

THE HUMAN BEING AND TRADITION FROM THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE OF XAVIER ZUBIRI

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Summary

This study explores the conception of tradition in Xavier Zubiri's philosophy, highlighting its role in the construction of human identity. It analyzes how history and cultural transmission not only preserve knowledge, but also allow each generation to reinterpret its own reality. A distinction is made between tradition as passive preservation and tradition as active delivery of possibilities, highlighting its impact on the education and development of the individual.

Keywords: Tradition, Xavier Zubiri, philosophy, history, cultural transmission, education, identity.

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Introduction

In studying the historical dimension of the human being, Xavier Zubiri raises the need to consider and understand the meaning of tradition in human life. But not tradition understood as conforming to tradition, but as the delivery of a way of being in reality, as a principle of possibilities, that is, that descendants, based on that received way, determine (by accepting, rejecting or modifying it) their own way of being in reality. Human life, therefore, does not begin from zero, it always begins in that way of being in reality that has been given to it.

Tradition and the human person

The concept of *traditio* has a radical importance in Zubiri's thought. Tradition is part of human history. The central question he poses is the following: what does history contribute to individual reality (DHS: 43).¹ And we add, how should the historical dimension expressed in tradition be considered in the education of the human being?

But first it is necessary to solve the key question: what is history? Zubiri answers by establishing that history is:

- 1º) A moment of the prospectivity of the species that evidently has a temporal character. This is what is usually expressed by saying that history is movement.
- 2º) A process by virtue of which human characters are transmitted from parents to offspring. The process would be a genetic transmission. History would be, then, a pro-

¹ To facilitate reading, we will cite Zubiri's works by capitalizing the corresponding abbreviations indicated in the bibliographical references.

cess of genetic transmission. However, Zubiri points out, this is not history, because this process of genetic transmission lacks the moment of reality.

- 3º) A delivery: the ways of being in reality are optional. When man, who is an animal of realities, engenders another animal of realities, he not only transmits to it a life and psycho-organic characters, but also installs it in a certain way of being in reality, he gives it a way of being in reality. It is not only transmission, but the installation in human life is also a delivery (*parádosis*, *traditio*) (DHS: 19).

Zubiri criticizes two notions of history that, in his opinion, falsify the character of history: history understood as natural history, which according to him does not exist, it is a square circle; and history as a prolongation of evolution. For Zubiri, history is made by optional invention, not by genetic mutation.

“X. Zubiri outlines an alternative to the enlightened philosophy of history and historicism by resorting to the category of possibility and to history as a dimension of the sociality and individuality of the human being. In the enlightened philosophies of history, the application of the Aristotelian categories of potency and act has been frequent, converting the historical into a mere actualization of what was virtually given in potency before all time. However, these categories were forged to think nature, and they obstruct what is most historical in history, which is precisely its novelty. Human actions are not mere reactions to stimuli, but man interposes, between things and his actions, a project that he outlines from his situation. Therefore, things and human nature itself are not presented as mere powers, but as possibilities that allow us to act. History is thus the successive creation of new possibilities together with the obstruction or marginalization of others, and not merely the development of some original potencies. This historical dynamism does not possess a directionality, a progress or a rational end, nor is it consubstantial to it that it is governed by a totality, an ideal, a meaning or a utopia, but simply consists in the respective actualization of pure possibilities, whether in the form of birth or obturation, of progress or regression. In this way Zubiri distances himself from all those authors who have formulated a prefixed, closed or teleological metaphysics of history” (Corominas, 2006).

Fúnez (2007) explains it as follows:

“Zubiri reminds us that delivery is *traditio*, therefore, the formal of history is to be tradition. History is not biology, although it merges into the biological, by Thus, in order to rescue the biological dimension of history, but also its irreducible difference, Zubiri will speak of transmission, that is, what the progenitors bring to the new offspring; but also of *tradent*, that is, the delivery of the human way of being in reality”.

And Corominas (2006) adds:

“For X. Zubiri one thing is that the individual and the social have history, another that their most characteristic feature is exclusively historical or that it is the all-encompassing historical dynamism of all the others. The transmission of faculties and powers always takes place sustained in a determined way of being in reality, that is, on appropriate possibilities, and these possibilities are not given by genetic transmission, but are delivered by tradition. This delivery of real possibilities is what Zubiri identifies as the most proper of history”.

We can affirm, then, that Zubiri conceives history as a delivery of possibilities. On this subject Zubiri raises the following questions (DHDH: 23): What is tradition as constitutive of history? And in what sense and to what extent does this character of being traditum reflect on reality and on man's being, and, specifically, on his education? Let us now consider both issues².

Structural moments of the traditio

For Zubiri, “without tradition there is no history” (DHSB: 24). However, it is important to clarify that in speaking of tradition, Zubiri does not refer to tradition understood as conforming to tradition:

“The tradition of which we speak here consists of “surrender”, the surrender of a way of being in reality. This does not mean that the one who receives it break with what has been delivered. The only thing I want to say is that nothing, not even this rupture, is possible if it is not having received that which is broken” (DHSB: 24).

For this reason, he proposes using a term that avoids misunderstanding, and that is traditionality.

The first structural moment of tradition is the constituent one: each human being who is born is not only genetically transmitted certain determined notes, but is installed in a way of being in reality (DHSB: 24).

The second moment is the continuant: what is given to the new being in the constituent moment is what its progenitors have wanted to give it; therefore it can be understood as a continuation: it supposes, therefore, the act of receiving and reliving from itself what has been received.

2 “The expression ‘transmission tradente’ is parallel to that of sentient intelligence. Just as intelligence becomes the moment of formality of reality and the sentient involves the impressive-material moment in such a way that each moment is co-determined in a systemic unity, so it is with history, which is transmission tradente. Transmission denotes the genetic-material moment while the tradente refers to the properly human moment, that is, the delivery of ways of being in reality, the system of possibilities” (Hernández, 2002: 8).

The third moment is the progredient: taking into account the received tradition, and, supported by it, the human being lives opting for forms of reality (DHS: 25), that is, it includes the act of reliving what has been received in a progressive way.

The human being, installed in a form of reality that he has received, that is given to him, and that he receives with less or more continuity, will change the content of what tradition is for his progenitors. For this reason, human life is not only tradible but also tradent:

“This human history is not a simple genetic transmission of psycho-or- ganic characters, but rather a delivery, a tradition of ways of being in reality. Life is transmitted genetically, the ways of being in reality are delivered by tradition. But since the ways of being in reality could not be delivered if this delivery were not inscribed in a transmission, it follows that the historical dimension of human reality is neither pure transmission nor pure tradition: it is trans- missionary translation. Dimensionally considered, history is a process of possibility by trans- missionary transmission: it is not composed of “facts”, the action of natural “powers”, but of “events”, the realization of personal “possibilities”” (DHS: 66).

And we add: Human life has no choice but to be surrendered. And precisely for this reason tradition and the history constituted in it is a progressing tradition (DHS: 26).

The subject of tradition

For Zubiri, the immediate subject of tradition is not the individuals, but the phylum, the species as such. Tradition affects individuals, but only by the fact that they belong to the same species, and it affects them by reflex (DHS: 27).

Reflex can affect individuals in two ways:

- 1) It affects each person insofar as he carries out operations on his own way of being in reality; therefore, tradition is a moment of man's own life, a moment of what constitutes his biography. Therefore, to live is to possess oneself as absolute in the whole of reality (DHS: 27).

This means that every human being “is always the same, never being the same. The way of always being the same by never being the same is the essence of biography” (DHS: 27).

- 2º) It affects the person, determining him/her as something different. It constitutes the tradition of the social, it is what is usually called history.

From all this derives the importance of tradition in human life:

“Since each man is co-determined by others in his absolute mode of being, and is so precisely and formally by being a phyletic reality, it follows that to his mode of

possessing himself belongs constitutively the phyletic possession of himself. That is to say, his biography has an inamissible moment of traditio. Well understood, biography is not only tradition, but tradition is an essential moment of biography. Tradition is, from this point of view, the phyletic absorbed in the personal, in the human person as a person" (DHS: 28).

The formal essence of history: the delivery of ways of being in reality

Zubiri understands that the formal essence of history is what he calls the delivery of modes of being in reality:

"When man, an animal of realities, engenders another animal of realities, he not only transmits to it a life, that is to say, he not only transmits to it psycho-organic characters, but he is given, he is given a way of being in reality. Delivery is called *parádosis*, *traditio*, tradition. The historical process is concretely tradition" (DHS: 21).

And what tradition delivers (the progenitors) is a way of possibly being in reality, but as a principle of possibilities, that is, so that the descendants, supported precisely in the received way, determine their way of being in reality by choosing to accept it, reject it or modify it (DHS: 39). Therefore, tradition consists principally in a delivery of ways of being in reality as a principle of possibility or of possibilities of being in some way in reality. Each human being will choose by having before him a concrete list of possibilities that offer him a received way of being in reality.

For Zubiri, to have possibilities does not mean to have or not to have faculties or potentialities. Possibility is what is possible as a term of an enabling power:

"Nothing is feasible that was not potential; nothing is a possible if it is not founded on the feasible. The potential and feasible belong to the bare reality of something. Not so the "possible". What is made possible as such by the fact of becoming so does not acquire any real note that it did not already have as potential and feasible. The only thing it acquires, in effect, is a "new actuality," the actuality, so to speak, of being "within reach" of the powers and faculties. The made possible is not, then, alien to the nude reality" (DHS: 48).

What does this power of possibility consist of? Zubiri explains that it should not be understood as a power juxtaposed to the potencies and faculties, but rather that this power of possibility includes these same potencies and faculties insofar as they reach certain objects and acts of theirs (what is usually called endowments). Therefore, powers and faculties are not, without more, endowments; endowments are the powers and faculties precisely and formally insofar as they are the principle of possibility (DHS: 50).

This means that human beings have different endowments, some endowments are fixed and others are not, that is, some are innate and others are acquired. Therefore, powers and faculties are not the same as the principle of their acts, and those same powers and faculties as the enabling principle, that is, as endowments (DHS: 50). Here the metaphysical problem of knowing what endowments are arises.

According to Zubiri, endowments are generally acquired. Possible is not only understood as a possible object; but also as that which will confer a way of being in reality. In this sense it is called possibilities; all possibilities are founded on the possible, and to be possible is strictly and formally to be a term of endowments (ibidem). Among the different possibilities, the human being has to choose, has to appropriate one of them. Once appropriated, that possibility is incorporated into the powers and faculties.

This appropriation, or naturalization as Zubiri also calls it, can occur in two ways:

- 1º) That which is based on the use of powers and faculties, in their exercise. It is, therefore, an operational naturalization and is referred to as a disposition.
- 2º) That which refers to the very quality of its own reality as a principle of possibility. They are constitutive endowments of the powers and faculties as principles of possibility; this is what is called capacity. Capacity is formally capacity of possibles, and capacity will vary according to whether the sphere of the possible that it constitutes is greater or lesser (DHS: 51).

It should be noted that in each capacity some dispositions are acquired by learning and others are not. In short, it is necessary to affirm that an act as an execution of potencies is not the same as an act as an execution of capacities. Moreover, only when capacities are acquired by appropriation can other capacities be acquired or those already possessed be modulated. This distinction is extremely important when it comes to pedagogical practice. Although some capacities are innate -those developed by the psycho-organic morphogenesis of potentials-, it is only when capacities are acquired by appropriation that others can be acquired or modulated and faculties, which are very few - most are acquired and modified or lost by naturalization of appropriateness (DHS: 52).

History as a determination of the person

Bearing in mind the above, we must ask ourselves what history formally consists of as a determination of each human being. Zubiri's explanation is consistent with what has been said so far: "Dimensional history consists formally in being a process of qualification" (DHS: 53).

Zubiri has no hesitation in calling it a metaphysical process. Process, because each stage not only succeeds the previous one but is supported by it. Hence, actions do not determine us only by what they are in themselves, but also by the processual moment in which they occur

(DHS: 53). In addition, history is a process of enabling, because in history there is real production of something that really “was not yet” (DHS: 53), production of capacities. It is also a metaphysical process, because it is the training for ways of being in reality.

Zubiri summarizes his thought in this way (DHS: 54ff):

- 1º) The person with his capacities accesses to some possibilities, which once appropriated are naturalized in the potencies and faculties, with which the capacities change. With these new capacities, people open themselves to a new field of possibilities.
- 2º) The reality of history consists in being a processual actualization of the possible actualities of the nude reality: it is a processual reality of actualization. The processual constitution of this “possibility” as such is capacitation. The process of capacitating is thus a process of making possible, and, therefore, a process of historical realization of the possible as such: a process of events.
- 3º) As a training process, history is rooted in the sentient intelligence. Through it, man is an essence open to the whole of reality. And since this capacity is the dimensional essence of history, it follows that man, by his very essence, is metaphysically open to the historical process. History is openness: it is a dimension of the metaphysical openness of human substantiality to its own actuality by capacitation.
- 4º) The human being, opened to his capacities by history, produces, before actions, his own capacities. This is why history is radical realization. It is the production of the very sphere of the possible as a condition of the real: it is the making of a power. This is why it is “quasi-creation”.

From these considerations appears the question that should demand a clear and concise answer: in what does the I, the being of human reality, physically assert itself as such an I with its capacities against the whole of reality, that is, absolutely, consist? (DHS: 55-ss).

The I is historical, because it is the act according to which substantive reality affirms itself as absolute in the whole of reality; furthermore, human substantive reality is prospective, that is to say, historical. And it is so from itself; it is constitutively prospective, it is historical “de suyo”. It is the historical refluence of others in the constitution of the reality of each individual. It follows that the I as an act of my substantive reality is the I of a historical reality. Therefore, the human being also has a historical character: “It is the refluence of the historical not only on reality, but also on the being of this reality, on the I” (ibidem).

From the above, we can deduce several consequences:

Bearing in mind that for Zubiri there are three human dimensions: the individual, the social and the historical, we can affirm that: ³

3 For a more detailed study of the three dimensions, see R. Acosta Sanabria. The dynamism of human person. Personalization in Xavier Zubiri.

“The historical dimension as a dynamism of appropriation of possibilities integrated with the social dimension as a dynamism of actualization and structuring by others of one’s own actions and with the individual dimension as an active and transforming dynamism. The human being is actualized individually, socially and historically” (Corominas, 2006).

The historical dimension requires understanding that history is the space that the human being must take advantage of as an area of realization based on possibilities, that it must be understood as an opportunity to be a person, the moment to contribute, at the same time, positive elements to society.

History is the space of individual and collective fulfillment. Tradition makes it possible, or at least makes it easier for people to connect with their past, understand the present and be able to project themselves into a consistent future:

“History is not simply a succession of real states, but a formal part reality itself. Man has not only had and is having history: man is, in part, his own history. This justifies the occupation with the past: to occupy oneself with the past is, in such a case, to occupy oneself with the present. The past does not survive in the present in the form of memory, but in the form of reality” (DHS: 364).

Understanding history as a moving tradition facilitates the exercise of possibilities, possibilities of being in the reality that founds tradition and the meaning that each culture gives to those appropriate possibilities, which are manifested in events, in a reality through which acts are presented as a projection in the moment:

“History is an actualization of possibilities that constitute the present upon which man builds his projects and his individual life, and even the social structures for the future” (EDR: 270).

Finally, we insist that history, as a training process, has a cyclical character:

“The person with its capabilities accesses to some possibilities, which once appropriated are naturalized in the powers and faculties, thus changing the capabilities. With these new capabilities, people open themselves to a new realm of possibilities. It is the cycle of capacity, possibility, enablement: it is history as a process. The process of making possible is, therefore, essentially constituted by the process of empowerment” (Ramírez, 2013: 108).

This must be taken into account in every pedagogical action and in every educational process if we wish to develop an authentic integral education of the human person.

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