

DOUBLE EDGES

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The International Association for

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PLENARY: ENRIQUE DUSSEL

AUTONOMOUS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, AND
NATIONAL AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF MEXICO, MEXICO

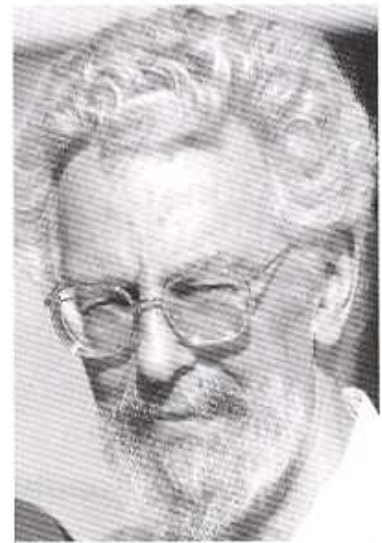
The Fifth Annual Petee Jung Memorial Session
Introduced by Hugh J. Silverman, IAPL Executive Director
Followed by light dinner reception in the Mead & Cavendish Rooms,
Hamilton Centre

LECTURE CENTRE THEATRE B
TUESDAY | 2 JUNE | 19:00 - 21:00

ENRIQUE DUSSEL

*Enrique Dussel was born on Christmas Eve 1934 in the town of La Paz in the Argentinian province of Mendoza. He is the founder with others of the Philosophy of Liberation movement, and his work is concentrated in the field of Ethics and Political Philosophy. His most recent works include *Twenty Theses on Politics* (Duke 2008) and *Coloniality at Large* (Duke 2008).*

Dussel went to Mexico in 1975 as a political exile and is currently Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Autonomous Metropolitan University, UAM) and also teaches at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM). He has degrees in Philosophy from the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo/National University of Cuyo in Mendoza, Argentina, the Complutense University of Madrid, a Doctorate in History from the Sorbonne in Paris, and an undergraduate degree in Theology obtained through studies in Paris and Münster. He has been awarded Doctorates Honoris Causa from the University of Fribourg in Switzerland and the University of San Andrés in Bolivia.



ESSAY BY ENRIQUE DUSSEL

WORLD DIALOGUE BETWEEN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

I will explore a theme that I believe should occupy us for a significant portion of the 21st century: our recognition and acceptance of the meaning, value, and history of all regional philosophical traditions on the planet. This will be the first time in the history of philosophy that these diverse traditions will be open to an authentic and symmetrical dialogue—a dialogue that will enable us to understand many aspects unknown to us, aspects that may be better developed in some traditions than in others. This will make it possible for us to transcend the Eurocentrism of Modernity, so prevalent today, which impedes creativity and often obscures the great discoveries achieved by other traditions.

All of the world's great cultures have created philosophies as well, with varying styles and characteristics of development, but all have produced (some only initially and others with great depth and precision) conceptual structural categories that must be recognized as philosophical. Philosophical discourse does not destroy myth, although it does negate those who lose the capacity to resist the empirical argumentation inherent in such discourse. For example the myths of Tlacaélel among the Aztecs, which justified human sacrifice and provided good reasons for it, completely collapsed once their impossibility was demonstrated, as well as their lack of practical feasibility.

The dominating centrality of Northern Europe as a military, economic, political, and cultural power laid the foundation for the development of its philosophy from the end of the Middle Ages. This made it possible for its own philosophy to develop and, in the face of the crisis of the other great regional philosophies, elevate its philosophical particularity to a universality claim. Modern European philosophy was therefore positioned in such a way as to appear to be the universal philosophy—both in its own eyes and in those of the intellectual communities of the colonial world that lay prostrate at its feet, and philosophically paralyzed. It was situated geographically, economically, and culturally in the center, able to manipulate the knowledge and information wrested from all of the peripheral cultures within its grasp. These cultures were connected to the center along a link running between the Colonial South and the European metropolitan North, but disconnected from each other, without any South-South relations or alliances possible as yet. These relations will evolve during the Age of European Modernity, cultivating an increasing disdain for their own identities and contributions, which includes forgetting their traditions and confusing the high levels of development produced by the Industrial Revolution in Europe with the supposedly



universal truths in its discourse –both its content and its methods. Philosophical Eurocentrism is, then, in essence this universality claim of a particular philosophy, many aspects of which may still be absorbed by other traditions. We can assume that all cultures have ethnocentrist tendencies, but it is modern European culture that was the first whose ethnocentrism became globalized. But this universality claim falls of its own weight when philosophers of other philosophical and cultural traditions become conscious of their own philosophical history and its grounded implications.

First, we must start with a dialogue between North and South, because we will be reminded of the continuing presence of colonialism and its legacies, still with us after five hundred years. This is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes economic and political structures and expressions, as well as cultural and philosophical ones. The philosophical communities of the post-colonial world (with their distinct problems and responses) are still not generally accepted, recognized, nor engaged by their counterparts in metropolitan hegemonic communities.

Second is the need to undertake and deepen a permanent South-South dialogue, in order to define the agenda of the most urgent philosophical problems in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, etc., and discuss them together philosophically. We must lay the pedagogical foundations by educating future generations in multiple philosophical traditions. For example, in the first semester in the history of philosophy in our universities at the undergraduate level, we should begin with the study of the “First Great Philosophers of Humanity”—the thinkers who developed the original categories of philosophical thinking in Egypt (Africa), Mesopotamia (including the prophets of Israel), in Greece, India, China, Meso-America, or the Incas. In the second semester we should continue with study of the “Great Ontologies,” including Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Greeks (such as Plato, Aristotle, and up to Plotinus), the Romans, etc.

A third course should explore later stages of philosophical development in China (beginning with the founding of the Han empire), later examples of Buddhist and Indian philosophy, Byzantine Christian philosophy, Arab philosophy, the Medieval European philosophy, and so on. This is how a new generation can begin to think philosophically from within a global mindset.

European Modernity has impacted cultures throughout the world through colonialism (except for China, Japan, and a few others, who were spared direct European rule). It exploited their resources, extracted information from their cultures, and discarded that which it could not absorb. When I speak of Trans-modernity, I am referring to a global project that seeks to transcend European or North American Modernity. It is a project that is not post-modern, since post-Modernity is a still-incomplete critique of Modernity by European and North America. Instead, Trans-modernity is a task that is, in my case, expressed philosophically, whose point of

departure is that which has been discarded, devalued, and judged use-less among global cultures, including colonized or peripheral philosophies. This project involves the development of the potential of those cultures and philosophies that have been ignored, upon the basis of their own resources, in constructive dialogue with European and North American Modernity. It is in this way that Arab philosophy, for example, could incorporate the hermeneutics of European philosophy, develop and apply them in order to discover new interpretations of the Korán that would make possible a new, much-needed Arab political philosophy, or Arab feminism. It will be the fruit of the Arab philosophical tradition oriented towards a pluriversal future global philosophy. This project is necessarily trans-modern, and thus also trans-capitalist.

For a long time, perhaps for centuries, the many diverse philosophical traditions will each continue to follow their own paths, but nonetheless a global analogical project of a trans-modern pluriverse (other than universal, and not post-modern) appears on the horizon. Now, "other philosophies" are possible, because "another world is possible" –as is proclaimed by the Zapatista Liberation Movement in Chiapas, Mexico.