

# Response to Mendieta

Santiago Zabala and Gianni Vattimo

Eduardo Mendieta's claim that *Hermeneutic Communism* reads like a manifesto is not only philosophically accurate, but also touching as we never thought of the text in these terms. We knew this was going to be a book of political philosophy, but it never occurred to us it would be interpreted as a manifesto or proclamation. If Mendieta is correct, readers will continue to interpret this book in the future. And it is precisely for this future that we have written it. A future which, similarly to Heidegger's other "inception," Derrida's "democracy to come," and Richard Rorty "social hope" must still arrive. While this might sound paradoxical, as we took Latin American progressive governments as a model for our Western neoliberal democracies, the book was not written for *them*, but rather for *us*. The "hermeneutic communism" we deem is still taking place in Latin America has not ended with the passing of its charismatic leader (Hugo Chavez) or recent political changes in Argentina, Cuba, and Brazil during 2014 and 2015, but rather begun there.

What is extraordinary today for us, almost 7 years after its publication, is that this inception of radical democracy and social initiatives has reached Europe. We are not referring to the *indignados* or Occupy movements, but rather those who have been capable of transforming these movements into a political party. It should not come as a surprise that the first country in Europe where this took place is Spain with Podemos. But this did not simply occur because its leaders (Pablo Iglesias, Juan Carlos Monedero, and Íñigo Errejón) travelled, researched, and admired Latin America's Bolivarian revolution, but also because of Spain's linguistic proximity to the new continent. Together with Podemos we must also emphasize the significance of Pope Francis' election. The election of a Latin American Pope who has begun a

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progressive reformation of the Vatican belongs to an epoch where the “weak” have finally began to take part in the distribution of power.

In his insightful contribution, Mendieta does not simply and generously relate our book to other manifestos (*The Communist Manifesto*, *The First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*, and *The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City*), but also questions the way we present the “end of metaphysics,” whether Rorty would have approved of hermeneutics’ ability to weaken communism, and “what counts as a more productive interpretation.” Let’s start with the end of metaphysics.

According to Mendieta, we “write as though the end of metaphysics had happened qua dispensation of being itself.” But “how can something come to an end, and yet still remain operative?” “Did it come to an end of its own accord, or was it something that humans did that spelled its end,” and finally, “whether in announcing its end, metaphysics endurance is not renewed, and given a new lease on life.” We agree with Mendieta how paradoxical the end of metaphysics sounds as we condemn to “framed democracies,” and “scientific realism” ongoing contemporary impositions. But as we tried to explain in the third chapter the end of metaphysics is not a fact, but a narration which has different stages and interpretations. This is why we refer to the end of colonialism and rise of cultural anthropology, and also Nietzsche’s well known chapter from *Twilight of Idols*, “How the ‘Real World’ at Last became a Myth.” These ought to be interpreted as part of the dissolution of metaphysics whose “end” is in progress, that is, an ongoing process. If this end cannot become complete, it’s not only due to our incapacity to overcome it, but rather resistance our to falling back into another metaphysics. This is why from the start we emphasize the difference between overcoming metaphysics in the sense of “überwunden” (defeating or leaving at large) and “verwindung” (twisting or weakening). In this form, metaphysics is not “renewed,” but rather overcome productively because as Heidegger once said, “overcoming is worthy only when we think of incorporation.”

Mendieta believes Rorty would have reacted to *Hermeneutic Communism* the same way he reacted to Cornel West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy* and Habermas’s *Between Facts and Norms*: “democracy and political freedom need weak thought, universal pragmatics, or propheticism as much as a fish needs a bicycle.” It is true Rorty did not believe philosophy ought to guide politics, but we must recall for Mendieta both hermeneutics and weak thought do not rely exclusively upon Heidegger, Gadamer, and Nietzsche, but also Rorty’s own postmetaphysical pragmatism. If he believed the “hermeneutical or Gadamerian attitude is in the political world what democracy is in the political world,” it’s because hermeneutics cannot be reduced to another “philosophical stance,” that is, metaphysical approach. For Rorty “philosophy” and “hermeneutics” are not equivalent. This is probably why he believed, as he said at Gadamer’s hundredth birthday celebration in Heidelberg, that a “Gadamerian culture would have no use of faculties called ‘reason’ or ‘imagination’ – faculties that are conceived as having some special relation to truth or reality.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. Rorty, “Being that can be understood is Language,” *London Review of Books* 22, n. 6, March 16, 2000.

Mendieta's reference to our call for "productive interpretations" does not require a response, as he agrees with our characterization of hermeneutics as a radical and emancipatory thought. He is correct to point out that this is a problem Reiner Schürmann and Karl-Otto Apel have also confronted. Our preference for the former does not simply rest in his use of "anarchy" to interpret the different epoch of metaphysics, but also in his suspicion in Apel's request for "rational criteria" when preferring one interpretation over another. After all, these rational criteria are never abstract or philosophical, but always participatory in oppressing the weak. Mendieta is correct to point out that the "key lesson of *Hermeneutic Communism* is" to interpret both "the inheritance of communism in ever more generative and creative ways" and "to fashion a more ecumenical and humane 'we'" as long as this "we" refers to the weak.



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