principle whose formulation is unambiguous.

We find, therefore, in the form of the principles of impossibilities the matching form to formulate such a principle, since we can prove through its form that it is factually unavoidable. Thus, we are next to the formula which Hinkelammert provides by explaining Marx's critique to capitalist relations. This formula fulfills a holistic characteristic as well, for it refers to the society as a whole, but at the same time it goes to the specifics through the focus on the relations that have to be transformed.

Against this background, I want to display another formulation of a principle of impossibility which aims to be more unequivocal or even more precise than that of Dussel and that of Hinkelammert. We display in fact two statements which are compatible to each other. They are:

1. Any human act or any practice is factually possible without the living subject and nature.
2. Any human reality can be realizable without the living subject and nature.

Here we are in front of two principles of impossibility in which both are mutually implied. The one is extension of the other. Thus, both are based on the acceptance that the human reality is created, developed and transformed through practices, actions and thoughts of the human being. This is what we refer as practical reality, since it implies at least a face-to-face relation. Thus, practical reality means that reality is possible and depends on our thoughts and our praxis. This practical reality is distinguished from the natural one which owns its logic and which exists independent of our thoughts and our praxis. It exists as such. From this view, the relation between these two kinds of reality cannot be seen as contradictory or even as conflicting each other; rather it has been seen as a relation in which they coexist and as such they seek, from their own logic, a way of cooperation. To this extent, the practical subject naturally is in charge of seeking ways of relation with it.

On the other hand, the sense of the human being, in the context of the above formulated principles means, whoever belongs – through a socialization process – to a community with its rules, customs and institutions, and who is able of assuming moral responsibilities. But the human being is also the being who is *capable* of transcending its given reality. The practical search (from the praxis) and the discovering (through science) for the development of the three life moments, which Dussel has distinguished, is the task of every social community.

Now, from these principles the means that make possible the production, reproduction and

developing of the human living being and of the nature must be generated. Hence, if the human being is in charge of the practical reality, then it must be responsible for its life and nature.

To go beyond the mentioned principles finally implies an approximation to the opposite side, namely, the dissolution of human reality. In other words: to go beyond something that practically and factually is impossible seems to be the beginning of the practical no-reason and with that the beginning of the irrationality, to speak together with Hinkelammert and Dussel. These principles enable to regulate the practices, customs and institutions for the development of practical realities. And here the social sciences (practical sciences) have much to say. Hence, the above displayed principles act as practical and epistemological principles.

Hinkelammert, Franz. *Crítica de la razón utópica*. (Bilbao: Descleé de Brower, 2002). It must be noticed that the first edition of this Hinkelammert's work was published in 1984. However, the second edition (2002) has two new important articles. This text as well as many other of Hinkelammert's works are published in Spanish and German. We refer the reader to the original works, the Spanish editions, along with the present text just in the case of Hinkelammert.

2 Popper, Karl. *The poverty of historicism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, pp. 79-80. Emphasis in the original.

3 Einstein, Albert. *Ideas and Opinions. Based on Mein Weltbild*. Edited by Carl Seelig (en.tr: Sonja Bargmann), New York: Crown Publishers, Inc: 1960, pp. 228. Emphasis in the original.

4 The reason why Popper does not see this epistemological function comes, according to Hinkelammert, from his negation to the utopias and their empirical realization under the argument of a kind of realism. In fact, the quoted place of *The poverty of historicism* is found in the context of Popper's criticism to the utopian, while Hinkelammert takes it not in a naive view, but in a reality from which Hinkelammert shows its necessity and its limits.

5 We do not go further into Hinkelammert's contribution with regard to his critique of utopian reason, for from that we just want to concentrate on the principles of impossibility for our goal in the present paper. But, we refer the reader to the mentioned work as well to Hinkelammert, Franz. *Ethik und Utopie* (Costa Rica: 2001) in <http://pensamientocritico.info/index.php/libros/libros-de-franz-hinkelammert/aleman?download=3:Utopie%20und%20Ethik> and to the *Critique of Utopian Reason* (op.cit).

6 Cf. Hinkelammert, F., *Crítica de la razón utópica*...pp. 309-317.

7 Here the anarchism is not considered, even though Hinkelammert analyses, mainly Flores Magon's thinking, in the mentioned work as well, since, as he points out, there have been anarchist revolutions but not anarchist *societies*. This fact arises from the lack of a praxis concept in the anarchist thinking. Cf. Ibid, pp. 202-203.

8 Cf. Ibid, Chapter 3.

9 In the sense as we are sketching these kind of principles, we could add within them the principle of feasibility elaborated by Hinkelammert in the mentioned *Critique of utopian reason*.

10 I distinguish the term of practical reality and social reality, since, in my view, social reality presupposes the concept of individual and not the concept of community, while practical reality is related to the face-to-face situation that makes possible any kind of practical reality independent of whether it is formed as society or a community. This distinction allows us to make a difference between social sciences, specially the sociology since its beginning, has drawn it up, and practical sciences, as it could be found in certain way by Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas, as Lutz-Bachmann has shown. Cf. Lutz-Bachmann, Matthias. "Die Grundlegung des Wissens und die Rationalität des wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis. Zur Theorie der Wissenschaften in den Aristoteles Kommentaren des Thomas von Aquin", pp. 239-251, in Lutz-Bachmann, Matthias., Fidora., Alexander & Atolic, Pia., (eds.). *Erkenntnis und Wissenschaft. Probleme der Epistemologie in der Philosophie des Mittelalters*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004; Lutz-Bachmann, Matthias., (2008), "Praktisches Wissen und 'praktische Wissenschaft': Zur Epistemologie der Moral Philosophie bei Tomas von Aquin", pp. 89-96, in Lutz-Bachmann, Matthias & Fidora, Alexander (eds.), *Handlung und Wissenschaft. Die Epistemologie der praktischen Wissenschaften im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008. By Dussel we could also find a distance to the idea of the individual, as it has been conceptualized by the social sciences. For instance, he talks about the term of practical truth. Cf. Dussel, Enrique. *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*. Duke: Duke University, 2013, Chapters 2 and 4, which is near to the sense of practical sciences in the sense that we are talking about it.

11 See Apel, Karl-Otto. *From a transcendental semiotic point of view*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.

12 This contribution of the transcendental pragmatic is present along with Apel's work. We find, for instance, in *The response of discourse ethics* (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), the following: "thinking is not autarchic in the Husserlian sense of 'methodological solipsism', but it transcendently presupposes a public language and together with this, a communication or discourse community". Ibid, pp. 46.

13 We take the distinction between the natural and the reality of the human culture that Karl-Otto Apel offers, namely, that natural reality exists independent of our thinking and will, while human reality depends on our thinking and will. Cf. Apel, Karl-Otto. *Paradigmen der Erste Philosophie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011, pp. 350. This distinction retakes, by the way, the Perice's conception of reality.

14 In my view, *The Ideological Weapons of Death* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986) is the work that synthesises the sense that has been present in the Latin-American thinkers, especially since the coming of neoliberalism in Latin America.

15 Dussel has made a revision of this criterion in the most prominent historical philosophies. Cf. Dussel, E. *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion...*, Ch. 1, 4.

16 There are many other critical thinkers whom one can mention such as Paulo Freire, Theotonio Dos Santos, Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Juan José Bautista, Ramón Grosfogel, among many others. Because of the aim of the present paper, we have concentrated, however, on those who, in my view, have grounded intensively the criterion of life, namely, Dussel and Hinkelammert.

17 Cf. Hinkelammert, Franz. *El sujeto y la ley*. Costa Rica: EUNA, 2003, pp. 44.

18 Cf. Ibid, Chapter 1.

19 In *Hacia una economía para la vida* (Costa Rica: DEI, 2005), Hinkelammert develops together with Henry Mora a material rationality that is articulated to the strategic-instrumental reason.

20 Cf. Hinkelammert, F. *El sujeto y la ley...*pp. 33.

21 “Eine Gesellschaft, deren Produktionsverhältnisse sich als unfähig erweisen, das konkrete Leben der Menschen und der Natur zu reproduzieren, zerstört sich selbst und ist nicht auf lange Sicht lebensfähig. Um weiterleben zu können, muß sie ihre Produktionsverhältnisse an diese Überlebensbedingungen einer Reproduktion des konkreten Lebens anpassen und daher verändern“. Hinkelammert, F. *Ethik und Utopie...*pp. 8.

22 Marx, Karl & Engels, Friederich. *Collected Works*, Vol. 35. New York: International Publishers, 1996, pp. 507-508. In Hinkelammert's interpretation this is the reason why Marx states the imperative to go beyond the capitalist relations.

23 Dussel, E. *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion...*2013

24 Cf. Dussel, E. *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization...*Chapters 1 and 4.

25 Zubiri, Xavier. *Estructura dinámica de la realidad*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1989, Chap. 8.

26 Dussel, E. *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization...*pp. 434.

27 Dussel, E. *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization...*pp. 92.

28 Dussel, E. *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization...*pp. 95.

29 Ibid, pp. 104

30 Ibid, pp. 365.

31 Ibid, pp. 365-366.

32 Cf. Ibid, pp. 184-203.

33 Dussel, Enrique. *16 Tesis de economía política*. Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2014.

34 This is, moreover, near to the following quote by Hinkelammert: “La realidad objetiva no es algo independiente a la vida del ser humano. Es la vida de éste, al logra esquivar la muerte la que mantiene la realidad como realidad objetiva. Por este motivo en el suicidio se disuelve la realidad, y en el suicidio colectivo de la humanidad la realidad se disuelve de modo definitivo. No existe un mundo objetivo sin seres humanos. Inclusive la propia objetividad del mundo se desvanece. La objetividad de la realidad no antecede a la vida humana, sino que es tanto su producto como su presupuesto” Hinkelammert, F. *El sujeto y la ley...*pp. 69-70.

35 We can, naturally, discuss the fact that the practical reality is not a natural one, and therefore the given practical reality is full of institutions, laws, norms, and so on. The problematic here is to notice that these social constructions have a hold on the living subject and nature. Any institution, for instance, is possible without these two living entities.

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