

Contra o Espírito da Época: Interview with Roberto Mangabeira Unger¹

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CARLOS SÁVIO : To kick off, I would like to ask you Mr. Mangabeira to compare the general context of thought from the moment when you started your theoretical activities, in the late 1960s, to that of today.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : From social and historical thinking, I found the predominance of three trends. That is, rationalization, humanization and escapism. In positive social sciences, rationalization is used to explain the dominant order as the natural consequence of inexorable forces. This rationalization takes two distinct forms, one is Marxism and the other is positive social sciences, as practiced in academia in the United States. Each of these social sciences gave into fatalism in different ways. Tolstoy says at the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, ‘Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.’ This was and continues to be the case in social sciences.

Each form of rationalization suppresses an imperative of structural vision in a different way. Marxism and classical social theories had a structural view, but they compromised to become a series of determinisms. The positive social sciences abandoned the great meta-historical narrative of determinations at the expense of suppressing the view of structures (forming structures and structural discontinuity) and, therefore, the possibility of creating structural alternatives. It was not yet clear what that meant.

On the side of Marxism, there was an attempt to rescue Marxism in two ways – by either emphasizing culture and conscience or by emphasizing the autonomy of politics. In fact, what resulted from this was a kind of confusion in which Marxists and neo-Marxists little-by-little stopped believing in the heroic premises of Marxism: that is, the closed list of regimes in history, each with an indivisible system and laws to govern their succession. However, they continued to use the Marxist vocabulary as if the thesis of the premises of that vocabulary continued to hold. On the positive social sciences side, the ideas were compared with the studies, such as physics. Each degenerated and perverted the ideals of science in different ways. The economy, a marginalist theory of the end of the 19th century, became a given. Many of the other social sciences treat the study of society as if it were the same as natural history or the science of time, the climate or sea currents.

CARLOS SÁVIO : And often, the findings would be considered obsolete compared to that of the natural sciences. Is that correct?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Yes. Therefore, the meaning of this incoherent, confused relationship with fatalism has not yet been made explicit. What was common within these trends, that is neo-Marxism and positive social sciences, was to break a fundamental to understanding, which is the link between understanding the existing and imagining the

possible. This is not only considering the remote, hypothetically possible, but also the adjacent possible, that is, the next steps. To understand a phenomenon is to understand what it can become, given certain provocations or changes and it is this link that was interrupted in the rationalizing tendency. In the normative disciplines of political philosophy, as in the theories of justice and legal thought, humanization prevailed.

CARLOS SÁVIO : As in the case of John Rawls?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Apparently very abstract pseudo-philosophical speeches that placed an idealizing halo on the liberal social settlement and in the social democratic society advanced in the second half of the 20th century. It was all very abstract in the theory of justice, the idea of the social contract, the principles that supposedly justified a radical compensatory redistribution to increase equality and in law - the conception of law, of positive law - as a system of principles and public policies. But all this, in fact, was just a way of glossing over a political reality, which was an arrangement of the mid-twentieth century in which any attempt to reimagine and reconstruct the institutional structure of those societies was abandoned, in favor of humanization. Humanization followed two main forms - compensatory redistribution and idealization of the law. The third trend was that of escapism that prevailed in the humanities.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Post-structuralism.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : For example, in literary theory, which was heavily influenced by the French, a subjectivist radicalism in which consciousness embarked on a kind of roller coaster of possibilities totally disconnected from the re-imagination and reconstruction of society. The essence was the privatization of the sublime, and this adventurous subjectivism came from the fateful divergence between leftism and modernism in the early 20th century. I saw it all, but it was not usually recognized at the time for what it was. Comparing the situation of now with the situation of that time, it is as if the king had garments before - even if already frayed - and now the garments started to disappear.

CARLOS SÁVIO : They fell apart.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The king was now naked. The insufficiency of this tendency to move Marxism is much clearer today than it was then. Marxism is still defended from a purely negative point of view. The radical criticism that I rehearsed against this historical fatalism was repelled as if it were a mere constructivist voluntarism, when in reality, it was a way of explaining both transformative opportunities and structural constraints without this surrender to historical fatality. The limitations and historical context, the historical anchor, of those humanizing tendencies in the normative disciplines of political philosophy and legal thought are much more clear today than they were at the time. Even for its most ardent defenders, it is now crystal clear that there is a link between those trends in political philosophy and legal thinking and the divides of the centrist, left-center, social liberal and social democratic politics.

As it becomes clear that this policy is unable to address the problems of contemporary societies, these trends are beginning to be discredited. In the humanities today, it is difficult to dispute the meaning of the adventurous subjectivism which I described. This practice is no longer demonstrated with the same enthusiasm. It descends into pessimistic and sad Alexandrism with a lack of transformative energy that regards literature and criticism of literature with regret. Therefore, the difference between that time and now is that since then intellectual circumstance that were veiled decades ago have unfolded and now become much clearer. Now, all of this also occurs against the backdrop of a more lasting and less accessible situation in philosophy. There have always been two prevalent trends in the

world history of philosophy. The first is the trend that prevailed in the West. It can be called the Greek philosophy of being that began with Aristotle, but continues in modern science, including in the most important one, that of fundamental physics. It is the idea of a permanent structure in the world, the fundamental components of reality and nature as well as the laws, regularities, symmetries, and constants that govern the phenomena. Over time, there are changes and the concept of time is regarded as relatively real.

CARLOS SÁVIO : It's invariable.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : However, these changes take place within a framework of laws and lasting structures that exist outside of time. Within this philosophy, reality is associated with eternity. The more real a phenomenon is, the less changeable it is.

CARLOS SÁVIO : It becomes ever more invariable.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The concept I have described is the dominant trend in the West. In ancient India, for example, speculative monism dominated. This is also represented in the West, as seen in the work of philosophers, such as Schopenhauer. In this idea, the ultimate reality is the unitary, to be a single unit, which is both timeless and exists outside of time. The changes and distinctions between beings are either unreal or less real than a reality which is that unitary and timeless. The commonality of these two trends is clearly that they both associate reality with the denial of time and therefore, they prevent us from understanding our own human and historical experiences. That is why in Western philosophy, which is dominated by the Greek philosophy of being, we have witnessed from the middle ages until today a series of dualisms between the realm of nature and that of grace, between mental and physical phenomena in Descartes, between the phenomena and things in themselves in Kant, and 19th century historicism between the realm of history and the realm of nature.

These dualistic concepts attempted to make an exception for human experience. Since we were unable to reconcile our experience within the parameters of the Greek philosophy of being, we needed to divide reality into two parts and claim that our experience is a miraculous privilege. There is a third position worth developing which refuses to associate reality with the negation of time and states that everything that exists in the world - really everything - even the natural phenomena and the regularities of nature, everything changes. But it is no less real because it is changing. It is only within this view that we were able to grapple with miracle dualisms and begin to understand our experience as if our self-explanation was not just the practice of self-deception. This third philosophical position finds some incipient defenders in 20th century philosophy, such as Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead, but although it may seem - and must seem - to be the most plausible and most promising position in philosophy, it has the weakest voice in the history of philosophical thought. That has not changed. This was the case when I started working and it continues to be the case. However, the transformation of the state of thought is also important. To construct a philosophical project that covers not only humanity, but also nature, must make sense of the world in a way that affirms the possibility of the new and, therefore, also the work of the imagination. That is what I did. As this theme is very distant from the immediate controversies of thought, I worked in silence at that time and I continue to do so.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Considering this final link, I would like you to comment on the following questions: what role does philosophy play in the framework of your political thinking and how would you broadly characterize your philosophical position in this field, considering that you articulate, as you just mentioned, social and political theories with general philosophical un-

derstanding, which is relatively different from the contemporary framework of thought.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The nature of philosophy has two concepts – or there are two most influential concepts in the history of thought. Classical conception of philosophy - both in the Western, Greek philosophy of being, as I called it, as well as in ancient India, the speculative monism or in Chinese philosophy with its eminently practical, ethical and political concerns - was to see philosophy as a super science, a fundamental science, distinct from all specializations. It would hover above and address the fundamental, timeless nature of reality. But the claim of the philosopher had a practical objective that by using the exercise of thought, it would understand the basics, the fundamental science and the science of the fundamentals. The practical objective was a kind of self-help to face mortality, the enigmatic nature of existence and the insatiable nature of human desire. We seek the infinite, only touch the finite, and then try to rip the infinite out of the finite. So fundamental science was for that, to develop a narrative that said, 'the situation is not as bad as it looks.' [laughs] And we have a way of explaining that allows us to reconcile with death, the inability to understand our situation in the world and this contradiction between what we want and what we can have. It is this conception that was abandoned by professional philosophers. When I say professionals, they are ...

CARLOS SÁVIO : Academics.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Yes. Teachers and universities. The anthropologist Ernest Gellner said that looking for a philosopher in the philosophy department is like looking for Picasso in the fine arts department [laughs]. But that, that is professional philosophy. Professional philosophy, especially in regard to the analytical aspect that prevailed from the middle of the 20th century in English-speaking countries, developed another conception of philosophy. Philosophy would be a kind of police.

CARLOS SÁVIO : For the purpose of control?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : It has a policing function in the way of arguing and analyzing. The philosopher goes on to point out the fallacies in the arguments of others. It is a minor conception of philosophy and absurd, because there are no sacred or permanent methods. The vision, a substantive agenda, overlaps the method.

CARLOS SÁVIO : It becomes transitory?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The methods are discarded. This form of philosophy is a police apparatus that has run out of employers, they offer to police thought, but nobody wants to hire their services [laughs]. This is the second conception. I did not accept either of these two views. I didn't want to have anything to do with this self-deception, nor the pretension of a super science, nor with the idea of using it as a protective instrument against the terrors of existence, nor with this idea of policing thought.

CARLOS SÁVIO : As a form of control.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : For me, philosophy is the mind at war, transcending disciplinary divisions and trying to go to the limit, the limit of the almost invisible and the almost unthinkable. There is a characteristic problem that reveals the tension between philosophy seen in this way and established disciplines. At the same time, it demonstrates the usefulness of philosophy for the evolution of thought. University culture is generally organized in the form of orthodoxies in each discipline that associates the method with a subject. It is a kind of forced marriage between method and matter. Take hegemonic economics, for example. Hegemonic economic theory that comes from the marginalization of the end of the 19th century is not the study of economics, it is the study of a method and

that method is applied to matters that have nothing to do with production or exchange. This is treated as economics. And the study of economics by a thinker, say Max Weber, by another method is not recognized as economics. This is the sociology of economics or anthropology of economics. All of this works against understanding the world.

We need to subvert this forced and singular association between matter and method to demonstrate how the same matter can be understood in contrasting methodological perspectives. That is one of the values of philosophy from the point of view of university culture. It is also clear that philosophy has the potential to combat illusions, which are rationalizing, humanizing and escapist, as I described before this dialogue. It is a great mission and we do not need to claim to possess a super science to exercise philosophy in that spirit. Let's forget the goal of self-help and try to live without illusions as long as we can.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Perfect. I would like to shift the discussion to ask you a question related to social theory. In a recent presentation on his work, the American sociologist Charles Sabel said that you are the closest theorist to Karl Marx, although your work also represents a deep and direct criticism of Marx and Marxists. What do you make of this?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : First, I will explain my relationship with Marx in the evolution of my social theory. Marx was my greatest inspiration ever and I consider the criticism that Marx made to English political economy to be exemplary. The essence of that criticism is that what English economists treated as universal and eternal laws of the economy were actually the laws of a specific form of economic and social organization.

CARLOS SÁVIO : What he called a capitalism.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Yes. What he called capitalism. And so, they naturalized something that was a human construct. It turns out that in the development of the Marxist work, this clairvoyant view was surrounded and emptied by a series of deterministic conditions. These conditions imposed the idea that there is a closed set of alternative regimes in history, each of these regimes is a indivisible system and therefore politics is either the revolutionary substitution of one system for another or it is a reformist management of a system, and there are higher laws governing the predetermined succession of all this. All of this is false. Furthermore, these falsehoods have consequences. I set out to preserve the central idea. The central idea is that everything is political, in the sense that these structures are not natural phenomena, they are our construction. It becomes a collective construction and it is later designed in a way to prevent its change, more or less. The ideological institutional structures can be more or less ingrained, they can be organized in a way to facilitate their own change and then we empower ourselves. As you can see, I had the idea to try to save the central revolutionary idea, not only from Marx, but from other great social theorists of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Someone like Weber?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : I aimed to save the central revolutionary idea from these concessions. Much later, defenders of conventional Marxism came to attack me, denouncing my ideas as constructivist voluntarism. But it is a misunderstanding. Much of my work in social theory is an attempt to explain the structural constraints and the impediments to transformative action, without naturalizing the dominant evolution and negating our transformative power. It is not enough to perform this task in general social theory. It is necessary to break into the field of specific disciplines. Above all, the two disciplines that are most important for the reimagination and reconstruction of structures is -

CARLOS SÁVIO : Economy and law?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Yes. The economy and the law. That is what I did. Now, along this path, I share two deep affinities with Marx. That is, in addition to the influence of his exemplary work of redefining what was presented as eternal and universal in the specific and historical. First is Marx's conception that we move, we transform humanity by fighting to change the world and society. This sense of a bond, of a dialectic, between changing the world and self-transformation - this is something very profound. Second is the conception that we are free, and we become greater beings only through structural changes and the structures of society in history can be more or less hospitable to our nature. We share the divine attribute of transcendence; we are bigger than the context. This is in Marx. This is the spirit of Marx. It is not an idea cultivated with a series of abstractions outside of time or deduced from supreme temporal premises but requires facing reality - to face reality in thought and to face reality in political practice. Therefore, I will say without reservation that I consider myself closer to Marx than Marx's collaborator and friend, Friedrich Engels, with whom he wrote the communist manifesto.

CARLOS SÁVIO : [laughs] I would like to take this opportunity to return to your analysis of social theory and of its argumentative nucleus with regard to the two trends, the trend you seek to rescue and the trend you seek to discard. I wanted to hear about that which you hope to discard. What do you attribute the concessions that Marx, Weber, Durkheim - classical social theorists - made in order to empty the orientation that was the most fruitful and liberating to thought?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : It was primarily the influence of a conception of science.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Typical of 19th century.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : I would attribute this to the influence of physics, and then the influence of natural history, such as that of Darwinism. This was the paradigm of scientific explanation and everything that diverged from it, everything that complicated, everything that loosened determinisms seemed to walk in the path of agnosticism, an abdication of explanatory ambition. This waiver in vision in turn would serve conservatism. We would not be able to explain structural change and the result would be this disorientation. That was one of the elements, but there is another element to explain these concessions, which is spiritual. It is moral. The 'transforming will' finds itself surrounded by enemies on all sides, inhibitions and impediments and needs to lift the mood, needs to arm itself against constraints, through a heroic narrative. The easiest path of the heroic narrative is to say that history is on our side, that there are determinisms that will take us forward, there is a great wave in history and that wave condemns humanity to centuries of suffering, but in the end liberation will come.

CARLOS SÁVIO : You're describing the concept of redemption.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Let's surf this wave. It is similar to the drive of the Semitic monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, who say that we have a friend in charge of the universe. That friend in classical social theory, in Marx, is history. History may be the enemy of an individual who was born at the wrong time but is a friend to another. All of this is a fairy tale, we will not mince words, but it is possible to understand this because there is an intense determination, and a convergence of the spiritual temptation to adopt this heroic discourse in the form of self-help and the restrictive, reductionist model of science, which comes from the 19th century and has to do with the philosophical controversy I described. But nothing like the passage of time to reveal what it all means. Going back to the beginning of our conversation, it is now much clearer than it was 40 years ago what all this means. The debacle and emptiness in disciplines, such as economic theory, is becoming clear. It

is an especially important lesson for practical experience in contemporary society. Earlier, I quoted a line from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and it also applies in this situation. Each discipline abandons explanatory ambition and enters the path of deception in a different way. The predominant trend is in economics due to four defects. First, the separation between analysis or explanation and empiricism. The economist builds models and when the model does not work, he leaves the model and makes another one, but the underlying theory does not change, because it is not causal. As the Austrians realized, in the case of a logical and analytical apparatus, there is no dialectic between empiricism and theory, only a change in models. The second defect is the reification of structures and the dogmatic imagination, which includes the market economy itself. That is what fundamentalism is - to confuse the abstract idea of the market with the specific institutional form of the market.

CARLOS SÁVIO : What you might call structural fetishism.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The extreme form of this is Hayek. Robinson Crusoe on his island, if he spent enough time doing business, he would end up generating the 19th century German private law. This is not true. The market economy has no natural and essential way of organizing itself. The third defect is that this prevailing theory sacrifices the theory of production and the theory of exchange. For the two greatest economists in the history of economic thought, Karl Marx and Adam Smith, there was a theory of production equivalent in its importance to the theory of exchange. In this understanding of economy, the theory of production is only a shadow of the theory of exchange. It considers productive relations from the perspective of relative prices, facilitated by the attribute of these economies that for historical reasons, human labor can be bought and sold. And the fourth defect is that it is a theory of competitive selection which lacks an approach to create a diverse material on which selective competition incurs. It is as if in the biological sciences we have only the theory of Darwinian evolution and not the theory of mutation or genetic recombination. If I give an example of the criticism of one of these disciplines, each discipline deserves a different criticism.

CARLOS SÁVIO : It would be specific to each field.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The meaning of this criticism is to associate the demystification of social life - Karl Marx's ambition - with our action to transform the world. That is why I say again, no contemporary of mine is closer to Karl Marx than I am and for this very reason, I am opposed to the ideas of Marxists.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Perfect. I would like to advance into the rebellion that you are trying to carry out against what you call the lack of institutional imagination of contemporary thought and address this issue of how you formed the idea of institutional imagination in your thinking. How did you come up with the transition from subjective perception of imagination to the idea of institutional imagination? This is one of the central concepts of your social, political and legal theory. In your book "The Self Awakened," you write that imagination has two constitutive operations. The first is highlighted by Immanuel Kant, which considers imagination as perception and the second, not perceived by Kant, is the memory of a perception. In the second operation occurs what you call transformational variation. What were the main theoretical inspirations for the development of this second function of the imagination?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : I'm going to take a step back to explain this. One of the central ideas in my work is the idea of our attribute of overcoming or transcending. We are formed by specific conceptual and social worlds, contexts, structures, regimes, but there is always more in us, in each one of us, individuals, and in all of us together, as humanity,

of what is or what can be in these structures. They are finite compared to us, and infinite compared to them. We have always been able to experiment, build and see more than they accommodate. And so we can turn against them and try to create structures that are not only different in content but also different in nature because instead of becoming naturalized, instead of presenting themselves as natural, immutable phenomena, they start to facilitate their review and then we become bigger and more empowered. This conception has an expression in the experience of the mind, in the transcendence.

Our mental life has two aspects. In one aspect, the mind is like a machine, serialized in the brain. There is a physical basis for mental operations, each part of the brain structure has different functions, so there is rigidity and modularity in the formulaic mind. But we have a second aspect of our mental life in which we were able to develop new functions of the same brain structures, that is plasticity. We were able to combine everything with everything else. It is what in mathematics we call the recursive infinite and above all, we were able to discard the established methods and the usual premises of our thinking and discover something or invent something that challenges and subverts these premises and methods. It is discovery through negation. That is imagination. The relationship between these two aspects of the mind, the mind as a machine and the mind as an anti-machine - not formulated - have the powers of recombination and transcendence. It is not determined by any physical attribute of the brain; it is determined by the organization of politics and history. In this sense, the history of politics is internal to the history of the brain and that of the mind. That is the basis. It is a conception of intelligence that is linked to a general conception of humanity.

Now, in your quest, you point to an illuminating distinction. As the basic characteristic of the imagination, Kant described the distance from the phenomenon. The image is the memory of a perception. We have to be away from the phenomenon to remember it as an image. But this is only the first step in the imagination's job. There is a second moment in which, apart from the phenomenon, we begin to subject it in thought to a series of possible variations, variations in the possible adjacent terrain. We imagine what this phenomenon may become, given a particular intervention or external trauma. This is how we understand things and how we understand ourselves.

So, there is this close link between imagination and transformation. Imagination is thought studying the transformation and building the new, because what we do in thought, we also do in practice. This is the starting point for the idea of institutional imagination. This is how we must also approach the structures of society and history and it is in this spirit that we must want to rebuild the structures. There arises a very important problem in our contemporary situation, which has to do with the division between left and right and the conception of what it means in the world today to be progressive. For liberal progressives, social liberals, social democrats of the end of the 20th century, the idea is the commitment to equality. But that commitment to equality is combined with the compensatory redistribution method. The structure is accepted. In this case, that is the existing structure of the market economy and it seeks to mitigate the inequalities generated in the market. The market is a great tool to create wealth that unfortunately generates inequality, we will fix it later by compensatory redistribution.

CARLOS SÁVIO : This is done retrospectively.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : And here come the theories of justice that idealize this retrospective humanization and the idealization of law in the form of a principle that creates the intellectual environment for this humanizing operation. But none of this equates the problems of contemporary society that require structural innovations. Imagination is required here for the following reason, 19th century liberals and socialists understood that the goal of

reformers, revolutionaries was not to humanize society as much as it was to deify humanity. The goal is greatness.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Aggrandizing.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : A shared greatness, getting bigger together. That is the goal. The fight against inequality is subsidiary. That is a bigger goal. And the method is structural change. They had an overly narrow view of greatness because it was formed in an aristocratic model, of self-possession, of self-mastery. We would have to have a magnanimous and contradictory view and they had a very limited conception of structural change.

CARLOS SÁVIO : A spreadsheet.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : In the form of dogmas, yes, spreadsheets. Each had its definitive system. Like the 19th century liberals and socialists, we have reason to affirm the primacy of structural change. Even for equality, what matters most are institutional innovations that influence the fundamental distribution of advantages, not retrospective correction. The fight against inequality is just one dimension of the goal becoming greater together, but unlike the 19th century liberals and socialists, we can no longer rely on institutional dogmas. Therefore, one of the most important attributes of the institutions to be built is that they have a quality to facilitate their own transformation - this is the meaning of experimentalism. For example, the federative regime in a federative country like ours, use the federation as an experiment machine, strong central government action, but the possibility for parts of the country to diverge from the prevailing solutions and to build against models of the national future. There, the idea of imagination ceases to be a philosophical abstraction and becomes embodied in practices and institutions. This is what it means to bring imagination to power. The slogan of the revolutionaries of '68, which I, unlike almost all my contemporaries, continue to take seriously. They matured, became adults, abandoned what they started to consider romantic daydreams and I persisted. I persisted in remembering the poet William Blake's warning: 'If the fool would persist in his folly, he would be wise.'

CARLOS SÁVIO : I wanted to go back to this question of the primacy of imagination in your thinking and ask what are the main theoretical inspirations for the development of this second perception, second vision of the imagination as you just presented. Is Hegel one of them?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : There are two series of inspirations. One is more limited and specific while the other is more general. The most limited inspiration is that of romanticism, the idea of creative imagination comes from the European romantic movement and from the philosophers of that time, for example from the writer and playwright Schiller and from that entire period. But there is a wider influence.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Diffuse.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The wider influence is this struggle in the history of world philosophy to build what I called before a third position, distinct from the Greek philosophy of being and later qualified by dualisms in the history of Western philosophy and speculative monism, which affirms the reality of differences and changes and disassociates reality from eternity. Everything is temporal and time is the most radical reality that encompasses everything. It is in this world that the work of the imagination makes sense and the imagination is possible. The imagination is transcendence translated into a thought experience; it is the mental aspect of our transcendence. See that all this has to do with vision, as a possibility to see, not just as an analytical facility. Schopenhauer observes in his masterpiece, 'The World as Will and Representation,' that the difference between talent

and genius is as follows: the talented is like a sniper who hits a target that others cannot reach, and the genius is like a sniper who hits a target that others cannot see. Genius is the visionary and prophetic power, the power to see, it is not as if it were a kind of super intelligence. The very smart ones who do well in tests, who triumph in academic competitions, judge themselves in the right to be geniuses, but do not understand what genius is and that genius - that is the ability to see - is widely diffused in humanity. We radical democrats believe that prophetic power is present in all of humanity. The Protestant reform insisted on the priesthood of all believers and we democrats claim the prophetic power of all agents. Therefore, the cultivation of the imagination for an education friendly to it and the translation of the imagination into institutional structures and practices is part of the aggrandizement of humanity.

Brazil has one of its most propitious contexts and scenarios. Brazil is a great creative anarchy, a culture in which syncretism, the mixing of everything with everything is at the same time the problem and the solution, an amazing but raw vitality that now needs to be refined, needs to have its instruments. Instead of getting into in the strait jacket to suppress it, we need to raise it and give it arms, wings and eyes so it can stand up. And so I see Brazil's liberation by building a national project that empowers Brazilians as agents instead of co-opting them as beneficiaries, that fuses development and radical democratization and opportunities and training as a way not only to raise Brazil, but to make Brazil play a prophetic role within humanity.

CARLOS SÁVIO : We will speak about Brazil more in the third section of this interview. For now, I will ask my final question addressing imagination and how it unfolds in a more specific scenario. American philosopher Richard Rorty wrote an essay on your work and it contrast the institutional imagination in your thinking with the social imagination in the thinking of a contemporary Greek philosopher Cornélius Castoriadis. How do you see this link made by Rorty?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : It has merit, there are common themes in my thinking that are in line with the thinking of Castoriadis. Castoriadis is of the same generation, also influenced by the experience of '68 and disagreed with the realm of these dogmatisms, but Castoriadis had a specific concern with the social, with the political. I understood that we were able to promote this change only because of a greater intellectual and political ambition, the construction of other institutions, and the construction of other thoughts. Castoriadis' thinking is still very much influenced by romanticism and a flaw in romantic thinking is as follows: Romantics imagine that human authenticity, vitality and creation contradicts with structures, routines and repetitions. Danish philosopher Kierkegaard noted that the war against repetition is the war against life itself because there is no life without repetition. And it is not to suppress repetition, it is to organize this dialectic between the repeated and the new. For the romantic, the moment of genuine life only exists when routines, institutions and structures are shaken in those intervals. So, the romantic thinks that the structures will inevitably assert themselves again but that they need to be shaken in that interval. Take the romantic element in Mao Zedong, for example, the cultural revolution, it is inevitable that bureaucratic structures have returned, but we now need to subvert them even if the subversion is temporary.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Transitory.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Consider this from the sphere of personal existence and the romantic idea that the routines and repetitions of marriage are incompatible with romantic love. In the romance of romanticism - in soap operas - the goal is to win the girl, the beloved, the lover - to win the other.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Win somebody over right?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : And then you live. You spend the rest of your life with them, but the novel doesn't write that marriage comes at the end because it is indescribable to the romantic imagination. It is a form of hopelessness that imagines that the imaginative is just that warm moment.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Interlude right?

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : There is an interruption, a disturbance of structures. I position myself against this romanticism, because I discuss the change in the relationship between human action and structures, the creation of structures that are not just like the Hand of Midas turning everything into gold, into metal, killing, but that are hospitable to continuation of the imagination because they open up, because they facilitate their own transformation. And so, this is an element of division between my thinking and Castoriadis' thinking. And a comment that I make about another misunderstanding of thought that is to associate myself with romanticism. Two of the most common misunderstandings are: first, to interpret my thinking as constructivist voluntarism because I deny Marxist determinism and social theory. The other misunderstanding is to associate myself with romanticism because I work for the triumph of the imagination when in truth, I reject the most characteristic idea of romanticism, which is the idea of an insurmountable contradiction between spirit and structure.

CARLOS SÁVIO : This last statement ended up raising two more questions. In the romantic rebellion against romanticism, what is the specific role of two very different tendencies of thought that in a way influence you - on the one hand Christianity and on the other the American pragmatism.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : Both are powerful influences, but Christianity has a greater influence. Pragmatism is a minor philosophical tendency, I criticize pragmatism in my works because in its American form, it has not been radicalized. It has not been radicalized in the analysis of thought nor in the analysis of society. It reified the method and did not persist in the development of a superior idea of organization, much less of the practices of social institutions that would embody this superior empowerment of humanity. But Christianity is a fundamental influence. I interpreted Christianity as having two central ideas. One is the idea of the transcendent spirit embodied in the finite, in the body and in the social situation but always exceeding that finite determination, and the second is the central role of love, of love and not of altruism. Love is different from altruism. In love, the primary problem is the ability to imagine the other. There is an epistemological obstacle and love is not like altruism, which is a gift given from a distance and from a higher position. Love requires profound equality and it increases vulnerability. In the history of Christian doctrines, this conception of the message of Christianity has almost always been betrayed.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Corrupted.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : The story of what would be Christian orthodoxy is actually the story of a series of heresies. And I say this as someone who is not a believer, I am not a Christian, I do not believe in the Christian narrative of the message of redemption, reincarnation and of God in humanity, but I feel very close to the message interpreted in this way and almost always perverted or suppressed by a series of false views. The history of Christianity is a history of a series of transactions and commitments to social regimes from feudalism to the Victorian ethics of domestic respectability.

CARLOS SÁVIO : The bourgeois.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : And in morals. Ethics became an idea of radical altruism, which is not the Christian idea of the radicalization of love. And in the conception of man and his divine attribute, not properly recognizing the extent to which we humans can share this attribute that we give to God, of transcendence, is not the attribute of omnipotence or omniscience and it is not being gods as were the gods of the Greeks and the Romans. It is not God who rules, governing, dominating, is a God who suffers and loves.

CARLOS SÁVIO : Mangabeira, thank you for that first part of this interview. We will return to the second and third part later.

ROBERTO MANGABEIRA UNGER : It's just the beginning. [laughs]

Notes

¹The interview will have three parts: the first - which is presented in this article - is dedicated to the interviewee's thought in general, the second will be dedicated to politics and the third will be dedicated to Brazil.

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