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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF MANFREDO OLIVEIRA

1. Introduction

I do not doubt that, alongside the Jesuit priest Henrique Cláudio de Lima Vaz, the diocesan priest Manfredo Araújo de Oliveira, born in Limoeiro do Norte in 1941, is the greatest Brazilian philosopher of the second half of the 20th century, considering his vast body of work, critical view, originality, and conceptual domain of the theories used in his various writings. A fundamental feature of Manfredo Oliveira's philosophical thought is that it is not possible to label him as Kantian, Husserlian, Heideggerian, Habermasian, etc., in the sense that he traced his own path in his philosophical reflection.

Manfredian philosophical thought is structured based on the attempt to overcome the limits of the subjectivism of Kant's transcendental philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology. Since completing his doctoral thesis in Germany in 1971, there has been an ongoing search for intersubjectivity and Being, with the linguistic turnaround, the ethics of discourse, and the metaphysics of Being being fundamental to his philosophy. The questions of language and metaphysics occupy, so to speak, the first shelf of his philosophical problematizations, marking them as his own intellectual identity.

I would say that today I identify with the "logical-semantic-ontological" current, which thus encompasses the fundamental dimensions of discourses. Every philosophy presupposes a language in which it is articulated. Philosophy is articulated in language – this is the first presupposition – and language has components that are therefore components of philosophical theory. These fundamental components are logic, semantics, ontology, and pragmatics. However, I defend the primacy of the semantic-ontological dimension. [Oliveira 2024: 229]

This semantic-ontological primacy confirms the scope of his philosophy: the search for Being. Thus, anyone who thinks that Manfredo is a philosopher of transcendental subjectivity is mistaken; it is essential to note that the subject gives meaning to the world and to objects, but subjectivity does not exhaust the meaning of the objective world. In an interview given in May 2023, Manfredo says:

Do you want to know something? So that you know where I come from, I will translate the final chapter of my thesis; that way, you will know that from then on,

I was already fighting with Transcendental Philosophy”. From talking so much about Transcendental Philosophy, it always gave the impression that I was a transcendental philosopher! I would say today that I am an ontologist or a metaphysician. [ibid.: 228]

Despite the “semantic-ontological” tendency of the last phase of his philosophical life, he even declares that his book, *Metaphysics of Primordial Being*, is his most outstanding work. Manfredo Oliveira’s philosophy is constructed through a long process that starts from transcendental philosophy and advances towards the philosophies of intersubjectivity:

Regarding the evolution of my philosophical thinking, I would say that my first influence, following the seminar in Olinda, was Kant’s philosophy, which I understood as a system that profoundly shook the entire tradition of Western thought. That’s why I went to Germany, and my doctoral thesis is on the fundamental structure of transcendental thought. I addressed three main lines of thought there: first Kant, then Husserl, and then neo-Kantianism. Then, based on Schelling, Hegel, and Heidegger, I questioned the structure of the way of thinking of Transcendental Philosophy. I followed this direction until I returned to Germany for a research internship, when I discovered analytical philosophy. Even then, I continued to consider that contemporary philosophy was deeply marked by different versions of transcendental philosophy. In this regard, I was fortunate enough to accompany Jürgen Habermas when he taught at the Max Planck Institute. I also participated in many conferences with Karl O. Apel, sometimes on the same thematic panels. So, I was lucky enough to follow and even participate in the attempts to restructure the linguistic turnaround of Transcendental Philosophy by philosophers such as Habermas and Apel, as well as these new currents (such as the “Philosophy of Difference”). [ibid.: 226]

In concrete terms, at the epicenter of his philosophy are human beings and their relationships with others, with nature, and with God. His concerns with ethics, ecology, and metaphysics are not in vain. This is addressed through a philosophy based on the initially continental and later analytical traditions, so that Manfredo draws from both the instruments and the fundamental concepts that underpin his philosophy without affiliating himself entirely to one or the other current.

The fundamental question underlying his philosophy is about the horizon of meaning of human life. Throughout his vast work, he consistently discusses modern rationality, its demands, and its limits, always considering philosophy to be indispensable, even when the theological question about God is under discussion. Philosophy is positioned as a primary dimension of understanding faith (*intellectus fidei*) to avoid fanaticism.

Having set out these introductory guidelines to Manfredian philosophy, this article will present two fundamental components of his thought: the biographical place from which the philosopher Manfredo Oliveira was conceived, since to understand the idea of an author one of the best ways is to know the vital context in which it was constructed; and his philosophy traced through his work, specifically, from his books.

2. The Philosopher Manfredo Oliveira (1941-)

I like to say that I am an eternal student of Philosophy. I have never stopped considering research, so when some people are surprised by the many books I have published, with the time required to prepare them, I respond that there is nothing surprising because I have dedicated my entire life to this. Thus, I do not consider myself the figure that I am sometimes said to be, as in the case of the honor of “Professor Emeritus”. I am just someone who takes things seriously, who studies, who researches. [Oliveira 2024: 226]

In 2010, I had the pleasure of being a student of Manfredo Oliveira during my master’s degree in philosophy at the Federal University of Ceará, in Fortaleza. At the time, he was around 70 years old, but he taught his subjects with great vitality, conceptual depth, and enthusiasm, which are striking characteristics of his lectures, conferences, and classes.

My first encounter with Professor Manfredo was in 2002, moments before an annual Catholic Church celebration in Fortaleza, in a room where priests and seminarians were gathered. On that occasion, I asked him questions about Apel’s philosophy, and we talked for a few minutes. I had already read some of his writings and heard a great deal about him during my time as a seminarian at the Prainha Seminary (2002–2005), now the Catholic College of Fortaleza, and while I lived in the preparatory seminary in his hometown of Limoeiro do Norte (2001).

As a seminarian in his same diocese, I always heard his fellow priests talk about his intellectual greatness, so that for us seminarians who dedicated ourselves to philosophical studies, Manfredo was the reference. I heard people talk about him and Cardinal Dom Falcão (1925–2021) as great intellectuals, sons of the Diocese of Limoeiro do Norte.

I once went to do pastoral work in a community in Limoeiro in 2001, and there I met a lady who said she had been Manfredo’s teacher. At the time, she spoke about his remarkable intelligence from an early age and his vocational decision to become a priest. Manfredo Oliveira’s initial philosophical training took place at the Diocesan Seminary in his hometown of Limoeiro do Norte, Ceará (CE), northeastern Brazil, under the leadership of Dutch Lazarist priests. According to Manfredo himself [2024], the Dutch priest João Miguel saw in him potential for philosophical studies.

As is typical of the structure and intellectual organization of priestly training seminaries, studies of science are accompanied by studies of languages, so that Manfred had to read works in the original Greek, Latin, French, and English, something that helped him in his studies of other languages such as German, Italian, and Spanish.

It was, as is often the case in today’s seminaries for priestly formation, a thorough education with rigorous and systematic study schedules. As we know, this is of fundamental importance for access to an intellectual world that few people could access, in addition to helping to develop the discipline of study. This was the environment in which the intellectual Manfredo Oliveira was prepared.

This was crucial for me because, years later, when I arrived at the University of Munich for my doctorate, anyone who had not studied Latin and Greek for at least six years could not do so. I recall that once, during a doctoral seminar in Germany, my professor asked a Jesuit for a translation of a Greek text. The Jesuit said, “I don’t know Greek.” And my professor exclaimed, “But there’s no such

thing! How can there be a Jesuit who doesn't know Greek? Get out of here! You're not in the right place." At that time, there were few translations of classical philosophical texts into Portuguese, so reading the original was essential. So, I can say that, already in the seminary, I was developing a philosophical mindset based on the guidance of that Dutch priest. [Oliveira 2024: 215]

The diocesan seminary education consists of a minor seminary, which consists of initial preparation, and a major seminary, which includes studies in philosophy and theology. In 1960, Manfredo began studying philosophy at the Prainha Seminary. However, seeking a more robust and qualified philosophical education, in 1961, he requested a transfer to Recife, where he also had Ariano Suassuna as his professor of Philosophy of Aesthetics.

In 1963, he was sent to Rome to begin his theological studies. During the first year, with the interruption of scholarships, his father continued his studies in Europe. Later, he received a scholarship from a German woman who donated to the church for the training of future priests.

The rector called me and said that the lady was willing to help me, but on one condition: that I would celebrate the first Mass in the village of 300 inhabitants in southern Germany, where her family lived. I said: "I do not accept." Imagine if I gave up priesthood? I would spend the rest of my life feeling remorseful because I had used the resources of that lady and frustrated her purposes. However, things moved forward and everything worked out. [ibid.: 217]

In Rome, Manfredo experienced the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), as the Council was often the subject of classes, conferences, and conversations at informal moments, such as meals. He wrote his theology dissertation on Karl Rahner in 1966 and was a student of Rahner's in Munich. He was often exposed to great philosophers and theologians during his training at the Pontifical Gregorian University. The choice of Rahner was not by chance, since for him, his theology presupposes the understanding of faith, and this intellectual activity is genuinely philosophical. In fact, as we will see in the next topic, this will be of fundamental importance in Manfredo's philosophy, particularly in considering the relationship between reason and faith.

I chose Karl Rahner as my subject of study also because I was already planning to pursue a doctorate in Philosophy. In fact, during my doctoral studies, I attended Rahner's classes there. At that time, he was a professor at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Munich, teaching at the Romano Guardini Chair, which was affiliated with the university's rectorate. He was, at the time, a guest professor for courses in which he was supposed to address the major theological issues of the day. I attended a seminar he gave on the problem of atheism today and how religion is situated in an increasingly secular society, in which religion does not determine the direction of thought or public administration. The classes were held in the university's largest auditorium. It could hold about 800 students, and some people still sat on the floor in that class. At the end of the semester, he had a maximum of 80 students. Some said it was because he spoke very difficult German. Well, if that were the case, I, as a foreigner, would not have been able to attend the classes. The problem was not the German. The problem was Philosophy. He was practicing Theology rooted in his conception of Philosophy. [ibid.: 218]

After completing his studies in Theology, the bishops wanted Manfredo to return to Brazil to teach seminarians in Regional I of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). Still, he set the condition that he first prepare for this through further studies by obtaining his doctorate in philosophy in Munich (1966–1971), a goal endorsed in a letter to the bishops by his supervisor of studies at the “Colégio Pio Brasileiro”, priest João Batista Libâneo. The attempt was successful, and Manfredo obtained his doctorate in philosophy under the guidance of Max Müller, a former student and disciple of Heidegger.

After completing his doctorate in Munich, Manfredo returned to Fortaleza to assist in the training of seminarians, where he served as rector for six years, teaching at the Prainha Seminary. In 1973, he took up the position of philosophy professor at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) through a public selection process. In 2023, he celebrated 50 years as a professor at this institution of higher education.

Manfredo requests to be relieved of his role as rector of the Seminary and resigns as a philosophy professor at the Catholic College, the Prainha Seminary, because most of the students do not wish to study philosophy. He disagrees with the idea that the most important thing to be a priest is theological studies and, consequently, philosophy is dispensable or irrelevant. On the contrary, a dense and profound priestly formation requires a safe path paved in philosophical studies.

I dropped out of Catholic College because of this: because there was a strong reaction to the study of Philosophy, as something that had nothing to do with it – “Priests don’t need that”. Since I was failing half the class, there was a movement to kick me out, and I said, “No. No, no. I’ll go on my own, happy as can be. You can rest assured. Stay in peace, and I’ll go somewhere else.” I’m not going to waste my time with people who don’t want to think. That, even today, hasn’t disappeared. [ibid.: 223]

As these were difficult times of Military Dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985), it was common to have agents of the Dictatorship observing their classes: “In the classes I taught at the university, there was always an undercover agent accompanying me. I would quickly discover who it was due to their absolute lack of understanding of anything. Even so, Dom Aloísio Lorscheider received a long report from the Police declaring me a subversive.” [ibid.: 222]

Philosophy, rejected by the dictatorship, was for Manfredo the only one capable of evoking reflection against the regime's abuses. It was necessary to resist, and this was an ethical task for the philosopher: “My people, in this situation that we find ourselves in, the only subject that is capable of being critical is Philosophy, of making sure that students do not give in and do not accept this dictatorial regime, etc.” [ibid.: 223]

Another fundamental point in Manfredo Oliveira’s trajectory is his concern regarding the need for philosophy to be seen beyond the large centers in Brazil, a stance that I also share and am emphatic about, especially when defending the vitality of philosophy in the Brazilian Northeast. “Even today, this is a somewhat complicated legacy for us, because several Postgraduate Programs find it easier to obtain higher evaluations from CAPES because they have more professors who graduated in São Paulo.” [ibid.]

One last point I would like to highlight is his constant reservations about assuming positions of power, whether as course coordinators, rector of a seminary for priestly formation, or directors, among others. Manfredo follows Kant’s warning in *Perpetual*

Peace that “it is not to be expected that kings philosophize or that philosophers become kings, but neither is it to be desired, because the possession of power inevitably corrupts the free judgment of reason.” This separation between knowledge, science (*episteme*), and power (*krateia*) as a requirement of philosophical freedom was fulfilled by Manfredo. It is a whole life dedicated to intellectual activity and philosophical production.

3. The Work and his Philosophy

Manfredo Oliveira’s work is vast: to date (April 2025), it comprises a total of twenty-four books, eighty-eight articles, and ninety-four book chapters. This is a highly qualified production that moves between philosophy and theology with scientific rigor, in addition to his knowledge of languages that allowed him to read theorists in their original writings, something that is an intellectual legacy of his days of seminary training in the priesthood, where he studied Greek, Latin, German, Italian, French, English, and Spanish. In addition, it is worth highlighting his immersion in Europe during his master's degree in theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome (1963–1966) and his doctorate in philosophy at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (1966–1971), in Germany, as demonstrated in the previous topic.

His master’s dissertation was on the theme of Concupiscence in Karl Rahner, and his doctorate was on Subjectivity and mediation: studies on the development of transcendental thought by Kant, Husserl, and H. Wagner, a thesis that resulted in his first book, published in Germany in 1973. This would give rise to an entire intellectual trajectory of this Brazilian philosopher with a view to dialectically reflecting on the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity and its implications for philosophy and theology.

It is possible to think of Manfredo Oliveira’s philosophical work as a search for unity between the individual, society, nature, and Being as such, that is, God. For him, none of these dimensions can be discarded or obliterated from philosophical-theological discourse. This presupposes that philosophy and theology are not in a relationship of opposition, but of integration.

Following the publication of *Subjectivity and Mediation* (1973), *Transcendental Philosophy and Religion* was released in 1974, which aimed to highlight Karl Rahner's theological anthropology. In the wake of Edmund Husserl’s *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, *Philosophy in the Crisis of Modernity* was published in 1989, a book in which the cultural crisis is conceived as a crisis of meaning and a crisis of reason itself, questioning its consequences for human relations. “In this epochal situation, it is urgent to reflect on the meaning of the upheaval that Western civilization has undergone with the transformations of modernity, to ask ourselves, in this current crisis, about its significance for human life.” [Oliveira 1989: 7]

This book is essential to understanding the dialectical path of Manfredo Oliveira’s thesis that remains alive in his writings, namely: that the crisis of meaning regarding human life is not answered in isolation by a single paradigm or philosophical model, but presupposes a movement that passes through the subject, through their intersubjective relations, through the praxis of solidarity that culminates in the demand for a liberating God, especially for the weakest and most oppressed, which characterizes a fundamental mark in Manfredo Oliveira’s philosophy-theology of liberation.

In this sense, the philosophy of religion plays a fundamental role in articulating the relationship between these philosophical and theological claims, which would be realized within a liberating and emancipatory Christianity, informed by an ecumenical stance and inter-religious dialogue.

If God himself is communion, everything in the world and in history is called to enter into communion with God. God, as a communion of persons, is the supreme norm of the new lifestyle of humanity, which can transform all dimensions of human life, now understood as a struggle for the realization of the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of law, justice, truth, and love. [...]. The philosophy of religion is, from philosophy, the bridge that leads to theology, as it raises the question of the Absolute on the horizon of human historical praxis, where what is ultimately at stake is the very meaning of human life, the process of realizing man as a rational and free being, in a word, the process of emancipation [ibid.: 124].

In 1993, three other fundamental books were published: (i) *Ethics and Modern Rationality*, (ii) *Ethics and Sociability*, and (iii) *On Foundation*. In the first, Manfredo continues the discussion on the crisis of modernity, situating the modern debate between Kantian subjectivity and Hegelian intersubjectivity, and supporting the thesis of the need to overcome modern solipsism towards an ethics of discourse based on the work of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. He focuses on the contribution of European philosophies, but does not ignore the Latin American context, even dedicating a chapter to the ethical crisis in Brazil.

He is concerned about environmental degradation, the invasion of indigenous lands, corruption in clientelist politics, authoritarianism, and the poverty that plagued Brazil in the 1990s. “The coexistence of misery and poverty points to the moral scandal that emerges as the fruit of a new social ethos, one that makes the cultivation of one’s own individuality the supreme value.” [Oliveira 1993a: 42] A necessary aside: it is essential to highlight that this criticality is shaped not only by the philosophical reflection internal to books and academic debate at the university level but is also the fruit of Father Manfredo’s pastoral work in the city of Fortaleza, especially in the poorest areas of the capital.

Returning to the question, in Manfredo Oliveira’s work, Kantian subjectivity is only the starting point. Still, it is depotentiated to the point of not resulting in a subjectivism that would collapse intersubjective relations and the resignification of autonomy as a co-formative process in which subjects are inserted into a world shaped by reciprocal relations of mutual recognition. It is no coincidence that the ethics of discourse is so important in his work.

Merely in an intersubjective process of understanding is it possible to reach a consensus of a reflective nature, in which participants can know that they, as a community, have convinced themselves about something. Hence, the new formulation of the categorical imperative: the emphasis will shift from what each person can want, without contradiction with the universal law, to what everyone must recognize in accordance with the universal norm. Argumentation is a communal and non-solipsistic task. [ibid.: 23]

The other book from 1993, as mentioned, was *Ethics and Sociability*, a text that is now in its fourth edition. It is a fundamental work that highlights the main theses of ancient and modern philosophers on the ethical dimension, rationality, and its

implications for politics, delving into these issues through the perspectives of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Hegel, and Marx.

The starting point is that, in Western terms, ethics is thought of as a fundamental moment in the “civilization of reason”. The human being is, above all, a historical being, possessing rationality that is constantly under construction and, therefore, is a being capable of giving meaning and justifying his actions. “Man, therefore, is not, purely and simply, but rather makes himself in the world through action.” [Oliveira 1993b: 13]

From a Manfredian perspective, in Plato, the ethical dimension is reflected in the condition of politics and a good life, according to the virtue of justice. Aristotle, in turn, rethinks justice in terms of virtuous practices. The individual is not born virtuous but becomes so as he performs virtuous acts. “The individual becomes just, courageous, prudent to the extent that, by acting, he ‘gets used to’ (acquires the habit) of what, in the city, is ethically just, courageous, prudent.” [ibid.: 57]

On Hobbes, Manfredo presents him as one of the exponents of modern political philosophy in which the ethical dimension is no longer thought of in terms of virtues, but as an instrumental and practical dimension of life. Locke, in turn, is positioned as the defender of freedom conceived as a fundamental right. The problem is that property rights ultimately restrict fundamental rights for citizens who own property. “Although Locke understands property in the broad sense of life, liberty, and goods, in some places the expression simply means the power to dispose of things. The common good is, for Locke, above all a state of property owners.” [ibid.: 127]

In Kant, the capacity to self-determine action, that is, autonomy, is placed at the center of ethical activity. This concept is the center of practical philosophy. However, this autonomy, still procedural, owes an operationalization of the categorical imperative. This formalism is addressed by Hegel's ethics and his concept of historicity, in which the individual is immersed in the social determinations of institutions and intersubjective life. Thus, Hegel reconnects the missing link between the ethical and the political, so precious to the Greeks.

Manfredo ends the book by addressing the specificity of Marx's ethics and its challenge to capitalist sociability. It is now a question of being mediated by labor relations in which the possibility of his alienation and, consequently, of his ethical emptiness as an emancipatory dimension is at stake.

Regarding the book *On Grounding*, the theme of the linguistic-pragmatic turnaround is addressed more systematically, with an analysis of its implications for transcendental philosophy and phenomenology. Grounding is no longer thought of from the perspective of the solipsistic subject, but through a linguistic community of communication. Wittgenstein, Apel, and Habermas join Kant and Husserl. Transcendental subjectivity as a priori possibility of constructing the world gives way to the intersubjective construction of the meaning of the world.

Language is no longer simply *flatus vocis* (voice emission) as the medieval nominalism of Roscelino de Compiègne had it, but is a “language game” immersed in the various forms of life (*Lebensformen*): “language begins to be considered, above all, as a communicative praxis that mediates intersubjectivity.” [Oliveira 1993c: 55] Apel and Habermas attempt to rethink the transcendental through this linguistic turnaround, one through the path of ultimate foundation, and the other through the normative reconstruction of the possible conditions of mutual understanding. Apel and Habermas will be relevant authors to Manfredo Oliveira, particularly in light of meetings and

debates in Germany and Brazil, which contribute to the North-South dialogue regarding the critical reception of discourse ethics in Latin America.

In 1995, *Ethics and Historical Praxis* was published, a book that attempts to philosophically reflect on the contexts of pluralism and secularism from a dialectical stance that respects contexts without renouncing the ethical universality of human rights. In human praxis, there is what Manfredo calls “a double root”, particularity and universality. Plurality is part of democratic vitality, but it cannot be reduced to radical ethical relativism. “From this perspective, pluralism carries an ethical value, since it represents the only way for the ethical universal to be realized, thus opening up the space for man’s free realization.” [Oliveira 1995a: 170]

Ethics and Economy [1995b] anticipates a set of reflections present in *Ethical Challenges of Globalization* [2008]. It is a book in which Manfredo Oliveira is fundamentally concerned with the impacts of the consumer market and the individualistic logic of capitalism on human actions, and how this implies the emptying of ethics and solidarity among humans. According to his critical opinion, for neoliberalism, the centrality of everything is profit and the market; therefore, neoliberals do not realize that the growth of these, instead of solving the problems of human life, on the contrary, deepens them. The reduction of the human being to a being of needs and consumption obliterates the ethical and emancipatory dimension.

Another factor criticized by the author is the lack of reflection on technological progress that is made to the detriment of its consequences. “Technological progress has deepened the gap between rich and poor. Alongside the immense technological possibilities created, hunger is spreading throughout the world, reducing millions of people to stupid situations of misery and permanent threat to survival.” [Oliveira 1995b: 24] It is up to the human being, as an ontologically free being and holder of unconditional dignity, to take a radical stance against these restrictions.

In 1996, Manfredo published *Topics on Dialectics*. This book explores the relationship between historicity and nature, beginning with the human being as a conscious being embedded in history. It is divided into nine fundamental chapters, beginning with a consideration of knowledge and historicity, and proceeding to the theme of ontology and the Hegelian perspective on Christianity, culminating in a dialectical treatment of the relationship between ecology, ethics, and liberation.

Dialectics, in the author’s understanding, does not refer to a sense of dialectical logic, but rather to human historicity, its movements, tensions, and syntheses throughout its practical life. In Hegelian terms, it is a matter of observing the unfolding of reason in history. For Oliveira [1996a: 240], dialectics presupposes a process of cultural education aimed at liberation, so that reason is thought of as a condition for the possibility of emancipation.

In 1996, the *Linguistic-pragmatic turn in contemporary philosophy* was also published. Its first part deals with traditional semantics through topics that address the discussion between naturalism and linguistic conventionalism in Plato, language and reality in Aristotle, language and intentionality in Husserl’s phenomenology, Franz von Kutschera’s realist semantics, Frege’s and Carnap’s semantics, and ends with the early Wittgenstein’s theory of figuration.

The second part of the book deals with the pragmatic turn, revisiting Wittgenstein’s contribution to the philosophy of language from its second phase, specifically language games and language as action. It then delves into Austin and Searle’s speech acts,

concluding with what Manofredo calls “existential pragmatics” in Heidegger, leading to a hermeneutics of facticity.

The third part of the book proposes a hermeneutical turnaround of ontology based on Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Apel’s transcendental pragmatics, and Habermas’ universal pragmatics. The book concludes by presenting criticisms of transcendental pragmatics, based on Vittorio Hösle’s objective idealism and Latin American hermeneutics.

In 2000, *Dialogues between Reason and Faith* was published, a book in which Manofredo once again articulates the relationship between philosophy and theology. Initially, he situates the context from which he speaks philosophically, describing it as plural and fragmented, thereby immersed in ethical relativism and diverse worldviews. This is the context from which one should talk, since there is no absolute religion or worldview that universally dictates the rules and trends regarding human life.

Then, he analyzes Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, in which faith and reason are seen as the two wings through which the human spirit rises to contemplate the truth. Theology cannot do without philosophy, just as faith cannot do without reason, so that grace and nature complement each other. This inseparability shaped Manofredo’s reflections and publications, including his involvement in the formation of diocesan seminarians in Fortaleza.

Taking as a premise this inseparability between reason and faith, Manofredo relies on his PhD advisor in Philosophy, Max Müller, to redefine metaphysics as a “metaphysics of freedom” with a view to thinking about the human in a dialectical relationship between transcendence and immanence. In the final part of the book, he articulates the relationship between the gospel and cultures based on the praxis of Jesus from the perspective of liberation theology. He concludes the book with reflections on Habermas’ theory of communicative action and theology, emphasizing the ethical dimension as the prerequisite for a symmetrical intersubjectivity that transcends the relationship of subservience between master and slave [Oliveira 2000a: 220]. If God is Trinity, He is intersubjectivity and being intersubjectivity; He is a community of people who fight for liberation. This is the key to the book’s conclusion.

In the same year was published the book *Fundamental theories of contemporary ethics*, a collection in which eleven chapters by collaborating professors are presented on the various ethical prisms that have permeated the history of moral philosophy, among them: the ethics of Aristotle, MacIntyre, Heidegger, Lévinas, Mill, Rawls, Habermas, Hans Jonas, concluding with a chapter in which Manofredo addresses intentionalist-teleological ethics in Vittorio Hösle in which the limits of deontologism and utilitarianism are considered.

In 2001, the book *Ethical Challenges of Globalization* was published. This book ratifies Manofredo Oliveira’s fundamental theoretical and practical concerns: the consequences of neoliberalism for the poorest and the need for a philosophy focused on the liberation of the oppressed. The starting point is a dialectical conception of freedom permeated by transcendence, engagement, and institutionality.

One of the chapters highlights the critique of capitalism from the perspective of those who are victims of exclusion. The target is the “third world,” countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. In the case of Brazil, Oliveira [2001: 55] expresses concern about the impact of globalization and industrialization on the marginalized, that is, those who, in that given context, lived in situations of poverty, hunger, and social

abandonment. “The richest 1% have fifty times the income of the poorest half. Poverty and misery particularly affect children up to 14 years of age.”

To address the problem, Oliveira [ibid.] proposes a “construction of real intersubjectivity as a supreme ethical requirement” that presupposes the recognition of all human beings as holders of inalienable dignity so that “instrumentalization and oppression are replaced by the genesis of an intersubjectivity as solidarity freedom”.

In 2002, *Beyond Fragmentation* was published, a book that addresses the assumptions and objections of contemporary dialectical rationality. The first part presents some fundamental conceptions of dialectical thought, drawing on Popper, Puntel, Gadamer, and Habermas; the second part rearticulates modern dialectics as a transcendental philosophy of the absolute, according to Hösle. Overcoming fragmentation means, in this sense, moving towards the absolute that Manfredo envisioned finding in the philosophies of Hegel and Hösle, but seems to have found in Puntel's philosophy, as his book, *The Metaphysics of Primordial Being* [2019], will show.

In the same year, the collection *The God of Modern Philosophers* was published, which discusses various themes in the works of religious philosophers such as Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, among others. Manfredo writes no chapter in this book; he only participated as an organizer.

In 2003, the collection *The God of Contemporary Philosophers* was published. The book is composed of four parts, containing contributions from expressive and renowned authors who have left their mark on philosophy in Brazil. The first part articulates contemporary philosophy and classical thought, including one chapter that features a text by Manfredo on overcoming the philosophy of subjectivity, based on Thomas Aquinas, Hegel, and Heidegger.

In addition, there are texts by Cirne-Lima, Lima Vaz and Urbano Zilles; the second part addresses the question of God in analytical philosophy, containing a chapter by Nelson Gomes; the third deals with the question of God from the perspective of phenomenology, with texts by Ernildo Stein and Pergentino Pivatto; the fourth part addresses the question of God in contemporary cosmology, ending with a text by Leonardo Boff on the ecological question regarding the relationship between cosmology and theology.

In the same year, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* was published, a collection containing sixteen chapters by various authors. The first part addresses the modern theory of the State and its critics, including Karl Marx, Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Sigmund Freud. The second part deals with political theory in the context of finitude and historicity. The third part presents proposals for the normative foundation of politics, concluding with a chapter by Manfredo on political philosophy as a normative-material theory of institutions, as outlined by Vittorio Hösle.

In 2004, *Dialectics nowadays* was published, a book by Manfredo in which he articulates the relationship between logic, metaphysics, and historicity. The author defends dialectics as a logic of finitude and the absolute. The human being, as the holder of a *logos*, is finite, but is not limited to it; he is dialectically immanent and transcendent. Like Hegelian dialectics, Manfredo's dialectics presupposes a movement in which the human spirit passes through the dimensions of subjectivity, objectivity, and the absolute.

In 2007, *Contemporary Metaphysics* was published, a collection of sixteen chapters by various authors, divided into four parts: the first presents criticisms of the claims of

metaphysics; the second deals with metaphysics as the totality of being, with emphasis on a text by Manfredo on the relationship between philosophy, logic and metaphysics, and a text by Lorenz Puntel on a new metaphysics based on the question of the totality of being and the absolute; and the third addresses the various modes or categories of being; the last part deals with theories of possible worlds.

In 2010, *Ethics, Law, and Democracy* was published. The first part of the book addresses contemporary ethical challenges, highlighting the tension between relativism and absolutism. There is also a topic on the relationship between ethics and technology. This is an issue that is always present in Manfredo's ethical writings.

In the second part of the book, Manfredo addresses the issue of the relationship between law and democracy. The fundamental problem that permeates his approach is the defense of human rights as a fundamental normative cornerstone for confronting contemporary injustices and the basis of democracy. Another central point, already raised in other books, is the importance of education for autonomy and solidarity. The urgency of a Latin American ethos requires confronting the exclusions of capitalism based on a "solidarity socioeconomy".

In 2012, *Contemporary Philosophical Anthropology* was published. This book is of fundamental importance for understanding Manfredo's philosophy about the relationship between subjectivity, transcendence, and historicity. It reinforces his dialectical understanding of this relationship. Manfredo begins by establishing the fundamental landmarks of a theory of subjectivity in Husserl and his critics, culminating in a "theoretical inversion" and de-potentiating of subjectivism based on the reconstitution of metaphysics as a philosophy of being and how this affected anthropology itself.

In addition to this philosophy of being, there is another element that implies this de-potentialization of subjectivism, namely, postmodern criticism. Another fundamental component of this reconfiguration of subjectivity came with the intersubjective reformulation of discourse ethics, primarily through Habermas in the wake of Hegel's critique of Kantian-based philosophies of subjectivity.

The journey continues from an ontological reading of the individual based on the systematic-structural philosophy of Lorenz Puntel. Manfredo also discusses the impacts of instrumental rationality on the constitution of subjectivity and how this affects the dimension of otherness and mutual recognition. He ends the book by considering subjectivity as an unfinished process of emancipation.

In 2013, *Religion in Urban and Pluralistic Society* was published. Some fundamental questions raised in 1984 about *Transcendental Philosophy and Religion*, and in *Dialogues between Reason and Faith* in 2000, are reconsidered in this book, with an eye to the cultural phenomena of the 21st century and the way in which they have become more acute and challenging. The first part of the book addresses religion in the face of reasonable pluralism and urban challenges, set within a new societal context that is tense between relativism and ethical absolutism.

The second part explores philosophical and theological considerations about the Christian religion in the face of contemporary challenges, aiming to balance reason and faith. In practical terms, it examines how the Christian perspective can position itself in the face of scientific advances and technological advancements in productive civilization. In other words, the central question is the question about the role and meaning of religion in the contemporary world.

For Manfredo, the meaning of religion lies in its unifying and dialectical character, which encompasses the relationship between the human and the divine, as well as between humans, and in its praxeological attitude of liberation for those who suffer the most. This emancipatory mark continues to permeate his entire work.

In 2014, *Ontology in Debate in Contemporary Thought* was published, a foundational book on the need to reflect on the importance of metaphysics in contemporary philosophical studies. Although some people assume that philosophy is in a secularized and “post-metaphysical” moment, values, worldviews, and the meaning of existence and the world indicate the opposite: that metaphysics is relevant to thinking about reality. Based on Puntel, Manfredo leads his philosophy towards the metaphysics of the primordial Being. The idea of the absolute, God, once again resurfaces.

In 2019, *The Metaphysics of Primordial Being* was published, in a certain sense a continuation of the previous book, which ratifies the ontological concern in the final phase of Manfredo Oliveira's philosophical thought. As he himself states:

The most relevant to my philosophical project are two books that I have published more recently: *Ontology in Debate in Contemporary Thought* and *The Metaphysics of Primordial Being*. As Puntel suggests, an ontology is developed today in two moments: that of the Theory of Entities and that of the Theory of Being. I then wrote about the Theory of Entities to put contemporary ontology up for debate. [...]. After dealing with this dimension, which involves considering the types of entities and their fundamental characteristics, I dedicated the other book to the second dimension, that of being. In order not to confuse it with the theories of entities, the notion of “primordial” being was added. [Oliveira 2024: 229]

The *Metaphysics of Primordial Being* is based on the relationship established by Lorenz Puntel between Being and Structure, absolute and subjectivity, and the challenge of rethinking metaphysics in modern times. The book first addresses the three dimensions of analytical philosophy: semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. The second chapter presents considerations on phenomenology and hermeneutics, highlighting the work of Heidegger and Gadamer. The following chapters examine the contributions of Habermas and Puntel to the theme of being. The book ends with a chapter on Puntel's philosophical thought on the issue.

4. Conclusion

The book *The Metaphysics of Primordial Being* reveals what has been the culmination of Manfredo's philosophy since his doctoral thesis in Philosophy in 1971: the movement that starts from subjectivity in search of intersubjective mediation and its anchoring in Being. However, this movement is made dialectically, without demolishing or abandoning subjectivity along the way. Subjectivity, language, metaphysics, ethics, politics, all of these are fundamental categories of Manfredo's vast work.

Another point that can be inferred about his philosophy is that the human being is immersed in and surrounded by their own contingency, as well as the contingency of others. Still, they are also spiritual beings open to transcendence. Here, we see the positioning of Manfred's Christian philosophy of the human being as focused on the absolute, yet also historicized in intersubjective relationships. Thus, it is necessary to take good care of oneself, of others, of nature, and of one's relationship with God. Being a philosopher requires taking care not only of the reflective dimension, but of action by

virtue of a praxis in which the place of the other is placed as the center of the relationship between ethics and sociability.

“Being-with-others” implies the ethical responsibility of building solidarity at the liberation of the poorest and the excluded. This is a fundamental feature of the philosophy of liberation present in Manfredo’s work, particularly when considering his enduring concern for the suffering of the Brazilian and Latin American people.

To conclude, I would say that Manfredian philosophy has two fundamental and dialectically inseparable paths: in ontological and metaphysical terms, the incessant search for Being as the horizon of meaning in life; and in ethical terms, the commitment to the praxis of solidarity and liberation of the weakest and most oppressed. In my opinion, these paths are inseparable because Being is present in the historicity of relationships, and the social being, in turn, finds the meaning of its existence in Being.

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Received / Одержано 3.01.2025

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An Introduction to the Philosophy of Manfredo Oliveira

Manfredo Oliveira's philosophical thought is part of a Western debate between continental philosophy and analytical philosophy. Manfredo's position in this discussion is dialectical in the sense that it structures his thought based on a dialogue about the potential and limits of transcendental philosophy, the philosophy of language, and metaphysics. His starting point is a critical appropriation of the limits of Kant's and Husserl's transcendental philosophy, resulting in an intersubjective resignification of the transcendental based on the linguistic turn. In the final phase of his philosophy, he places the metaphysics of primordial being at the center of his reflections.

Франсіско Жозіван Гедес де Ліма

Вступ до філософії Манфредо Олівейри

Філософська думка Манфредо Олівейри є частиною західної дискусії між континентальною і аналітичною філософією. Позиція Манфредо в цій дискусії є діалектичною в тому сенсі, що вона структурує його думку на основі діалогу про потенціал і межі трансцендентальної філософії, філософії мови та метафізики. Його вихідним пунктом є критичне привласнення меж трансцендентальної філософії Канта й Гусерля, що призводить до інтерсуб'єктивної ресігніфікації трансцендентального на основі лінгвістичного повороту. На завершальному етапі своєї філософії він ставить у центр своїх роздумів метафізику первісного буття.

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