

OBSTACLES AND LIMITS TO  
ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN LATIN AMERICA

BY

Franz J. Hinkelammert\*

In the decade of the 1970s academic freedom in Latin America underwent a drastic curtailment with the rise of so-called "National Security" dictatorships, especially in Brazil (beginning in 1964), Chile, Uruguay and Argentina.

In the course of previous decades, and more particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, Latin American universities had undergone a radical transformation. Until then they had been largely elitist in character. Their principal vocation was teaching, and they had practically no research. The leading professors were men exercising liberal professions, primarily law, who also taught at the universities. Although a number of universities are very old, in some cases dating from immediately after the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, most were founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century or the first half of the twentieth. As a result of this expansion, the elitist universities were no longer able to function as before. They began to professionalize and to participate in the social conflicts which developed from the 1930s onward. This period saw the rise of universities with an extremely wide vocation, which allowed for considerable ideological movements of all kinds.

Concurrently, university research centres were developed little by little. Indeed, this gave the 1950s and 1960s their specific character. Based on the universities, a new intellectual environment was developed, which strongly influenced political events during this period. For the first time academic life was oriented to Latin American problems and discussion of possible alternatives for the continent's future development. The universities were closely tied to movements in favour of social change in the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. This was particularly true of Chile, with the rise of the Peoples' Front (1970-1973).

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\* Ecumenical Department of Investigations, Costa Rica

These professionalized universities enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. They were financed by the national budgets of the countries concerned, and often had full-time professors who also engaged in research. The university research centres which developed at that time were also to a large extent self-governing. Government financing and university autonomy combined to give academic freedom.

The decade of the 1970s saw the rise of "National Security" dictatorships, which crushed all social reform movements and imposed an extreme form of free-market capitalism. These regimes were primarily directed against the peoples' movements themselves; however, they also sought to eliminate any type of intellectual environment in which such movements could have a positive impact on society. In this way the academic freedom of the foregoing period was replaced by academic control.

I. ~~The seizure of control~~ of Latin American academic institutions by the National Security dictatorships

This illegal interference was accomplished by assassination, firing and expulsion of unwanted teachers, professors and research workers. There was talk of a need to "purge" the universities.

The seizure was based on admitted ideological criteria. Targets of the repressive measures were persons who had collaborated with peoples' movements or with governments advocating any type of social reform. Entire university research centres were dissolved and there was wholesale firing of teachers and professors. <sup>and students</sup> The universities were raided, and in extreme cases opponents were assassinated. The aim was to eradicate such political movements and prevent their return.

Only regime supporters and persons or movements which the "National Security" regime considered to be non-political were able to continue. Thus, there was advanced at that time the idea of "non-political" science as the only tolerable kind. Any science which the "National Security" regime chose to eliminate was declared to be "political" and, to an

increasing degree, whatever science was tolerated was declared to be "non-political".

This initial purge, which continued during the early years of these dictatorships, led to a complete re-staffing of the universities together with a mass exodus of scientists. <sup>war studies</sup> Although many scientists went into exile, a fair number managed to continue working in these countries, albeit outside the university framework. Whenever possible, they founded independent research centres, which were also sometimes engaged in teaching. These research centres developed in many parts of Latin America, in the form of "non-profit" foundations. They could expect no financial support from the respective governments, but they managed to continue to exist through private funding, especially from foreign financial institutions, more particularly foundations in North America and western Europe. In addition, government university financing was being curtailed at that time, and the result was a rapid decline in the level of university research. It was claimed that the funds could be better employed for teaching. Whatever university research survived had to rely on funding from private sources outside the university and mainly outside the country. Moreover, the "National Security" governments felt more inclined to promote the foundation of private universities and the self-financing of state-owned ones.

## II. The institutionalization of controls over academic freedom

We now come to the institutionalization of control over academic freedom, which has come increasingly to substitute for arbitrary and unjustifiable control.

### 1. Control of science in the name of scientificity

This institutionalization of controls over academic freedom in Latin America can be traced back to certain ideas developed in western Europe and the United States, in particular in the philosophy of science of Karl Popper. During the period under discussion these ideas reached Latin America and were turned into a key instrument for the control of science.

In this process many countries were inspired in particular by the experience of the Federal Republic of Germany in exercising control over academic freedom in its universities. This was particularly true in the case of Chile, Uruguay and Brazil. This control was based on scientific methodology.

I believe that this problem was totally ignored in the WUS Lima Declaration, which led unnecessarily to a limitation of its scope. I should like here to cite the following key reference:

"6. All members of the academic community with research functions have the right to carry out reseach work without any intereferece, **subject to the universal principles and methods of scientific enquiry**. They also have the right to communicate the conclusions of their research freely to others ...

7. All members of the academic community with teaching functions have the right to teach without any interference, **subject to the accepted principles, standards and methods of teaching.**" (1)

Now it was precisely in the name of these "universal principles and methods of scientific enquiry" and "the accepted principles, standards and methods of teaching", identified with the principles of this scientism, that controls were introduced. In their name it was stipulated that all opinions advanced in the name of science should be indeed scientific, which meant that they had to be opinions in conformity with the standards of

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(1) Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education, September 1988, 40th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. World University Service.

this scientism. (2) I shall now mention the criteria developed in this respect by the Argentine, Mario Bunge, in his methodology, which applies to the scientific movement founded by Karl Popper, which goes under the name of "critical rationalism". Bunge calls himself a "philosopher of science":

"On the other hand, the philosophy of science favours the development of specific techniques in each field on one condition only, namely that **such techniques must satisfy the essential conditions of scientific method with respect to questions and proofs.** Thus it would seem as if the scientific method could be extended to all specialized fields of knowledge". (3)

Bunge expressly calls for this control over science in the guise of a control of "questions and proofs":

"It is not only of theoretical, but also of practical importance since it permits us to distinguish the scientific from the non-scientific, provides us with a criterion for the evaluation of research projects, and together with this, **a criterion for deciding on whether or not we should support the latter.**" (4)

The Lima Declaration was concerned with the conflict between censorship and academic freedom. Censorship is a direct control imposed on investigation. It prohibits certain results of scientific work and favours others,

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(2) Hinkelammert, Franz J.: El control de la Ciencia en nombre de la Cientificidad. revista Centroamericana de Economía, Sept.-Dic. 1982, Nr.9, p.6-19. Ver del mismo autor: La deuda externa de América Latina: El automatismo de la deuda. DEI, San José, 1988. Capítulo V.: El circuito de la dependencia: el financiamiento externo como condicionante de la sociedad latinoamericana, p.51-58.

(3) Bunge, Mario: La ciencia, su Método y su Filosofía. Siglo Veinte, Buenos Aires, 1980, p.65/66.

(4) Bunge, Mario: Epistemología. Ariel, Barcelona, 1981, p.34

depending upon the political or ideological convenience of a particular society. Bunge, on the other hand, does not do this. He demands control over questions and proofs, and wishes to control the allowed questions and the proofs which are considered to be valid. This type of control does not determine the results directly, but it does control them indirectly. By dictating the questions and allowable proofs, he dictates and controls the possible results. From all possible scientific results he eliminates a sub-group of results through controls over questions and proofs. This he does in the name of scientificity.

Nevertheless this scientific methodology transforms itself into a "secretary-general" of the scientific institution <sup>concerned</sup>, which arrogates to itself the right to establish the agenda. And it is well known that whosoever dictates the agenda dominates the institution. This methodology demands the right to control the agenda so that it can control in its name the scientific institution. There is no censorship of the results but of the means to arrive at the results, namely the allowed questions and proofs. A censorship exists, but it is hidden behind the concern for the scientificity of science. The control is nevertheless exercised, in the name of this scientificity.

In the name of this methodology, any scientific thinking is excluded which refers to social and economic alternatives for our present day society. This is done by forbidding in the name of science any reference in scientific thinking to the social whole, and thus to the effectiveness of the existing social system. It is maintained that only statements with an informative content are "scientific". However, the informative content is defined in such a way that only those scientific results may be stated which refer to a part of the total reality without taking the whole into consideration. Thus it condemns as non-scientific any reference to the social whole. The only technology which then may be considered is a technology which is also partial, a type of technology which Popper refers to as "piecemeal technology", in other words a technology which results from a piecemeal approach to scientific knowledge.

A methodology of this type will not admit results which are contrary to the system in force. As a methodology it is tied to the capitalist economic and

social system. Hence, only those statements are accepted as being scientific which are affirmed by this society. Any statement which tends towards the setting up of a socialist society is automatically non-scientific; however, no mention is made of the control over the results, nor is there a need for any such mention. All that can be considered is whether or not the statements are scientific. The control over the questions and proofs establishes the ideological framework for any results, and freedom exists within this framework.

This explains why there is today so much discussion about the scientific character of scientific theories. It is a matter of explaining that sciences can and must be prohibited simply in the name of methodology, without being subjected directly or explicitly to any type of censorship. This also explains the type of discussions we are having today concerning Marxist theory. The discussions being held are mainly on method in order to arrive at the conclusion, in the name of the method used, that Marxist thinking is not scientific. Once this conclusion is reached, there is no need to discuss the results. These can be, and are, prohibited in the name of the scientificity of the science. All this concern is usually nothing more than a legitimation of this prohibition. This concern with scientificity has been transformed into a most efficient means of control over science in today's world. Nothing is said of control, but only of the imposition of scientificity. As a result, "academic freedom" is merely a new word for academic control. We are speaking here of an Orwellian transformation.

The criticism is made that any ways of thinking not in line with control by means of scientificity are dogmatic. Hence, in following this line of thought, the more blindly and dogmatically this so-called rationalistic and critical method is applied, the greater the degree of scientificity.

Felix von Cube of West Germany has concluded that all scientific thought which fails to adjust to the control of questions and proofs imposed by critical rationalism should be eliminated in the name of science:

- "1. All dogmatic systems ... are in contradiction with the ... concept of science of critical rationalism.
2. All dogmatic systems are necessarily totalitarian in nature.
3. Only the concept of science of critical rationalism is compatible with a libertarian democracy ..." (5)

This would prohibit in the name of freedom all forms of alternative thinking. Any scientific opinion which does not come within the methodological framework of this scientism is declared to be dogmatic and totalitarian, and only theories which can be adjusted to this framework are accepted as being scientific. Thus any thinking about social alternatives is condemned and can be prohibited in the name of science itself.

## 2. Sources of financing and scientificity of science

In order that the control over the sciences may be actually carried out in the name of such scientificity, it is necessary to make sure that all the sources of financing and all the decision-making bodies concerned with academic life apply this "criterion for determining whether or not they should be supported" which Bunge mentions.

This is no easy matter, since such criteria are rather absurd. Bunge, for example, like almost all advocates of critical rationalism, declares all psychoanalysis and almost all Marxist thinking to be "non-scientific", and therefore non-eligible for support. But this is only part of the story. There is in fact no science which could not be declared "non-scientific" in the name of such criteria. Not even physics resists as a field of science.

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(5) Cube, Felix von: Ist parteiliche Wissenschaft noch Wissenschaft? - eine Streitschrift. Aus: Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Beilage zur Wochenzeitung "Das Parlament", B35/77, S.12 zitiert nach Spinner, Helmut E: Popper und die Politik. Deitz, Nachf. Berlin, Bonn, 1978.S.514.



These controllers have declared all of science to be non-scientific. (6) They can then either accept or prohibit such theories according to their taste. They can always defend their decisions under the pretext that they were concerned with scientificity. No type of order has been established, even controlled order. There is total disorder. The result is that those points of view are considered scientific which are oriented in a mediocre way to immediate empirical needs, without any theoretical discussion. Scientificity turns to empiricism.

For this reason, the decision-making bodies and sources of financing have not adapted themselves automatically to such criteria. However, the National Security dictatorships fully accepted them in the 1970s in order to mask the fact of their tight control over academic life in general. They took advantage of this opportunity to pretend that their unilateral orientation and their destruction of scientific pluralism were in reality services in the cause of academic freedom and science. Tight controls were instituted over university life in the name of this scientism, and Popper was promoted to the position of a "philosopher of freedom". In Uruguay and Chile he was metamorphosed into a philosopher who represented the point of view of the military National Security dictatorships there.

Under these circumstances, the possibility of foreign financing looked like a life saver for many research and teaching activities, especially for the private and independent research centres which had developed at that time, and for certain university centres which they had been able to support. Nevertheless, the problem of control also arose for these centres.

This was because the decision as to which lines of scientific investigation should be followed was no longer reached in the Latin American countries

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(6) ver Franz J. Hinkelammert: *Crítica de la Razón Utópica*. DEI, San José, 1984, Capítulo V : La metodología de Popper y sus análisis teóricos de la planificación, la competencia y el proceso de institucionalización. p.157-228.

concerned. It had become necessary to convince bureaucratic authorities in North America and Europe of the need to investigate certain aspects of Latin American society. Without their concurrence it was not possible to proceed with the proposed lines of research. A great deal of effort was necessary to make these far-away bodies understand the real situation and needs of Latin America. Often such efforts were unsuccessful. A dynamics was involved which in many cases prevented Latin American researchers from getting at the problems in which they were really interested. A dependency came into being, the effects of which could not always be overcome by the good will of the parties concerned.

But there was still another problem. The methodological control of science exercised by the National Security dictatorships was not the product of these dictatorships. It had its origins in the societies of North America and western Europe and was influenced by them. However, it also arose in the foreign agencies which are the source of funding in Latin American research. Thus the agencies frequently used the same arguments as were used by the military dictatorships in exercising their control over the sciences, even though they did allow a greater amount of flexibility. Nevertheless their methodological ideology was often the same as that of the dictatorships. They also sought to use scientific methodology as a pretext for ideological control.

Although many scientific projects were able to survive thanks to these foreign sources, they were allowed very little academic freedom. Control mechanisms of similar types were at work and could be felt in all aspects of research. This prevented the research activities from being what they should have been -- which is to say, centres of thought and reflection whose scope included alternative economic and social proposals for solving the problems of Latin American society. The most commonly discussed subject today is the institution of political democracy. Discussion of badly needed social and economic reforms is ruled out by the system of control. For example, in the case of ecology only the pertinent physical and biological aspects may be discussed. The close ties existing between the destruction of the environment and decision-making mechanisms of an economic type, especially in view of the tendency of businessmen to quantify decision-making, cannot be discussed. The methodological ideology used to

control science considers this to be non-scientific and therefore outside the scope of the questions and proofs allowed by critical rationalism -- that aforementioned "secretary-general" of the scientific establishment. Critical rationalism has been transformed into an all-powerful political commissar.

### III. Perspectives of academic freedom

It would be difficult to imagine a disappearance of the type of scientific control which has been imposed on Latin America and which also exist, although, perhaps, under more relaxed conditions, in all present day western societies. The methodological thinking involved is a kind of common denominator in the societies of the western world of today.

In the academic field, this methodological control is more developed ~~than~~ in the control of state-run universities, where decisions with regard to hiring and contracting and proposed lines of investigation must be defended in the face of public opinion. In private universities, which are based on the ideology of private property, the boards of overseers can exercise political and ideological control without resorting to such pretexts, because their decisions are not subject to public approval. However, <sup>state-run universities</sup> they play a more important role in societies such as that of West Germany than in the United States of America. In Latin America this has led to a tendency to take West Germany as a model in learning how better to control public universities, and the United States of America as a model in learning how to control private universities. In the latter case political and ideological control can be exercised more discreetly.

This explains the tendency to allow domestic industry to play a more important role in the financing of research. In this case also the ideology of private property permits direct control. It is not necessary to justify interference on methodological grounds.

To be sure, the above-mentioned methods of control, although the most important, are by no means the only ones. For example, in Latin America, customs formalities, currency regulations and customs duties ~~h~~ have been used

as a means of preventing a Latin American cultural interchange. Valid arguments concerning a shortage of hard currencies are used as a pretext to destroy cultural mobility. It is very difficult to ascertain in certain cases the measures taken to interfere with this mobility. However, in many cases there can be no doubt that the aim is to prevent the rebirth of Latin American culture as it existed in the 1960s, under the pretext of economic necessity.