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Everyday Consciousness of Praxis and its Critique Elements of Critical Theory in A. Sánchez Vázquez

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Abstract

In this article, we analyze the critique of everyday consciousness of praxis, that has been undertaken by Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (1915 Algeciras, Spain – 2011 Mexico City). The Spanish-Mexican philosopher confronts everyday consciousness of praxis conceptually with emancipatory praxis, detecting with that method two problems of the first: on the one hand, its concrete determination, namely, its immanent pessimism, which fails to grasp the human being in all its importance as a subject of history; and on the other hand, its general conception, which he has determined to be atheoretical and which, in the absence of a reflexive moment, may not nurture an emancipatory praxis. His critique of everyday consciousness of praxis is finally based on three of its concrete determinations: its inherently 'ingenuous realism', its 'objectivism', and its 'utilitarianism'.

1. Introduction

The following lines should be of some interest for two reasons. In the first place, because the Spanish-Mexican thinker Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (Algeciras, Spain, 1915 – Mexico City 2011) develops his main work *The Philosophy of Praxis* on the basis of a double critique of two forms of self-sufficiency: the 'practical' and the 'theoretical'. In the second place, this article should be of interest not only to scholars, and as a result should not only refer to discussions among social scientists ('why does knowledge need praxis?'), but must also be directed toward those who are not academics, toward humans on the path toward an emancipated society, and thus we should not spare our critiques regarding this aspect either (hence: 'why does praxis need knowledge?').

2) The critique of everyday consciousness¹ of praxis, or what is a theoretical knowledge of praxis good for?

Sánchez Vázquez introduces his critique of everyday consciousness of praxis through reference to the latter's philosophical conception: the philosophy that has praxis as its central concept, as its cornerstone, is Marxism. Now, the philosophical concept of praxis does not develop on its own, but rather draws support from a long history of humanity and its intellectual doctrines (theories), and so we cannot conclude that it reaches its conclusion with the philosophy of Marx. In order to arrive at a true understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis, it is necessary to overcome the mystifying concept of praxis found in German idealism, in which praxis is always grasped only as human intellectual activity.

In terms of overcoming the 'level reached by German idealism',² Marxism entails both a more developed consciousness of praxis as well as a more powerful theoretical connection to it. So we must overcome idealism, but this does not mean a return to the immediate and naïve perspective of everyday consciousness. This is not a question of returning to a pre-philosophical state or to a 'vulgar or metaphysical materialist philosophy' – to some degree stuck to ordinary and run-of-the-mill conceptions of the human being – and which 'preceded the more developed expositions of Idealist philosophy (in Kant, Fichte, and Hegel)'.³ A developed concept of praxis is obligated, from a historical-philosophical perspective, to pass through and transcend its idealistic formulation.⁴

In order to overcome philosophical idealism, we thus need a more broadly-developed 'philosophical theory' and not 'a dose of "common sense"'.⁵ To the contrary, such a theory would distinguish itself even more from everyday consciousness than does idealism. This is not just any philosophy, however, but precisely that which – based on its theoretical analysis of what praxis is – demonstrates the conditions that make possible the transition from theory to praxis.⁶ The importance of idealism in world history has been underestimated, as the theoretical foundation for a Marxism which has broken radically with it, but which has been heavily enriched by this same idealism. This underestimation is one of the reasons that, in various sectors, Marxism has found itself reduced to 'the old materialism fertilised by dialectics on the one hand, or a materialist metaphysics which is little more than an inverted Idealism'.⁷

In internal Marxist debates, what interests Sánchez Vázquez is rescuing 'a true conception of praxis', which has been lost as much in 'Hegelian deformations

¹ The concept of 'conciencia ordinaria' that Sánchez Vázquez employs can be translated not only as 'ordinary consciousness' but also as 'everyday consciousness'. As a general rule, we use the second variant, which is slightly freer but also more common in German, and in favor of which Sánchez Vázquez also speaks with regard to the meaning of the concept of the. In free expressions, in this article are also used the terms 'everyday understanding of praxis' and 'common sense'.

² Sánchez Vázquez 1980, p. 21. In the English version of *The Philosophy of Praxis*, these words are simply translated as: 'Having gone beyond German Idealism' (Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 2.)

³ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 2f.

⁶ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 2.

⁷ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 3.

of Marxism' as in 'mechanistic, scientific or neopositivist interpretations of Marx's work'.⁸ But this rescue cannot occur through reference to everyday consciousness of praxis, but by destroying even the attitude that the latter determines⁹; this is necessary not only to achieve a developed theoretical-philosophical conceptualisation of praxis, but also to propel everyday political praxis and elevate it to a higher level, which means, for Sánchez Vázquez: to make it creative.¹⁰

The Spanish-Mexican philosopher, who elsewhere in this work still situates the proletariat as an at least potentially revolutionary subject¹¹ (something which would be modified in later of his statements)¹², nevertheless considers – in opposition to more than one Marxist author – that the consciousness of the proletariat in itself is in no sense more developed than, for example, idealistic German philosophy.

In this sense, the abolition of the standpoint of ordinary consciousness as well as a dialectical negation of the mystified consciousness of praxis are necessary preconditions of the development of an objective, scientific perspective upon man's practical activity. Only in this way can thought and action be united in consciousness. And only when the framework of ordinary consciousness is transcended can the philosophical consciousness of praxis and the elevation of reiterative, spontaneous everyday praxis to a higher, creative, level be achieved. ... The theory of revolutionary praxis requires that the instinctive and spontaneous point of view of ordinary proletarian consciousness be overcome, and that for both theoretical and practical reasons, it be countered by a correct understanding of praxis.¹³

(These words are directed against the absence of theory within emancipatory organisations and movements – an absence that exists not only in Mexico and Spain – as well as against various petrifications of Marxism, for example, in its Stalinist form,¹⁴ and point toward the same thing that we hope to

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 2ff. The 'abolition' discussed here refers above all to the attitude of everyday man. His consciousness, as Sánchez Vázquez says later, must be 'overcome' (ibid. In this regard, see the following extensive quotation in our main text).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See, for example, Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, Part Two: 'Some philosophical problems of praxis', Chapter VII, 'Spontaneous and reflective praxis', subchapter 'The historical mission of the proletariat in our time' (pp. 234–7) and the subchapter 'Marxism as a philosophy of the proletariat' (pp. 241–3). In these passages, Sánchez Vázquez also explains that it is not possible, on the basis of the objective situation of the proletarian class, to come to direct conclusions regarding its specific consciousness, but theoretical effort, among other things, is absolutely essential to its development.

¹² At least as regards the proletariat of industrialised countries, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez later became increasingly sceptical, and he recognised their partial identity of interests with the ruling classes when attempting to preserve the existing global relationship (for example, the 'North-South conflict').

In this respect, see Sánchez Vázquez's statements at the Seminar on Marxism and the State Question, summer semester of 1989, UNAM, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, and his lecture 'La razón amenazada', given in 1984 at the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (Mexico), on the occasion of being presented a doctorate honoris causa by that institution, and which was published in his book *Escritos de política y filosofía* (Sánchez Vázquez 1987), where he asserts that 'in this period ... we must bear in mind a series of facts: ... The displacement of the fundamental social antagonism (bourgeoisie-proletariat, according to classical Marxism) onto that of imperialism-Third World' (Sánchez Vázquez 1987, p. 135).

¹³ A. Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 4.

¹⁴ It is true that there was an ostensible production of theory under Stalinism, but it was more a question of legitimating the established state apparatus than a critical theory of 'revolutionary praxis', which is

emphasise in this part of our study: why it is that Sánchez Vázquez is considered by many to be one of the first and most outstanding non-dogmatic Marxists in Mexico and Latin America.)¹⁵

Nevertheless, the development of the philosophical consciousness of praxis, which is supposed to overcome everyday consciousness of the latter, begins – and this is worth observing – from that same everyday consciousness¹⁶ or, as Sánchez Vázquez says repeatedly, from the consciousness of ‘the ordinary man’.¹⁷ Everyday consciousness believes itself to be in direct connection with the world of praxis and, precisely as a result of the self-postulated circumstance of not being stained by any theoretical reflection, believes that in the realisation of everyday tasks such reflection would be more a hindrance than a help. A similar practicalist hostility to theory can be found occasionally within Marxist-oriented circles. It is worth noting that this posture could evidently be based on formulations by Marx such as the following: ‘[Men] begin, like every animal, by eating, drinking, etc., hence not by “standing” in a relation, but by relating themselves actively, taking hold of certain things in the external world through action, and thus satisfying their need[s]. (Therefore they begin with production.)’¹⁸

Alfred Schmidt, who more or less at the same time as Sánchez Vázquez – but in the intellectual, historical, and geographical context of the Frankfurt School – was also developing a critical and non-dogmatic interpretation of Marx’s theory, observes with regard to such affirmations that ‘these formulations are not to be understood in the sense of practicist enmity toward theory’. Schmidt continues, with reference to historical praxis (which for Sánchez Vázquez constitutes the central concept in Marx): ‘Historical practice is in itself ‘more theoretical’ than theory, as indeed it was in Hegel (although in his case of course it was determined in the last analysis as a mode of knowledge). Practice has already accomplished the mediation of Subject and Object before it becomes itself the theme of reflection’.¹⁹

In other words, a fully atheoretical world does not exist, and this assessment unites Sánchez Vázquez with Alfred Schmidt. However, the former bases this point

Sánchez Vázquez’s topic here. But, on the other hand, our author discusses ideas common to everyday consciousness and to that dogmatic theory, for example, in the critique of ingenuous realism.

¹⁵ ‘Sánchez Vázquez’s philosophical work ... [is] without a doubt ... one of the greatest of all Latin American Marxism: anti-dogmatic, constantly reconsidering its initial questions, dialoguing with European Marxisms, and open to new social problems’: Morales 1985, p. 133.

¹⁶ In the 1979 preface to the re-publication of the already classic *Filosofía de la praxis*, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez insisted on the urgent “need to overcome the dogmatism and sclerosis that for many long years had dulled Marxism’s critical and revolutionary edge”. His own work is an incredibly important contribution to this task, posing as it does the centrality of revolutionary praxis in the Marxist worldview’: Löwy 1985, p. 387.

See, likewise, K. Nair’s preface to the French translation Sánchez Vázquez 1977b, p. 141.

¹⁷ See, for example, Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 4.

¹⁸ See, for example, Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 6.

¹⁹ Marx 1996, p. 235.

¹⁹ Schmidt 1971, p. 194. In the German original, Schmidt writes here about ‘historische Praxis’, which would have been better translated as ‘historical praxis’, for the reasons Sánchez Vázquez mentions for the use of the term ‘praxis’ in Spanish, even when in both languages (English and Spanish) this term is less usual than the term ‘practice’/‘práctica’. (Compare Schmidt 1974, p. 204.) This edition of the book is identical – including the pagination – to the 1993 edition, with the only difference that the last one includes a new prologue from Schmidt, paginated with roman numerals (pp. i–xvii). The same applies for the whole book: where Schmidt writes in German ‘Praxis’ in the English translation there always appears ‘practice’.

on two elements, without referring – as does Schmidt – to the history of philosophy. As against the belief that everyday consciousness is not tainted by any theoretical reflection, he criticises not only the fact that this neglects the ‘prejudices, mental habits and commonplaces’ that influence it, but moreover that – whether we like it or not – theories sediment within such consciousness.²⁰ Equally, the real human being, who possesses this consciousness, which is purportedly not influenced by the history of ideas, is a social being, incapable of subtracting himself from the historical framework in which he finds himself. ‘The day to day character of his life, as well as the vision that he has of his own practical activity, are historically and socially determined’.²¹

So the human being who wants to see things simply as they are, without any major interpretation, without gossip, without philosophy and this whole nebulous mess, he who believes more in solid proof rather than Aristotelian ones, in a word, the unrepentantly practical, will be frustrated by Sánchez Vázquez, who always grants such importance to praxis. According to this Marxist philosopher, our ‘practical’ friend, who observed long ago that philosophers are the last people to expect anything from,²² will not be able to find what it is that is most relevant to him: the naked fact.²³

Is this a fresh trick by the philosophers? Could it be that, now that no one trusts them and everyone ignores them, they now send forth a Marxist colleague with the message that, up to this point, philosophy has done anything except to change the world, but that now we again need a philosophical theory for effective radical emancipation? This is as far as our taking the side of ‘ordinary consciousness’ against Sánchez Vázquez’s devastating explanations can go. But the latter still does not provide an answer as to how, in detail, the transition from everyday consciousness to critical consciousness will occur, a question that became central with the experience of National Socialism and fascism, in other words, with the collective participation of mass sectors of the population in a social engagement as far from emancipatory as could possibly be imagined. Only in a later passage does Sánchez Vázquez enter into this problem, which he had left unconsidered up to this point. We will need to see, then, how he situates himself vis-à-vis the three common recipes for overcoming everyday consciousness, namely: first, everyday consciousness becomes more critical through education; second, ‘the Party is always right’; and third, it is only in struggle that consciousness can develop.

To everyday consciousness – with its suspicion of talk of helping to overcome it or even destroy it, that is, its fear that another ideology is already prepared to disfigure the simple and natural thought of the human being who lives

²⁰ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 4ff.

²¹ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 5.

²² Our interpretation of Sánchez Vázquez’s text is ultimately too optimistic. Philosophers can very well ‘be of some use’ to the practical person. Just think, for example, about the close cooperation that currently exists in various genetic research institutions with philosophers who directly oversee the ‘ethical harmlessness’ of the most recent discoveries in the natural sciences, and once giving this certification of non-objection, know how to defend it (philosophically, we mean) against insatiable critics.

²³ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a.

in the world of practice – Sánchez Vázquez responds that the consciousness of the ordinary human 'is never called upon to confront a naked fact, for each fact is assimilated by him into an ideologically determined perspective generated by the particular social and historical situation of his daily life'.²⁴

In this point of the discussion of everyday consciousness, Sánchez Vázquez does not explain how we should understand in detail the end of the quoted phrase, for example, how the current 'historical situation' engenders a specific 'ideologically determined perspective'. Setting out from Marx, we could explain these formulations in the sense that, under given social relations, a specific ideological consciousness can be facilitated in humans insofar as, in all their contradictions, such relations slow or impede their correct knowledge. Marx explains this in *Capital*, and especially in the subchapter 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret'.²⁵ He shows the effects provoked by the double character of human labour, which simultaneously generates use-value (concrete and useful, created by 'private individuals')²⁶ and value (abstract and socially mediated). This double character of human labour prevents or makes it difficult for humans to see its second side, as a result of which value does not appear as a social relationship, but, instead, as something almost inherent in the nature of the commodity. The false consciousness that the human being develops, here, does not result simply from a deceptive theoretical development, but from the objective appearance of the commodity, which 'automatically conceals' its social character.²⁷ This, in turn, leads necessarily to errors in economic theories, the critique of which is the central objective of Marx's main work.

On the question of everyday knowledge – which concerns us, here, principally in relation to theoretical conceptions and its dependence on them – Sánchez Vázquez concludes that everyday consciousness is influenced by ideas that 'are present in the very air [the human being] breathes'.²⁸ Consequently, everyday consciousness is not completely free of a certain 'theoretical basis' in which it carries theories, albeit in a simplified and degraded way.²⁹

Sánchez Vázquez develops the character of the double dependency that everyday consciousness has on both 'infiltrated' theories and real social relations,

²⁴ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 5. Sánchez Vázquez does note the fact that the theme of the everyday and everyday consciousness receives special attention in 'contemporary bourgeois philosophy', and in this respect he mentions Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers, José Ortega y Gasset, and Martin Heidegger, but the topic is scarcely mentioned in Marxist debates 'despite Marx's extremely valuable discussion of the topic'.

This is why those studies which exist on the topic despite everything are especially important, among which he mentions the following authors: Karel Kosík, György Lukács, Henri Lefèbvre, and Agnes Heller (Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 34 n4. Compare also: Sánchez Vázquez 1980, p. 24 n3, where the complete list of the aforementioned authors appears.).

Elsewhere, he refers to Antonio Gramsci as an author who dealt critically with the problem of everyday consciousness (Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, Part II: 'Some philosophical problems of praxis', Chapter V: 'Unity of theory and practice', section: 'The "common sense" point of view: pragmatism', pp. 169ff. and p. 195 n2).

²⁵ *Capital* Volume I, Chapter One, Section Four: 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret': Marx 1976, pp. 163–77.s

²⁶ Marx 1976, p. 165.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

on the basis of his understanding of two specific forms of creative praxis: revolutionary and artistic.

2. Revolutionary praxis and everyday consciousness

The individual activity of a revolutionary cannot be understood in general by the everyday human being in his social or class dimension, who thus considers it to be something 'fruitless, foolish or irresponsible [... that will] never lead to the transformation of the world in its present state'.³⁰ But this disdain toward practical transformative activity on the terrain of social relations fits seamlessly within a generalised pessimistic atmosphere which is characterised by the underestimation of the active, social, and transformative elements³¹ of the human being.³² Schopenhauer openly defends this same attitude in the philosophical-theoretical sphere, with his 'pessimistic and irrationalist philosophy', which 'walks hand in hand with those contemporary philosophies that deny socio-historic progress and rob both history and human action of any and all significance'.³³

Here, the critique of everyday consciousness begins to emerge. For Sánchez Vázquez, it is not a question of privileging philosophical consciousness as better developed and truer than everyday consciousness per se, but of demonstrating the intersections and connections between a widely disseminated orientation of the latter and influential tendencies among the former. Everyday consciousness should, therefore, not be transferred to a philosophical and therefore rational plane through a theoretical-pedagogical mechanism, but instead critical analysis must uncover the contradictions of all predominant types of thinking (both everyday and theoretical). But to do so, a particular foundation is essential, another theoretical basis which understands the human being as social, historical, and active.³⁴

This is one of the questions to which the Marxist theory of knowledge owes its relevance. But here we would like to return to a more precise investigation of everyday consciousness. The fact that the latter is infiltrated with theoretical ideas, which it collects unconsciously does not in any way entail that everyday understanding assumes a theoretical attitude toward praxis. What is lacking for it to do so is the conscious relationship of consciousness to its object.³⁵ The everyday human being, who perceives himself to be a 'practical man, ... living and acting in a practical way',³⁶ has, of course, a conscious relationship with his actions – he

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ '... [M]an as a social, active, and transformative being ...' (Sánchez Vázquez 1980, p. 25). This is different in the English-language edition: 'the active role of men in transforming society' (Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 5). Sánchez Vázquez does not let slip such anthropological determinations.

³² This underestimation of transformative practical activity appears also in certain interpretations of Marx's works.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ But why is everyday consciousness not oriented, as a result, according to this philosophical consciousness? Why is it that it does not allow itself to be infiltrated by it, rather than this being merely occasional, as stated above? Is Schopenhauer simply more astute than Marx, does he have better 'public relations'? Or is it because the man from Trier, since his burial at Highgate Cemetery on 17 March 1883, has died over and over again in recent years with increasing frequency and greater commotion?

³⁵ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 5.

³⁶ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 6.

cannot carry them out without reflecting – but at the same time ‘he does not separate or stress practice as his proper object in such a way that that separation occurs first of all in consciousness as a theoretical attitude’.³⁷ It is as a result of this that, as Sánchez Vázquez explains, everyday consciousness does not develop a theory of praxis (and nor could it do so, as will need to be shown).³⁸

Sánchez Vázquez’s critique of everyday consciousness of praxis has, therefore, raised, through a contrast with revolutionary praxis, two problems: in the first place, its concrete determination, namely, its immanent pessimism, which fails to grasp the human being in all its importance as a subject of history, and in the second place, its general conception, which he has determined to be atheoretical and which, in the absence of the reflexive moment, ‘can never nurture a true revolutionary praxis’.³⁹ He continues his critique on the basis of three other concrete determinations of the everyday consciousness of praxis: its inherently ‘ingenuous realism’, its ‘objectivism’, and its ‘utilitarianism’.⁴⁰

Ingenuous realism, insofar as everyday consciousness assumes that things ‘are ... known in themselves, irrespective of their relation to human activity’, whereby when speaking of human intervention, Sánchez Vázquez evidently refers to the act of knowing.⁴¹

The objectivism characterises the everyday consciousness insofar as, through the assumption that things are known in themselves, it additionally implies that their importance, their meaning, and their significance are given to the human being almost as if by nature. That is to say, the ordinary man ignores ‘the fact that because they have a practical significance practical acts and objects exist only for and through men. The characteristic of ordinary consciousness is that it regards the practical world as a world of things and meanings in themselves’.⁴²

Sánchez Vázquez speaks here, above all, of that aspect of the cognisant subject, which is underestimated by everyday consciousness: the active subject who recognises things and gives them meaning. But it seems that, at the same time, this is present in a hidden way in the other side of the subject, which also produces those things, which are already implicitly present in the ‘critique of pessimism’. A formulation in the final line of the ‘critique of objectivism’ in the introduction to *The Philosophy of Praxis* would seem to speak to this broader interpretation: ‘this objectivism which disregards the human, subjective aspect, and maintains the separation between the practical object and the subject’.⁴³

Aside from this objectivism, which, as we have seen, constitutes part of ingenuous realism, our author also critiques everyday consciousness of praxis for its utilitarianism, which it is similarly not conscious of and which implies that it

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid..

⁴¹ Ibid. With regard to the concept of ingenuous realism, as well as later on, when Sánchez Vázquez sharpens and explains over and over again his analysis through the example of art as human praxis, we should recall his close relationship with aesthetic debates.

⁴² Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 6.

⁴³ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 7.

'reduces the practical to a single utilitarian dimension, whereby a practical action or object is one which has material utility or which produces profit or advantage; that which lacks that direct or immediate utility, is impractical'.⁴⁴

Here, Sánchez Vázquez takes an interesting turn when he relates this aspect of everyday human consciousness to the economic reality in which it is located as well as respective economic theories. While he does not suggest that the latter represent the immediate material foundation of this consciousness, in any case he indicates that 'ordinary consciousness and the standpoint of capitalist theories of economics and production coincide', as was the case with earlier economists and their theories, such as classical political economy, for example.⁴⁵ The utilitarian understanding of the concept of praxis in everyday consciousness maintains a discrete but definite relationship with the capitalist mode of production in which the law of value dominates. What other authors would understand as a clear dependency, Sánchez Vázquez describes as simultaneity, a concept that he makes broad argumentative use of in various texts (while it is true that the grammatical construction of simultaneity is, as far as we know, used more in Spanish than in German, a language in which the causal construction insatiably and jealously demands its rightful place): 'For ordinary consciousness what is productive is by definition practical; from the point of view of capitalist production the practical is defined as whatever produces new value or surplus value'.⁴⁶

Sánchez Vázquez's critique of everyday consciousness of praxis, to summarise what we have explained up to this point, the following aspects which we have emphasised in the search for a general understanding of everyday consciousness and its concrete determination: an atheoretical conception, as well as its concrete determination as pessimistic, ingenuous realistic, objectivist, and utilitarian.

3. Practical politicism and practical apoliticism

'Everyday (or ordinary) practical consciousness', which we address in this section, is criticised by Sánchez Vázquez not only for its insufficient transcendence for radical, emancipatory, and revolutionary transformation of existing social relations – as we have argued thus far – but also because, in particular cases, it even directly stabilises these relations. To the critique of its passive non-emancipatory character, we add a critique of its active side. Sánchez Vázquez simultaneously grasps this aspect with the concepts "practical" politicism and "apoliticism" that is encouraged and sustained for "practical" reasons'.⁴⁷ Both can find themselves favored by specific behaviors of the ruling power [el poder].

Practical politicism sets out from the seeming integration of the ordinary human being into political life, 'but in fact on the condition that he restricts himself

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 7. 'Politicismo' is translated in the Edition in English of The Philosophy of Praxis as 'politics'. We prefer the translation 'politicism'. We will also make this correction in other quotations, without further mention. Compare: Sánchez Vázquez 1980, p. 27.]

exclusively to its 'practical' aspects, that is politics as a career'.⁴⁸ In contrast, for those who remain outside this integration, politics reduced to this practical content understandably acquires a negative connotation. It becomes impossible for those who hope to intervene politically despite all this to see another dimension of politics – one which is not that of 'romanticism, idealism, or Utopia'⁴⁹ – beyond this 'practical' politicism.

Practical apoliticism, like practical politicism, feeds off the attempt 'to satisfy the "practical" aspirations of ordinary men', which can lead to depoliticisation.⁵⁰ On this point, Sánchez Vázquez does not formulate precisely how this depoliticisation is generated. But we can conclude that he has in mind, on the one hand, the aforementioned secondary effects of practical politicism and, on the other, the phenomenon that via small 'concessions', apparent or real, the impression can be generated that being quiet and waiting for gradual improvement through an automatic process or the activity of others promises more possibility of success, as we read in the following passage: 'The attempt to satisfy the "practical" aspirations of ordinary men can also take another form, much favoured by those in power, whose object is to suppress any awakening of a clear political consciousness, however slight, and to maintain ordinary people in a totally apolitical state.'⁵¹

4. Artistic praxis and everyday consciousness

The position of everyday consciousness vis-à-vis artistic praxis is only analysed by Sánchez Vázquez with regard to its dependence on real (social) relations, and not, as we just saw in relation to revolutionary praxis, with regard to its dependence on 'infiltrated' theories. Everyday consciousness stamped with utilitarianism perceives artistic praxis as 'unproductive or impractical activities par excellence', since from the angle of immediate personal interest, it produces nothing more than aesthetic pleasure (just as revolutionary praxis produces only 'hunger, misery, and persecution'). As a result, since this form of praxis does not produce anything 'solid' or directly usable, it is, for the everyday man, a 'parasitic activity'.⁵²

5. Conclusion

To conclude, Sánchez Vázquez observes in the course of his critique of everyday consciousness of praxis in the introduction to *The Philosophy of Praxis*⁵³ that the picture sketched there of the ordinary human being and its everydayness is that of a historical human being whose everyday character cannot be separated

⁴⁸ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 8.

⁵³ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 1–38. Title of the introduction: 'From ordinary consciousness to the philosophical consciousness of praxis'.

from a determinate 'social structure'.⁵⁴ What today's everydayness represents is, therefore, not the quintessence of human history nor the end of time. The boredom of the everyday – Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez might add – so easily confused with eternity, is not itself secure from decadence or destruction.

Summarising: human praxis, whose forms are mentioned at the end of the introduction to *The Philosophy of Praxis* as including 'labour, art, politics, medicine, education, etc.'⁵⁵ and described elsewhere as 'experimental scientific activity' that 'qualifies as praxis',⁵⁶ is not grasped in all its 'anthropological, cognitive, and social dimension' by everyday consciousness.⁵⁷ This abandonment of those three dimensions of praxis coincides with an understanding of the latter as 'utilitarian', 'self-sufficient (atheoretical)', and 'individual'.⁵⁸

That is to say, the error of 'common sense' is that it is in no way capable of understanding praxis 'in its social and historical totality' which is expressed in various forms, some already mentioned, and in 'the activities specific individuals and groups, as well as their varied products'.⁵⁹ This broad understanding of praxis in its totality is the object of a certain consciousness. Sánchez Vázquez explains in relation to this specific form of consciousness: 'Historically it is possible to trace the development of that perspective from the ingenuous, empirical conception of praxis to the philosophical consciousness that finds expression, though not yet a complete or absolute expression, in Marxism'.⁶⁰

But this developed philosophical consciousness (of praxis) is not accomplished in our era as something immanent to theory, or based on a particular stroke of genius, but, instead, can only be achieved in the historical process when human praxis itself makes this step of knowledge necessary and possible; necessary, because at this real historical point the human being 'cannot longer continue to act upon and change the world creatively, that is in a revolutionary way, without first gaining a true philosophical consciousness of praxis'; and possible, 'when the necessary theoretical premises have been allowed to mature

⁵⁴ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, Part Two: 'Some philosophical problems of praxis'; Chapter IV: 'What is praxis?'; subchapter: 'Forms of praxis', pp. 156–61, here p. 159.

The question of whether scientific experimentation constitutes a form of praxis or not is controversial in the literature. While Engels sees the only possible demonstration of causality inherent in nature 'in human activity, in experimentation, in labour' (Engels 1955, p. 244) the opposite is the case – as Alfred Schmidt emphasises – in Lévi-Strauss and in structural ethnology more generally: 'Dialectical materialism ... is distinguished from structural ethnology since (like the early Lukács) it calls into doubt the character of the objective praxis of experimental knowledge in the natural sciences'. (Schmidt 1969a, pp. 254ff.)

Schmidt describes Lévi-Strauss' manner of understanding experimentation through his 'Feuerbachianism': 'Lévi-Strauss falls back into Feuerbachianism when he isolates the category of the legality [regularity] of things from that which social production (however modest it may be) undertakes in each one of those things' (Schmidt 1969b, p. 254).

Merleau-Ponty also calls into doubt the character of experimental praxis and 'insists that experimentation is merely a mode of knowledge that industry also relies on. Merleau-Ponty's interpretation has its gaps insofar as, to determine Marx's concept of praxis, it refers only to the Theses on Feuerbach': Schmidt 1973, p. 1137 n205. Schmidt refers here to Merleau-Ponty 1968, p. 60.

⁵⁷ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 9. The gnoseological dimension of praxis, already mentioned here by Sánchez Vázquez, will need to be discussed in more depth by both him and by us in further contributions.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

through the history of ideas'.⁶¹ Consequently, in order to continue developing the concept of praxis, we must refer critically to both real history and the history of ideas and follow the footprints of human praxis and its concept in this history of humanity grasped in this double form.

It would be obviously too much to demand that everyday consciousness overcomes, using only its own forces, its 'spontaneous and unreflective conception of practical activity',⁶² if we consider this need of a double recourse to its own buried historical and intellectual foundations. But the theorist and philosopher Sánchez Vázquez does not make this suggestion maliciously, such that, satisfied with himself and his discipline, he might sit happily in elevated philosophical consciousness and ponder about everyday consciousness, untainted by the latter and distancing himself from it. Rather, he seeks – as we understand it – to break with the helplessness of 'ordinary consciousness' and intervene in the development of a 'true philosophical conception of praxis',⁶³ as an urgently necessary development in real history. To do so, Sánchez Vázquez attempts to explain the reciprocal dependency that exists between the two mentioned historical developments, in the subchapters 'Towards a history of the philosophical consciousness of praxis'⁶⁴ and 'Towards a full vindication of human praxis',⁶⁵ in the introduction to *The Philosophy of Praxis*, where he discusses this interdependent relationship by looking at it, above all, as one in which the concept depends on the state of the real and material development of the respective historical forms of society and praxis.

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⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 10–23.

⁶⁵ Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 23–31.

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