

Luis Sáez Rueda, *Ser errático. Una ontología crítica de la sociedad*. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2009, 333 pp.

Continental Philosophy Review 46 (1):149-151 (2013)

In the work *Ser errático* (Erratic Being) Luis Sáez Rueda proposes a *Critical ontology of society* in which the author analyses some of the most salient philosophical questions relating to different philosophical traditions, especially to phenomenology, in which he is a specialist. However, it must be said that the essay *Erratic Being* stands out as a clear exercise in philosophical and literary creativity.

Ser errático is an essay arranged in four chapters: *Phenomenology of everyday life; Erratic being, discordant being; Dimensions of the event; and The life of the thought*. This set of chapters sums up very simply the fundamental theses maintained by the author. Sáez Rueda also introduces into this critical ontology of society certain texts with the structure of dialogues. In these, the imagined conversation between two people renders the arguments put forward by the specialist, by the philosopher - only in a more informal register, yet without being less critical and demanding from the theoretical point of view. This literary device is clearly a nod at common sense and its ways of calling into question the most speculative assertions.

Thanks to the insertion of these brief dialogues, reading *Ser errático* becomes an immediate experience, rooted in the dialogue of collective life and oral communication. This literary device connects with the particular vision the Spanish philosopher has of the troubled gaze with which mankind finds in every seemingly solid foothold a shifting reality, a journey of exploration. Sáez Rueda admits to being obliged to make use of this device because a stormy table companion brusquely interrupts "his grandiloquent prattling and demands explanations" (p. 3).

Man's condition is erratic. The *erratic being* of the human being arises from having a world to inhabit, which implies the possibility of placing oneself eccentrically towards one's surroundings. Sáez Rueda adds to the Heideggerian ontology the idea that authenticity of existence does not depend only upon the dedication with which every human being inhabits her own world and devotes herself to her own existence, but also upon a movement of displacement and eccentricity the author calls *erratic being*. In this sense, the ontology proposed in this book is a critical ontology of society, as the author considers present society to be stationary, that is, it organises its emptiness in a ceaseless movement.

The erratic condition produces a potential space of discrepancy that is the core of the philosophy of events proposed in *Ser errático*, because it also forms part of the pre-reflective level of the world of life. If we examine ourselves attentively, we find ourselves in specific situations that engulf us but, in Sáez Rueda's opinion, we must add to that centrality the experience of being at the same time outside, that is, eccentrically placed. Although different authors have described this experience, perhaps more than in any other author it is present in the philosophy of Derrida when he states that the experience of meaning belongs to linked contexts with no anchorage points.

However, in this work, the concepts of eccentricity and centrality are connected to the human condition of our times in a much more explicit and determinate way than in Derrida's philosophy, in the sense that they reveal man as an erratic being and, at the same time, allow us to consider ontology as a critique of the present stationary society. Musil's *Man Without Qualities* is much more eloquent. We find ourselves in societies in which the term "eccentricity" is understood only in its relation to the world as it is administered in a broad sense, with its mediated and instrumentalised space; whereas

the centricity of a person's life is understood in our societies apart from the demands of real life, that is, as a de-centred centricity with respect to the world.

Sáez Rueda's book owes its first formulation to Helmuth Plessner. Plessner compares human and non-human organisms in their relation with the place each inhabits. The comparison showed her that the human being enjoys a different organism because in the natural environment she has an eccentric position. By this, Plessner wanted to point out that, in contrast to other living organisms, the human being is not tied to the natural context she inhabits. In other words, she is a "being weighed down by indeterminacy, condemned to make up for the lack of natural imperative by means of that complex, doubting, fragile medium that is intelligence" (p. 41). Thus, the concepts of centricity and eccentricity are co-originary. Although there are differences between the final position of Plessner (whose contribution should be included within the field of anthropology) and that of Sáez Rueda, the distinction between these two concepts is fundamental to the latter's critical ontology. The position the author maintains regarding the meaning and scope of ontology as discourse is one of the clearest questions in the book: ontology is a form of thought that inquires into the understanding of that which we consider real – underlying both the praxis and the form in which we conceptualise in general.

One of the relations of the conceptual pair "centricity-eccentricity" stems from the fact that the human being belongs in situations, in contexts. We human beings do not possess any specific place precisely because we are not to be found anchored anywhere in an essential way. The author refers to this when he states that the distance interposed with respect to the immediate opens up a world for us, but the same circumstance acts by expelling us beyond any world, ejecting us from it. The author refers to this outstanding aspect of human life when he states that all of us have a place, *topos*; but at the same time we are not anywhere: "the same order of things we establish is familiar and strange (exotic). We are rooted and at the heart of our rootedness we feel obscurely exiled too. Man is an *erratic being*". (p. 54).

The critique of the stationary society consists of describing it as a world in which the erratic spirit, as this is defined by the author, is limited and muzzled. In the stationary society, paths are generated that, socially and culturally, govern the complex relation between centricity and eccentricity that makes up the erratic being of man. With this poetic understanding of human action *par excellence*, Sáez Rueda challenges pragmatist conceptions in which man is situated in social, historical or cultural circumstances and described without the slightest problem. This *Phenomenology of everyday life* gives rise to one of the book's most striking chapters - not only from the philosophical but also from the literary viewpoint: *Erratic being, discordant being*. In this chapter Martin Heidegger's thought is subjected to a clear critique with regard to the notion of *event*.

Sáez Rueda mounts a defence of man's erratic condition, of borderline life and the absence of belonging in relation to any sort of property. One of the most interesting arguments is found in the figure of Don Quixote. According to the author, Heidegger deserves the same reply Don Quixote gave to Sancho Panza when the latter forgot the joys of the erratic adventure that united them, simply because they did not achieve any real conquests. Then Don Quixote replied that it is precisely the unrootedness of knights-errant, that is, their lack of a world, which allows them to listen to the call of the other regardless of their world or their condition. It is precisely the fact that Don Quixote is an eccentric figure that best sums up his eccentricity with respect to any form of world, thus he is a being excluded by the world he comes from and escapes from. So, according to the author, Heidegger had forgotten the intrinsic value of this form of

errancy that endows the human adventure with true value and which, in the case of Don Quixote, as Michel Foucault also saw, makes the Don a figure who speaks to us of the luck possessed by the fool, the outcast, the other - who, nevertheless, is present in each of us. Sáez Rueda's fundamental criticism of Heidegger is that the German philosopher presented a notion of "event" under which the real existence of the human being fails to be clarified with true profundity. Sáez Rueda's thesis consists in calling attention to the fact that for Heidegger and, in a certain sense, also for H.-G. Gadamer and Peter Sloterdijk, estrangement towards the world forms part of the *modus cognoscendi* of being, but is not an integral part of its *modus esendi*.

Luis Sáez Rueda has been outstanding for his contributions to modern and contemporary philosophy, and also for his interpretation of the thought of Karl Otto Apel, about whom he published, in 1995, the book entitled *La reelustración filosófica de K.-O. Apel*. Equally well-received and fully relevant are his books *El conflicto entre continentales y analíticos* (2002) y *Movimientos filosóficos actuales* (which appeared in 2001 and was re-edited in 2003 and 2009). The author undertook much of his early work at the Freie Universität of Berlin, where he collaborated with A. Wellmer and A. Honneth. He is currently a lecturer at the University of Granada, Spain.

María G. Navarro
University of Amsterdam
Faculty of Humanities