

CIVIL ORGANISATIONS  
MORE POLITICS FOR LESS ORGANISATION: ARISTOTLE'S  
SOCIAL THEORY

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**Abstract**

There is a lack in analysing Third Sector from a philosophical perspective. It is very complicated to answer many questions that are arising: Why men are concerned to the problems other men are involved in? Which is the driving force of the Social Sector? Why are NGOs legitimated to support social matters? What have NGOs to do in the XIX century? This questions need to be answered to fix correctly future strategy, mission and objectives. It is necessary to build an ethical-political frame to understand deeply how Third Sector works. This paper studies from a philosophical approach the relationship between NGO and beneficiary, the changes happened in the XX century and the challenges NGO need to face in the forthcoming years.

**Keywords**

Third Sector, non-profit-organisations (NGOs), ethical-political focus, relationship, liberty, justice



## 1.-INTRODUCTION

If we contemplate the work of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from the different perspectives offered by the tree of knowledge, we will be unable to draw any precise conclusion.

Economic thought has observed that the predominantly non-profit-making goals of these organisations, as opposed to the goals of associations that are run to make money, do not prevent NGOs from having to deal with economic contexts and conditions. This makes them no different from the norm throughout all human organisation. Financing sources and calculating the marginal utility of available resources are vital issues in an NGO's co-operation project, in profit-making operations of a trading company and in household accounts to manage to get to the end of the month.

The perspective as regards the science of law is analogous; national laws in developed countries acknowledge forms of association and fiscal procedures for these organisations which differ from those that govern trading companies and civil associations created for sports, charity, leisure or other similar purposes.

Recently, it has been repeatedly suggested that it would be fitting to apply the methodology and conclusions of Organisational Theory to these non-profit-making initiatives. The reason is clear: from a sociological point of view, both are forms of social action amongst individuals that, with the exception of their respective missions, have similar internal and functional procedures.

For my part, I propose to add some new features that are not often found in literature on NGOs, but which, in my opinion, assist in obtaining a more exact, perhaps more fantastic picture of this new phenomenon, which is so full of nuances. Every reality can be analysed from a philosophical point of view, and the activities of the third sector are no exception. For this purpose we will use tools employed in philosophical politics.

## 2.- TYPES OF RELATIONSHIP

This type of focus has not been comprehensively approached, although outlines and sketches can be found in the most recent essays analysing the so-called "third sector". Some persons sustain, for example, that the purpose of NGOs is to modify behaviours and thus transform cultures on a long-term. A proposal like this does not hide its macro-political, long-term sociological and cultural ambitions. Another example. In the United States, one argument that is currently upheld on communitarism aims to recover ideas from the 19<sup>th</sup> century – and even earlier – on the individual's capacity for initiative in self-improvement of citizen coexistence, with emphasis on neighbourhoods. This shows that although non-governmental initiatives may not harbour economic pretensions, they certainly have political ambitions.

In my opinion, NGO activity offers two major political issues for philosophical consideration: liberty and non-state-controlled justice. These are the same political issues of old that the third sector modulates into a special contemporary form. We can now confirm that the social initiatives directed by NGOs that have arisen in developed countries since the eighties, do not limit themselves to impersonally administrating or

distributing resources as governments do, but instead they seek to create efficient opportunities for well-being and development. They do not rely, as others have done until now, on markets, which in theory conciliate and satisfy individual desires anonymously, but instead they feed more on a sense of practical and benevolent equity, capable of modifying the destiny of men and women, regardless of nationality, race or belief, by seeking to demonstrate a genuine love of humanity in every personal contact.

Aristotle's social theory distinguished three types of relational activities:

First, there is conflict or enmity when one party, either an individual or a group, tries to impose his will on the other party, and the latter uses his liberty to resist or accept it. One means of holding someone unwillingly is through physical force. The other means is deceit, which turns into violence when the deceit is discovered. Variations of conflict are marginalisation, attack and defence, slander, insults, humiliation, which provoke reactions of indignation and retribution; also, defeat of one party if the other is victorious, or cessation of hostilities if both parties accept an agreement. This pact would be included in the next relational category.

Community relations are amicable. The two parties, which differ in some aspects as individuals or as groups, agree however to commence a joint initiative, with respective voluntary contributions that constitute the community. Men and women, human individuals who differ by gender, come to an agreement to act together to produce riches for the family community, which is different from them as individuals; cobblers and greengrocers differ in their productive capacity, but make an agreement as a market community to exchange shoes for lettuce and tomatoes, in a previously agreed proportion, to the benefit of the individual parties. All these cases of communities rest on the balance between equality and diversity, which we could characterise as dialectic. If the individuals were not different in any way, there would be no sense in making an agreement on individual contributions to the community in which they are involved; but if they were so different that they had nothing in common (sexual appetite, the need to satisfy their needs, etc.), either this relation would not occur at all, or it would be a relation of conflict and violence (whenever one party wanted to take over absolutely everything it was lacking). But there could also be a third type of social relation, as identified by Aristotle.

Some individuals who are absolutely different from each other, i.e., they have nothing in common at all, may form a relation because of this difference, and such a relation would not just be void of conflict, but based on a great friendship, benevolence, to be specific. Parents give their children many riches over the course of the years, starting with the first and principal one - life- and their offspring will never be able to match this with strict equality, or even proportionally, as in the case of the market, or in civil agreements. A relation of this type is established between a rich man who gives money and a beggar who receives it. There is no conflict, or equal community, but friendship between unequals: the wealthy gentleman provides money or goods and receives thanks, honour and God's blessing; the beggar provides acknowledgement, praise, feelings of piety, and receives money or goods. In general, a relation between a person who provides a benefit and another who receives it is formed between two such different persons, from a point of view of the relation, that one is superior and the other is inferior under the circumstances of the relation. For Aristotle, men relate this way to the gods. The divine are beings who hold the power to provide the things that men most

desire, the very things that are unattainable, beyond reach. Health, a happy marriage, good children, prosperity and great wealth, victory over enemies, a never-ending life, if there is such a thing, are riches that are beyond the grasp of any mortal, and it is the immortal gods who concede such riches to whom they so desire. For this reason, men ask for such desired riches, and if they receive them, they return the favour with devotion, appreciation, sacrifices, and first offerings to honour their benefactors, those metaphysical beings. Later, Adam Smith observed that the extension of the free market economy, with its corresponding proliferation of special skills, directly resulted in the disappearance of social relations based on this type of superiority. According to this English economist, the change from a relation of benevolence and compassion to another based on exchange, marked the difference between an advanced social organisation that democratised wealth, as was the case of London in 1765, and the former servile, social, class structures, based above all on differences in assets. “A puppy fawns upon its dam - said Adam Smith in a well known part of *The Wealth of Nations* - and a spaniel endeavours by a thousand attractions to engage the attention of its master who is at dinner, when it wants to be fed by him. Man sometimes uses the same arts with his brethren, and when he has no other means of engaging them to act according to his inclinations, endeavours by every servile and fawning attention to obtain their good will. He has not time, however, to do this upon every occasion. In civilised society he stands at all times in need of the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons. (...) Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens”<sup>1</sup>.

### **Relationship between NGO and beneficiary: avoiding paternalism**

Now we need to gain a better understanding of the relation between a non-profit-making organisation and its beneficiaries. Is this a *compassionate* relation, from superior to inferior, or is it a type of *companionable* community between parties that are only partly different, and set up an agreement or exchange between them?

On one hand, we are inclined to believe that this relation reflects the categories of superiority and inferiority in several aspects. NGOs in developed countries that are wealthy in a sense finance and/or run projects, the beneficiaries of which are the citizens of underdeveloped countries with scarce resources: the economically superior country benefits the inferior one.

In other cases, NGOs work to benefit physically or mentally invalid, handicapped or disabled persons, who are in an inferior situation in comparison with their fellow citizens – healthy persons – and therefore require special care.

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*, I-3

Other non-profit-making organisations, and there are a fair number of them, teach and promote certain intellectual or spiritual capacities in individuals who have fewer opportunities for personal development, or they try to democratise certain cultural, artistic or scientific assets that hitherto have been owned by certain privileged classes.

In fact, all social activities in the Third Sector can be analysed from the perspective of the disproportionate inequality of certain individuals who, for some specific reason, relate to other individuals in order to share their assets with them, in a relation that is not strictly based on exchange.

This is the fact of the matter and I would go as far as to say that it is clearly a universal situation: few 20<sup>th</sup> Century men or women gain pleasure from paternalism. Our liberalism has gone further than Adam Smith's. We like to do good to our fellow citizens, on the condition, I believe, that we can think that they are not children and we are not privileged adults who possess such maturity that we have no choice but to become their tutors.

No; we have fully accepted the doctrine of equality and fraternity. We prefer to view the inequality that separates us from our peers as accidental, caused by changeable circumstances that, when the situation arises, will cause the effect to be the very contrary of present circumstances. Our fellow citizens simply require a helping hand.

We do admit that there is ignorance in this world, but it is also true that men and women are naturally prepared for learning. We accept that there is poverty in this world, but we believe that every single person in the world could live better than the most cultured Londoners in Smith's time. To deny disease and suffering would be to go against all evidence, so we do not deny it; but meanwhile we work to progress in medical science and universally available medical care.

If the contemporary benefactor seeks to do good on the condition that he is not considered as a paternalist do-gooder, it is more to the point – and this is widely supported by empirical experience and testimony – that the beneficiary will not want to receive such charity if at the same time he has to admit the essence of his inequality with his benefactor, or that such inequality is not fortuitous, as is the relation between men and gods; it is simply an opportunity to improve, progress and to get on to the same footing as his peers.

Furthermore, much debate is not needed regarding the fact that it is common practice that beneficiaries of many NGOs have to pay a share or price for services they receive, and this increasingly approaches the provision of services by profit-making companies.

In turn, a benefactor's action becomes part of a trans-personal organisation, a community structured by means of a governing body, and the beneficiary receives the action through a supra-individual entity. The service is not received from or owed to a specific, single individual, but to a social organisation with which the beneficiary holds a formal or objective relation, as Simmel would say, that is not solely determined by a personal relation<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Georg Simmel. "A Chapter on the Philosophy of Value." *American Journal of Sociology* 5 (1900):577-603.

Despite everything, it is indeed true that a payment is demanded of the beneficiary; that the relation is established between essentially equal but accidentally different individuals, and that the bond between the beneficiary and the NGO is more rational than personal. Although this is all true, it is also a fact that when we refer to the social work of NGOs, it seems to be more fitting to talk of beneficiaries rather than customers, and to refer to altruism and philanthropy rather than a mission for profit, and to advocate generous communication rather than a rational exchange of goods.

### **3.- FROM A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO AN ETHICAL-POLITICAL FOCUS**

NGOs now undertake different social work from that of the past, and we must make an effort to understand this process that will not be as easy as making a simple historical comparison. The operation of non-profit-making organisations belongs to the field of ethics, the dominion of virtues that are used in a new way, focused through contemporary missions.

It would be worth going beyond the analysis based on management and the science of law. I propose to put forward the old debate that commenced with an individual end and concluded with a group end: Aristotelian ethical-political science. The use of the term "ethical-political" is not for pedantic reasons, but because books on ethics and books on politics indeed trace a continuum.

Ethics makes an exhaustive analysis of the causes that determine individual liberty, i.e., the set of possible individual choices. Its dominion is therefore the expression of subjectivity, the manifestation that each person is in accordance with that which is chosen, providing that the choice is free. If no one and nothing forces me to do it, if at least no one and nothing forces me to do it to a greater extent than others, then all I do through my choice will reveal my personality. The proposition "I know who I am", stated so boldly by Don Quixote, is truer when it corresponds to a life full of moral determinations and free choices.

However, philosophical ethics (Aristotelian ethics) does not disregard the social conditioning of an individual. There are, of course, strictly individual moral choices, however, in the majority of our choices we do not only take our individual gain into account, but also the gain of all with whom we relate socially: our spouse and children, neighbours, fellow citizens... This is always the case when community relations are at stake; or to be more precise: our gain as individuals, an object of choice, is also inseparable from the gain of the other individuals with whom we live as a community.

#### **Supporting social matters**

There have been several manifestations of love towards humanity. Shortly before the First World War, a mature Tolstoy renounced his artistic vocation for a philosophical-

sociological vocation, and created a social organisation that would eradicate all forms of human violence from the face of the earth. The Count, thus converted to prophet, advocated a social organisation that would dispense with the State, based on an army and an armed police force, in short, implemented through physical force.

The peculiar synthesis of Kantian practical reason, Rousseauian idealism, Marcus Aurelian rationalism and the ethics of Jesus, that Tolstoy defended, was never put into practice. States have not undergone any substantial change since 1910. But one of his profound convictions continues to be valid: reason is a fitting principle for social foundation. It would be difficult to find a more universal ground on which men could erect a building for a community life.

The utopia of the author of *War and Peace* represented a step forward from positions alienated by the French revolution ideal of fraternity and equality. For its theoretical advocate, Genevan Rousseau, citizen group motivation represents a general will, which is effective to the point of functioning as a principle of political and social organisation in the community. The French revolutionaries' slogan could summarise this general will, the collective consensus on which they expected to establish the social situation of a new humanity. But what the Genevan and the French did not foresee was that future societies would be made up of masses of individuals – the real distinctive mark of 19<sup>th</sup> Century societies – for which the mechanisms of direct democracy had no efficacy. These mechanisms were as ancient as city-state organisations. No; where societies exceed one hundred thousand or one hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants in a Greek city or Swiss canton there can be no direct expression of general will, but rather an assembly of representatives. “Sovereignty, for the same reason as makes it inalienable, cannot be represented; - observes Rousseau- it lies essentially in the general will, and will does not admit of representation: it is either the same, or other; there is no intermediate possibility. The deputies of the people, therefore, are not and cannot be its representatives: they are merely its stewards, and can carry through no definitive acts. Every law the people has not ratified in person is null and void — is, in fact, not a law. The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing. The use it makes of the short moments of liberty it enjoys shows indeed that it deserves to lose them”<sup>3</sup>. The thinker had already expressed what this meant for him in chapter IV: “To renounce liberty is to renounce being a man, to surrender the rights of humanity and even its duties. For him who renounces everything no indemnity is possible. Such a renunciation is incompatible with man's nature; to remove all liberty from his will is to remove all morality from his acts”<sup>4</sup>.

There is one thing, however, that may be established regardless of the ideals of political organisation: there is benevolence and mutual love between men, that works as the ground for all social communities. Hobbes would clearly not accept this proposition, since he viewed conflict as the heart of human relations. Marx would not agree either, since his prime thought lies in the struggle, not of individuals, as is known, but of class groups formed from property relations. For me, it is more philosophical to accept that it is natural friendship between men that constitutes the basis of social coexistence, not enmity. Rousseau himself would agree with this, since for him, the *good pre-civilised man* would live naturally in a compassionate relation with his fellow men (providing

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<sup>3</sup> J. J. Rousseau. *The social contract*. XV; tr. M. Armiño, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1996, p.98

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Rousseau. *The social contract*. IV; tr. Cit, p. 16.



that they did not harm his own interest in surviving). It is compassion – observes Rousseau in his dissertation *On the origin of inequality among men* - “which, instead of inculcating that sublime maxim of rational justice: *Do to others as you would have them do unto you*, inspires all men with that other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect indeed, but perhaps more useful; *Do good to yourself with as little evil as possible to others*”<sup>5</sup>.

That men are naturally friends – that men spontaneously love each other – is manifested, according to the Stagirite, in travel. “Friendship – he writes in the first book dedicated to Nicomachean Ethics on this subject - seems by nature to be felt by parent for offspring and offspring for parent, not only among men but among birds and among most animals; it is felt mutually by members of the same race, and especially by men, whence we praise lovers of their fellowmen. We may even see in our travels how near and dear every man is to every other”<sup>6</sup>.

Analysing its genesis, the first true movement of this affection is benevolence (*eunoia*). Aristotle understands this as loving one individual as another, and sharing one's feelings. To truly love someone does not mean being willing to embark on joint activities. For the Greek philosopher, benevolence is manifested, for example, in the relation between spectators and competitors at gymnastic contests: one group – the fans - long for their team to win, but do nothing with the competitors to fulfil their desires: one group smokes, drinks and cheers, while the others run wildly after the ball.

Our benevolence may be a sudden and superficial feeling on occasions, making us jump up from our seats to cheer on a competitor, for example, or it may make us sad when watching the misfortunes suffered by actors in a play. In all these cases, Aristotle maintains that this is friendly affection, but not friendship itself. Friendship cannot occur in a relation between unknown persons, but benevolence can: it may not even be noticed by the person who is the object of the same – by the runner or the actor – but friendship does not suffer such ignorance.

The philosopher believes that benevolence is not friendship, but the start of the latter. Whoever truly loves someone may commence a relation with that person, and start to live together, and eventually friendship will arise when such affection is transformed into a mutual, acknowledged and stable feeling. “Benevolence – Aristotle comments in chapter 5 of the second book on friendship- seems, then, to be a beginning of friendship, as the pleasure of the eye is the beginning of love. For no one loves if he has not first been delighted by the form of the beloved, but he who delights in the form of another does not, for all that, love him, but only does so when he also longs for him when absent and craves for his presence; so too it is not possible for people to be friends if they have not come to feel benevolence towards each other, but those who feel benevolence are not for all that friends; for they only wish well to those for whom they feel benevolence, and would not do anything with them nor take trouble for them. And so one might by an extension of the term friendship say that benevolence is inactive friendship, though when it is prolonged and reaches the point of intimacy it becomes friendship - not the

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<sup>5</sup> J. J. Rousseau, *On the origin of inequality among men*; tr. M. Armiño, Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1996, p. 240.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics VIII*, 1155 a 16-22; tr. Cit, p. 122.

friendship based on utility nor that based on pleasure (...) but on account of some excellence and worth”<sup>7</sup>.

A similar thing occurs with feelings provoked in theatregoers when watching a play. Good plots that, according to Aristotle, may be equally read or enacted, provoke sympathy (*philanthropy*), compassion (*eleos*) or fear (*phobos*)<sup>8</sup>. These feelings are experienced by the spectator or reader when the latter learns of the fate of men, including those he admires for their goodness, and those he scorns as contemptible. He sees that all men push their fortune in a certain direction, resulting in certain good or evil. And to us it seems logical or contrary depending on what we expect of these subjects.

“Pity – as defined by Aristotle in Rhetoric - is a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it in our opinion, and which we might expect to befall us or one of our relations or some friend of ours, and moreover we believe this will occur, if not immediately, at least soon, to the point that we think that it would not be impossible for it to happen to us”<sup>9</sup>. We feel pity seeing ills that are accompanied by sadness and physical pain: disease, hunger, bodily injury and affliction, and those that result in death, and major changes of fortune: loneliness, ugliness, weakness, mutilation, etc., providing such ills befall someone who does not deserve it in our opinion because of their innocence or goodness, or when someone undeserving, in our opinion, enjoys good fortune. Those whom we see suffer need to be similar to us in age, education, character, customs or family, because this emphasises the impression that their ill could befall us too. “Whatever we fear for ourselves - summarises Aristotle-, excites our pity when it happens to others”<sup>10</sup>.

Life experiences leave us with a sense of the proportion of the merits and demerits, and of enjoyment and sadness that we and our fellow men experience. We believe that an imbalance between the two sides is unfair: we do not like to see a contemptible person – liar, cheat, or proud person – triumph and always appear to be happy. Nor do we like to see an honest, good man constantly scorned, the object of ridicule or the victim of deceit. Injustices may be committed consciously or deliberately by individuals, when someone voluntarily seeks to enjoy greater pleasure, or avoid a greater pain than that which he deserves in comparison with the pleasure enjoyed or pain avoided by individuals who are similar to him. If this is not the case, and we believe that this individual has damaged our property or the community's property, then we resort to legal means of justice to rebalance this proportion by replacing the property that corresponds to each person.

### **Searching for justice as a driving force for social issues**

But the cases discussed above are somewhat different. At the theatre, disproportion – injustice – is established between individuals' merits and their good or bad fortune, lucky or unlucky fate, favourable or unfavourable destiny. It is not the individual who

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics IX, 1167 a 3-ss; tr. Cit, p 146.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, Poetics XIII 1452 b 38- 1453 a 1; tr. V. García Yecra, Ed. Gredos, Madrid 1988, p. 168.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, Rhetoric II-8, 1385 b 11-ss; tr. A. Tovar, Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, Madrid 1971, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, Rhetoric II-8. 1386 a 28-29; tr. Cit p.116.

assaults the individual or collective proportion of property and enjoyment of goods, but a superior, somewhat impersonal, even divine, being, against whom there is no place for legal appeal. No, in tragedies, it is unusual for an individual to consciously and voluntarily cause damage to a third party – for this is simply an enemy – but in any event it is someone who appears to be moved by the inevitable strings of destiny.

“There are three kinds of injury in transactions between man and man; – distinguishes Aristotle - those done in ignorance are mistakes when the person acted on, the act, the instrument, or the end that will be attained is other than the agent supposed; the agent thought either that he was not hitting any one or that he was not hitting with this missile or not hitting this person or to this end, but a result followed other than that which he thought. (...) when the injury takes place contrary to reasonable expectation, it is a misadventure; when it is not contrary to reasonable expectation, but does not imply vice, it is a mistake (for a man makes a mistake when the fault originates in him, but is the victim of accident when the origin lies outside him). When he acts with knowledge but not after deliberation, it is an act of injustice, for example acts due to anger or to other passions necessary or natural to man”<sup>11</sup>. This is why in his poetic theory he states that in a drama a virtuous, good man must not be brought from prosperity to adversity, for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. And, again, a bad man must not pass from adversity to prosperity: for this possesses no single tragic quality. The spectator's philanthropic feelings must be aroused by someone's unmerited misfortune; he feels pity, if he believes the man to be innocent, and he experiences fear of the adversity represented if he believes that because he is similar to the man on the stage who suffers adversity, the same ill could befall him<sup>12</sup>.

Clearly this natural friendship towards all men, the benevolence that makes us sympathise with their destinies and desires, is also what moves us to become involved in the work of non-governmental organisations in favour of the less fortunate. How do NGOs plan their campaigns to secure donations and volunteers? Indeed, is it not by reminding us of the fiscal advantages, and making us aware of the suffering of the innocent? How could it be the fault of children for being born in poor countries where they suffer hunger, disease and death? Are teenagers guilty for their lack of education, and young people for their lack of job prospects, personal and family development? Who is the culprit here for all this undeserved suffering? Is there anyone we can turn to? No, it rather seems that there is an inexorable fate involved that places a lucky few in developed countries, and eight out of ten in poor countries.

Informing us thus of the disproportionate suffering of some unfortunate men (and not in an unreal way as in a story); informing us also of the plans that, despite the apparent imperturbability of fate, the NGOs have designed to alleviate the same, even if in part, the target audience of the advertising and image campaigns of these organisations will feel how all their resorts, benevolence, philanthropy and compassion are moved (fear is more unlikely), in short, their entire sentimental complex, in order to bring out a calling in them for the organisations in question.

Some NGOs try to convince their audience by emphasising sentiments, and others use rationality more. In the first category are those that dwell in particular on the pain and injustice suffered by men in some parts of the world, also permitting pathetic tones on

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<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 1135 b 12-ss; tr. Cit p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* XIII 1453 a 3-6; tr. Cit, p. 168.

occasions. The results are almost unavoidable because not all of us are in a position of being able to travel to witness these misfortunes for ourselves, and form our own opinion. If we could, we would then be able to agree with Aristotle who said that by discovering the real situation lived by humans, this would definitely arouse our benevolence and friendship, because we are not indifferent to the suffering and enjoyment of others.

NGOs, for their part, have travelled and seen for themselves, and so they tell us what they have learned, of how others live, with a greater or lesser degree of truth. They can also inform us of the resources and strategies that they have planned to confront these unfortunate turns of fate. This combination of rational and sentimental resources increases the total input of persuasive messages we receive. And we can all give examples of the most sentimental and most rational information strategies. In any event, donations towards the social work of NGOs are the minimum expression of co-operation and good work. It is a major step forward for a donor to part with his money (and not have to leave his house). Football fans also enthusiastically shout and cheer on their team, but remained seated on their soft cushions and light up a cigar. The first step for all NGOs is to secure sympathisers (to use political party jargon) or well-wishers (to opt for the Aristotelian term). In both cases there are still many milestones to achieve on the way from co-operation to development: sympathisers, minor collaborators, major donors, volunteers who contribute work and effort; a gradual transition in personal enthusiasm for the organisation's plans and objectives. In my opinion, for a volunteer to progress in co-operation towards development, it is necessary for him to have a greater commitment to justice and a moral perception that is the result of a more conscious, deliberate nature. In other words, freer and more self-expressive than a simple gesture made by a benevolent donor, who nevertheless is generous and always warmly received into the arms of NGOs.

### **Liberty, necessary condition**

Perception of inequality is the start in co-operation towards development that is based and focused on liberty. Only free persons can morally decide to redistribute all the pleasure and suffering amongst men – without freedom it is not possible to act with justice. Fair persons are not motivated by personal rights that have been damaged by others, or coercive government action; they simply wish to contribute towards their fellow men achieving a greater degree of effective freedom.

The following observation, made by Rousseau, invites us to admit that volunteer work is political action of prime importance. “If we ask in what precisely consists the greatest good of all, – writes the Genevan in *The social contract*- we shall find it reduce itself to two main objects: liberty and equality. Liberty, because all particular dependence means so much force taken from the body of the State; equality, because liberty cannot exist without it”<sup>13</sup>. Let us analyse this in greater detail.

Since Aristotle, practical philosophy has analysed four elements that are involved in all acts of justice: two individual and two real. What is just and what is unjust refers, in cases of distributive justice, to the proportion or analogy between the number of goods possessed or enjoyed and their corresponding faculties. All good and evil that refers to

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<sup>13</sup> J. J. Rousseau. *The social contract*, XV; tr. Cit p. 57

health, food, education, professional development, family, climatic and geological phenomena, i.e., all the advantages that are enjoyed or suffered by the whole of humanity over a specific time (this year), may seem poorly distributed to us, unfairly awarded to or suffered by individuals. We know, for example, that people who live on some continents suffer more or are better off than those who live on other continents; that our fellow men in the Northern hemisphere possess a greater number of worldly goods, and suffer less than those in the Southern hemisphere; that children, young people and women suffer more than their due with regard to their age, innocence and dignity. I call these inequalities injustices. Some people cannot live comfortably with these injustices, and consider breaking the Gordian knot in which these social relations are knitted. It is not hard to see that if one becomes involved in this cause for justice, little personal advantages will be reaped. Do not be misled: if you want to co-operate, you will have to pay your way, and that means sacrificing personal opportunities. Do not expect pleasant or agreeable experiences either. To the contrary, those who seek to co-operate will soon be awash with calamities and suffering that could be avoided by simply not poking their noses uninvited into bottomless pits of despair.

But it is a fact that some people still wish to personally discover what is barely useful, and how unpleasant such initiatives will surely be, and therefore they commence this work despite it all, because they believe that acting thus is morally beautiful, or ethically good, or deserving of the praise we give those who consciously choose to behave in a just manner. Those who act thus are not motivated by fear, the most common of all motivations. The man who fears is not perfect in charity, says Paul. He who acts in fear of punishments that may be imposed by law is not a just man, but a politically correct man. In every country, the Government lays down punishments for those who transgress or break its laws. The free and just man whom we are discussing is more than someone who simply complies with the law. He pays his corresponding taxes, for example, but although this in itself is a requirement for full justice, it is not sufficient. We have yet to find a man who has reached justness by complying with the law to perfection.

Let us reflect how the government acts in relation to poverty. It is the government's job to confront areas of poverty that may be found within its territory (and this would also apply to co-operation between countries, such as is our case with other Latin America countries). George Simmel made a fine observation of this post-Franklinean political Puritanism, in which a nation does not focus so much on solving the personal problems of poor people, but on the abstract and general problems of poverty. Indeed, it appears that governments are more interested in homelessness than in the homeless, and therefore they do not promise individualised provision of health care, assistance and counsel, like charitable religious organisations, but an on-going, abstract, bureaucratic fight in order to overcome objective misery, impartially, even paying if necessary – as was recently the case in one of our local governments – to transfer the homeless to another city, not so that they would find homes, but with the local government's interest to clean the face of the streets forming part of its administrative territory.

Well, whoever pays his taxes, conscious that the objective government administration will then relieve him of all responsibility in the global redistribution of resources, acts according to the justice that since Aristotle has been called “legal”- according to the specific provisions of each country – and according to that which others have called “absolute” or “natural”. “Political justice – explains the Stagirite at the beginning of

chapter 7 of the fifth book of Ethics -is part natural, part legal. Natural, that which everywhere has the same force and does not exist by people's thinking this or that; and legal, that which is originally indifferent, but when it has been laid down is not indifferent"<sup>14</sup>. In Rhetoric, the philosopher refers to them as special laws and general laws: the first are written laws that serve to govern each country; and the second are unwritten principles which are supposed to be acknowledged everywhere"<sup>15</sup>.

It is therefore necessary to decide whether there are indeed certain principles that, although they may not act as written legal provisions of a certain country, still possess universal legal strength. And if there are such principles, it must also be questioned to what extent these principles are binding to the people: what obligations regarding justice do the members of any country have in relation to these unwritten principles, what responsibilities can morally be demanded of them, appealing to that ethical sense that only a free will can heed, over a selfish capacity to respond to coercive and threatening laws (such as tax laws) of a government, or economic exchange regulations dictated by quasi-mechanical market laws.

Is there any natural justice that obliges citizens of democratic, developed, rich countries to act disinterestedly, if such a case should disagreeably occur, in favour of the needy citizens of other countries that are neither rich or developed, without any national written law to coercively make us do it? Allow me to make two philosophical observations that may influence our answer, before our will decides for us, which is the very final instance of our acts. "We must not forget – writes the Stagirite, and Rousseau follows meekly on - that what we are looking for is not only what is just, without qualification, but also political justice. This is found among men who share their life with a view to self-sufficiency (*autarky*), men who are free and either proportionately or arithmetically equal"<sup>16</sup>.

Are we, democratic and rich citizens, called to live a life in common with inhabitants from other nations? Are democracy, development and well-being not the most beautiful riches that awaken in us our awareness of obligation, sense of responsibility and summons to work? "The law of nature – said Rousseau in *On the origin of inequality among men* - survives no longer except in some great cosmopolitan spirits, who, breaking down the imaginary barriers that separate different peoples, follow the example of our Sovereign Creator, and include the whole human race in their benevolence"<sup>17</sup>.

In today's world of self-propelled robots on Mars, telecommunications, e-mails and global economy, are equality and liberty still political objectives confined to nineteenth-century territorial boundaries, to the rules of a national, frequently puerile game? If liberty and equality are not universal assets, then what is the international field reserved for? Will it be filled again with world armed conflicts?

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1134 b 18-ss; tr. Cit p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, Rhetoric 1368 b 8-10.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1134 a 26-27.

<sup>17</sup> J. J. Rousseau, On the origin of inequality among men, tr. M. Armiño, alianza Editorial, Madrid 1996 p. 267.

#### 4.- THE AWAKENING OF THE THIRD SECTOR

From an ethical-political point of view, we can say that the third sector has arisen from the social work of free men (who are amongst the most outstanding of their time), who have set about promoting a more proportionate equality amongst all individuals in the universal society of humankind, with regard to the enjoyment of an extensive, universally acknowledged, inalienable liberty, an expression of individual, common self-government and synonym of moral beauty.

Health would appear to be the first asset that determines an individual's capacity for self-expressive action, for this autarky. The progressive limitation of this asset leads to the greatest ill of all, which is death; the conclusion to the limited human capacity for survival. Positive progress, to the contrary, in the context of a generally good state of health, represents, first, the capacity to perform all organic and motor functions naturally; and second, to perform them for a longer period of time, i.e., delaying the age at which natural decline occurs, when biological weakening commences (it would be a poor result if long living implied suffering or discomfort).

Thus there will be non-governmental organisations whose objectives will include the universalisation – democratisation – of this fundamental asset. Surgical procedures, orthopaedic operations, specialised training to contribute to reduce disease, the implementation of specific prevention strategies, in areas where hygienic customs are as yet unknown, or where necessary health facilities are not available; care of the elderly, minority disease groups, drug addicts, AIDS and the mentally handicapped.

Amongst exterior assets, we believe that property is another essential condition in self-expression. I understand property as a set of belongings that is available for use to meet the needs of an individual and his well-being, and cannot be removed by a third party. Both Aristototele and Simmel have made in-depth analyses of food, clothing, housing and other properties as a form of expression and to channel the subject's will. To love property, - which is natural, says the Greek – is to love oneself, which is natural to all men, and is pleasurable to all. To use one's own things and property – says the Jewish sociologist – is a means of making one's own desires instrumental by expressing them..

It is no coincidence that we refer to a person as “needy”, designating the situation of a man who the force of life has made poor. A poor person suffers limits due to his lack of alternatives, and hence the saying “the poor person takes what is offered”. Rich men, however are said to have “room to choose”. Property increases liberty because it multiplies the possibilities of choice and makes each possibility a revelation.

The majority of NGO programmes propose that individuals, who are owners of few assets at present, should increase their capacity of expression by means of exterior assets. This is fundamentally the direct consequence sought in training programmes, schemes to promote the securing of a first job, and self-employment, which aim to sustain progressive growth. These programmes do not seek the democratisation of princely sultanates, like those that grant rare fortunes in the stories from the Thousand and One Nights; no, they seek to democratise middle classes, where the immense majority is equal with regard to not being needy, and enjoying a certain degree of choice, which always reveals the nature of each person. Another issue is the medium and long-term security of acquiring property through work. This cannot even be

guaranteed by national governments, despite what they boast in pre-election promises, since macro-economic and social variables are based in turn on micro-economic and day-to-day variables. Only in this respect can it be said that the enthusiastic, but necessarily limited action of NGOs does indeed contribute to major developments when programmes are launched to promote the particular skills of individual persons.

We know that solving material day-to-day problems does not depend on this sustained development alone. Other factors are also in play, because as Dostoevsky quotes from the Gospel - "man cannot live by bread alone". It is not just a question of filling one's belly and having a snooze. Self-esteem, progress in moral sentiments, disposition towards generosity and the possibility of spending more time and energy on education, culture, knowledge and science - it is known that all these assets follow one after another in sustained development, for this has already been experienced in developed countries. NGOs now propose to popularise sustained development in countries gripped by poverty.

## 5.- CONCLUSION

NGOs have a multiplier effect on world liberty. Action organised by free men who set about enhancing the contemporary manifestation of individuals is bound to succeed. It is no matter of wonder that the majority of NGOs register a sustained increase in activities, and that volunteer-related experiences are now recognised as forming part of mass phenomena.

Languid participation in national politics, an infrequent occupation of common citizens at the turn of this century, can hardly satisfy the sense of altruism or of any justice. Can any nation today fulfil our somewhat secret aspiration to abandon the narrow (and quite stupid) laws of market utilitarianism? Like the forty-year-old underground man in Dostoevsky's *Memoirs*, it would be enough for someone to decide to demonstrate the laws of reasonable human behaviour, insisting on their universal application, to make us want to do a series of absurd, nonsensical actions to contradict these laws, not just to show scientists their utility but for our own conscience, to demonstrate that what is of more importance for us than all of their reasoning is our precious, inescapable liberty. You are right, my dear Rousseau: there is nothing more sacred than being sovereign over ourselves, nothing more inalienable than our own liberty.

It is as though NGO workers had put into practice the Aristotelian observation that our action is just, and we do not only do just things when we have a choice, i.e., when we do things voluntarily<sup>18</sup>. Nowadays, we do not expect the butcher to give us meat because of his benevolence, as Adam Smith would say, but his benevolence would result in his co-operation as a voluntary brick-layer in the building of hygiene facilities in a little hamlet in the depths of Peru.

The superior-inferior dialectic cannot be used to explain the relationship between volunteers and beneficiaries:

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<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1135 a 4-ss.



- First, because we have all been recipients rather agents or protagonists in the spectacular development of European and then North American culture. We have benefited from the work of our parents and ancestors, providing us with a system of common life, constructed with thousands of talents, contributions and lives. It is no wonder that Aristotle included love of culture amongst our pious duties, for no-one is in a position to return to his country all the benefits that he has received.

- Second, NGOs in developed countries appear to be motivated by the desire to communicate, to open up, to share assets that, by their very universal nature, are destined to structure a new civilisation and more complete humanity.

“For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worth while to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states”<sup>19</sup>. If it is beautiful and divine to choose that which reveals our moral subjectivity, it must also be beautiful and divine, in these times of globalisation, to prefer that which makes us better by improving the whole of Humanity, by transforming that vast spread of human beings into a spectacle of self-expression of specific and personal individuals.

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I-2. 1094b 5-9; tr. M Araujo and J Marías. Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, Madrid 1981, p. 238.

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