

The Ethic of Social Science in Latin America. From individual to collective responsibility?

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Summary:

The ethical subject and its relation to the disciplines of knowledge and the intervention of the world constitute one of the most spread manifestations of ethics in the present time.

Specialized ethics, gives shape to the idea of a practical interest in nowadays society. By practical we refer to the successful outgoing of a process in the performance of a determined practice, which can be either scientific or technological. It can be inferred that the results will be "correct" in the means that the procedures are correct. This preeminence of the ethics of procedures has found a notion of consensus in the borderline concept to qualify an action as a good one.

The situation of Social Sciences is critical in Latin America and in what remains of social science, more and more dominated by absence of discussion on the principles that hold the social action.

The notion of social action is explored with a sense of collective responsibility which will contribute to understand what occurs in Latin America and also to social science, regarding the comprehension of the World.

The dimension of Ethics

Ethics is the systematic and rational way to acknowledge our customs. Knowledge that informs on what deserves our effort to achieve a good life. We can name three aspects.

The first is Science. Systematic and communicable knowledge. Therefore, it necessary to elucidate the prevailing rationalization in the construction of knowledge; to explore the limits that define systematic knowledge. This is an *epistemological ethos*.

Second, the transitory condition from a present situation to a desired situation, for being good. This aspect is based in the tripartite condition of ethics (MacIntyre, 1981).

Finally, the constitution of the fundamental plot for the action that refers us to the conception of the World and the notion of "being", in terms of its comprehension. It is the ontological construction of ethics.

This definition of "what-is-in-each-case" in terms of an ethos takes us to propose the demand of a systemic thinking which overcomes the duality subject-object.

Ethics of Social Sciences

The question on Ethics inquires about the good condition of social science to society. A fundamental feature of social science is the search of knowledge guided by defined and agreed patterns within those who research to accept knowledge as valid. Which means, norms for the development of “good Practice” in social sciences gives place to a methodological ethics. The correct appliance on the procedures will give birth to a good practice, a neutral practice. By “neutral” we assume the division between fact and value.

The “methodological ethos” involves to alienate from society that is been studied to interrogate it. This supposes a social behavior ruled by laws foreign to the socio-historical circumstances.

This knowledge requires a rationalization of the social action. The formulation of typologies of social action reveals dependence towards the cultural circumstance as well as to the plurality of rationalities. The limits of social action are given by the rationality which assignates a subjective meaning. This implicates an ability to respond to a situation, based on principles. The prevailing rationality depends on the ability of an individual and in terms of goal-means rationality. An individual who acts and his action is acknowledged as social, constitutes the basic condition of conception of an individual that knows. In conclusion, both the actor and the researcher of society do it from an individual responsibility.

The prevalence of the individual in knowing, acquires a fundamental condition. It is the constitution of an “Epistemological ethos”. The way of how we have searched to show the complexity of the interaction of several actors is the way we distinguish the normative values of the involved and separate them from the investigation. This separation, liberates the researcher from the responsibility of “acting” in what is been studied. In this process, the “epistemological ethos” reveals a conception of the World, an ontology: The way “What is” is conceived conditions and is conditioned by the way it is interrogated.

In Interpretative Systemology, systemical thinking with phenomenological fundaments, it is searched to understand the transcendental unity of the whole. The knowledge implicates the enthusiasm for understanding the way of how this unity is given in the scene in which the subject-object is constituted. This is the critical opening of the scene (Fuenmayor, 1991). This opening is not exhaustive, so, knowing is the comprehension of the contingent character of the ways to seize reality and the redefinition of rationality and the sense of social action.

The Holistic Knowledge

The diverse conceptions of the World and its knowledge demand a perspective able to identify the differences and draw the borders of the conceptions of which it can be learned. This demands as well an ethic with an open non violent point of view, dialogue that can overcome the incommensurable limits of the knowledge. It is an ethic of the “ideas”, “a political ethic that dictates us to play the game of truth and error, not to control it, that is to say, to avoid playing it. The most sacred is not the truth. The most sacred is the game of truth” (Morin, 1981, p. 306).

The “game of the truth” is not exclusive of the scientists. It requires a broader cultural substrate, the society itself. It is the ethic of a new social science, authentically engaged with its object of study, based on the culture from which society itself is constructed. This perspective is contingent and collectively held as it referred to as social science and the actors involved in the construction of this object of study and the subject studying it. It is necessary to state a more comprehensive notion of responsibility.

The collective responsibility minimizes the control of the goals-means rationality. In its place emerges the acknowledgement of the vulnerability in contrast to autonomy. This means, be able to explain the social phenomenon in time. A “genealogy” of the ways of explaining is the socio-historical reconstruction of the methods and objects of study of the social sciences. In this case, the identification of the limits of science reveal the limits in which it is authentically searched what defines society or, on the contrary, the games of power and the control of the truth. (Foucault, 1991).

What primes in collective responsibility, is the unity towards diversity. Collective responsibility requires a concept or socio-historical trajectory different from the Eurocentric trajectory guided by the constitution of a universal subject a priori. This socio-historical trajectory achieves in the popular Latin American spaces , elements for its constitution revealing the social science as alienated of the social and political actual conduction.

Re-creation of the Collective

The social science in Latin America has followed the trajectory of the prevailing social science, the course of the history of modernity and its decay.

This perspective does not explain the “silent transformation” of the plural deliberant and autonomous subject into a new unitarian “subject-object” based on the acknowledgement of a transcendental order based on a weak culture which has its basis on the dependence regarding the other. We will denominate this new “subject-object” , “people-future”.

“People-future” is the construction of diversity from the unification upon a concept of World. Such unification supposes an historical reconstruction of its races from the spaces which are not ruled by the rationality of the modern.

The ability of answer lies in the recognition and acceptance of a unity which is prior to the consensus and has an occult character. It is the vital attitude of constituting itself as subject-object from a more inclusive perspective, which less defines limits and a clear vocation of imputing to an “us” prior to an “I”, an action with sense.

The “people to come” is a continuous and sustained construction of the cultivation of the unity from the fragility of the good to constitute itself in a unity. In Latin America's case, the “people to come” are the reconstructions of the conceptions that can recognize themselves in the transit of the excluded people and who “play” with the modern and post modern order, for the reconstitution of the collective alternate unity. Thus, new forms of research and comprehending on what occurs to this new “subject-object” are necessary. This implicates to overcome the procedure oriented ethic of the disciplines and the specialization.

New Social Science?

The ethic of a new social science cannot be separated from the ethical proposal of making sense. Thus, the ethic of knowledge involves to reconstruct the knowledge at social level as a good that contributes to the construction of a unity of ethics and its ability to give answers and the prevalence of an order that will transcend the “here and now” circumstances.

The social science based upon the premise of an “actor-scene” (“subject-object”) has to be, necessarily a science that acknowledges its weak condition and the ethic co-account of its conclusions and proposals of action are weak social constructions because they acknowledge their contingent condition, at the same time it searches the transcendence of its efforts in the ability to set up a positive construction of knowledge and a way to seize the World different from the technological way. This involves a search of points of encounter between research and society. Spaces where the search of the good and the reconstitution of the question of the sense of society are possible. It is to acknowledge ethic in a condition of poverty given by the transition from an ethic based in the autonomy towards an ethic based in the acknowledgement of its dependence on the ways of how the collective responsibility is constituted.