

Listener

Journal of Religion and Culture

Winter, 2008

This issue:

**The Ethics
and Politics
of Liberation:
Essays on
Enrique Dussel**

*Volume 43
Number 1*

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RESPONSE TO CONTRIBUTORS*

Enrique Dussel

The essays that Michael R. Paradiso-Michau has passed on to me regarding the relationship between Levinas's thought and my own work have awakened in me, in the first place, a feeling of deep gratitude, insofar as it shows me that a group of colleagues—some of whom are very young—are showing interest in the philosophical thought emerging from the South. This is a gesture of hospitality toward the Other . . . as a philosopher.

The case of Lewis R. Gordon—a friend whom I encountered at Harvard University and Brown University, and later as the president of the Caribbean Philosophical Association—strikes me as a great coincidence, for his studies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon, for his being an African-American Jew, and for the pedagogical passion that is evident in the admiration of his numerous students wherever he teaches. For this reason, his reflections are important for me. He indicates that he finds in my thought an essential relationship to the concrete history of a people, its territory, its cultural works, its historical efforts for liberation; a thought which makes concrete reference to social and political victims. He has grasped some fundamental characteristics of the philosophy, ethics, and politics of liberation. He understands the fact that we need a new vision of World History, one which is organized from the perspective of the oppressed, from the South. To bring together Karl Marx and Emmanuel Levinas is no easy

*Translated by George Ciccariello-Maher, and edited by Michael R. Paradiso-Michau.

task. But, as he and I know, French and leftist thought find no scandal in this relationship.

In the end, among other questions, Gordon asks me whether or not my thought represents a sort of Catholicism. I think that liberation thought (especially liberation theology) in Latin America is post-ecumenical; i.e., there is no difference between a Catholic and a protestant thinker. But moreover, the “return” to the primitive Christianity of the poor and persecuted under the Roman Empire allows us to affirm in Jesus of Nazareth a Jew with a certain perspective and praxis that will separate him from the later Talmudic and synagogue Judaism from the second century C.E. onward. This allows us in Latin America to situate ourselves outside the traditional or conservative separation between Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. A dialogue with Islam is easier from within a Semitic cosmivision, as Maimonides of Cordoba—who recalled that Jews, Christians, and Muslims represented three *similar* creationist metaphysics—indicated.

Because of this (and here I already enter into relation with Greg Wolff’s excellent work), the responsibility to the Other is not merely ethical, but rather equally (and from the beginning) political, because the subject or *ego* which confronts the Other in a “face-to-face” relationship is a communal intersubjectivity standing before someone who similarly reveals herself as a communal intersubjectivity (even if these are from the same community). Alterity has degrees: from the Other from the same community as the *ego*; to the Other as a victim of the same community; to the Other from another community: “the foreigner” of Hammurabi’s Code (the “extremely”—but not absolutely—Other). The Other is “*ouk-tópos*,” and even more when he or she is “the widow, the orphan, the poor,” and the aforementioned foreigner. To assume responsibility for the Other is a “dissensual praxis of liberation” (and, in effect, when I read Simon Critchley I see that he proposes as a future task *something that we have already been constructing theoretically for the past thirty years*). The South is also the excluded Other of the “dominant philosophical community.” Thank you, Greg Wolff!

In the same way, William Paul Simmons’ enlightening exposition—with which I agree—shows the difference that exists between Levinas’s thought and my own. I am always accused of not understanding Levinas very well, of not carrying out a correct interpretation. But what is really going on, as Simmons shows, is that from the beginning Levinas *suggested* to me a subject which I immediately situated *in a different way* within my discourse. The

Other is concrete, intersubjective, and communal: the Other is unique, the Other is someone, and the Other is always already a member of a community. The problem of “le tier” (the *third*) is not necessary for me: the “third” was within the Other from the very beginning because the Other is always already “you all” [*vosotros*] (an historical, communal other). So the “absolutely Other” (God) is not absolutely necessary in anthropological alterity. But, if there is a God (which I neither affirm nor deny), this God will always be revealed and will need to be primarily understood from the most extreme Other: from the innocent victim, from the poor, from the orphan, from the widow, from the foreigner. This Other is Other from any Other Other, and, above all, is an Other separate from any fetish *made by the hands of men*. This is atheistic toward any fetish that obscures, dazzles, and distances us from the anthropological Other, especially the Other as innocent victim. I agree, William Paul Simmons.

Finally, the comments offered by George Ciccariello-Maher (translator of my *20 Theses on Politics*, forthcoming from Duke University Press) deal with a political treatise written thirty years after my *Philosophy of Liberation*, the work to which my colleagues from the previous essays refer. In Ciccariello-Maher’s essay, we can observe a Levinas enriched by the passage through Marx and Karl-Otto Apel. This is a new way of returning to Levinas, but from an analytically-developed political architectonic, Ricoeur’s *voie long* (my teacher at the Sorbonne). The *20 Theses* is a small book which draws together the argument from three volumes, the first of which has just been published in Spanish by Trotta in Madrid: *Politics of Liberation: Critical Global History*. But now, the Other is a *people* (the Semitic *ham*), *the remainder* (as a correction to the positions put forward by Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek) which, from experiences like that of Evo Morales (a pure indigenous American elected president of Bolivia), shows us what “obediential power”—the liberatory hyper-power of those “from the bottom”—is. It is from the Levinasian Other, Walter Benjamin’s *mesiakh*, and Agamben’s “remaining time,” that the collective actor in the history of liberation emerges. This is a politics that Levinas never imagined.

