



*Frederick B. Mills*

# ENRIQUE DUSSEL'S ETHICS OF LIBERATION

AN INTRODUCTION



## Enrique Dussel's Ethics of Liberation

“Felicito y agradezco el tiempo de su vida que Frederick Mills se ha tomado en introducir una filosofía elaborada en el desconocido Sur global, como práctica de un diálogo Norte-Sur, que vaya descolonizando la filosofía eurocéntrica y la abra al horizonte mundial que está lentamente surgiendo en nuestro planeta globalizado, que enfrenta el riesgo de un eminente suicidio colectivo ecológico de la modernidad.”

—Enrique Dussel, *Ciudad de México*

“Frederick Mills’s *Enrique Dussel’s Ethics of Liberation: An Introduction* is a very clearly written, comprehensive presentation of the ethics of liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel. Mills provides a biography of Dussel and expounds his work, dealing with its Levinasian origins, the analectical methodology, the basic liberation principles of his monumental *Ética de la Liberación*, the implications of Dussel’s corpus for politics and economics, and its potential for the development of a planetary humanism. Mills is thoroughly acquainted with the massive literature on liberation philosophy, and he never loses sight of the victims of Western instrumental rationality on behalf of whom this work, as well as Dussel’s philosophy of liberation, is written.”

—Michael Barber, *author of Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationality in Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation (1998)*

“Dr. Frederick Mills’s new work, *Enrique Dussel’s Ethics of Liberation*, is a philosophically masterful exploration of, and lucidly insightful commentary on the work of a Latin American thinker who is possibly the most distinguished living philosopher of liberation. Focusing radical humanist and liberatory ethics, Mills’s book shows not only penetrating insight. It exudes a certain spirit which reveals

Mills as a kindred spirit of Dussel sharing a common vision of a liberated life in a community of freedom which embraces every man, woman and child on earth.”

—Robert E. Birt, *editor/author of The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Critical Essays on the Philosopher King*

“Mills has accomplished a major feat in not only making Dussel’s critically important work more accessible to a broader audience, but also in breaking it down in such a way that it can readily be taken up as a tool for today’s most pressing social and ecological struggles. This contribution matches the urgency of the times we are living through.”

—Christina M. Schiavoni, *co-editor of The Politics of Food Sovereignty: Concept, Practice & Social Movements*

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# Enrique Dussel's Ethics of Liberation

An Introduction

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*This monograph is dedicated to the memory of Honduran Indigenous environmental and human rights activist Berta Cáceres who was assassinated in her home on March 3, 2016 for her attempts to stop the building of a hydroelectric dam on a river sacred to the Lenca people.*

*Berta Cáceres Vive!*





## PREFACE

This monograph aims to make basic concepts in Enrique Dussel's ethics of liberation more accessible to English language readers. Dussel's influence has been felt in the Global South for more than five decades, but his voice is still not sufficiently heard north of the Rio Grande. By reaching a broader audience, I seek to contribute to the dissemination of Dussel's principled defense of human life and the biosphere at a time when both are threatened with catastrophe by the ravages of Western instrumental rationality.<sup>1</sup> I intend, in particular, to articulate Dussel's analectic method and show how the ethical principles developed in his magnum opus, *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (1998/2013), form the basis of norms in the economic and political fields. I argue that these norms provide a moral compass for those committed to transforming the prevailing system and advancing a planetary humanism.

My engagement with Dussel's thought is inspired by the struggle of oppressed peoples and their allies against domination by globalizing corporate capital. Unlike armchair musings on the human condition, Dussel's humanism challenges us to take co-responsibility for the victims

<sup>1</sup>I use the term "Western instrumental rationalism," following Alejandro A. Vallega (2014), to mean: "the kind of thinking that accompanies the unfolding of capitalism, colonialism, globalization, and the reduction of all rational means and ends to production of wealth, which means the ultimate commodification of senses of existence and of intersubjectivity" (3).

of the prevailing system and to urgently address the ongoing assault on the earth's ecosystems. The assumption of this co-responsibility inevitably involves us in reaching out to a diversity of communities, crossing national as well as cultural boundaries. As part of this effort, the philosophy of liberation movement has been promoting an intercultural philosophical dialogue based on the premise that a new, pluriversal world, one that affirms the production, reproduction, and growth of all human life in community and in harmony with the biosphere, is not only empirically and technically possible, but also *ethically necessary*.

Although the philosophy of liberation, in a sense, transcends any particular ethos, it has been ever conscious of its cultural, regional and historical origins. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Latin American and Caribbean intellectuals from a variety of disciplines were intensely engaged in an effort to develop a decolonized philosophy, sociology, and historiography that takes the lived experience of the popular sectors and Original peoples of the region, rather than Eurocentric narratives, as the focal point of reference.<sup>2</sup> The Cuban revolution, national liberation movements, and electoral victories of several progressive governments in the region, demonstrated it was possible for the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean to challenge entrenched oligarchic interests despite the formidable setbacks imposed by US hegemony in the region.

While the philosophy of liberation has not been a homogeneous doctrine, nor the work of a single person or school, there is no doubt Dussel has been its most prominent figure, having systematized many of the ideas now associated with this current in Latin American philosophy. Today his liberatory message is relevant to the efforts of progressive forces around the world to challenge the ideology of global corporate capital and any other system that would instrumentalize human life and the earth's vulnerable ecosystems. This is a philosophy for our age.

Dussel's ethics of liberation, which takes solidarity with the victims of Western instrumental rationality as its point of departure, articulates three universal ethical principles. In this monograph, I intend to provide the basic conceptual framework and methodology by means of which these principles are grounded, mutually condition each other and form the basis of norms for the critique and transformation of the political and economic fields.

<sup>2</sup>For a brief historical overview of the philosophy of liberation movement, see Galindo et al. (2011).

At first approximation, the *material ethical principle* expresses the obligation to produce and reproduce human life in community in a manner that is in harmony with the biosphere. The *formal principle* requires the material principle be pursued by means of symmetrical democratic procedures. And the *feasibility principle* limits the outcome of deliberation to achievable policies and practices. None of these universal ethical principles is reducible to one only principle, nor can any one principle alone guide a liberatory project unless it conditions and is conditioned by the others. If we have democratic institutions that do not take into account the imperative to meet basic human needs and respect the earth's biosphere, we violate the material principle and thereby also undermine the very conditions, in the long run, that make any human acts or institutions possible. And, if we blindly pursue what is technically feasible on behalf of capital accumulation or any other totalizing system, we are likely to violate both the material and formal principles. We already know the dire consequences of leaving technical feasibility without a moral compass. When technical feasibility was joined to national socialism during the last century, millions were deported to death camps by means of technically efficient bureaucracy and machinery. I believe Dussel is correct in insisting that, in order for actions and practices to have any claim to goodness and justice, these three dimensions of critical ethical rationality ought to mutually condition each other.

While no single ethical principle has priority over the others, a common theme throughout *Ethics of Liberation* (1998/2013) is the affirmation of human life and the biosphere. Since the prevailing system makes it impossible for hundreds of millions of human beings to live and grow in community and degrades the earth's ecosystems, the ethics of liberation aims to "justify the struggle of victims, of the oppressed, for their liberation" (1998/2013, 56 [57]). A central message of Dussel's work is that the cry for justice of the condemned of the earth is not merely an object of study but an urgent appeal to our common humanity for intervention. And Dussel suggests we can prepare ourselves to hear this cry and respond to it in a solidary fashion by cultivating our original communitarian bond with other human beings, as well as with all life on the planet.

How do we prepare ourselves to hear and respond in a meaningful way to the appeal of the Other (the victims) for justice? Face-to-face encounters with other human beings, in the Levinasian sense adopted by Dussel, challenge us to practice seeing others as more than their

superficial functionality within the socio-economic system. This “something more” is the Other’s subjectivity, autonomy, and will to live and grow in community.

If we are open to the appeal of the Other, we can begin to grasp our co-responsibility for calling into question the systemic causes of his or her suffering. Yet even this openness and realization of our co-responsibility does not yet constitute a critical ethical consciousness. For it is always possible to turn away and resume our routines, taking care to avoid the face of suffering and to evade thoughts about our own complicity with the status quo. This avoidance, however, may be fraught with bad faith. For as Jean Paul Sartre points out, bad faith requires that we know, at some level, what we are trying to suppress. “The one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet I must know the truth very exactly in order to conceal it more carefully ...” (1943/1994, 49). In the case of bad faith, we know that we share a common humanity with the Other from whom we continue to turn away, as if the one whom we cannot fail to see and recognize were nevertheless somehow still invisible. On the other hand, if we decide to assume our co-responsibility, we can then begin to critique and ultimately strive to transform the system that instrumentalizes human life and devastates the earth’s ecosystems.

How do we go about what seems to be an insuperable task? The economic, social and environmental challenges facing humankind are global and call for a worldwide response. An ethics of liberation then, may prompt us to enter into local and international alliances aimed at transforming the prevailing system into one that affirms *all* human life on a planetary scale. To this end, the philosophy of liberation movement has influenced the development of decolonial thought and remains in productive dialogue with decolonial theory and praxis of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, as well as the Global North.

I have suggested that although the philosophy of liberation emerged in Latin America in the late sixties, it has broad implications for the advancement of a planetary humanism. I try to justify this claim in detail in the concluding chapter of this monograph. There I argue that Dussel’s vision of a new age of the world has both universal and pluriversal features. To put this all too briefly, the vision has a *universal* feature because it argues that the will to live and grow in community pertains to all cultures. It is also *pluriversal*, because it fully acknowledges the plurality of

paths available to a diversity of cultures to advance human life. Finally, it is *transmodern*, which means it rejects the myth of modernity while affirming the value of critical science and technology when consistent with advancing human life and protecting the earth's ecosystems.

It is with this multifaceted liberatory project in mind that Dussel rejects both political conservatism and anarchism. Generally, the conservative would warn that attempts to transform the modern capitalist world system (see Wallerstein 2004) could bring about chaos and destruction. The neoliberal version of conservatism generally maintains that even with structural unemployment, growing economic inequality, and cyclical crises, a free market system is the only socio-economic model consistent with human nature, liberty, and ever-increasing utility. For neoliberal true believers, economic history ended in 1989 and there is no other feasible path forward besides models based on "free" markets. Any attempt to build an alternative amounts to tinkering with the possible to pursue the impossible (see Hinkelammert 1984).

The conservative does not take into account that the feared chaos and destruction had already begun centuries ago and still reigns today.<sup>3</sup> For the hundreds of millions who have been marginalized, the calamity is quite evident. There is no apologetic sophisticated enough to convince the victims of the prevailing system this is the best of all possible worlds when the wealth of a handful of billionaires could quickly alleviate extreme poverty on the planet.

Dussel also takes issue with anarchism. At first approximation, the anarchist agrees the status quo is ethically unacceptable, but rejects representative governance as part of the solution because all such representative power tends toward corruption. Hope for a better world can only, on this view, be found in some form of direct participatory democracy. While Dussel does recognize the importance and even priority of building bottom-up direct participatory democracy, he views representative democracy as an indispensable feature of governance in larger populations.

Dussel avoids both the Scylla of neoliberal conservatism and the Charybdis of anarchism. He acknowledges the need for representative forms of governance but with reservations. And he recognizes that while transformation of the prevailing system is ethically imperative, it will inevitably bring imperfect outcomes.

<sup>3</sup>See Hinkelammert's discussion of the anarchist's critique of conservative thought (1984, 109–114).

Dussel argues that the ultimate seat of sovereignty is in constituent power and ought never be surrendered. The delegation of constituent power to public or state institutions, then, is always conditional. The condition placed on constituted power is that it remain obedient to constituent power. Dussel is under no illusion that this middle road can ever be perfect. Since constituted power has the unfortunate tendency of taking itself as the point of reference, it is up to constituents to hold it accountable. Otherwise constituted power will likely betray the interests of constituents.

The transformation of the prevailing system in accord with an ethics of liberation does not aim at replacing one totalizing system of domination with another. Dussel rejects both neoliberal economics as well as so-called real socialism (centralized planning), for in each case constituents become instrumentalized by the system. It would be an error to read the philosophy of liberation as a leftist version of totalitarianism on the one hand or as a compromised political reformism on the other. While Dussel emphasizes the protagonistic role of the victims in leading the way to “a world in which many worlds fit,” (to use a Zapatista expression) such protagonism does not entail a dictatorship of one socio-economic class over others. Dussel’s critique of the totalizing capital system as well as real socialism does not portend a new totalitarian order to replace an old one or an exchange of one dominator with another, but seeks *to overcome the dominator-dominated dialectic entirely*.

The challenge posed by Western instrumental rationality to human life and the earth’s ecosystems is daunting. Economic inequality, racism, militarism, and climate change are taking an ever increasing toll on the majority of humanity, with a greater burden falling on the Global South. According to a 2017 Oxfam report, “since 2015, the richest 1% has owned more wealth than the rest of the planet.”<sup>4</sup> This is an obscene state of affairs. Meanwhile, war, poverty, and other emigration drivers

<sup>4</sup>Oxfam (2017, 2). Oxfam also reports: “Last year saw the biggest increase in billionaires in history, one more every two days. Billionaires saw their wealth increase by \$762bn in 12 months. This huge increase could have ended global extreme poverty seven times over. 82% of all wealth created in the last year went to the top 1%, while the bottom 50% saw no increase at all. Dangerous, poorly paid work for the many is supporting extreme wealth for the few. Women are in the worst work, and almost all the super-rich are men” (2018, 2).

are causing a growing number of refugees to seek shelter in an ever less hospitable world. According to the 2017 *United Nations International Migration Report*, “by the end of 2016, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world was estimated at 25.9 million representing 10.1% of all international migrants.”<sup>5</sup> This refugee crisis, while inspiring limited humanistic generosity in the Global North, has also evoked a dangerous xenophobia and a spike in expressions of white supremacy. In the United States the Trump administration is continuing an aggressive deportation campaign begun, with a liberal facade, under the Obama administration. All of these social maladies are taking place in the context of growing geopolitical conflict. In the 2017 *Doomsday Clock Statement* of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, it is two and a half minutes to midnight, reflecting concern that “over the course of 2016, the global security landscape darkened as the international community failed to come effectively to grips with humanity’s most pressing existential threats, nuclear weapons and climate change.”<sup>6</sup> I am not a pessimist, but there is a sense among progressive forces around the world that time is running out to save the human species as well as address degradation of the earth’s ecosystems.

It is no surprise that Dussel finds the biblical account of Exodus, for both the theology and philosophy of liberation, to be an allegory of the road ahead (Dussel 2003). We are in the desert, called to take a stand on behalf of human life and Mother Earth before it is too late. We know deliverance is not guaranteed and we are often forced to take two steps back before resuming our advance. Yet one thing is for sure. We cannot be discouraged or succumb to nihilism or cynicism without betraying future generations. We envision an alternative horizon of the lifeworld that is not structured by ever expanding and coercive social control. The regulative ideal toward which we strive is perpetual human life. Dussel is not advocating we advance toward an impossible world, but that we strive to make progress toward what is achievable at any given juncture given the conditions with which we are confronted.

It will not be easy to cross the desert. For given the US-NATO pursuit of world hegemony through ever-expanding war, universal

<sup>5</sup>United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017, 7).

<sup>6</sup>Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (2017).

surveillance, and a permanent state of exception, we have already entered a period of necropolitics. As Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe describes it, the central project of some “figures of sovereignty” is “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (2003, 14). Of course, this is not a new phenomenon. We have been here many times before. As Martin Luther King Jr. said in “Beyond Vietnam”:

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin—we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered. (King 1967, 9)

Dussel’s thought suggests, as does King’s, that the giant triplets *can* be overcome, if only we cultivate our native sensibility toward the plight of the Other and realize our co-responsibility for all life on the planet. This would indeed take “a revolution of values.” Are we up to the task?

### THE AIM AND SCOPE OF THIS MONOGRAPH

This monograph takes Dussel’s magnum opus, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (*Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, 1998/2013), as the major point of reference for articulating Dussel’s ethical theory and its implications for a praxis of liberation. Where ideas from other works by Dussel clarify or deepen our understanding of the principles of the ethics, I draw upon them. For example, in his later work, Dussel himself often refers back to the inspired *Filosofía de la liberación* (*Philosophy of Liberation*, 1977/1985), which has undergone some revision since the first Spanish language edition (Dussel 1977/2011). This foundational book still provides, I think, one of the best presentations of the major categories of Dussel’s work: totality and alterity, cosmos, the analectic method, and exteriority. I will make frequent reference to the early but still important *Para una ética de la liberación Latinoamericana* (*Towards an Ethic of Latin American Liberation*), especially Vol. 1 (1973/2014a) and Vol. 2 (1973/2014b), when discussing Dussel’s encounters with the thought



of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. I refer frequently to *14 tesis de ética: Hacia la esencia del pensamiento crítico* (2016) (*Fourteen Theses on Ethics: Towards the Essence of Critical Thinking*), which not only concisely summarizes some of Dussel's previous work in ethics, but elaborates on the distinction between three stages of the liberatory project: ethical critique of the ideology, politics and economics of the prevailing system; the period of transition away from the capital system; and construction of a new nontotalizing socio-economic order. I also make use of Dussel's comprehensive study of the work of Karl Marx, with a special focus on concepts that further develop the material ethical principle and Dussel's understanding of alienation. I refer frequently to Dussel's *Twenty Theses on Politics* (2006/2008) as well as the first two of three volumes on the politics of liberation; these texts are indispensable for an understanding of Dussel's application of ethics in the political field.

Although I have narrowed more detailed discussions of Dussel's encounter with other philosophers to Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Karl Marx, Karl-Otto Apel, and Franz Hinkelammert, I acknowledge the broad range of important encounters Dussel has had with philosophers from a variety of traditions. I focus on these because I believe they mark critical turns or moments of Dussel's thought as it pertains to the ethics of liberation. I acknowledge other figures merit close attention; a work of this brevity inevitably falls short of articulating in any detail all the major influences on Dussel's philosophy.

I have had to toil over the limited scope of this monograph, given the extraordinary breadth and depth of Dussel's work. There are so many interesting themes raised by his ethics worthy of further research. For example, while I provide a brief biography of Dussel, I do not attempt to trace the evolution of his thinking in the detail it deserves, from his earlier publications to more contemporary ones, nor do I compare his theological work to his philosophical work, though I acknowledge the importance of such endeavors. I do not address in any detail the polemics over differences within the philosophy of liberation movement, especially at the time of its commencement in the late sixties and early seventies, a time of political crisis in Argentina. And I do not address the critique of Dussel's interpretation of Levinas, Heidegger and other important influences on this thought, as my focus here is on how Dussel's interpretation of other philosophers impacts the development of his ethics of liberation. Here my aim is limited to unpacking the basic concepts of the ethics and showing how together these concepts clear a

path for a critical ethical perspective, one that affirms the autonomy and dignity of all human beings and Mother Earth in the face of an increasingly totalitarian global capital system.

In an essay introducing basic concepts in Dussel's ethics, "The Development of Human Life in Enrique Dussel's Politics of Liberation," (Mills 2016), I tried to concisely articulate some of the themes elaborated in more detail in this monograph. For example, in this present work, I have addressed the ethics, politics, and economics of liberation in more depth. In my 2016 essay, I had not yet worked out the relation between the analectic experience and the face-to-face encounter with the Other. I also did not address the transition from the dialectical to the ana-dialectical (or analectic) method as it relates to the movement from an ontological to a trans-ontological perspective. I now see more clearly how these transitions are critical to a more complete understanding of the relation between totality and alterity and the development of critical ethical rationality. Although in "The Development of Human Life," I briefly alluded to the debate between Karl-Otto Apel and Enrique Dussel, in this present work I discuss the relation between discourse ethics and the ethics of liberation in more detail. Also, for this monograph, I have benefitted from access to more recent publications by Dussel, especially on the idea of pluriversal transmodernity, which is the topic of the concluding chapter. In the case of the study of such a great philosopher, one is always on the path to discovery.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very much indebted to the ground-breaking work of Michael D. Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationalism in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (1998). Barber's work shows how Dussel's ethical hermeneutics and analectic method, far from leading to a closed totality, calls us to a more critical self-reflection on how we view history, politics, social relations, and economics. Barber's work is still indispensable for anyone engaged in Dussel studies. I am also grateful for the work of other scholars who have cleared a diversity of paths to an understanding of the philosophy of liberation, among them, Linda Martin Alcoff, George Ciccariello-Maher, Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Eduardo Mendieta, Walter D. Mignolo, and Aníbal Quijano.

In the process of writing this monograph, I have been fortunate to be able to attend several conferences sponsored by the Asociación de Filosofía y

Liberación (AFyL) (Philosophy of Liberation Association) where I have met scholars who have been generous enough to critique earlier drafts of this monograph. Thanks to the association, many of Dussel's works are now available online.<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Enrique Dussel for receiving me in his study in January 2018 to discuss some of the central concepts of the ethics and politics of liberation, including Marx's concept of living labor; the theory of knowledge; Dussel's critique of the central themes of discourse ethics; the importance of Jorge Zúñiga's work on a further grounding of the material ethical principle; and the significance of the reflexivity of human life for an understanding of the material principle.

I am very much indebted to Enrique Téllez-Fabiani for very useful comments on an earlier version of the manuscript. Téllez-Fabiani cautioned me against a teleological interpretation of Dussel's concept of the growth of human life. His article (Téllez-Fabiani 2015) on ecological ethics has influenced my emphasis on the ecological feature of the material ethical principle as well as my understanding of critical economics. I have also benefited from email correspondence with Jorge Zúñiga M. and two meetings with him in Mexico City, in January 2018. His critique of my interpretation of Dussel is always constructive. Also, Zúñiga's work on the principle of impossibility (2016, 2017) helped clarify the importance of this principle in providing an additional grounding of the material ethical principle as well as fortifying Dussel's arguments for the inclusion of the material principle as co-foundational with the formal principle. Zúñiga has been very generous in reading the final draft of this monograph and writing the prologue.

I appreciate the suggestions of Don Deere whose work (2013) raises interesting ideas about the meaning and function of human life at the foundation of Dussel's ethics. In the early stages of this project, Jorge Alberto Reyes López referred me to important essays by Dussel on solidarity, the analectic moment, and ontology. I am grateful to Gabriel Salazar for sharing his insights with me on the centrality of the analectic method and the material principle in Dussel's thought. I have made use of his article on "The intersubjective and cultural borders of reason" (2017) in my discussion of the concept of ana-logos in Dussel.

The Salvadoran American writer Mario Bencastro was the first to suggest I write this monograph and has encouraged me throughout

<sup>7</sup><http://www.ifil.org/dussel/html/libros-filosoficos.html>.

the journey. I have benefitted a great deal from dialogue and visits to Venezuela and Bolivia with delegation leader and political analyst, William Camacaro. During these visits and ongoing discussions with Camacaro, I have learned a great deal about eco-socialism as well as social movements in Latin America. My son, Henry Mills, showed loving patience in editing parts of the manuscript. And my beloved wife and *compañera en la lucha*, Evelyn Gonzalez, has encouraged and supported me each step of the way.

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### A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

I translate the titles of publications in Spanish the first time they are mentioned in each chapter. I cite section numbers of sources using brackets after page numbers when available. Unless English language translations are cited, translations from the Spanish are my own. When Dussel cites Marx or other authors, unless the passage is in English, I have translated Dussel's Spanish translation of the original into English. On occasion, I defer to the Spanish for certain key terms after translating them within the text. I translate *ente* as entity and *ser* as being. Since Dussel refers to human life as either *singular* or *comunal*, I use the phrase *singular human life* or *singular human being* instead of *individual human being*. I generally translate the term *subsumir* by the English *to*

*subsume*. In Dussel's later work, the statement of the material principle uses the verbs *crecer* or *aumentar* instead of *desarrollar* so I translate the Spanish accordingly.

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## PROLOGUE

The monograph, *Enrique Dussel's Ethics of Liberation: An Introduction*, that Frederick Mills presents to us, is a document which brings together diverse virtues for those English language speakers interested in one of the most important Latin American philosophers of the twentieth century: Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel.

The wide reach of this philosopher does not limit itself to the philosophical and social frontiers of Latin America, but seeks explicitly to be a global philosophy. Global is not meant here in the sense of globalization promoted and defended ideologically by the representatives of neoliberalism in the United States, England and their agents in Latin America. On the contrary, the global philosophy of Dussel is thought and constructed from the excluded whom neoliberal globalization has abandoned on the road since the decade of the seventies of the past century, the historical moment of transnational implementation of this economic model.

Dussel is one of the Latin American philosophers most translated, discussed, and interpreted in other languages different from Spanish; he is also an interlocutor of Latin American with Western and US philosophies. He is a necessary point of reference for Latin American philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Garcia and Vargas (2018) have indicated, not without reason, that the philosophy of liberation is the Latin American philosophy that has had the most impact outside the Latin American region.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that he belongs to a generation of philosophers<sup>2</sup> and a large Latin American philosophical tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Frederick Mills's book joins the diverse studies in the English language that have been done on the philosophy of Enrique Dussel, many of which are taken into account in the making of this book. It should be mentioned that this monograph is set in a context in which, within the circle of Anglo-American philosophy, there has been a major opening toward Latin American philosophy in recent years and, in particular, toward the philosophy of liberation of Dussel.<sup>4</sup> This environment which has started to be promoted in the United States can be understood in terms of the very close alliance or relation that exists between the philosophy of liberation and decolonial philosophy (cf. Maldonado-Torres 2011).

An achievement of the author, in my judgment, is to introduce the reader to this Latin American philosophy by means of a biographical and historical approach to the Argentine-Mexican philosopher, a theme amply covered in the introduction of this monograph. This form of approximation permits the reader to center and gauge historically the theoretical and practical intentionality of the philosophy studied here. By means of this path, Mills shows the development of Dussel's philosophical concerns since the seventies.

The journey which the author makes, by means of categories relevant to the philosophy of liberation of Dussel, such as totality, exteriority, or the important explanation of the analectic method, is, in the same way, relevant to comprehending the point of departure for understanding the discourse of Dusselian thought. The critique of the Heideggerian ontology cannot be understood without the philosophy of the Other and exteriority of Emmanuel Levinas (cf. Levinas 1977). The critique of

<sup>2</sup>We certainly refer to a generation of the philosophy of liberation and in general a generation of philosophers who endeavored to show the particular features of Latin American philosophy. It was Leopoldo Zea who was a great promoter of this philosophical movement in which Dussel subsequently became included (cf. Solis Bello et al. 2009).

<sup>3</sup>One of the latest works promoted and coordinated by Dussel brought light to the large tradition of philosophical thought in Latin America (cf. Dussel et al. 2009).

<sup>4</sup>Along this line one cannot disregard the effort of professors like Eduardo Mendieta, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Ramón Grosfoguel, among others, who have shown the theoretical and practical potential of the philosophy of Dussel within the circle of Anglo-American philosophy. One ought also to indicate that perhaps for geopolitical reasons, or at least I understand it this way, the opening that exists with regard to Latin American philosophy gets much more attention in the philosophical debates occurring in the United States than those in Europe.

modern-western ontology cannot be understood without the recognition of those excluded by the modern-colonial system; by philosophical decree, the center has denied them their claim to universality. The critique of Eurocentrism cannot be understood without making clear the systematic negation of the projects and ways of being rational that are distinct from modern-western and, presently, Anglocentric ways.

On the other hand, as the author himself points out, his journey through the ethics of liberation of Dussel has as its focus the *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (Dussel 2013<sup>5</sup>). This book by Dussel has an important relevance to understanding the contemporary version of the practical-critical philosophy studied here. It has special significance among the wide-ranging theoretical production of Dussel, as it represents, on the one hand, a regrounding of Dussel's philosophy of liberation, and, on the other, it synthesizes four of the most significant dialogues for Dussel: the dialogue with Apel and Hinkelammert and his interpretation of Marx and Levinas from the Latin American context.

One ought to add the approach that Dussel makes in the said text toward the pragmatic-linguistic philosophy as well as Anglo-American political philosophy, which had been outside the radar of the philosophy of liberation. This approach to Anglo-American pragmatism has relevance in the context of the second ethics (2013), for in this work these philosophies are problematized from a critical and, strictly speaking, Latin American position. In other words: this second version of the ethical-critical philosophy of Dussel also presents a critical interpretation of these Anglo-American philosophies. This aspect of the *Ethics of Liberation* cannot be ignored. For this reason, Frederick Mills takes the reader on a journey through the ethics of Dussel by means of Dussel's second version, centered on a detailed explanation of the practical principles, the realization of which makes the act with a claim to goodness possible.

Even so, Mills's exposition is not limited to this detailed account of the ethics of 1998: the reader also encounters a brief journey through the ethics of 1973,<sup>6</sup> the first version of the ethics of liberation, in order to explain the categories of totality and exteriority in the ethics and their

<sup>5</sup>As Mills clearly indicates, the first Spanish edition of this book was published in 1998 (Dussel 1998).

<sup>6</sup>I allude to the ethics of 1973 in order to refer to the first edition of the ethics of liberation (Argentina: Siglo XXI). The second edition of this first version was published in 1977 (México: Edicol), in Mexico during the exile of Dussel and his family.

subsumption in politics. In this sense, it is important to point out one of the virtues that this book offers: it shows how the ethics, or better said, the ethical principles, are subsumed by the practical fields, such as politics and economics. In this way, one can understand, as the author also shows, how ethics takes on the role of a metaphilosophy that problematizes and reflects in the abstract what unfolds historically in the concrete.

This schema of the relation between the abstract features of ethics and the concrete features of the practical fields can be seen since the ethics of liberation of 73 and it will accompany Dussel's theoretical elaboration to the present day. This relation of ethics to the practical fields notwithstanding, Dussel explicitly states up to his recent *14 tesis de ética* the following words: "ethics is the general theory of every practical field, not having as its own any practical field as such," and continues, "[it is] the theory of the practical or normative of all the practical fields" (Dussel 2016, 19–20).

The introduction that Frederick Mills presents on the practical philosophy of Dussel strives, with success, to show Dussel's schema. What one can encounter in the ethics of liberation is nothing more than the entranceway to the problematic at which Dussel wants to arrive: the problematization of a critical politics transformative of the hegemonic political system and of the exclusion imposed by the fetishized economic system. For this reason, a problematization and study of the Dusselian ethics of liberation cannot be accomplished without regard for the subsumption of the ethical principles in the practical fields. This is something very well understood by Frederick Mills, and explained, in my judgment, successfully.<sup>7</sup>

Mills's monograph reveals a profound enthusiasm for introducing the philosophy of liberation to specialists in practical philosophy and students of philosophy that may be interested in practical philosophy and Latin American philosophy. This enthusiasm is reflected clearly in the knowledge this author has of the different aspects of the subject that he deals with. To achieve this he has always gone beyond the comprehension and

<sup>7</sup>Mills's text also shows a concern for the reflections of Dussel about economic relations, especially in relation to humankind and nature, using the frequent expressions mother earth, ecosystems, and biosphere. In this way the interpretation of the author places Dusselian discourse in the context of the contemporary debate over the ecological crisis, an emergency which the inner necessity of capital to increase the rate of profit has imposed on the population of the world.

interpretation of the texts being studied; as he himself conveys in various part of his text, he sought and found a permanent dialogue with scholars very much involved with the philosophy of liberation and with Enrique Dussel himself. These encounters enabled the author to breathe in—from sources close to the philosophy of liberation, or at least some of them—the meaning and the theoretical and practical intentionality of this philosophy.

One is able to see the fruits of this exercise in continuous dialogue in the final result of this book. In different parts, the author himself on occasion briefly indicates very recent themes and problematics with which the philosophy of liberation is now occupied. A pair of examples of this type are the references to *14 tesis de ética* (2016), a text that has only recently appeared and in which Dussel begins to prefigure an extension of his explanation of the transformation of practical systems in terms of the discernment of three moments of the processes of liberation. Mills also includes a discussion of another theme of recent appearance in the debates within the philosophy of liberation, one that, in a sense, goes to the root of the debate with discourse ethics and transcendental-pragmatics: the grounding of the material principle and the formulation of the principle of impossibility of the living subject and nature (cf. Dussel 2018; Zuniga 2017<sup>8</sup>).

As already mentioned, but worth highlighting, the text presented to us by Frederick Mills fulfills the necessary elements to be considered with time as an obligatory point of reference for future studies of the

<sup>8</sup>I will not elaborate on this theme that is the subject of recent study and which has important relevance to the third volume of the politics of liberation that is now being prepared, since Frederick Mills has already dedicated an important space to it within the parameters of his exposition to the formulation of the material principle in Dussel. Nevertheless, one has to briefly mention that the relevance of *the principle of impossibility of the living subject and nature* and the theme of grounding the material principle can be assessed in the best way if one considers the challenge posed by Karl-Otto Apel to the philosophy of liberation. Apel posed a challenge to the philosophy of liberation to show an indubitable point of departure, or, as Apel would say, show presuppositions that, having been affirmed in the pragmatic act of argumentation, in the case of the pragmatic-transcendental, are affirmed as truths. This context puts into perspective in the best form the intentionality of the principle of impossibility of the living subject and nature and the function that it performs within the critical philosophy and the philosophy of liberation. At the same time, what one is speaking about here is to show objectively intuitive certainties, as Apel would say, or better, as Kant would say, pure intuitions.

philosophy of liberation in the English language. Mills presents us with a journey, clear and well synthesized, of the philosophy of liberation which joins the studies and reflections that have been realized over the last decades in the English language, coming principally from the Anglo-American philosophical circle. This text thus offers the reader an up to date synthesis of the philosophy of liberation of Enrique Dussel, a philosopher that has already entered the pages of the general history of philosophy.

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March 2018

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## Introduction: The Path to Liberation

When I took office one year ago, I appealed for 2017 to be a year for peace. Unfortunately - in fundamental ways, the world has gone in reverse. On New Year's Day 2018, I am not issuing an appeal. I am issuing an alert - a red alert for our world. Conflicts have deepened and new dangers have emerged. Global anxieties about nuclear weapons are the highest since the Cold War. Climate change is moving faster than we are. Inequalities are growing. We see horrific violations of human rights. Nationalism and xenophobia are on the rise. As we begin 2018, I call for unity. I truly believe we can make our world more safe and secure. We can settle conflicts, overcome hatred and defend shared values. (Excerpt from the New Year's Message of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, December 31, 2017)

In *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (1998/2013), Dussel declares "My ultimate intention is to justify the struggle of victims, of the oppressed, for their liberation" (1998/2013, 56 [57]). In the chapters that follow, I attempt to articulate how Dussel justifies the struggle for liberation by: (a) explaining the main categories of the philosophy of liberation; (b) describing the analectic method; (c) articulating in detail the ethical principles; and (d) showing how these principles are subsumed in the political and economic fields. The monograph concludes with a discussion of the planetary humanism advanced by the ethics of liberation and its relevance for everyday praxis. This introductory section will summarize the content of each chapter and provide a brief biography of Enrique Dussel.

## SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 2, on totality and alterity, defines the two major categories of Dussel's ontology and metaphysics. It is here that we pay close attention to Dussel's critical encounter with the works of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. At first approximation, totality refers to the everyday lifeworld and horizon of comprehension within which we make sense of our lived experience. Since this is an ethics that affirms human life, Dussel is particularly interested in the impact on human life of Western instrumental rationality. For this totalizing ideology justifies European (and later US-NATO) domination of subalternized peoples, a capital system that generates millions of victims, and use of the biosphere as if it were an unlimited resource. The uncritical consciousness generally takes this ideology and the capital system for granted, as though it were natural and inevitable there be those who dominate and those who are dominated. Insofar as one is autonomous and not a mere cog within a totality, however, there is always a possibility that one may awaken from such naivete and call the totalizing system and its institutions and practices into question. Such critical transcendence of the lifeworld is a necessary condition for principled dissent and opens a breach within the totalizing system. This breach constitutes an *exterior* to the system, the space of *alterity* from which the victims, and their allies, as autonomous self-conscious beings, may call into question the totality and become protagonists of a liberatory project *within* the lifeworld. Chapter 2 will discuss in detail the anatomy of the interface between totality and alterity and the concrete expression of this interface in the relationship between modernity and subalternized peoples.

In Chapter 3, on the analectic method, we trace the transition from everyday naive involvement in the world to critical ethical consciousness. We also discuss the impact of Levinas's work on Dussel's account of the key moment of this transition: the experience of the face-to-face encounter with victims of the prevailing system whom Dussel refers to as the Other. This experience provides an occasion for us to open ourselves to the revelation of the oppressed Other and thereby see more and more clearly those structural features of the prevailing system that cause the Other's suffering. At the same time, we also become increasingly aware of our own co-responsibility to critique and ultimately transform the unjust socio-economic order.

In Chapter 4, we discuss three fundamental ethical principles that will provide the compass for the exodic path of victims and their allies out from subjugation, through a period of deconstruction and transformation of the prevailing system, and toward liberation. First, the material ethical principle: we ought to ensure the production, reproduction, and growth of human life in community and in harmony with the earth's ecosystems. Second, the formal principle: the material principle ought to be pursued through democratic symmetrical deliberative procedures in which all those who may be impacted by any decisions are included. And third, the feasibility principle: whatever we endeavor, in accord with the first two principles, ought to be achievable, given our understanding of the conditions with which we are presently confronted. As we will see in some detail, these three principles mutually condition each other and are subsumed as norms within the political and economic fields.

In Chapter 5, on the ethical dimension of politics, we articulate the subsumption of the ethical principles into norms of critical political rationality. When constituted power of the state and other institutions become corrupt and are no longer obedient to constituents, constituents face the challenge of recuperating their sovereignty and restoring democratic governance. We will examine in detail Dussel's account of how a politics of liberation engages in struggle to transform corrupt forms of governance into ones that answer obediently to democratic expressions of constituent power.

In Chapter 6, on the ethical dimension of economics, we turn to Dussel's detailed study of the work of Karl Marx. Dussel interprets Marxism as an ethics of liberation which deploys an analectic method. Dussel argues that living labor, for Marx, retains a certain exeriority to the economic system despite being exploited by capital for private gain. In particular, we focus on alienation of living labor in the form of labor power subsumed by capital. We also discuss the theory of surplus value and how bourgeois economics mystifies capital accumulation as though capital created value out of nothing when in reality this value comes in large part from unpaid (surplus) labor time. We show how, for Dussel, the ethical principles are subsumed as norms of the struggle to overcome the alienation of labor as well as the degradation of the biosphere. The economics of liberation seeks to create an egalitarian economic alternative to capitalism in which production, distribution and disposal of excess value of commodities is communally controlled by freely associated workers.

We will conclude this monograph by discussing the South-South as well as North-South intercultural philosophical dialogue, inspired by the decolonizing efforts of a diversity of liberatory projects. To this end we will examine the idea of a planetary humanism aimed at building a pluriversal transmodern world, a world in which all peoples can live and grow in community, with mutual respect for cultural diversity, and in harmony with Mother Earth.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Enrique Dussel was born in La Paz, a department in the northeast province of Mendoza, Argentina, on December 24, 1934. In a short but essential autobiography published in 1998, “Proceso de análisis e investigación,” (“Process of Analysis and Investigation”), Dussel relates that “La Paz was a poor town. It consisted of just a few blocks of dusty streets. The shacks of the peasants, destitute, gave me forever the experience of the suffering, of the misery, of the difficulty of the people” (1998, 14). During his youth, Dussel engaged in community service as a member of *Acción Católica*, and later became a cofounder of the University Federation of the West (la Federación Universitaria del Oeste - la FUIO), and president of The Center of Philosophy and Letters (El Centro de Filosofía y Letras - CEFYL) (15). In 1954, Dussel was arrested along with other student movement leaders for anti-Perón activism. It was, he said, “a time of accelerated formation of a practical, social, political, and intellectual personality” (15). Dussel views his intellectual journey in the years that followed as a pilgrimage to understand Latin American culture, history, and philosophy (Dussel 1983, 11).

Dussel earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in philosophy at Universidad Nacional del Cuyo (Mendoza, Argentina) in 1957. The traditional curriculum, which emphasized classical Greek and Latin, as well as modern and contemporary Western philosophy, prepared him for graduate studies at Universidad Complutense in Madrid, where, by means of a scholarship, he was able to earn his doctorate in philosophy in 1959. It was during his voyage across the Atlantic in 1957 that he experienced the “existential anxiety” over the unanswered question of his Latin American identity (Dussel 2015, 258). In Madrid, Dussel had the opportunity to engage with students from all over Latin America and this experience, along with his studies and encounters in other parts of Europe, gave him a deeper, more critical perspective of Latin America:

“I discovered Latin America, paradoxically, in Europe, more exactly in Madrid, when being with colleagues from all of the countries of our socio-cultural continent ... I began to be aware of the reality of our Patria Grande” (Dussel, as cited by Marquinez, 1979/1995, 14).<sup>1</sup>

After completing his doctorate, Dussel set out for what he called “a pilgrimage to find origins” which took him to the Middle East—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and finally Israel. In Israel, Dussel spent two years working as a carpenter in Nazareth “in order to discover in the *ethos* of the man of the desert, the ancestors of the Spanish, of the criollo, of my Latin America, the horizon ever present in my Mediterranean experience” (Dussel 1983, 10). It was during this time Dussel drew closer to an understanding of the experience of the poor and excluded. “I discovered in the man of the desert the prophet, the critic of our consumerist society” (10). While working in Nazareth, Dussel had a memorable conversation with French Priest Paul Gauthier:

Telling him [Gauthier] the history of Latin America on one of those cool nights in our poor shack of the construction cooperative made for Arab workers who built their own houses in Nazareth, I became excited about Pizarro who conquered the Incan empire with a few men. Gauthier, looking me in the eyes, asked: Who were on that occasion the poor, Pizarro or the Indians? That night, with only a candle for light, I wrote my friend, the Mendocino historian, Esteban Fontana, “Someday we ought to write the History of Latin America from the other side, from below, from the oppressed, from the poor!” It was 1959, before many other experiences. This was the “original experience” that buttressed the entire future epistemological or hermeneutic transformation. (Dussel 1998, 17)

As philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres points out, in this conversation with Gauthier, “Dussel realized that he had yet to understand Latin America from the point of view of its underside” (2008, 192). But now the doors to a decolonized view of his own identity as well as Latin American history had been opened. “It was necessary,” recalls Dussel, “from its [Latin America’s] poverty, to encounter a place in World History, to find its hidden being, to reconstruct history in another way to ‘find our place’” (Dussel 1998, 18).

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of Dussel’s European trip, see Maldonado-Torres (2008, 190–192).

When Dussel returned to Europe (1961–1966), and viewed the monuments and sacred places of Greece, he realized how much his perspective had changed on the question of how to understand Latin American philosophy and culture. In 1961 Dussel completed *El humanismo helénico* (*Hellenic Humanism*), published in 1976, followed by *El humanismo Semita* (*Semitic Humanism*), published in 1969, and *El dualismo en la antropología de la Cristiandad* (*Dualism in the Anthropology of Christianity*), published in 1974. He found that Semitic culture was, in some ways, more relevant to Latin American experience than early Greek culture. For example, the former held out the possibility of emancipation from slavery, while the latter generally glorified the culture of the Greek aristocracy, and in some cases theoretically justified slavery (most notably, Aristotle).<sup>2</sup> For Dussel, the mythology of Exodus provides an allegory for both the theology and philosophy of liberation (Dussel 2016, 130–131 [10.02–10.03]).

In 1963, during his first trip to Germany, Dussel met his future wife Johannah Peters, whom he married in Germany in 1964. In 1965, Dussel earned a Bachelor in Theology degree at Institut Catholique of Paris and Muenster University. In 1965 their son Enrique was born in Paris and in 1967 their daughter Susanne Christian was born in Maguncia. In 1967 Dussel earned his doctorate in history at the Sorbonne.<sup>3</sup>

In 1966, Dussel obtained a scholarship to study in Mexico to work with Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea, but he chose to return to Argentina to accept a position (1966–1968) as professor of ethics at Universidad Nacional de Nordeste, Resistencia (Chaco, Argentina). Here we should give some context to his return. It was a time of economic crisis and political upheaval in Argentina, and for a group of

<sup>2</sup>For a more in depth discussion and critique of Dussel's early views of Latin American identity and history, see Maldonado-Torres (2008, 189–194).

<sup>3</sup>Dussel, while pursuing his doctorate degree in history at the Sorbonne, spent three summers studying at the Archives of the Indies in Seville, pouring through thousands of documents, to conduct research for his doctoral thesis on *Latin American Bishops as Defenders and Evangelizers of the Indians, 1504–1620*, originally written in French. Dussel addresses a similar theme in several works, including *The Invention of the Americas* (1992/1995), in which Bartolomé de Las Casas's (1484–1566) defense of the Amerindians at the hands of the conquistadors is described as among the first counter-narratives, though only partial, of early modernity (69–72); see Hanke (1974), for a discussion of the debate between Juan Gines de Sepulveda and Bartolomé de Las Casas.

Argentine intellectuals, including Dussel, a time to reexamine the direction of philosophical inquiry in Latin America, a project that was by then well underway in Mexico and other countries in the region. Dussel had returned to Argentina in August 1966 on the heels of a military coup on June 28, 1966 that brought General Juan Carlos Onganía to power. Onganía's wave of repression included an assault on the University of Buenos Aires in July 1966 in what became known as the Night of the Long Truncheons. As the repression intensified, critical ethical writing and lecturing had become an increasingly dangerous enterprise.

Dussel describes the dominant trends in philosophy at Universities in Argentina in the late sixties: "At first everything was phenomenology: from Max Scheler to Merleau Ponty, Ricoeur, Husserl, and Heidegger. In Argentina the Heideggerian tradition had grown a great deal. Nothing of Latin American thought. The task, slow coming, difficult, obscure. Europeanism had established itself in our national thought" (1983, 12).<sup>4</sup> Dussel's comments here are not a wholesale rejection of the Western philosophical tradition, but a realization that this tradition does not constitute a universal philosophy. Dussel engages with this tradition, from a perspective which exposes the Eurocentric myth of modernity while critically appropriating ideas relevant to the conceptual scaffolding of the philosophy of liberation.

From 1968 to 1975, Dussel held an appointment as professor of ethics in the department of philosophy at Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (Mendoza, Argentina). One of Dussel's major concerns during this period was articulating the "asymmetric confrontation" between European modernity and the Amerindian world, that is, the destruction of the Amerindian world during the conquest and continuing domination of the latter by the former. In 1969, Dussel worked some of his lectures on ethics into *Para una destrucción de la historia de la ética* (1973) (*Towards the Destruction of the History of Ethics*). This work includes studies of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, and Max Scheler. Dussel's intention was not to limit ethical theory to the relativity of particular cultures, but to clear a path for a transcultural approach to ethics based on the dignity of *all* human life on the planet.

It was during this same period that Dussel engaged in interdisciplinary discussions about dependency theory. In the late sixties dependency theory had inspired a generation of Latin American intellectuals to call into

<sup>4</sup>On the question of advancing a Latin American philosophy, see Salazar Bondy (1968), Zea (1969), and Mignolo (2003).

question hegemonic views of the theory of economic development that interpreted underdevelopment of nations in the periphery of the world system as a symptom of their backwardness in comparison to the United States and Europe (the developed center). “This [dependency] theory,” remarked Dussel, “indicates the economic asymmetry Center-Periphery, the domination by the North that conditions the underdevelopment of the South” (Dussel 1998, 20).

Already in 1968, and even more in 1969, one began to speak about the doctrine of dependency. In interdisciplinary meetings with sociologists and economists, we began to discover the necessity of gaining the independence of philosophy in Latin America. In 1969, in discussions with sociologists in Buenos Aires, I saw in a profoundly critical way my basic philosophical options. There emerged the idea: Why not a philosophy of liberation? Did not Fals Borda speak of a “sociology of liberation”? What would be the assumptions of such a philosophy? (Dussel 1983, 12)

The philosophers who would give form to a number of different approaches to a Latin American philosophy of liberation in the coming years did not always share the same political or ideological commitments or interpret the currents within the philosophy of liberation in the same way.<sup>5</sup> And although most currents within this movement sought to decolonize the academy of its Eurocentric epistemology, philosophy and historiography, they nevertheless maintained a critical dialogue with the Western philosophical tradition.

For Dussel, the encounter with the work of German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, especially *Being and Time* (1927/1962), provided partial but nevertheless important conceptual tools for thinking through some basic categories of the philosophy of liberation. For example, Dussel made use of Heidegger’s ideas about everyday skillful, yet unreflective involvement of human beings in the lifeworld. These everyday dealings are the basis of possible subsequent explicit critical reflection on these involvements.

Dussel argues that Heidegger’s existential ontology, by lacking a more developed notion of alterity, falls short of critical ethical transcendence

<sup>5</sup>For Dussel’s detailed account of “An Argentine Political Decade (1966–76) and the Origin of Liberation Philosophy,” see Dussel (2007/2011c, 498–520). Dussel addresses several of the criticisms of Cerutti-Guldberg (1983/2006) about various tendencies within philosophy of liberation and their relation to the politics of the time in Argentina.



of the prevailing system. Moreover, Dussel did not find in Heidegger's thought a sufficiently robust concept of community to anchor intuitions about ethics and human communality. On the contrary, Dussel saw Heidegger's ontology as lacking any solid basis for an ethics. He also viewed Heidegger's Nazi commitments as a moral failure to question and condemn the ideology of national socialism in Germany. What was needed was a concept of alterity and an ana-dialectical method by means of which we could make sense of our original bond with, and responsibility for, other human beings.

Dussel worked out some of the major categories of his ethics (totality, alterity, and the analectic moment) in five volumes of *Para una ética de la liberación Latinoamericana (Towards an Ethic of Latin American Liberation)*, written from 1970 to 1975. In volume 1 of this series, Dussel posed the question of the possibility of transcending the hegemonic totality of sense in the clearest terms: "Is it possible to escape the trap of 'the Same'? Are we able to think the ontological difference of being and the entity from beyond 'the Same'?" (1973/2014c, 97). Dussel answers: "The overcoming of Heidegger posits, exactly, thinking of 'the Other'" (119). This thinking of 'the Other' from beyond 'the Same' is based on a relationship to other persons that is not exhaustively defined in terms of their functions *within* the prevailing socio-economic system. It is defined rather, by our common participation in a community of human life. But how do we conceptualize this common participation?

It was the work of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas that Dussel says "woke me up from my ontological slumber" marking a critical turning point in the project of developing a philosophy of liberation. "This book of the first and greatest of the French phenomenologists ... enabled me to find, from the Heideggerian phenomenology and ontology, the way to overcome them. The 'exteriority of the other,' the poor, is always encountered beyond being" (1983, 13).<sup>6</sup> *Totality and Infinity*:

<sup>6</sup>I follow Barber (1998) and other Dussel scholars in taking this Levinasian turn as being a critical moment for the manner in which Dussel anchors the critique of the totalizing system in the exteriority of the Other. "Once Dussel underwent his conversion to Levinas's thought," writes Barber, "such 'Catholocentric' and 'ethnocentric' judgments cease to appear, and he focuses his efforts instead on an unmasking of false universalistic claims, such as these of his earliest period" (57–58). For a critique of Dussel's interpretation of Levinas, see Maldonado-Torres (2008).

*An Essay on Exteriority* (1961/1969), as well as other texts by Levinas, inspired Dussel's use of the idea of alterity as the underside of totality, that is, the point of view and lived experience of the excluded Other. The term *exteriority* does not refer to a physical or spatial exterior to everyday lived experience. It refers to the interiority or subjectivity by means of which we are able to transcend the totalizing system and, given the right conditions, take a critical perspective on the lifeworld and even engage in a praxis to transform it into a more just socio-economic order.<sup>7</sup>

Levinas's work had been informed by his own lived experience as a victim of the Jewish Holocaust. Dussel, however, would apply the idea of alterity to all oppressed peoples. "In 1972," recalls Dussel in an essay on Levinas:

In Louvain, I brought a group of students together to talk with Levinas. I asked: "What about the fifteen million Indians slaughtered during the conquest of Latin America, and the thirteen million Africans who were made slaves, aren't they the other you're speaking about?" Lévinas stared at me and said: "That's something for you to think about." (1999, 125–126)

While not denying the universality of Levinasian insight into the face-to-face encounter with the Other, Dussel explicitly extended the concept 'Other' to victims of European colonization and, more broadly, to all oppressed peoples. "The *originary experience* of the philosophy of liberation consists in discovering the massive 'fact' of domination, of the constitution of one subjectivity as 'master' of another subjectivity." The victims of the prevailing system, the Other, "the oppressed, tortured, destroyed in his or her suffering corporeality simply screams, demanding justice: I am hungry! Don't kill me! Have compassion for me!" (Dussel 1993, 141–142). While Dussel credits Levinas with having marked out the space of exteriority and the basic phenomenology of the face-to-face encounter with the Other who is victimized by the totalizing system, Dussel emphasized the importance of moving beyond these Levinasian insights to the theory and praxis of liberation.

The ideas brewing in these texts as well as intense discussions about liberation philosophy in the academy must have been conducive to

<sup>7</sup>A caution is in order here. There is no metaphysical dualism in Dussel. Although we are able to transcend the lifeworld from a critical perspective of alterity, we remain lived bodies within the lifeworld. Furthermore, this transcendence is itself an expression of life and never a mere abstraction.

critical thinking about politics in Argentina during the seventies. Indeed, in 1972, with the imminent return of Peronism, Dussel considered at the time that the incipient philosophy of liberation provided valuable conceptual tools for the popular sectors: “Our thought was connected with the actual, historic, active popular process. We had a new experience. Perhaps never before had philosophy in Argentina been able to address itself in a direct, comprehensible, and useful manner to the grassroots political militant” (1983, 15). The study and dissemination of the philosophy of liberation, and of Dussel’s version in particular would soon be seen as a subversive activity by an increasingly repressive right-wing government in Argentina.

To summarize in just a few words a very complicated political situation in Argentina in the late sixties to late seventies, as civil unrest intensified at the end of May 1969, there was an uprising in the city of Córdoba (the *Cordobazo*). President Juan Carlos Onganía was ousted in 1970 by a military Junta. This was followed by another coup by the commander of the armed forces, General Alejandro Agustín Lanusse in March 1971. In March 1973, the Peronistas won in national elections, and after the brief Presidency of Peronista, Héctor José Cámpora, who assumed office in May of that year, Juan Domingo Perón, having returned from exile, was elected President in a special election on September 23 for the third time. Upon Juan Perón’s death in 1974, his wife, Isabel Martínez de Perón became President in July 1974, only to be deposed by the military in March 1976, by a coup that brought a military junta led by General Jorge Videla to power. Thus commenced a brutal dictatorship and one of the darkest periods of Argentine history known as the ‘dirty war’.

In the midst of these turbulent events in Argentina during the 70’s, Dussel published several books on ethics, including: *Para una de-structión de la historia de la ética* (1973), five volumes of *Para una ética de liberación latinoamericana* (1973–1980), and with coauthor Daniel E. Guillot, *Liberación Latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas* (1975) (*Latin American Liberation and Emmanuel Levinas*). Dussel and other faculty and students at Universities in Argentina, however, ran the risk of arrest or assassination for expressing dissident views (Dussel 1998, 15). Giving voice to a critical ethical philosophy was indeed risky. On October 2, 1973, in an attempt on the life of Dussel and his family, the Commando Rucci, an extreme right group, set off a bomb which destroyed half of Dussel’s home in Mendoza.

The next day, among the books lying dispersed on the ground in the debris of my library, I took the *Apology of Socrates* and gave my class before the students, explaining why, when philosophy is critical, it can be expected to be persecuted as was the case of Socrates. We had left behind academicism and committed ourselves to the history of universal philosophy as critique, as struggle, as dangerous and risky. (Dussel 1983, 15)

After a trip to Europe (December 1974–March 1975), Dussel returned to a situation of escalating repression against intellectuals and activists. On March 31, Dussel was among 17 of 32 colleagues in the Department of Philosophy expelled from the University of Mendoza (Dussel 2011c, 517). On August 15, 1975, Dussel and his family left Argentina for exile in Mexico. Soon after, the military government shut-down the journal, *Revista de Filosofía Latinoamericana* (*Journal of Latin American Philosophy*, Buenos Aires) of which Dussel was a cofounder, and some of his books were censored.

In 1975, Dussel was appointed professor of ethics at Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa (UAM-Iz.), and in 1976 was also appointed to teach at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM, Mexico City) in the Faculty of Philosophy. It was during this time that Dussel went to work synthesizing his approach to ontology, metaphysics, and ethics and also began a detailed study of Karl Marx.

In 1977, Dussel published the foundational *Filosofía de la liberación*.<sup>8</sup> This inspired work, which had been written without the benefit of his library, marked another turning point in the development of his thought. It was in this seminal work that Dussel clearly brought together and further developed major concepts of his philosophy, such as totality and alterity, as well as the analectic method, ideas he had been developing since the early seventies and today remain the center of gravity of his philosophy.

During the 1980s, Dussel's work, especially with regard to the development of the material ethical principle, was influenced by a comprehensive study and reinterpretation of Marx. "For the task of a radical reconstruction of the thought of Marx," says Dussel, "it was necessary, in place of studying the European commentaries of our author, to set

<sup>8</sup>I generally refer to the English language translation, *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977/2011b), except where I cite passages that are in later editions of the original Spanish and are not included in the 2011 English translation or I offer a new translation of a specific passage.

oneself to the patient task of re-reading entirely, from the situation of Latin American ‘dependency’ ... the entire theoretical part of the production of Marx himself” (1998, 24). What emerged from this project was an “anthropological, ethical and anti-materialist” interpretation of Marx (25).

Dussel’s study of the trajectory of Marx’s thought led to publication of several works on Marx’s intellectual journey from the early manuscripts to the last version of *Capital*. These works include: *Capital: La producción teórica de Marx: Un comentario a los Grundrisse* (1985) (*The Theoretical Production of Marx: A Commentary on the Grundrisse*); *Hacia un Marx desconocido. Un comentario de los Manuscritos del 61-63* (1988/2008a) (*Towards an Unknown Marx. A Commentary on the Manuscripts of 61-63*); *El último Marx (1863–1882) y la liberación Latinoamericana* (1990/2014b) (*The Last Marx (1863–1882) and Latin American Liberation*); *16 tesis de economía política: Interpretación filosófica* (2014a) (*16 Theses on Political Economy: Philosophical Interpretation*); and *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx* (1993/2017) (*Theological Metaphors of Marx*). In these works, Dussel gives great importance to Marx’s critique of Hegel’s idea of the absolute spirit; Marx’s theory of alienation; the concept of living labor versus labor power; the theory of surplus value; and the critique of theology.<sup>9</sup> Dussel’s interpretation of Marxism as an ethics of liberation helped shape Dussel’s ideas about the material principle in *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (1998) (*Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* [1998/2013]) as well as his work in the politics and economics of liberation.

<sup>9</sup>In 2017, Dussel had *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx* republished with a new preface that emphasized the continued relevance of this work for both Marx and theological studies. Dussel argues that the theology of a form of Christianity in accord with the capital system “inverts” the messianism of the first Christians and that Marx “continuously” makes this case as a feature of his critique of political economy. “Marx endeavors to suggest a *critique of theology* that enables Christians ... to situate themselves *contradictorily* in relation to capitalism. To this end he [Marx] continuously uses theological metaphors: he lays out the theoretical path for the believer to discover the contradiction of the original critical Christian religion (if it is authentic and inverts the inversion of Christianity) with capitalism, [an endeavor] made possible by defetishizing economic science, but also simultaneously suggesting a *critical reinterpretation* of theology ...” (2017, 10–11). The economic science Dussel refers to here maintains that capital is self-expanding and therefore such science covers over the source of value, namely, living labor.

In the late 1980s Dussel began what would develop into an enduring and intellectually productive debate with the discourse ethics of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas.<sup>10</sup> Apel's discourse ethics posed a challenge to the inclusion of the material principle as part of the foundation of ethics. At the same time, Dussel acknowledged the importance of insights offered by discourse ethics with regard to providing a foundation for the formal ethical principle.

In 1989 Dussel entered into a discussion with Apel in Freiburg, Germany as part of a seminar for fifty professors. Dussel recounts how he raised a question about the ethical status of a real communication community which attained consensus through symmetrical relationships between participants but left out an excluded Other, such as the Amerindians who were excluded from the discussion of the Spanish conquistadors. Dussel argued that in addition to the formal principle that addresses the conditions which make a communication community possible, there must also be a material principle which expresses the imperative that all those who would be impacted by deliberations have a symmetrical voice at the table.<sup>11</sup> Anyone who does not have the basic material conditions of life to meet vital needs will obviously not be able to benefit from the formal conditions that make a communication community possible; they will likely not even be at the table. This material principle, argued Dussel, should also inform the content of deliberation to ensure real communication communities promote the material conditions for the production, reproduction, and growth of all human life in community.

One can see the impact of both Dussel's study of Marx and his debate with Apel on Dussel's formulation of the ethical principles. Dussel took a great leap forward in the development of his ethics with the publication of *Ethics of Liberation*. This book was begun in 1993. The first Spanish edition was published in 1998 and the English version was published in 2013. The introductory chapter presents a critical history that culminates in an account of the world system that first took shape with "modern" Spain of the sixteenth century. This chapter continues the work of debunking the myth of modernity that Dussel had covered in *The invention*

<sup>10</sup>While Dussel's dialogue with the thought of Jürgen Habermas is also important, I limit the discussion to Dussel's encounter with Apel.

<sup>11</sup>Dussel discusses the relation between the thought of Marx and Apel and the importance of the material principle in an autobiographical video (García-Agundis 2015, 1h 22 min–1h 23 min).

of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the myth of modernity (Dussel 1992/1995). Part one of *Ethics of Liberation* articulates the foundation of critical ethical reason, including the analectic method and the material, formal, and feasibility principles. Part two applies these principles to a critique of the prevailing system and establishes the basic framework for the praxis of liberation. Since the completion of *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel has continued to refine the statement of the ethical principles as well as the analectic method. For example, the recent *14 Tesis de la ética* (2016) (*Fourteen Theses on Ethics*) expands the treatment of the exodic stages of liberation and more clearly distinguishes between the abstract definition of the ethical principles and their practical subsumption as norms in the various practical fields.<sup>12</sup> It also provides an eloquent illustration of the face-to-face encounter using the example of a Bedouin who offers hospitality to a stranger in the desert.

Since the publication of his magnum opus in 1998, Dussel has also continued the project of developing a politics, economics, and aesthetics of liberation. These publications include: *Hacia una filosofía política crítica* (2001) (*Towards a Critical Political Philosophy*); a short introduction to the basic concepts of a politics of liberation, *20 Tesis de Política* (2006) (*Twenty Theses on Politics* [2006/2008b]); *Materiales para una política de la liberación* (2007b) (*Materials for a politics of liberation*); followed by two volumes: *Política de la liberación. Historia mundial y crítica* (2007a) (*Politics of Liberation: A critical world history* [2007/2011c]) and *Política de la liberación. Volumen II, arquitectónica* (2009) (*Politics of Liberation. Volume II, Architectonic*). I believe we also ought to include *Carta a los indignados* (2011a) (*Letter to the Indignant*) among Dussel’s other important post-1998 works on political philosophy.

<sup>12</sup>Dussel explains the term *subsumption* in *16 tesis de la economía política: Interpretación filosófica* (*Sixteen Theses on Political Economy: Philosophical Interpretation*) (2014a). In a Kantian and Hegelian sense, something is subsumed when “its abstract universality is *negated* and it is redefined or *affirmed* in its new particularity. Metaphorically we can say that the bread, upon being eaten is *negated* as bread and is *transformed* or *affirmed* as a moment of the same corporeality that has digested it (subsumption of the bread in the living corporeality). The bread, metaphorically, would be the ethical principle, and the living corporeality the normative principle in the economic field” (202, note 40). It should also be noted that for Dussel, subsumption can also be used in the sense of alienation, such as the case of the subsumption of living labor (as labor power) by capital as an “internal determination” of capital (Dussel 2001, 148, note 9).

Dussel, in collaboration with students and colleagues, has been engaged throughout his career in advancing the project of *decolonizing epistemology* as a means of developing critical sciences and revalorizing suppressed cultures. One concrete effort toward this end was the publication of an edited collection of essays, *El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano, del Caribe y "latino" (1300–2000)* (Dussel et al. 2011) (*Latin American Philosophical Thought of the Caribbean and "Latino" (1300–2000)*), a 1111 page comprehensive survey of the philosophical history, traditions, and themes of the region covering a period of eight centuries. Also to this end, Dussel helped organize a South-South philosophical dialogue in July 2012 in Marrakech, Morocco. This launched a dialogue among Hindu, Bantu, Chinese, Islamic, Latin American, and other traditions. Having set an agenda that includes discussions about transmodernity, pluriversality and decolonization, this South-South dialogue has also led to North-South encounters, including the recent First International Congress of the Association of Philosophy of Liberation on Post-globalization, Decolonization, and Transmodernity, in September 2017 (Ciudad Juarez).

Dussel's voluminous contributions to the project of decolonization and liberation, his dedicated teaching and public discussions, as well as his efforts at promoting intercultural dialogue are important contributions to the efforts of progressive forces around the world to reverse the irrational march toward collective suicide and realize instead a world in which "many worlds fit." At this writing Dussel is completing a number of new works, including an essay on the aesthetics of liberation as well as a third volume on the politics of liberation.

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## Totality and Alterity

What enables one to situate oneself from the standpoint of the *alterity* of the system, in the world of everyday life of prescientific common sense, but without ethical complicity, is the ability to adopt the perspective of the *victims* of a given ethical system. Such *victims* ... stand out in plain view in any system from the vantage point of a critical-ethical consciousness. For a consciousness that is complicit with the system, the victims are a necessary, inevitable moment, a functional or “natural” aspect—like the slaves of Aristotle’s *polis* or the “least favored” in socioeconomic terms in Rawls’s second principle. (Dussel 1998/2013, 207 [205])

### OVERVIEW

Totality and alterity are categories that frame the struggle between, on the one hand, totalizing systems that instrumentalize human life, and the other, the underside of such systems, the alterity of the victims. First we will unpack this dynamic relation—totality versus alterity—by interpreting Dussel’s critical encounters with the thought of Martin Heidegger as well as Emmanuel Levinas. Then we will move from somewhat abstract considerations about ontology and metaphysics, to more concrete critique of the myth of modernity. We will also prepare the groundwork for entering into the analectic method covered in the next chapter.

For Dussel, the term totality refers to the everyday lifeworld, and in particular, to the totalizing system of Western instrumental rationality.<sup>1</sup> The phrase *totalizing system*, rather than the term *totality*, would be a more precise expression of Dussel's meaning because he does not intend to characterize globalizing capital as a totalized or closed totality. The totality is not closed because human beings generally retain a dimension of exteriority and autonomy in relation to socio-economic structures even when subject to harsh conditions of economic exploitation and social domination.

The autonomous subject's exteriority or alterity, which is always a lived alterity, prevents the closure of the totalizing system. For example, the factory worker pulls a lever on the assembly line. As such the worker fits into an instrumental network within the factory whose aim is production of a commodity. But the worker, having an ability to be directed toward the future (*poder ser*), is also able to reflect on this functionality and consider alternatives.<sup>2</sup> For example, the worker can consider other options for employment (if there are any) or join with other workers to demand better working conditions. Despite the limited choices, the worker still has a degree of autonomy. The global capital system would end up turning everything and everyone into a mere resource or function of ever expanding accumulation if not for the persistence of human autonomy. For as beings who exist not only as functional parts of a system but also who exist for ourselves, we constitute a breach of alterity that resists complete instrumentalization within the system.

On account of this exteriority or existence for ourselves, we can, at any moment, by means of reflection on our everyday involvement in the world, experience a dimension of our lives which is not subsumed by our instrumental functionality within the socio-economic system. That sacrosanct dimension of our existence is human freedom. Alterity, then, "is like an opening that always prevents the circle from closing as a completed Totality" (Dussel 1973/2014b, 175). Dussel is ever mindful of this breach in the totality and its historical concrete expression in the resiliency of oppressed peoples to resist domination and exploitation and struggle for their sovereignty.

<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, the term totality refers to any totalizing system, so this includes capitalism, theocracy, as well as real socialism.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the ability to be (*poder-ser*) of the Other as revealed in the analectic experience, see Barber (1998, 37–38).

Dussel's interpretation of Martin Heidegger's existential ontology in *Being and Time* (1927/1962) is important for understanding the relation between totality and alterity, and the path of human sensibility from everyday naive engagement in the lifeworld to its development into critical ethical consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Dussel accepts, in large part, Heidegger's argument that the ability to take our experience as an object of thematic reflection is based on our previous naive involvement in the everyday lifeworld. Dussel also shares Heidegger's view that everyday life reveals, upon reflection, a systematic network of equipment and practices that together constitute the ontology or totality within which naive consciousness realizes and makes sense of the lifeworld. But here, the ways of Heidegger and Dussel part. While Dussel adapts features of Heidegger's ontology to his own ideas about the human experience of totalizing systems, Dussel argues that Heidegger does not sufficiently distinguish between ethically relevant instrumentality and other forms of utility. Even more damning of Heidegger himself, Dussel maintains, in *14 tesis de ética: Hacia la esencia del pensamiento crítico* (2016) (*Fourteen Theses on Ethics: Towards the Essence of Critical Thinking*), that Heidegger's *Being and Time*,

was not a *critical* ethics ... but just a *morality* of the *prevailing* system, and, in the tragic case of post-war Germany, of Nazi Germany. Considering that it was not a *critical* ethics, [Heidegger] was able without contradiction, in a manner inexplicable for such a great intellectual, to adhere to a racist doctrine such as that imposed by Hitler. Unable to overcome ontology, he remained trapped in its net. (2016, Preface, 10)

What does it mean to be trapped in the net of ontology? According to Dussel's interpretation, Heidegger's analysis of the human condition in *Being and Time* does not critically surpass the horizon of Western instrumental rationality to reach its underside, alterity, the space of human freedom and transcendence by means of which totalizing systems are most effectively challenged by their victims. For this reason it was not a "*critical* ethics."

<sup>3</sup>By the term 'naive' I am referring to the everyday uncritical practical engagement in the world that takes its political, economic, and social structures for granted. This naive consciousness stands in contrast to critical thematic awareness. Of course, this is not a binary, as there are gradations of critical awareness.

We will rehearse basic concepts in Heidegger's ontology that are relevant to Dussel's ideas about totality. We will then examine what Dussel takes to be serious ethical limitations in Heidegger and how these defects are somewhat remedied by the Levinasian turn. This will lead us to a clearer presentation of alterity and anticipate our discussion, in the next chapter, on the analectic method.

### EVERYDAY BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

Heidegger's critique of the metaphysical dualism of René Descartes helps set the conceptual stage for Heidegger's existential ontology. In this critique, Heidegger gives priority to naive engagement in the world as the basis of subsequent thematic awareness (see Heidegger 1927/1962, 122–148 [89–113]).<sup>4</sup> It is worthwhile here to briefly rehearse the main outlines of Descartes's theory of knowledge as developed in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Descartes 1641/1990).

For Descartes, the rational subject (the *res cogitans*) can arrive at an apprehension of the foundation of human knowledge by engaging in a thought experiment in which assumptions about sources of human knowledge of the world are systematically called into question. The idea is to see if, in this process of systematic doubt, one could arrive at some indubitable truth. Descartes notes he is often deceived by sense perception and therefore becomes skeptical about the veracity of perceptual experience. He finds, even if he is deceived by perceptual experience about the existence of an extramental world, including the existence of his own body, at least while he is doubting, he cannot doubt he exists, for doubting is a form of thinking and thinking is a form of existing. Descartes is not calling into question what he takes to be the representation in the mind of a physical world. "But certainly," insists Descartes, "I seem to see, I seem to hear, I seem to be warmed. This cannot be false. It is this which in me is properly called 'to sense'" (1641/1990, 107–109). Descartes takes the *appearances* of things that seem to come from outside his mind to be mental representations, or what he calls adventitious ideas. The question is whether these adventitious ideas in the mind that seem to come to him from outside really do represent extramental objects. Descartes believes he cannot verify this directly because he presumes his sensibility and cognition have no direct contact with what is outside the horizon of his mind.

<sup>4</sup>See also Dussel (1979/1995a, 230; 1973/2014a, 38).



Descartes goes on to argue that thinking things and corporeal things are distinct sorts of substances which have different essential properties. I will not rehearse the arguments for this view here. The upshot is Descartes sets up a mind body substance dualism that poses a serious problem for the theory of knowledge. In such a mind body dualism, the ego of the thinking thing (a mental substance) has no direct perceptual contact with the extramental corporeal world (a physical substance), nor does a given mind have any direct relationship with any other minds. The isolated ego only has direct access to its own ideas, its own mental contents. We are literally, on this view, disembodied minds. If the mind is separate from the body, how can the thinking thing gain any knowledge of the corporeal (extramental) world, including its own body, and of the existence of other thinking things?<sup>5</sup> What saves the day for Descartes (after several dubious proofs of the existence of God) is that a benevolent God has set up the universe in such a way that certain features of the corporeal world (the primary qualities) do indeed resemble certain features of corresponding ideal representations of the corporeal world.

Heidegger's critique of traditional Western metaphysics includes a rejection of the Cartesian methodology and its consequent substance dualism.<sup>6</sup> Once we start our search for a method from a solipsistic point of view, if we are not to allow dubious arguments for a good God to save the day, there is no escaping the horizon of the isolated ego. Heidegger argues that the primary relationship of human beings to the world is not one of a detached ego confronting an unreachable extramental object, but rather one of being-in-the-world. As being-in-the-world, or to use Heidegger's term, *Dasein*, human beings are not detached thinking things that hover over or identify in some way with their corresponding extra-mental bodies. Normally, without need for much reflection, human reality is embedded in the world, and finds itself always already skillfully dealing with its everyday tasks.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Descartes did try to theorize a bridge between mind and body at the site of the pineal gland.

<sup>6</sup>See Dussel's discussion of Heidegger's critique of Descartes's egology (1998/2013, 376–377 [355]).

<sup>7</sup>For an excellent detailed discussion of Heidegger's break with Cartesian epistemology, see Hubert L. Dreyfus (1991).

For Heidegger, Dussel remarks, “Man, before [being] a *subject* is already a man open to the world, in the world. Before [being] a *subject*, man is a worldly entity that is able, as one of his modes of being, to take the attitude of a subject before an object. This mode of being, however, is not original but rather founded, second” (1973/2014a, 38). How is the “attitude of a subject before an object” something that is “founded, second?” Heidegger offers an account of the movement from everyday naive engagement in the lifeworld to reflective or thematic awareness of that same lifeworld in terms of the distinction between our experience of things *ready-to-hand* and things *present-at-hand*.<sup>8</sup> Since Dussel makes use of this distinction in working out his own views of ontology and what lay beyond ontology, we will discuss this theme in so far as it intersects with Dussel’s purposes.

### READY-TO-HAND VERSUS PRESENT-AT-HAND

The experience of things being ready-to-hand describes our everyday familiarity with instruments or equipment. Our use of any one instrument generally involves reference to other related instruments: “the structure of the Being of what is ready-to-hand as equipment is determined by references or assignments” (Heidegger 1927/1962, 105 [74]). By assignments, Heidegger refers to that for the sake of which the instrument is taken to hand. Opening the car door is assigned to the task of entering the vehicle. I enter the vehicle to position myself to drive. I drive to make my way toward a destination. And of course, means-end analysis can continue in all its detail. Our everyday familiarity with systems of instrumental assignments generally occurs beneath the level of reflection. As Heidegger explains:

This familiarity with the world does not necessarily require that the relations which are constitutive for the world as world should be theoretically transparent. However, the possibility of giving these relations an explicit ontologico-existential Interpretation, is grounded in this familiarity with the world; and this familiarity, in turn, is constitutive for Dasein, and goes to make up Dasein’s understanding of Being. This possibility is one which can be seized upon explicitly in so far as Dasein has set itself the task of giving a primordial Interpretation for its own Being and for the possibilities of that Being, or indeed for the meaning of Being in general. (1927/1962, 119 [86])

<sup>8</sup>This is very similar, as we will see in a moment, to Dussel’s distinction between things-with-sense and cosmic things.

When Dasein (being-in-the-world) is involved in its everyday familiar activities, there is generally limited explicit awareness of the equipment with which it is engaged so long as things are functioning as expected and one has already become familiar with their operations. This does not mean Dasein is unconscious in its everyday dealings in the world. There is indeed a level of awareness of the instrumental complex even at the pre-reflective level. What Heidegger calls *circumspection* is not yet thematic awareness, however, it does scan the environment, identify instrumental values, and exercise a know-how in dealing skillfully with what is ready-to-hand.<sup>9</sup> As Heidegger points out, Dasein can “set itself the task of giving a primordial Interpretation for its own Being and for the possibilities of that Being, or indeed for the meaning of Being in general” but the naive consciousness is generally content to go about business as usual (119 [86]). Explicit awareness of what is present-at-hand usually occurs as the result of a break in everyday use of objects or some other break in everyday experience. This break in routine has significance for the development of Dussel’s ideas about critical ethical reflection. As Michael D. Barber points out.

For Dussel, existential comprehension as access to being makes the radical thematization of being possible, and this making explicit of what is implicit often depends on the passage to reflection effected by a crisis, an alienation, rupture, or separation that forces one to forsake the security of everyday life. (1998, 33)

Heidegger’s example of the use of a hammer illustrates the break in routine use of tools (1927/1962, 98 [69]). As we deal skillfully with things that have instrumental sense for us, such as taking the hammer to hammer nails into a board to construct a frame for a wall, we take for granted the proper functioning of the instrumental complex: hammer, nail, wood. The hammer may even be experienced as an extension of our hand as we aim at the nail head.<sup>10</sup> Heidegger calls this everyday access to instruments their readiness-to-hand. If we are skilled carpenters, we may not even have to think about the hammer as intervening between

<sup>9</sup>See Dussel (1979/1995a, 99; 2016, 41 [3.44]) on *circumspección*.

<sup>10</sup>Don Ihde points out that embodiment relations have the structure (I—technology)—world, where the technology becomes transparent because I am directed at the world through the technology (1990/2009). In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder makes a detailed study of this phenomenon (1990). See also Frederick Mills (2013) on Merleau-Ponty’s views on embodiment.

our hand and the wood; we focus only on driving the nail into the wood. We are directed at the nail through the hand-hammer combination (Ihde 1990/2009, see also Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012, part one). Should the hammer handle break or the nail bend or the wood split, however, we become mindful of the instruments *as instruments* and perhaps even their physical properties, at which point we move from experiencing instruments as ready-to-hand to their being present-at-hand. “The presence-at-hand of entities,” argues Heidegger, “is thrust to the fore by the possible breaks in that referential totality...” (1927/1962, 107 [76]).

Heidegger’s notion of the presence-at-hand of entities offers an account of how we can become explicitly aware not only of some particular involvement, but more broadly of the systems and subsystems that impact our everyday existence. For Dussel, the totality of sense revealed by thematic awareness in Heidegger may raise profound issues about what it means for Dasein to be in the world and face its mortality, but it does not sufficiently raise critical *ethical* questions about Western instrumental rationality, nor does it recognize the specific breach in the totality opened by the alterity of the victims.<sup>11</sup> For these reasons Dussel takes some of the Heideggerian categories in new directions.

### DUSSEL AND THE COSMIC GROUND OF TOTALITY

Dussel’s ideas about ontology, or what he often calls the totality of sense, are similar to Heidegger’s account of human understanding of the equipmental system in *Being and Time*. In *Para una ética de liberación Latinoamericana*, Vol. 1 (*Towards an Ethic of Latin American Liberation*, Vol. 1), Dussel rehearses the Heideggerian analysis of naive everyday consciousness, and observes, “we are in the everyday world, a-thematically, in an absorbed manner, lost in the use of instruments, open without reflection to everyday pragmatic tasks” (Dussel 1973/2014a, 39). Dussel’s account of the totality of sense, however, is ever mindful of the contingency of the network of instruments and practices. Dussel argues that the prevailing institutions and practices of the life-world could have been and can be other than what they are.

Let us examine in more detail the basis of this contingency of the life-world. In *Filosofía de la liberación* (1977/2011) (*Philosophy of Liberation*

<sup>11</sup> “It is the exteriority of the Other which permits us to overcome the ontological horizon itself ...” (Dussel 2016, 35–36 [2.72]).

[1977/1985]), Dussel argues that the instrumental complex of the prevailing system is built upon an enduring substrate that is common to all lifeworlds. Underlying the social and economic structures of the lifeworld and the totality of sense by which we comprehend and to some degree reproduce these structures, is the *cosmos*. The term *cosmos* refers to things as they are in themselves, apart from the worldly utility they may have for mediating human ends (1977/2011, 54–55 [2.2.3]). “Without human being there is no world” says Dussel, “only cosmos” (54 [2.2.3.2]). The totality of sense in which we live out our lives, including the economic, social, political, and aesthetic fields, as well as the way in which we experience nature, is constructed on the foundation of the cosmos.

In the language employed by Dussel, when a thing, which is always grounded in the cosmos, has some utilitarian or other value, it is a thing-with-sense or meaning (*cosa-sentido*). It is still the cosmic thing, but now it also exists *for us* as an entity within a world. “Some real things of the cosmos play a function in the world as *things-with-sense*” (Dussel 1977/2011, 54–55 [2.2.3.3]; see also 1979/1995a, 99–102).

A thing-with-sense is not known in isolation, because, like Heidegger’s system of assignments of the ready-to-hand, a particular thing-with-sense has its sense only within a larger context of other things with instrumental value, or as Dussel says, within a totality of sense.

One does not know the entire sense of any entity or part if one does not discover it within the totality of sense within the world or everyday system. In this way, the whole world will end up being defined as a totality of totalities, as a system of systems ... that explains every partial, singular behavior of every member, subject, particular I. (Dussel 1977/2011, 58–59 [2.2.6.2])

In *Filosofía de la liberación*, Dussel takes the example of the various possible uses of wood to illustrate the cosmic versus the observer-dependent or hermeneutic features of a thing.

The wood of the table appears, when present to me, as firewood, when in the extreme cold it is more important not to die frozen than to use a table. It appears as the phenomenon wood-firewood, a thing-with-sense, just as the wood-desk would, in an everyday manner, appear equally as a thing-with-sense. The sense (*sentido*) [which something has], on the other hand, never is a merely theoretical or abstract consideration. It always pertains to the everyday and is existential; it is the wood as something integrated into the ‘for’ of action, whether [the action be] practical or [geared towards the] production of artifacts (*poiética*). (1977/2011, 69 [2.3.5.7])

As cosmic thing, wood has certain mathematical physical properties that lend themselves to different uses and therefore different senses.<sup>12</sup> None of these senses or purposes exhausts the cosmic properties of the wood. The intrinsic properties of wood only take on instrumental value within a horizon of sense that integrates the wood into an instrumental network, a totality of sense. “The world is a Totality of sense,” says Dussel, “instruments (of things-with-*sense*) whose ‘sense-for’ indicates to us, at the same time, a totality of reference ...” (1973/2014a, 42).<sup>13</sup>

If each instrument has sense by means of its involvement with other instruments to form a totality of reference, from what sense or purpose does the totality itself get its orientation? In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that the point of reference for the totality of assignments is ultimately Dasein.

This primary “towards-which” is not just another “towards-this” as something in which an involvement is possible. The primary ‘towards-which’ is a “for-the-sake-of-which”. But the ‘for-the-sake-of’ always pertains to the Being of *Dasein*, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an *issue*. We have thus indicated the interconnection by which the structure of an involvement leads to Dasein’s very Being as the sole authentic “for-the-sake-of-which” .... (1927/1962, 116–117 [84])

<sup>12</sup>The reference here to mathematical physical properties is itself, strictly speaking, also a partial knowledge of cosmic being-in-itself. For Dussel, the cosmic being is neither the unknowable Kantian thing-in-itself nor the idealist, entirely immanent object of consciousness. “The rose grows not because I know it, but because it has the capacity to grow.” Since “cosmos is the totality of reality,” and “we only know of the cosmos what we have incorporated into the world” our knowledge is always partial and relative to the singular and cultural sense of our world (Dussel, interview with the author, January 10, 2018, Mexico City).

<sup>13</sup>We have followed Dussel in defining the cosmos as things as they are in themselves (observer-independent) and the lifeworld as the totality of things-with-sense (*cosas-sentido*). The cosmos underlies different possible totalities of sense. Not all things, however, as cosmic things in themselves, become things-with-sense or entities within the lifeworld; many things may not even be noticed. And not all entities are grounded in cosmic things, for there are imaginary and purely conceptual entities that figure into making sense of the world that do not require a cosmic basis (see Dussel 1977/2011, 55 [2.2.3.3]). For example, there are no perfect circles in nature, yet we can make use of them in pure geometry. The future is not yet, but we can imagine a possible future state of affairs and base our behavior on what we take to be a feasible project. Of course, we can try to broaden what counts as part of the cosmos to include geometric abstractions, fantasies, and possible worlds, but such a discussion is not within the scope of this chapter.

In everyday naive but skillful use of instruments, Dasein is open to the disclosure of things as being related to each other in a manner that has instrumental value for human purposes (Dussel 1973/2014a, 44–45). As we saw above, it is on the basis of this naive everyday dealing with instruments that we can become thematically aware of the totality of sense in terms of which we understand ourselves and the world. In order to grasp the contours of the totality of sense, Dussel suggests we impose some order or classification on the infinitely complex network of things-with-sense. In this way, to anticipate our discussion of the analectic moment, we can also begin to examine those features of the totality that impact social, economic, and political life.

### UNDERSTANDING THE TOTALITY OF SENSE

In *Filosofía de la liberación*, Dussel is interested in making certain features of our everyday involvement in the lifeworld transparent. To this end, Dussel suggests that the world as totality of sense can be understood in terms of its subsystems (Dussel 1977/2011, 58–59 [2.2.6]). In *14 tesis de ética*, Dussel returns to this theme: “Fields (*campos*) ... are abstracted ‘cuts’ from the empirical [features] of the everyday infinitely complex world that permits us to value an entity, a thing; to know its significance, manage its utility, etcetera ...” (2016, 20 [1.53]). By cutting up the world in terms of fields (such as economic, social, political, and aesthetic), subsystems within fields, functions within subsystems, and finally singular human acts in the context of their functionality, we can begin to explicitly comprehend different dimensions of our everyday existence (45–46 [4.02]).<sup>14</sup> If we take one of these divisions from the world of everyday experience, we will likely find that each of us has a different experience of any given human act or institution depending upon our particular lived experience.

The world of everyday experience for one person may be different from that of another based on characteristics such as race, economic class, nationality, gender identity, and culture. We also make sense of our world through personal goals (Dussel 1979/1995a, 91). For these reasons, our own facticity and fundamental project unavoidably impact

<sup>14</sup>Starting from *mundo* as the broadest totality of sense, Dussel lists *campo*, *sistema*, *sub-sistema*, *función*, and *acto humano singular* in the order of increasing extension (see 2016, 46 [4.02]).

how we see and experience the world (Dussel 1973/2014a, 52). Let's take a contemporary example. The wall (both concrete and virtual) being built by the US on the US–Mexico border has radically different senses for Honduran refugees fleeing violence and poverty, contractors who build the wall, and US border patrol agents (ICE). The refugee or undocumented migrant from Honduras, who is forcibly deported by US border patrol after trying to scale or circumvent the border wall, or in some cases while attempting to enter the US legally, may face hardship as a result of being repatriated. But for the US border patrol agent who captures and deports this migrant, an *illegal alien* (rather than an *undocumented person*, *migrant* or *refugee*) has been intercepted and removed. Clearly, the hegemonic totality of sense which informs Washington's present immigration policy and the politics of the border wall, dehumanize those who are its victims. The observer-independent physical properties of materials which constitute the wall underlie each of these radically different perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

#### THE LIMITS OF ONTOLOGY AND OF THE DIALECTICAL METHOD

The so-called cuts (systems, subsystems, etc.) provide conceptual tools for the naive consciousness to pass from the things-with-sense to an understanding of the larger context within which things-with-sense mediate the achievement ends. “To pass from the horizon of a particular entity to the horizon of being is to pass from one horizon to another, a dialectical process” (Dussel 1979/1995a, 228). By passing from particular practices or use of instruments to the broader contexts within which instruments or practices have their sense, we can achieve more comprehensive understandings of our everyday experience. From a more comprehensive interpretation of our everyday experience, we can then descend again to particulars, but this time with more insight into their function or meaning. “To discover the relation [between the particular thing with sense and the larger totality of sense] is already the dialectic; from the ontic I go to the ontological; I explain the entity from the comprehensible horizon. One passes to the explicit interpretation, the clarification of that which is implicit in the everyday” (229). For example, I can come to understand

<sup>15</sup>Dussel maintains that “every horizon is the being that grounds everything included in its sphere” (1977/1985, 158 [5.2.4]). The term “horizon” refers to the totality of sense that defines how entities are seen within a particular worldview (Dussel 1979/1995a, 87).



the meaning of the border wall in the larger context of US immigration policy, the socio-economic pressures on migrants to emigrate, and ultimately a geopolitical context. And I can work back from the geopolitical understanding to subcontexts and ultimately to particular policies and practices at the border of which I will then presumably have a better understanding.

While in some sense dialectical understanding of entities is an advance over habitual or naive interpretation of being-in-the-world, dialectical understanding per se does not call into question the hegemonic totality of sense within which prevailing institutions and practices have their meaning and ideological justification. There is not yet, then, a critical ethical perspective at work. For Dussel, such a perspective can be most effectively anchored in a point of view that is exterior to the totality of sense. Such a standpoint would transcend the dialectical one. It would be, to use a Dusselian term, *ana-dialectical* (beyond the dialectical).

The movement from dialectical to ana-dialectical comprehension can be motivated by an ethical consideration of the totalizing system. Dussel argues that Heidegger's analysis of the totality of sense in which Dasein is immersed prior to thematic reflection fails to adequately distinguish between merely technical mediations and those that are practical (i.e., that impact human life):

In Heidegger there is no clear distinction between practical and instrumental reason. And for this reason he gives examples of instruments “at hand” (such as the hammer) to clarify the concept of comprehension (*com-prensión*) of being, without pointing out that [this example] is situated at the level of an instrument (instrumental reason), distinct from practical mediations (practical reason). (Dussel 2016, 33, note 11)

Dussel clearly distinguishes between instrumental and ethical-practical dimensions of our everyday engagement in the lifeworld (33 [2.42]; 38–40 [3.21–3.23]). For Dussel, at both instinctive and self-conscious levels, the singular human life values things within the network of instruments and practical relationships in terms of their impact on the ability to mediate the production and reproduction of one's life and to avoid suffering and death. In short, the lived human body polarizes the world with a network of values in terms of its vital interests. “Value,” says Dussel, “is simply a determination that the human subject attributes to an entity in so far as it [the entity] mediates its [the singular human life's] ability

to be. In other words, something *has value* because it serves as a *practical* mediation, and the value defines the mediation as a mediation-for” (41 [3.41]).<sup>16</sup> For example, if someone is hungry and I give her food, I make it possible for her to mediate hunger as a means of reproducing her life. The usefulness of an object for the mediation of human life is, by definition, a feature of its practical value (37–44, Thesis 3).

For Dussel, the *ethically relevant* epistemological break with naive involvement in the lifeworld happens when one calls into question a system and ideology that negates human life. For example, it is one thing to understand the function of the border wall in terms of the dominant ideology; it is another to call the morality of the dominant ideology into question from the point of view of the excluded, dehumanized migrant for whom the wall compromises the ability to live and grow in community.

In order to begin to assume a critical ethical perspective, we must exceed the ideological boundaries of our naive perspective as well as the limits of dialectical analysis. “Our life, because it is ‘natural’ and obvious, is lived in an acritical naiveté with very great consequences. Our way of facing beings [entities] is conditioned by this everydayness that is our own being, our second nature, our ethos, our cultural and historical character” (Dussel 1977/1985, 32 [2.3.4.3]). One breaks loose of this “acritical naiveté” by passing from the everyday familiarity with things and persons to a point of view that finds the everyday lifeworld contingent and questionable. Just as in the case of Plato’s prisoners who emerge from the shadows of the cave, which they had taken to be reality, into the light of day, this can be at first a disorienting experience. But having been relieved of the illusions of the cave, one is likely to become atheistic with regard to the dominant ideology and dread any relapse into ignorance.

For the poor, dispossessed, and persecuted, there is a familiarity with a type of suffering that is never simply routine because their lives are in peril. In such a case it is not equipment which fails to work properly that

<sup>16</sup>The idea of *poder-ser* also has a broader meaning as a person’s fundamental project. That which mediates this project can be considered of value, as mediating one’s *poder-ser*. See Dussel (1979/1995a, 105–108). Barber (1998) points out that *poder-ser* refers to human freedom within the limits of objective conditions: “The being of the human person is essentially non-totalized, open; that is, the human person is always able to be something different, and therefore is, in Dussel’s words, a being-able-to-be (*poder ser*). One experiences such possibilities emerging from the life-situation into which one has been born, not which one has chosen” (p. 34).

can awaken them from ontological slumber but a *systematic* assault by the ever expanding and coercive means of social control deployed by the prevailing system whenever and wherever its hegemony is threatened. Without the autonomy of social movements and the ability of progressive governments to resist the neoliberal gospel and militarism imposed by the Global North, the totalizing system would indeed eventually close and inaugurate an unopposed necropolitics of permanent war and death. The wasteland is already growing. But there are alternatives to such closure. For alterity is not only the underside of totality; it is also an opening toward a possible new age of the world.

### ALTERITY

Dussel argues that a lack of alterity in Heidegger's ontology precludes the development of an ethics. "Heidegger himself does not discover the category of exteriority—of what has been called 'the Other'; for this reason he does not describe an ethics. Ethics only starts when there is an Other, a level impossible in the totality" (Dussel 1979/1995a, 232). The category of exteriority is a necessary condition of critical ethical rationality because it is from a point of view *beyond* the hegemonic totality of sense that one can most authentically encounter the Other and begin to comprehend the structural causes of exclusion and exploitation.

Dussel argues that the Heideggerian concept of the worldhood of the world is limited to a Eurocentric, universalizing ontology and thereby misses the mark of alterity:

In reality, this totality is oppressive; it is the European totality of the fifteenth through twentieth centuries that treats other men as though they were things in the world; it [the totality] "comprehends" them in their everydayness and thinks them in its ontologico-dialectical philosophy. This world is thought of as unique, neutral, natural, unconditioned, and the exclusive point of support for all possible thinking. The Other was reduced to being an entity within such a world. This is what is necessary to question, because Latin America is the *exterior* of that world which has as its center a European "I". When Heidegger says "man exists", he is affirming the existence of Europe and the description is made from his tradition, taken as the tradition of all men. Latin America is exterior, as Latin America, but in fact it is considered by Europe as being "inside" her [Europe]. (Dussel 1977/1995a, 231)

It is possible to view Latin America, as well as other peripheral regions of the world system, however, as not merely sites of subalternized peoples dominated and exploited by the Global North. These exploited Others retain an exteriority from which they can decolonize their ways of understanding the world and critically recuperate suppressed expressions of their cultures.<sup>17</sup>

For example, Original peoples of the Americas, such as we observe in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, especially since the election of Evo Morales as President in December 2005, are revalorizing some of their traditions, posing alternative worldviews and praxis, and putting people before profits in the face of a globalizing capital system bent on undermining alternative economic and social models.<sup>18</sup> Though even the most progressive political projects harbor some regressive tendencies, the people of Bolivia are demonstrating even in the face of great adversity, it is possible to make significant progress toward living well (*buen vivir*), respecting Mother Earth (*pachamama*), and building “a world in which many worlds fit.”<sup>19</sup>

Dussel maintains that the movement from everyday familiarity with oppressive economic and political systems to critical ethical reflection on, and subsequent transformation of, those systems is possible because there is an exterior to any given ontology.

Ontology makes reference to the world, to the com-prehension of being, to the totality as a fundamental category. Beyond the ontological, the world, the alterity of the Other human being is revealed. This exteriority that pertains to the existence of the Other is the *meta-physical*. When we speak of the ontological we are referring to a realm that we ought to *critically* surpass from another level called meta-physical. (Dussel 2016, 31 [2.23])

<sup>17</sup>As Alberto Acosta as well as many other scholars of decolonial thought point out, “a process of intellectual decolonization is a prerequisite for decolonizing the economy, politics, [and] society” (2013, 51).

<sup>18</sup>See Bolivia (Plurinational State of)’s Constitution of 2009, Article 8, I. “The State adopts and promotes the following as ethical, moral principles of the plural society: ama qhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa (do not be lazy, do not be a liar or a thief), suma qamaña (live well), ñandereko (live harmoniously), teko kavi (good life), ivi maraci (land without evil) and qhapaj ñan (noble path or life). 8, II. The State is based on the values of unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, liberty, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, interdependence, harmony, transparency, equilibrium, equality of opportunity, social and gender equality in participation, common welfare, responsibility, social justice, distribution and redistribution of the social wealth and assets for well being.”

<sup>19</sup>See Stansfield Smith (2018) on eleven years of the “process of change” in Bolivia.

From within the ontology of a given system, we play a certain role or perform certain functions. Nevertheless, as autonomous subjects, at a trans-ontological or metaphysical level, we retain a certain extrasystemic dignity. In short, we are always more than our functionality in any given field of any given lifeworld. The taxi driver, says Dussel, is only at first glance merely an extension of the means of transportation: "It seems difficult to detach other persons from the system in which they are inserted" (1977/1985, 40 [2.4.2.1]). Yet this routine encounter with the other (as taxi driver) can rupture at any time revealing the exteriority of the Other (as an autonomous subject that transcends his or her intrasystemic functionality). It is not a break in the functionality of an instrument, but something much more profound that evokes our awareness of the alterity of the Other: "The face of the person is revealed as other when it is extracted from our system of instruments as exterior, as someone, as a freedom that questions, provokes, and appears, as one who resists instrumental totalization. A person is not something, but someone" (Dussel 1977/1985, 40 [2.4.2.2]).

A singular human life is not a thing. He or she is someone. This all important distinction is at the heart of the interface between totality and alterity. Again, the intrasystemic dimension of a singular human life indicates someone's function within the instrumental totality of sense. In this sense a human being may be viewed as a resource, a means to some end, an object among other objects, or in the Marxist sense, alienated and objectified labor. "The sin or the moral fault," says Dussel, "the ontic totalizing praxis, consists in the act of disrespecting the face of the Other and using the Other as a thing: it is praxis of reification of the Other. The Other as instrument is the mediation of the totalized project of the sacralized Totality" (1973/2014b, 77). The Other, however, while being-in-the-world in a number of practical roles, is never subsumed by any of them, "*transcending* them always... as *the Other than any possible system ...*" (Dussel 1998/2013, 375 [354]).

This passage goes to the heart of Dussel's ethics. The "*Other than any possible system*" is the autonomous singular human life, which is also a communal life. While it may sometimes seem as though we are locked into certain roles and occupations, there is always a residue of human freedom by means of which we are capable of transcending our functionality within the system. "Exteriority" argues Dussel, "is the sphere located beyond the foundation of totality. The sphere of exteriority is real only because of the existence of human freedom" (1977/1985, 158 [5.3.1]).

The alterity of the Other, which transcends totality, opens an exteriority from which the Other is able to critique and contest the negation of the community of human life by the prevailing system. This is not a spatial exteriority as though alterity were a matter of one object existing physically outside another. Nor is it the exteriority of a Cartesian thinking thing isolated from the lived body. The exteriority referred to here is the interiority of reflection. What is reflecting is the lived body and what is reflected is that same lived body as a being-in-the-world. The lived body is reflexive and is able to reflect on and take a position toward its own intrasystemic condition. Even from within the confines of a prison cell, Nelson Mandela retained an exteriority from which he refused to compromise his principles, maintaining, under great pressures, his militant opposition to Apartheid. Mandela, then, was both a prisoner (within the hegemonic ontology) and a resistor (within the growing dissensus of the Other which eventually became a new consensus). This interface between totality and alterity, ontology and metaphysics, the intrasystemic and extrasystemic features of human life, brings us to the threshold of the analectic method which we will discuss in detail in the next chapter. But first let us give a more concrete and historical expression of the relation between totality and alterity.

### TOTALITY AND ALTERITY AS TWO FACES OF MODERNITY

It is now time to briefly discuss the content of the dynamic relation between totality and alterity in the more concrete context of the deployment of the myth of modernity to justify the European conquest of the Americas beginning in 1492. In *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (1992/1995b), Dussel gives an account of the relation between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of two radically different experiences of modernity during the conquest of the Americas and the Transatlantic slave trade. One face is that of the European conqueror (beginning with the Portuguese and Spanish in the late fifteenth century). The other face is that of the conquered, subjugated Amerindian and enslaved African. Dussel argues that modernity is not properly conceived as an entirely European phenomenon, but rather as a *relationship* between colonizer and colonized. "When one conceives modernity as part of [a] center-periphery system instead of an independent European phenomenon, the meanings of modernity, its origin,

development, present crisis, and its postmodern antithesis change” (11). The emergence of a world capital system by means of extraction of wealth from Amerindia by the North Atlantic center would not have been possible without the underside of modernity—Indigenous peoples and Africans who were dominated, dispossessed, enslaved, and worked, often to death, in order to produce primitive accumulation.<sup>20</sup>

To these two faces of modernity there correspond different vantage points. One vantage point is that of the colonizer for whom the myth of modernity has served as a justification for the subjugation of non-Europeans. The other vantage point is that of the colonized Amerindians and African slaves, who were subalternized, victimized and instrumentalized by the colonizer. Dussel investigates not only the myth of modernity propagated by its European protagonists; he also takes into account the point of view afforded by the victims. “It is time,” insists Dussel, “to put on methodically the skin of the Indian, the African slave, the humiliated mestizo, the impoverished peasant, the exploited worker, and the marginalized person packed among the wretched millions inhabiting contemporary Latin American cities” (1992/1995b, 74). In *The Invention*, Dussel considers the point of view of Moctezuma and other Indigenous actors in addition to that of Hernán Cortés and other protagonists of the conquest. In this way the victims and their resistance to conquest and subjugation are able to appear in truth as the face that is negated by the colonizer.<sup>21</sup>

What are the basic features of the relations of domination imposed by European colonization of Amerindia? In *The Invention* Dussel links the conquest of Amerindia to the evolution of a capitalist world system with Europe as the center and colonized territories as the periphery. This center-periphery distinction is reflected in the modern European ego which takes itself to be the measure of a more developed consciousness than the presumed inferior undeveloped Amerindian and African. This European supremacist ideology has had racial, temporal, and geocultural dimensions which together constitute the *coloniality of power* (see Quijano 2000).

<sup>20</sup>See Maldonado-Torres (2008, 212–213).

<sup>21</sup>While Maldonado-Torres is critical of Dussel’s earlier “continentalist” approach to Latin American history, with regard to the publication of *Invention* he credits Dussel with “a fundamental step toward the formation of the *de-colonial attitude*: he suspends the ontological priority of his identity and adopts a ‘preferential option’ for the point of view of the condemned” (2008, 194, 206).

In *The Invention*, Dussel gives special attention to the Eurocentric historical narrative of linear temporal progress featuring Europe as the place of an advanced form of human intellectual development and Amerindia and Africa as places representing the primitive past of humanity. “The experience not only of discovery, but especially of the conquest, is *essential* to the constitution of the modern ego not only as a subjectivity, but as subjectivity that takes itself to be the center or end of history” (Dussel 1992/1995b, 25).

The modern subjectivity of the conqueror (the “I conquer”) was deployed by the European colonizers in the name of a historic and divinely sanctioned civilizing and Christianizing mission that in practice perpetrated the violent, racist, patriarchal, sexist, and dehumanizing underside of conquest.<sup>22</sup> In short, Europe conducted a ruthless holy war against the Amerindian and defined the Indian in terms of European categories. As Aníbal Quijano points out, Europe as the center of a world system could not exist without its counterpart, the colonized or peripheral nations and their subaltern peoples:

America was the first modern and global geocultural identity. Europe was the second and was constituted as a consequence of America, not the inverse. The constitution of Europe as a new historic entity/identity was made possible, in the first place, through the free labor of the American Indians, blacks, and mestizos, with their advanced technology in mining and agriculture, and with their products such as gold, silver, potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco. It was on this foundation that a region was configured as the site of control of the Atlantic routes, which became in turn, and for this very reason, the decisive routes of the world market. This region did not delay in emerging as... Europe. *So Europe and America mutually produced themselves as the historical and the first two new geocultural identities of the modern world.* (Quijano 2000, 552, italics added)

Quijano argues it was “the free labor of the American Indians, blacks, and mestizos” which made Europe the center of a world system. The center of this system and its division of labor, then, evolved through its

<sup>22</sup>As Grosfoguel points out, the Cartesian ego comes to represent the universal pretensions of the Eurocentric point of view: “The social, economic, political and historical conditions of possibility for the subject to assume the arrogance of becoming God-like and put himself as the foundation of all Truthful knowledge was the Imperial Being, that is the subjectivity of those who are at the center of the world because they have already conquered it” (2007, 215).



relationship to the periphery. This relationship of domination is not adequately addressed by an account of class struggle alone because economic exploitation is not a mere quantitative abstraction. Capital is a relationship of social domination by what Ramon Grosfoguel calls an “intersectionality of multiple and heterogeneous global hierarchies ... of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic, and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures” (2007, 217). These hierarchies are all brought to bear in the violent, institutionalized subjugation of the African and the Amerindian and it is through such “intersectionality” that a division of labor for the extraction of wealth from the Americas has been realized.

These hierarchies of domination persist to this day. As Grosfoguel points out, “although ‘colonial administrations’ have been almost entirely eradicated and the majority of the periphery is politically organized into independent states, non-European people are still living under crude European/Euro-American exploitation and domination” (2007, 219). Frantz Fanon, in *Wretched of the Earth*, made similar observations about the persistence of coloniality even after national independence. Local elites, who may have participated in a united front for national independence, often end up replacing instead of transforming colonial administrations and thereby continue to reproduce hierarchies that enforce the division of labor and extraction of surplus value from exploited workers and peasants (Fanon 1961/1963). Without breaking the cycle of dependency of post-colonial economies on the European metropolis, in the post-colonial government run by local elites, surplus value continues to flow from periphery to center. The salient point here is that national liberation may lead to a post-colonial era, but without decolonization of the multiple hierarchies of domination, the exploitation and instrumentalization of human life persists unabated.

The basic features of modernity have undergone various modifications over the past 500 years, but the “multiple and heterogeneous global hierarchies” or “coloniality of power” remains entrenched in the relation between contemporary US-NATO exceptionalism and their client states. As Walter D. Mignolo points out, “In its nineteenth century version, modernization was linked to the civilizing mission; after World War II, it was linked to developmental ideology; and in the nineties it was linked to globalization and the market ideology, yet its hidden side was, and still is, colonization” (2003, 83). In each case this “hidden side”

is revealed by mechanisms of social control deployed to police citizens and enforce structures of social and economic domination. “Modernity as myth always authorizes *its violence* as civilizing whether it propagates Christianity in the sixteenth century or democracy and the free market in the twentieth” (Dussel 1992/1995b, 71, italics added).

### EXPOSING THE MYTH OF MODERNITY

We must decolonize our way of seeing the world if we are to advance a project of liberation. Part of the effort to decolonize our horizon of comprehension of the lifeworld is to expose the myth of modernity. This means first recasting history from its Eurocentric center of gravity to a perspective that takes into account the point of view of the Other. As Dussel points out, the so-called *discovery* of America was really an *invention* by Columbus of “construing the islands he encountered as Asian.” As a result, “this Indian was not discovered as Other, but subsumed under categories of the Same” (1992/1995b, 32). The real heritage and culture of Indigenous peoples of the Americas was covered over and suppressed as undeveloped, inferior, and barbaric. Again, the colonizer racialized this invented Other as an inferior version of European humanity and thereby justified a holy war against the Indian. The surviving Indians had to be taught “true” religion and obediently serve their colonial masters. The conquest was not only a colonization of economic and political life, but of Amerindian and African minds and bodies as well.

Dussel distinguishes two basic features of modernity in Chapter 5 (1992/1995b, 66–67) and appendix 2 of *The Invention*. The first, positive feature of modernity is “rational emancipation.” “The emancipation involves leaving behind immaturity under the force of reason as a critical process that opens up new possibilities for human development” (136). This enlightenment feature of modernity, which champions the secular deployment of reason, technological innovation, and scientific objectivity, is not intrinsically dehumanizing if put to the service of a liberatory praxis. So Dussel does not reject, without qualification, modern rationality, but principally its deployment to instrumentalize human beings at the service of private accumulation or any other totalizing system. The second feature of modernity, its “negative *mythic* content” however, “justifies an irrational praxis of violence” and is therefore entirely rejected by the liberatory project. Dussel unpacks this myth in detail:

(a) Modern civilization understands itself as most developed and superior, since it lacks awareness of its own ideological Eurocentrism. (b) This superiority obliges it to develop the most primitive, uneducated, barbarous extremes. (c) This developmental process ought to follow Europe's, since development is unilineal according to the uncritically accepted developmental fallacy. (d) Since the barbarian opposes this civilizing process, modern praxis ought to exercise violence (a just colonial war) as a last resort in order to destroy any obstacles to modernization. (e) This domination produces its diverse victims and justifies its actions as a sacrifice, an inevitable and quasi-ritual act. Civilizing heroes transform their victims into holocausts of a salvific sacrifice, whether these victims are colonized peoples, African slaves, women, or the ecologically devastated earth. (f) For modernity, the barbarian is at *fault* for opposing the civilizing process, and modernity, ostensibly innocent, seems to be emancipating the fault of its own victims. (g) Finally, modernity, thinking itself as the civilizing power, regards the sufferings and sacrifices of the backward and immature peoples, enslavable races, and the weaker sex as the inevitable costs of modernization. (136–137)

Dussel argues that “to overcome modernity, one must deny its myth” (1992/1995b, 137). At the heart of this myth is the fallacy of development. This fallacy presupposes all civilizations pass through a period of immaturity and barbarism, beginning from a state of nature, and that Europe is at the advanced stage of humanity's historic progress, in terms of rational science, technology, and freedom of inquiry, whereas the “discovered” Indian represents the immature past. As Quijano points out, this myth explains the alleged inferiority of the Indian in biological terms. It interprets “the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power” (Quijano 2000, 542). Quijano argues that “domination is the requisite for exploitation, and race is the most effective instrument for domination that, associated with exploitation, serves as the universal classifier in the current global model of power” (572). This association of race and exploitation forms the “two principal founding myths” of Eurocentrism (542). One of Frantz Fanon's contributions to decolonial thought is to provide a phenomenology of how this myth is in some cases adopted and other times contested by the oppressed themselves (Fanon 1961/1963, 1952/2008).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>As Grosfoguel points out, “the fact that one is socially located in the oppressed side of power relations, does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location. Precisely, the success of the modern/colonial world-system consist[s] in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of colonial difference to think epistemically like the ones on the dominant positions” (2007, 213).

Based on the myth that Europeans are intellectually, biologically, and spiritually more advanced than any other people, modern subjectivity of the European conqueror justified subjugation of innocent victims in the name of the victim's own emancipation. Not only did European perpetrators of violence take themselves as innocent of any crime, but resistance by Indians to what appeared to them [the Indians] as the advent of the end of their world was taken to be culpable behavior. "The myth of modernity perpetrates a gigantic inversion: the innocent victim becomes culpable and the culpable victimizer becomes innocent" (Dussel 1992/1995b, 67).<sup>24</sup>

The myth of modernity is being exposed by a variety of liberatory approaches across the Global South and among oppressed peoples within the Global North, setting the creative and humanistic forces of alterity free to chart new paths. Again, the first step in this process is to decolonize our minds, North and South. This does not mean to recolonize our minds with another totalizing ideology. As I will discuss in the concluding chapter, the ethics of liberation seeks to build a new world based on mutual respect and a love of justice, not another totalitarian project.

We have seen how the interface between the totalizing system and alterity is the locus of confrontation between domination and resistance as well as colonization and decolonization. It also accounts, in part, for the movement from naive consciousness to critical ethical consciousness. We have also observed that there is no totalizing system without the alterity of its victims. I suggest the alterity of victims is not only the underside of totality, but in an important sense, in its positivity as a community of human life, it precedes and transcends the totalizing system. In the next chapter, on the analectic method, I will articulate the anatomy of alterity (or exteriority) and how it constitutes the basis of a critical ethical horizon. I will focus on Dussel's critical dialogue with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, and in particular, the lived experience of the face-to-face encounter with the Other. For Dussel, this encounter motivates both the assumption of co-responsibility for all life on the planet and a critique as well as transformation of those features of the totalizing system that would instrumentalize human beings and the biosphere.

<sup>24</sup>As Maldonado-Torres points out "the idea of the 'innocence' of enlightened Europeans—and the intrinsic culpability of non-enlightened peoples—is the crux of Dussel's analysis of what he refers to as the 'myth of modernity'" (2008, 200).

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## The Analectic Method

The analectical refers to the real human fact by which every person, every group or people, is always situated “beyond” (*ano-*) the horizon of totality. ... The analectical moment opens us to the metaphysical sphere ... referring us to the other. Its proper category is exteriority. The point of departure for its methodological discourse ... is the exteriority of the other. (Dussel 1977/1985, 158–159 [5.31])

### OVERVIEW

In Chapter 2 on totality and alterity we discussed the breach in the totalizing system held open by the alterity of the Other.<sup>1</sup> The system is not closed because we exist not only in terms of our intrasystemic functions but also as autonomous subjects, and as such, we retain a certain exteriority in relation to the hegemonic ontology. In this chapter we discuss an important manifestation of this breach—the *epiphany* or *self-revelation* of the Other. This epiphany is a presence in the lifeworld in the form of an appeal for help, but at the same time it reveals an absence on account of its origin in the autonomous subject. We will show how this epiphany can evoke, in the one who is sensible to the appeal and takes responsibility for the life of the Other, a critical ethical perspective. As we will see

<sup>1</sup>“The negativity of the Other is like an emptiness that always prevents the closure of the circle as a completed Totality” (Dussel 1973/2014b, 175; see also Dussel 1973/2014a, 97).

in this chapter, the critical ethical perspective is *trans*-ontological, taking the totalizing system itself as a theme, and as such, calls for a new method of comprehending the totalizing system. While the dialectical method is appropriate for analysis from within the hegemonic ontology, a method that surpasses the dialectic, the ana-dialectical method, is appropriate for analysis from a trans-ontological point of view.

The Levinasian turn is the key to understanding transitions from ontology to trans-ontology, dialectic to ana-dialectic, and naive consciousness to critical ethical consciousness. For this reason, we discuss the epiphany which evokes these transitions in terms of the face-to-face encounter with the Other. We then use two of Dussel's illustrations of how this encounter unfolds in everyday lived experience, the first drawn from the parable of a Bedouin who offers hospitality to a stranger in the desert and the second from the biography of Rigoberta Menchú. We close the chapter by showing how the analectic method lays the groundwork for the exodic journey from subjugation to liberation.

### THE EPIPHANY OF THE OTHER

We will take as our point of departure for entering into the analectic method the epiphany or self-revelation of the Other. The epiphany of the Other can take different forms: a face-to-face encounter, an appeal for solidarity (*interpelación*), or the spoken word. What is essential to the idea of epiphany is that unlike the *appearance* of things-with-sense, which are understood in terms of their intrasystemic instrumentality, the epiphany of the Other is a self-revelation of an autonomous being whose point of view is exterior to ontology (trans-ontological) and therefore cannot be understood solely in terms of ontological categories.<sup>2</sup>

Since the spoken word of the Other who appeals to us for help can be heard within the lifeworld but has its origin in a subject who is not reducible to an entity within the totality, Dussel calls this spoken word

<sup>2</sup>"Phenomenology, as its name implies concerns itself with what appears and how it appears from the horizon of the world, the system, Being. Epiphany, on the other hand, is the revelation of the oppressed, the poor—never a mere appearance or a mere phenomenon, but always maintaining a metaphysical exteriority. Those who reveal themselves transcend the system and continually question the given. Epiphany is the beginning of real liberation" (Dussel 1977/1985, 16; see also 1979/1995, 119; 1973/2014b, 160–162; 1974b, 188, note 44).



*ana-logical*. The appeal of the Other is analogical because it is not possible for us to completely comprehend its meaning. For we all have had different experiences and may differ in terms of culture, economic class, gender, or race. Thus, even the same spoken words may have different meanings for different interlocutors.<sup>3</sup> As Gabriel Herrera Salazar points out, “all subjectivities interpret, and all do so from a point of departure located in their own cultural constructions” (2017, 2). The exact meaning of the word of the Other expressed in his or her appeal for help, thus partially escapes me. Dussel puts the issue concisely: “The term *ana-logía* refers to a word that is a revelation, a saying whose presence reveals the absence that nevertheless draws and provokes, from ‘the meaning’: the other him or herself as free and as an alterative ontological project, now still incomprehensible, trans-ontological” (Dussel 1974b, 188–189).

The epiphany of the Other, expressed as an appeal, clearly enough solicits our recognition and solidarity. It is the appeal of the victims of poverty, war, human trafficking, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression. While these are concrete lived experiences endured by the Other within the lifeworld, the appeal has its origin in the trans-ontological freedom of the Other who seeks liberation. If we are receptive, these appeals can evoke in us a double movement: the recognition of our co-responsibility for the life of the Other and critical transcendence of the totalizing system that negates human life.

This double movement is itself somewhat complex. Dussel distinguishes an initial intuitive or pre-reflective yet ethical response to the appeal of the Other from a subsequently more critical ethical perspective.<sup>4</sup> The former is the origin of the latter. In *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel describes the intuitive ethical moment: “The victim’s very face of hunger, the ethical re-cognition of his or her corporeal pain ‘traps’ us in

<sup>3</sup>As Barber points out “Dussel readily admits these difficulties of translation, for he recognizes that the passage from one world to another in an adequate, complete, perfect manner is impossible, insofar as one word carries in its train the totality of a world that is untranslatable and that needs to be uncovered if that word is to be understood. Within this understanding of language, every word usage becomes essentially analogical, meaning the same and yet not quite the same to conversants” (1998, 54). Dussel observes, “The Other cannot be comprehended from my horizon, because he or she lives from his or her horizon, from his or her liberty, as exteriority of ontology and sense” (Dussel 1974a, 283).

<sup>4</sup>Dussel refers to this pre-reflective ethical response as pre-discursive or pre-originary ethical reason.

re-sponsibility: ‘we take up the burden’ before we can reject or assume it. This is the origin of criticism” (1998/2013, 281 [269]).<sup>5</sup> The “victims face of hunger” traps us because as an encounter between two exteriorities, our common humanity becomes manifest, beyond the totalizing system, and beyond any particular ethos. The encounter is the occasion of an intersubjective relation “without mediation” (Dussel 2016, 119 [9.16]; see also 1973/2014a, 121, 122). This primordial communality is the basis of human communication and solidarity.

[There is] a *specific kind of rationality* (different from discursive reason, strategic reason, instrumental reason, emancipating reason, hermeneutical reason, and so on) that “re-cognizes” the excluded victim, the Other as other than the prevailing system of communication. I called this “ethical pre-originary reason.” “Ethical pre-originary reason” is the first rational moment, prior to any other use of reason, by virtue of which we have the *experience* ... of re-sponsibility-for-the-Other. This experience occurs prior to any decision, commitment, linguistic expression or communication about the Other. “Ethical pre-originary reason” allows us to be stirred by an “obsession” or “re-sponsibility for the Other.” This responsibility is a priori. It is always presupposed by any propositional or argumentative linguistic expression in every communication, in every consensus or agreement, in every praxis. (1998/2013, 300 [285]; see also Dussel 1973/2014b, 93 [29])<sup>6</sup>

If we have not lost our innate sensibility to other human beings, we are able to respond to the plea of the Other at a primordial visceral level prior to “any other use of reason.” The presence of the suffering Other modulates my lived body prior to my thematic reflection on his or her plight. We do not first make sense of the words of the Other who appeals to our solidarity, and as a result respond to the Other’s appeal. We are able to listen deeply to the Other and receive his or her revelation because we are already open to and present for the Other.<sup>7</sup> All

<sup>5</sup>“The Other is beyond thinking, comprehension, the light, *logos*, beyond the foundation, the identity ...” (Dussel 1973/2014b, 161).

<sup>6</sup>“One is ethical prior to being theoretical or scientific; one is practical before being explicative; prior to explanation; one rises out of indignation and not just from the discovery of a new intellectual matrix” (Dussel 2016, 129 [9.52]).

<sup>7</sup>Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh refers to such receptivity to the Other as one of the miracles of mindfulness (1998, 64–65).

the listening in the world will not bring us closer to the Other, even if we speak the same language, if we have lost the sensibility to the Other that is the basis of proximity (Dussel 2016, 132 [10.13]).<sup>8</sup> By proximity (*proximidad*), Dussel refers to our coming near to the Other whose point of view we can never fully comprehend, as opposed to *proxemia*, which is the everyday nearness to a thing-with-sense. Pre-originary or pre-discursive ethical reason, argues Dussel, “precedes criticism and argument” and “is already the affirmation of the victim as a subject, who is *negated* or ignored in the system as an object” (1998/2013, 281 [269]; see also 300–303 [285–288]).

Since human life is reflexive, we do not remain at the level of pre-originary reason but are able ultimately to advance to “criticism and argument.” In concrete terms, as we come into proximity (*proximidad*) to the Other in caring responsibility, we can begin to see reflected in his or her face the structures of the prevailing system that are causing the oppression. These are the structures imposed on the cosmos by Western instrumental rationality. If we are to comprehend Western instrumental rationality itself in a critical manner, we need to pass beyond dialectical analysis, which remains within the confines of this hegemonic ontology, to a method suited for a trans-ontological perspective so we can examine the hegemonic ontology, as it were, *from the outside*.

### FROM DIALECTICAL TO ANA-DIALECTICAL METHOD

Dialectical understanding is an indispensable but insufficient method for interpreting the appeal of the Other and comprehending the causes of oppression because it is limited to purely ontological terms

<sup>8</sup>Unless there is some pathology present, we are already equipped with an original sensibility for the plight of the Other. For Dussel, this communal sensibility is derived from our birth from inside maternal corporeality and the experience of taking initial nutrition from the body of another human being, the mother (Dussel 1979/1995, 118; 1977/1985, 18–19 [2.13–2.14]; 2016, 12–13 [1.06–1.08]). Human communality is also hardwired in the cognitive-affective features of our lived bodies as part of our evolved adaptive genetic inheritance (Dussel 1998/2013, 68, 69). We therefore enter the face-to-face encounter already predisposed towards openness to the revelation of the humanity of the Other, a revelation which evokes our co-responsibility for the community of human life even before we have a chance to fully comprehend its theoretical and practical implications. It is, however, possible for us to lose this sensibility.

(Dussel 1974b, 191).<sup>9</sup> There is another method, however, available to us for coming into proximity to the Other and comprehending the totality itself as an entity. Dussel suggests we move beyond the dialectical method of comprehension by changing our point of view.

The *dia*-lectical method is the path that the totality realizes in its very self; from the entities up to the foundation and from the foundation to the entities. What we are dealing with now is a method ... that starts from the other as free, as one beyond the system of the totality; that starts then, from his or her word, from the revelation of the other and that confiding in his or her word builds, works, serves, creates. (Dussel 1974b, 182)

Before we enter into the ana-dialectical method “that starts from the other as free” we first need to have a preliminary grasp of what it could mean to take a point of view that is “beyond the system of totality” and thus beyond dialectical understanding.

If all entities (things-with-sense) and human acts in so far as they fit into the instrumental complex have their meaning in relation to the hegemonic totality of sense, how can I grasp the totality itself without some point of reference that places that totality into a larger horizon of meaning? Would this not presuppose that there is an outside of what Immanuel Wallerstein calls the modern world system and its self-justifying myth of modernity?<sup>10</sup> What would be our point of reference? How could we posit the totality of sense itself as an entity when all entities get their sense from within the horizon of comprehension of this totality? Will we not lose our way, as expressed in Nietzsche’s parable of the madman in the marketplace? This madman, who, having announced the death of the Christian God, a God that buttressed all of European morality, wandered in desperation without a point of reference for comprehending the lifeworld. “Who gave us the sponge,” asked the madman, “to wipe away the entire horizon?” Once we “wipe away the horizon”

<sup>9</sup>For an in-depth discussion of the phenomenology of the Other in Levinas and Dussel, see Barber (1998), especially Chapter 3: Overcoming Levinas: Analectical Method and Ethical Hermeneutics.

<sup>10</sup>Walter D. Mignolo points out that “world-system analysis operates from inside the system, while dependency theory was a response from the exteriority of the system—not the exterior, but the exteriority” (2008, 230).

are we not cast out into an open sea without any basis for establishing a new totality of sense? Nietzsche was correct in declaring that a re-evaluation of all values involves being atheistic with regard to the hegemonic ethos (Nietzsche 1887/1974, 181). But where do we go from here?

Dussel's atheism with regard to the myth of modernity and Western instrumental rationality is more radical than Nietzsche's atheism with regard to European morality and philosophy. For Nietzsche, the death of God was cause for celebration because it was an opportunity for free spirits to create new value systems in place of the old. The will to power remained at the center not only of Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality, but of the construction of new horizons of interpretation. Dussel correctly calls this view of the human will to live as a will to power into question. For the idea of will to power is still part and parcel of the myth of modernity and not an innate feature of human nature. The will to power, in its Eurocentric version, is still an expression of a particular ethos, an ethos that would impose itself, if left unchecked, on all the world.

Dussel argues in *14 tesis de ética* (2016) (*Fourteen Theses on Ethics*), "the world is the totality of sense that founds the meaningful place of entities, for which reason the world [as the totality of sense] cannot have sense unless it should be constituted as an entity, and this is achieved only from *outside* the world" (2016, 131 [10.11]). In order to constitute the totality of sense as itself an entity, we must surpass it [the totality] and assume a point of view that is "*outside* the world." From an epistemic point of view, this means we must go beyond the dialectic toward an ana-dialectical or analectic perspective.

The opening *to the Other* as other, beyond *the Same* is the anadialectical passage from ontology (the Heideggerian totality) to a beyond (*meta-*) of the horizon of the world (*física*). Ethics is metaphysics (for Levinas): the ultimate instance of the *essence of critique*, because this has a point outside the system from where it is able to put the totality in crisis. Every other ontological or ontic moment lacks sufficient distance to effect a practical negative judgement with regard to the totality as a totality. (Dussel 2016, 120 [9.17])

The term analectic, *aná*, for beyond, and *lectic*, for *logos*, refers to a perspective beyond the logos. Logos here refers to the hegemonic totality of sense determined by the horizon of Western instrumental rationality

(Dussel 1974b, 188).<sup>11</sup> The analectic is a perspective whose point of reference lay beyond (*ana*) this hegemonic totality of sense. From such a perspective one sees, as it were, with new, much more critical eyes because the totality of sense as constituted by Western instrumental reason itself becomes the object of critical ethical reflection. This is not to say the analectic perspective brings instant comprehension of the hegemonic totality of sense, but it shines a critical ethical light on the economic, social, and political structures as well as ideology of the prevailing system.

This movement from ontology to the trans-ontological, from the dialectic to the analectic, is not just any critical surpassing of ontology. One can transcend ontology toward a cynical, nihilistic or absurd perspective. The “passage from ontology ... to a beyond of the horizon of the world” that we have in mind here is evoked by a profound respect for the dignity of the Other. What makes our “passage from ontology” to a trans-ontological perspective ethical is our solidary response to the face-to-face encounter with the Other which accompanies that passage. This is what makes the analectic an *ethical as well as critical* transcendence. Dussel’s understanding of this turn from Heideggerian existential ontology to the trans-ontological locus of the Other was facilitated by his engagement with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas.

### THE LEVINASIAN TURN

It is no exaggeration to call Dussel’s account of the analectic method a Levinasian turn, though this turn arguably takes on a more universal and political dimension in Dussel. In “Sensibility’ and ‘Otherness’

<sup>11</sup>Dussel uses the term *ana-lectico* and *ana-dia-lectico* to refer to the same passage from the dialectic method that has application as an analytical tool within the totality to the more critical point of view of exteriority. In *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana* Vol. II (*Towards an Ethic of Latin American Liberation* Vol. II) (1973/2014b, 161), Dussel uses both terms. In *14 tesis de ética (Fourteen Theses on Ethics)* (2016, 120 [9.17], note 7), Dussel uses the term *ana-dia-lectico* and gives the following etymology: “The *ana-* (beyond) indicates positive transcendence of the Other; the *dia-* refers to the passage; the *logos* is the totality. It is a ‘passage / beyond / the totality / from the positive alterity,’ whose potential is not the mere negation of the negation, but the prior moment: the affirmation of the exteriority as origin and potential of the first negation.” According to Cerutti-Guldberg (2006), Argentine theologian Juan Carlos Scannone was the first to use the term “analectic”, though “[the one] who has undoubtedly done the most for the elaboration and diffusion of this term is Enrique Dussel” (372).

in Emmanuel Levinas,” Dussel recounts, “I turned to Levinas when I began to write *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana* ... and it was Levinas who gave me the opportunity to go beyond the Heidegger of *Being and Time*” (1999, 125). Dussel found in Levinas conceptual tools to account for the movement from uncritical naive consciousness of being-in-the-world to a critical *ethical* perspective that transcends ontology. These conceptual tools show how we can come near to the Other by seeing the victims of the prevailing system in terms of their extrasystemic dignity as autonomous human lives as opposed to seeing them merely in terms of their intrasystemic functionality, as instruments of the prevailing system.<sup>12</sup> It is by knowing how to listen to the analogical word of the Other, a word that originates from beyond every totality of sense, a word whose origin lay at an untraversable distance, that we are able to develop a critical ethical perspective (Dussel 1973/2014b, 57).

For Levinas, if we see other persons solely in terms of their ontological functionality, we reduce our understanding of them to the Same, that is, to their place in the network of instrumentality of the prevailing system. “The relation with Being that is enacted as ontology consists in neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it. It is hence not a relation with the other as such but the reduction of the other to the same” (Levinas 1961/1969, 45–46). This reduction or “neutralization” of persons to the status of an instrument or function of the Same is always alienating because it takes persons as objects. In the case of Nazi Germany during World War II, instrumental and technical rationality, combined with German National Socialism, led to the extermination camps and the systematic murder of millions of human beings.<sup>13</sup> In light of this European experience of the holocaust which deeply impacted Levinas personally, Levinas called into question the dehumanizing relationship of Being to its victims: “Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relation with Being in general, remains under obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny” (46–47). Dussel applies this critique of instrumental and technical

<sup>12</sup>We apprehend the Other as both intra- and extrasystemic: “Someone whom I take as other, exterior to the totality, at the same time is always something (*algo*) inserted into a system ...” (Dussel 1979/1995, 128).

<sup>13</sup>For a discussion of Hitlerism, see Maldonado-Torres (2008).

rationality to the devastation wrought by the conquest of Amerindia and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as the contemporary assault by globalizing corporate capital on the majority of humanity and the earth's ecosystems.

In *Against War*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that "Levinas subverts the basic intuition behind Heidegger's project. Instead of laboring against the forgetting of Being, Levinas concentrates his efforts in fighting against the forgetfulness of the beyond being" (2008, 62). We become insensitive to human life and forget its trans-ontological dimension as it exists "beyond being" at our own peril. "The aspiration to radical exteriority," writes Levinas, "thus called metaphysical, the respect for this metaphysical exteriority which, above all, we must 'let be,' constitutes truth" (Levinas 1961/1969, 29). As the wasteland of permanent war and the indefinite state of exception grows, it is this truth that must be kept in mind as we respond authentically to our face-to-face encounters with the Other.

### THE FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER: HOSPITALITY IN THE DESERT

Now it is time we enter more directly, into the moments of the face-to-face encounter with the Other as it has been appropriated by Dussel. In *14 tesis de ética*, Dussel describes the encounter of strangers in the desert:

Imagine a Bedouin of the immense Arabian Desert in his nomadic tent, never permanently installed in any one place, who suddenly, through the canvas of his tent, catches sight of a point, in the infinite and distant horizon, a small cloud of sand, still indiscernible. After some time passes, he makes out the figure of a slender rider on a camel, with face covered to protect against the heat. Finally, [the stranger] comes face to face (*frente a frente*) with the Bedouin, and [in this] face-to-face (*cara-a-cara*) [encounter], between supplicant and the one being challenged, [the supplicant] makes an appeal (*le interpela*): "I ask for hospitality!" Faced with this sacred expression of need (*exigencia*) the Bedouin asks him (since that which manifests itself phenomenologically does not show what is hidden behind the face): "Who are you?" And, from the mystery of the unconditional liberty of the Other, the one asked reveals himself saying his name. He is a member of an enemy clan! Nevertheless, the hospitality due is carried out in its finest details. After this encounter (*pasado el plazo*), the recipient of hospitality continues on his way. Perhaps in the future he will confront



(*enfrentarse*) the Bedouin, but the enmity (which takes precedence within the prevailing and established morality) cannot put at risk the experience of *proximity*, the creative source of all possible ethics. (Dussel 2016, 117 [9.11])

There are a number of moments in the face-to-face encounter revealed nicely in this display of hospitality. First, the stranger approaches the Bedouin in the desert and is revealed as a barely perceptible figure on the distant horizon, and ultimately as the face of a singular human life in need of help. The Bedouin does not seek to comprehend the stranger in terms of the stranger's intrasystemic being within a social system of adversarial clans, but as the self-revelation of an Other whose humanity is anchored in the trans-ontological horizon that transcends every totality of sense.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the desert sands, the camel, the hot sun, and the winds which are mere things-with-sense, the stranger in need is an epiphany of one who is not reducible to dialectical comprehension. The figure in the distance is a singular human life in need who breaks through the totality by means of a cry for help (Dussel 1979/1995, 119). The Bedouin who is receptively watching and listening does not experience the approaching stranger as a mere entity within the Bedouin's world. The Bedouin, in so far as he or she is engaged in this encounter, is now without a totalizing horizon. Free of prejudice, the Bedouin lets the Other be in his or her exteriority and distinctness and in this way is open and responsive to the Other's *appeal* for provisions, regardless of the Other's intrasystemic status. Having been open to the Other as autonomous stranger in need, the Bedouin attains proximity (*proximidad*) to the Other and assumes responsibility for the Other's well-being. When the Bedouin asks the stranger, "Who are you?" hospitality is not withdrawn after the Bedouin finds out the stranger is from an enemy clan. The priority for now is the extrasystemic proximity of one human being with another. From within a trans-ontological field of mutual recognition of each other's humanity and autonomy, proximity becomes "the creative source for all possible ethics."

<sup>14</sup>As Dussel remarks in volume I of *Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana*, "the 'face-to-face' as original experience, would be, nothing less, that from which the ontological order ... remains open; it is the beyond of the worldly totality, prior to [this totality] itself and original" (1973/2014b, 120).

THE FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER:  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ

We turn now to another illustration of the face-to-face encounter, but this time one focused on the protagonism of the Other (which is generally plural) themselves. Although Dussel at first uses the term *pobres* and later *victimias* to refer to the Other, by the term Other he refers to all those who are victims of any system that instrumentalizes human life and sets up relationships of social, political, and economic domination. But even this broad sense of the term *victim* does not fully capture Dussel's meaning. For he also views victims as potential protagonists of liberatory theory and praxis. Without this protagonism from below, a politics and economics of liberation cannot advance toward building institutions that are obedient to constituent power. The face-to-face encounter and subsequent analectic perspective then, is not only one that arises between a victim and a potential ally, but among the Other as protagonists of the liberatory project themselves.

In *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel uses the testimonial narrative *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian woman in Guatemala* to illustrate the movement from naive consciousness to critical ethical consciousness, and from being a victim to being a protagonist of the liberation of one's community. The example of Menchú shows a life trajectory which begins with unquestioning conformity to the domination of an oppressive system, and advances to an awareness that this system negates not only cultural identities, but also the possibility for persons to live and grow in community. This realization leads the community of victims to become protagonists of a critique of the system and a struggle to bring about its transformation.

Dussel identifies the content of Chapter 17 of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as giving expression to the "ethical moment":

Yes, I was very confused. I went through some sort of painful change within myself. It wasn't so difficult for the rest of them at home to understand what was real and what was false. But I found it very hard. What did exploitation mean for me? Why do they reject us? Why is the Indian not accepted. And why was it that the land used to belong to us? Our ancestors used to live here. Why don't outsiders accept Indian ways? This is where the discrimination lies! (Menchú, cited by Dussel 1998/2013, 297 [282])

Dussel points out that the ethical awakening begins when Menchú starts to call into question the reality of exploitation and affirms her cultural identity and dignity in the face of its negation by racism, oligarchy, and the oppressive Guatemalan regime. In another key passage, Menchú begins to call into question the constituted power that oppresses her community. Referring to the common plight of her people, Menchú says, “I was very happy when I realized that it wasn’t just my problem. ... That there were rich and poor and that the rich exploited the poor—our sweat, our labor. That’s how they got richer and richer. The fact that we were waiting in offices, always bowing to the authorities, was part of the discrimination we Indians suffered” (Menchú, cited by Dussel 1998/2013, 300 [284]).

Menchú realizes, through her face-to-face encounters with those who share her experience, that discrimination suffered at the hands of the rich who were exploiting her community was not just her problem. In these face-to-face encounters, members of the community were able to see each other not as mere instruments of exploitation but as autonomous subjects sharing the same experience. Together, they were able to gain a critical transcendence of the totalizing oligarchic system and their subjugation by various hierarchies of domination. Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, refers to this “reflection upon situationality” as a process in which “men *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled.” Such intervention is the result of *conscientização* or “the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence” (1968/1984, 100–101). This “deepening of the attitude of awareness” leads to a collective recognition that together it is possible to bring about change, a struggle that continues to this day. As Dussel emphasizes, the task of criticism is no mere exercise in polemics, but is a “moment of the struggle for life” (1998/2013, 284 [271]). Critique of the totalizing system is “the only way the oppressed become conscious of the oppression that afflicts all of the structures of his or her existence [and] consists in first discovering the dialectic of concrete domination, in each and every moment of his or her being” (1994, 317).

To understand the “dialectic of concrete domination” requires a critique of what Aníbal Quijano calls “the coloniality of power,” which includes the hold of the dominant ideology on a people’s own self-identity and worldview (Quijano 2000). Since the dominant ideology makes the status quo seem natural and necessary, it is only along

the arduous path of decolonizing one's mind that a politics and economics of liberation becomes possible (see Chapter 2, above, on the myth of modernity).<sup>15</sup>

### THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE OTHER

As we have seen in the case of the Bedouin and Rigoberta Menchú, the face-to-face encounter provides an occasion for recognizing our co-responsibility for human life. This does not mean, however, we automatically assume our co-responsibility. "The victim is another whose accusing presence we can no longer 'shake off' when it comes to our obligation to 'do something' for that person. I can reflect on the encounter afterwards, turn away and forget about it, or do something concrete for him or her" (Dussel 1999, 127). In the face-to-face encounter with the Other who is suffering, we can turn away, or we can assume our co-responsibility for advancing human life (Dussel 1998/2013, 285 [272]).<sup>16</sup> If we turn away, we are still responsible, as members of the community of human life, for the life of the Other. We cannot avoid responsibility for the Other by absorbing ourselves in liberal apologetics which mystify the politics of intrasystemic violence and domination. When immigrants, people of color, women, the LGBTQ community, Indigenous peoples, the poor, and others are under attack, the truth is, we can always have some impact on the causes of oppression.

This "taking-up-of-the-burden" [of responsibility for the Other] is *prior* to the decision to assume or not assume that co-responsibility. The *assumption* of re-sponsibility comes later, and is already ethically assigned; if I do not assume such co-responsibility I do not escape responsibility for the death of the Other, who is my/our victim, and regarding whose victimization I am/we are complicit causes, at a minimum because the victim is a human being assigned to the communitarian co-responsibility of the

<sup>15</sup>See Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), on the role of language in the colonization of the mind. See also Fanon (1952/2008), chapter one on the influence of language on one's worldview: "A man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied in this language" (2).

<sup>16</sup>Barber describes what is required for this "practical option for the Other" in poetic terms: "One must silence the dominating word, open oneself interrogatively to the provocation of the poor one, and know how to remain in the 'desert' with an attentive ear" (1998, 68).

shared vulnerability of all living beings. I am/we are responsible for the Other because he or she is a human being, “an intersubjective sensibility.” (Dussel 1998/2013, 285 [272])

If we opt for solidarity with the Other, we commit ourselves to realizing our co-responsibility for the well-being of the community of human life through a praxis of liberation. Criticism of globalizing corporate capital and the neoliberal ideology that supports it can expose mystifications which pretend to justify domination and violence in the name of freedom and democracy. Critique is also a prerequisite for the project of building a new dissensus that could one day challenge the hegemonic consensus. For this reason, as Dussel warns, “the praxis of liberation is the most ‘dangerous’ of praxes because it confronts illegitimate *power* with the weakness of the indefensible human bodily reality ... of the victims” (1998/2013, 421 [394]). The one who critiques the system may even become a substitute (or hostage) for the victim and suffer persecution, even death (Dussel 1998/2013, 287–288 [273]; 2016, 121 [9.19], 133 [10.15]). The one who identifies with the oppressed Other, however, is not silenced by the terrorism of the corrupt who seek to maintain their domination. “But he or she is more afraid, upon recalling the face of the suffering [victims] who ask for help, and betraying them, [of the] growing regret for failing to respond to their appeal” (2016, 192 [14.25]). Martin Luther King, Jr., Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, José Martí, Steve Biko, Berta Cáceres and so many others became substitutes for the Other because of their commitment to the poor and oppressed.

Today, there are many who stand as substitutes for the oppressed and for whom service (in the sense of the Hebrew term, *habodah*) alongside the Other is preferable to the complicity of silence.<sup>17</sup> Of course, it is always possible to turn away from the Other, even as the casualties

<sup>17</sup>The solidary bond that we form with the Other if we opt to assume our co-responsibility for human life is not one based on the desire to fill a particular lack. The desire for a relationship of solidarity from which we seek nothing in terms of personal gain, is, for Levinas, as well as Dussel, a love of justice. “*This love of the face-to-face*, of the Other as other, is *the supreme act of the human being* and no act of comprehension nor interpretation can compare to it” (Dussel 1973/2014b, 115). This love is not without its obligations. Dussel refers to the commitment to co-responsibility for the Other as *service*, a term he derives from the Hebrew, *habodah*, which refers to a relationship that is grounded in a trans-ontological bond rather than one anchored in the instrumental complex of the totality (1973/2014b, 94, 102–103).

of Western instrumental rationality mount, especially if one is somehow insulated from victimization. However, as those of us in the Global North contemplate the erosion of democratic institutions by the police state, universal surveillance, and the mounting casualties of racism, there is no telling when “*their* appeal” will become “*our* appeal.” Let us remember how the famous poem by German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller, which has a number of variations, ends: “Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.”

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## The Ethical Principles

... The moral or ethical phenomenon is not eternal nor has it always existed; it originates at a moment of cosmic time, in the development of the universe, in the evolution of life. Many think putting the human being in a privileged position is “anthropocentrism.” They do not see, instead, that the human being is the culmination of a process of life, its “glory.” This does not mean that the rest of living things do not have *dignity*. They have *dignity* for being living things, which is much more than mere *value*. The *value* of whatever reality is measured with regard to its mediation for *Life*, all life, of every living thing. Nevertheless the human being is the distinguished fruit of the same *Life*, as the only self-conscious life and, for this reason, the human being is not only alive, but also ... knows that he or she is alive and is responsible for his or her life and for the *Life* of every living thing. The death of a species is like the death of an organ of the human body which anticipates its own death as a species. Safeguarding *Life*, all life on Earth, is to also safeguard human life. (Dussel 2016, 16 [1.12])

### OVERVIEW

In Chapter 3, we discussed the analectic moment in which the autonomous subject transcends the ontology of the prevailing system and is thereby able to develop a critical ethical perspective in solidarity with the Other. The analectic, we saw, is a *trans*-ontological point of view that takes the hegemonic ontology itself as an object of critical ethical reflection. This critical ethical transcendence of the hegemonic ontology is evoked by the face-to-face encounter with the Other and can inspire the

one who is open to and receptive to this encounter to join in a praxis of liberation. I say “can” because we have a choice: in response to the epiphany of the Other we may opt to affirm our co-responsibility for human life and the biosphere, or turn away and resume our everyday complicity with the status quo. If we assume our co-responsibility for human life and the biosphere, we seek to negate (in the sense of critique and deconstruction of the prevailing system) the negation of human life. Our negation of the negation of human life is motivated by an affirmation of the project of creating a new world in which all human beings can live and grow in community (Dussel 1984/2003, 143).

This chapter will articulate the principles of critical ethical reason that guide the praxis of the liberatory project. There are three main ethical principles subsumed as norms of every practical field: the material, formal, and feasibility principles. These principles inform the critique of the prevailing system, deconstruction of corrupted constituted power, and construction of a new age of the world in the cultural, political and economic fields.<sup>1</sup> We begin with an account of the material ethical principle, followed by the formal and strategic principles.

### THE MATERIAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

Human life is the central concern of Dussel’s landmark work, *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*: “This is an ethics of life; that is to say, human life is the content of ethics” (1998/2013, 55 [57]). Although human life is the focus of *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel means to include an obligation to *all* life on the planet in the material principle.<sup>2</sup> This inclusion becomes ever more pronounced in Dussel’s work and is explicitly stated in the more complete expression of the material principle in *14 tesis de ética* (2016) (*Fourteen Theses on Ethics*). It is also important to note at the outset that Dussel’s ethics is not a vitalism without qualification, and this means that the will to live

<sup>1</sup>We can continue to multiply these principles, by considering their application as critical, transitional and constructive principles, in which case there are nine (see Zúñiga 2016a). For the sake of brevity and simplicity, however, I usually refer to three main principles throughout this monograph.

<sup>2</sup>Dussel expresses concern about the ecological crisis in several works, including *Ethics and Community* (1986/1988, 196–199 [18.3–18.5]); *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977/1985, 114–117 [4.17–4.18]); *Ethics of Liberation* (1998/2013, 39 [43], 103–104 [110–111]); and *14 Tesis de ética* (2016, 69 [5.77]).

and reproduce human life ought to be conditioned, even as it conditions, other ethical principles.<sup>3</sup> As we will see in more detail presently, in addition to the material principle, there is also a formal principle that requires life be advanced by means of symmetrical democratic procedures, as well as a feasibility principle that requires pursuit of the material and formal principles take place within the parameters of what is technically achievable. Only in this way can practical reason, on behalf of the community of all life on the planet, clear a path away from the current state of permanent war, growing economic and social inequality, and the destruction of the earth's ecosystems, toward a new age of the world based on *perpetual life* as opposed to unlimited private accumulation as its regulative idea.<sup>4</sup>

Our task here is to ground and articulate the material ethical principle. Let us start by specifying the content of the human will to live. The term "content" here is a synonym for material. The material or content of a purposeful act is that for the sake of which the action is taken, its end or finality. "The act of eating has for its finality the satisfaction of hunger, of a necessity," says Dussel. "Its content is the chewing and digesting of food. It is the material or *content* of the act, its finality" (2016, 58 [5.11]). In this example, the "chewing and digesting of food" is a lived experience of the cessation of hunger.

In reflection on the hierarchy of ends, we can discover that for the sake of which we pursue other intermediate ends. To continue with the same example, we can ask why we eat. We might enjoy eating for its own sake, but ultimately we must eat in order to go on living, to reproduce our carnality (*carnalidad*). If we trace the series of ends we pursue, says Dussel, "human life, being the end of ends, is the ultimate content of all human action. In this way the final *content* of all action is the affirmation of human life itself, its complete materiality" (2016, 58 [5.12]); see also 1998/2013, 55–56 [57]).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Dussel advocates a vitalism that is "critical, rational, universal, ethical, and of the left" and warns against the vitalism of the political right which is often racist, such as the case of Hitler (2016, 58 [5.12]).

<sup>4</sup>By regulative idea I mean the Kantian notion that we ought to strive toward an ultimate goal even if it might never be completely realized. The means of advancing toward the approximation of such a goal, however, ought to be feasible.

<sup>5</sup>I use the term 'carnality' here as a translation of *carnalidad*. I mean to convey Dussel's interpretation of the Hebrew *Basár*: "The blood, ears, bones, every organ is a faculty of the living unity that is man. There is not, strictly speaking, a 'corporeality, but rather a 'carnality' of the spiritual existence of man in his radical living unity" (Dussel 1969, 28).

Let us examine this “final *content*” of human behavior in more detail. Dussel describes the materiality of the human will to live “as a force and a capacity to move, to restrain, and to promote. At its most basic level this *will* drives us to avoid death, to postpone it, and to remain within human life” (2006/2008, 13 [2.1.2]). As a *force*, life is *conatus*, an effort to persevere in existence.<sup>6</sup> In order to “remain within human life” the metabolic relationship between the living human body and the source of life, Mother Earth, must be such as to enable the production and reproduction of human life.

The reproduction of life is the “end of ends,” and human sensibility naturally aims at this end. “To live is the *absolute* (not merely a conditional) presupposition of all human acts, and, at the same time, it is the ultimate end (in the sense of an end of ends ...) of all human action” (Dussel 2016, 68–69 [5.76]). Life as presupposition and end of human acts expresses the circular nature of metabolism, of vital processes of reproduction. Since to live is the absolute “end of ends,” human sensibility invests things in the world with value insofar as they serve as mediations in this metabolic relationship of reproduction.<sup>7</sup> Life itself does not have value, it has dignity as that which bestows value. The polarization of the world in terms of our vital interests continues beyond the level of instinct to inform our thematic awareness of the challenges we face in meeting our basic human needs (Dussel 2014a, 17–20 [1.1–1.32]). Thematic awareness of our effort to persevere does not, however, provide us with wings to soar above our all too human existence. For Dussel, life does not become a mere abstraction in the act of reflection because *reflection too is a vital activity*.

It is important to grasp the priority of existence over the concept in Dussel’s ethics. Dussel’s rejection of substance dualism and Hegelian idealism informs his understanding of human life as *corporeal* existence, as *carnalidad*. In Chapter 1.5a of *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel discusses

<sup>6</sup>I believe there is a Spinozist element in Dussel’s concept of human life. For Spinoza, the human mind is the idea of the body and the mind is “conscious of its own endeavor” (Spinoza 1677/1955, 92 [Part II., Prop XIII]); 137 [Part III., Prop. IX]).

<sup>7</sup>“The real things surrounding the human being have real physical properties. The apple has such physical components in its real constitution. Only when the living being, and as such [a being] in need, encounters the apple as a possible satisfier of its needs, only in that moment is the apple now food; that is to say, a mediation to replace the energy and material that life consumes in its very [process of] living, in its metabolism” (Dussel 2018, 70).

Marx's critique of the Hegelian primacy of knowledge over the reality of concrete lived experience. To put this simply, for Hegel, lived human experiences are merely moments of the Absolute Spirit reflecting on itself. Moreover, for Hegel, all of world history is the development of Absolute Spirit's self realization. Each human life pursues what it takes to be its own end, yet all its effort is the cunning of Reason (or Absolute Spirit).<sup>8</sup> "For Hegel the only movement of interest is that of self-consciousness as 'science of the subject,' which proceeds by the subsumption of one and another form or 'object' of 'experience' until absolute knowledge is reached" (Dussel 1998/2013, 93 [101]). Dussel points out that for Marx, however, the real always precedes reflection and retains its priority over the concept. "Against Hegel, for whom the supreme human act is the thinking that produces the thinking that thinks itself (formally), now *what produces human life with self-consciousness is real human life, from its corporeality, which has needs...*" (94 [102]). (We will return to Dussel's humanistic interpretation of Marx in Chapter 6. Italics added.)

Reflection on one's own will to live is not that of an Absolute Spirit beholding one of its finite expressions. Nor is it a Cartesian ego apprehending a separate body-machine. Reflection on one's will to live does not objectify that will; the life force is the very substance of the ability to reflect. Reflection is an act of the lived body which goes outside itself in an act of self transcendence in order to thematically grasp itself as a living being-in-the-world. In short, the lived body is reflexive.

The reflexivity of life makes certain features of the will to live and grow in community explicit. What at the level of instinctive human sensibility was immediate kinesthetic, cognitive, and affective directedness toward those features of the environment that mediate the reproduction of life, upon reflection, becomes a conscious effort that benefits from deliberation, forethought, and collaboration with others. The being-for-itself, aware of itself as a being-in-the-world with others, is no longer locked in a naive immediacy but is *deliberately* future oriented. What was mere instinct now becomes an explicit principle. In *14 tesis de ética*, Dussel provides a concise expression of the material ethical principle:

<sup>8</sup>Practical reason, argues Dussel, is "the cunning of life" (1998/2013, 56 [57], 69 [73]).

*One who acts morally (or ethically) ought to produce, reproduce, and increase responsibly the concrete life of every singular human being, of every community in which one belongs, which inevitably is a cultural, historical life, from a comprehension of the happiness that one shares with drive and solidarity, having as an ultimate reference all of humanity and all life on the planet Earth.* (2016, 69 [5.77])

This detailed statement of the material principle emphasizes not only our obligation to all of humanity, but to “all life on the planet Earth.”

Dussel, in dialogue with the Indigenous traditions of living well (*buen vivir*) and respect for Mother Earth (*pachamama*), maintains all living things have a certain dignity.<sup>9</sup> What is special about human life, however, is that it is a moment in the cosmic evolution of life on the planet when life has become aware of itself and its responsibility not only for its singular expressions, but also for all living things.<sup>10</sup> In order to pursue this end, we seek out technically feasible courses of action that are conducive to the survival and increase of human life in community and in harmony with Mother Earth. Dussel calls these courses of action *mediations* because they are means to an end. It is the task of practical reasoning, in different fields of praxis, to engage the cultural, social, political, economic and ecological fields of the lifeworld in order to secure the means to advance this material principle.

### NORMATIVE CONTENT OF THE HUMAN WILL TO LIVE

Every ethical theory presupposes an anthropology. Dussel, in part, justifies the normative content of the human will to live by means of a theory of human nature. Dussel calls into question theories of human nature that privilege private interests over the common good and justify various forms of social and economic domination. For example, he critiques a current in European philosophy that suggests the human will to live is a will to power. In *Para una de-strucción de la historia de la ética* (1973) (*Towards the Destruction of the History of Ethics*), Dussel points out that for Nietzsche, every people seeks to universalize their own ethos and impose their values on other nations. “The metaphysics of the ‘will to

<sup>9</sup>For a discussion of the idea of *buen vivir* as an important contribution to building a new world, see Acosta (2013).

<sup>10</sup>See Dussel (2016, 16 [1.12]; 2014a, 326–327 [16.77–16.78]).

power” argues Dussel, “is the foundation of the ‘final modern European man’ that universalizes itself by means of colonialism, and imposes itself on nature and other men through technology (*la técnica*). It is the essential constituent of the modern-contemporary ethos” (134; see also 2016, 13–14 [1.091], 124–125 [9.33–9.34]).

Dussel also critiques the nihilistic view of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who argued that the human will to live is an irrational force that merely uses unwitting individuals to reproduce the species. For Schopenhauer, individuals are the dupes of a species-will which seeks only to reproduce itself through what the individual naively takes to be his or her own interests. When a lover meets the eyes of the beloved the courtship that is born is the work of the species-will using the amorous individuals to its ultimate end of reproduction; individuals are only the means. Our attachment to this will binds us to a life we must ultimately lose, causing us to suffer. The solution to our suffering is to detach ourselves as much as possible, qua individual will to live, from the universal will to live expressed in the species-will (Dussel 2016, 123 [9.32]; see also 1998/2013, 250–253 [243–244]).

Dussel rejects Schopenhauer’s focus on metaphysical suffering because much of the lamented oppression of human beings is due to unnecessary exploitation and violence perpetrated by other human beings, not just some cruelty imposed by the species-will in an inhospitable world of natural disasters and inevitable death, though these too cause great suffering. For Dussel, however gloomy the horizon may become, it is a good thing, not a bad thing, to be attached to life. Turning away from life is not a solution to unnecessary suffering, but a betrayal of all those Others who seek to overcome oppression and celebrate life in community. Although Schopenhauer is correct that the singular human life, wittingly or not, aims at reproducing instances of the species, the will to live also constitutes the center of the singular human life’s desire to thrive in community.

Dussel argues that we know about the will to live from inside, that is, from reflection on our own lived experience. In the order of discovery of our co-responsibility for human life, we do not first discover an abstract maxim that tells us we ought to persevere in existence and increase human life, and only later, as a consequence of this maxim, heed this call. This would turn the emergence of critical practical reason on its head. Rather, our maxims are developed *in response* to a will to live in community that already announces itself to us in our flesh.

With regard to the biological basis of the will to live, Dussel draws on evidence from neuroscience, and in particular the work of neuroscientist

Antonio Damasio. Dussel agrees with evolutionary cognitive neuroscience research that maintains the human brain has evolved to selectively recognize those features of the environment that enhance or threaten life. “The limbic system,” argues Dussel, “governs the recollection of these [life enhancing or life threatening] experiences and evaluates every act by the criteria of practical truth in terms of life and death” (2016, 59 [5.23]). This affective-evaluative system values possible behaviors in response to the environment according to the degree to which they are likely to be conducive to life. “We pay attention,” says Dussel, “to those things in our surroundings ... to what is valuable, to what we can integrate into the network of possibilities for the affirmation of our life, both singular and communitarian” (60 [5.24]). Dussel even goes so far as to assert that the brain is a “moral organ” in so far as it “obligates us to carry out mediations necessary for the affirmation of human life, singular or communitarian” (60 [5.24]).<sup>11</sup>

As we have seen, the values we give to certain courses of action are determined by their end, an end generally related to the mediation of life and avoidance of death (Dussel 2016, 64 [5.55]). The more something promotes human life, the greater value it has. Again, the criterion, human life, is decided already on the instinctive level. There is a biological basis for the passage from the recognition that something is identified as poison and the judgement that we ought to avoid it (Dussel 1998/2013, 68–69 [73]). In a similar fashion, there is a biological basis for the passage from thirst to the notion that I ought to drink something. If I am thirsty, then to preserve life I must drink. *Thirst is not just a matter of fact; it makes itself felt from the outset as an imperative to drink.* “Inasmuch as this requirement is subsumed within an evaluative system, which is also and always rational, ethical-cultural, the vital human descriptive statement turns normative: it is a duty” (69 [73]). Is Dussel committing here a version of the naturalistic fallacy?

<sup>11</sup>In *The Structure of Behavior* (1942/2008), Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that human behavior (as well as other forms of animal life) is not passively shaped by its environmental stimuli but seeks out those mediations that would satisfy its vital interests. “Physical stimuli,” argues Merleau-Ponty, “act upon the organism only by eliciting a global response which will vary qualitatively when the stimuli vary quantitatively; with respect to the organism they play the role of occasions rather than of cause; the reaction depends on their vital significance rather than on the material properties of the stimuli” (161).



### THE NATURALISTIC FALLACY

The naturalistic fallacy argument, applied here, would maintain that a vital instinct which at first expresses itself below the level of reflection does not get normative traction at the level of reflection. There is a philosophical tradition going back to Scottish philosopher, David Hume, that argues one cannot derive a normative principle (a rule about what we ought to do) from a matter of fact (such as being thirsty or having a will to live). To rehearse the basic argument in its “logical-formal” version: There is nothing in the fact that I am thirsty that logically entails I ought to drink, however thirsty I may be. One cannot derive an ought from an is.<sup>12</sup> Nor is there anything about adding reflective awareness to the survival instinct that is obviously normative in character. So again, one cannot derive an ought from an is.

We can now pose the question motivated by consideration of the naturalistic fallacy in a way that challenges the naturalistic grounding of the material ethical principle: How does the material ethical principle, which is normative, arise from a pre-reflective will to live, which is a biological fact? Or, what amounts to the same line of inquiry, how does practical reasoning about what we *ought to do* emerge from the instinctive effort of the singular human life to persevere in existence. To put this question in its deductive form: How do we deduce from the statement “I am thirsty” the conclusion that “I ought to drink”?

We could circumvent the question by taking the Kantian route. In Immanuel Kant’s ethics, the naturalistic fallacy is overcome by denying the normative content of the will to live and placing the origin of normativity in a practical reason that is distinct from biological instinct. For Kant, practical reason provides rational ethical principles from its own conceptual resources, without the contamination of our natural instincts and desires, though it does take these into account in formulating its maxims. The categorical imperative provides a rule for ethical behavior based on the universalizability of norms for rational practical behaviors. If I cannot will that everyone in a similar situation adopt the same rule of behavior, then my rule is immoral. This route, however, is not open to Dussel. For Dussel, practical reason is not entirely distinct from natural instinct and desire. As we have indicated earlier, the subject that reflects

<sup>12</sup>Dussel correctly distinguishes a formal logical version of the argument from Hume’s original argument (Dussel 2001, 87–93; 1998/2013, 68–69 [73]).

on the will to live is not a solipsistic spectator to the life force. The reflecting subject is a feature of the lived body (*carnalidad*). And reflection itself is in part motivated by the will to live and grow in community.

The naturalistic fallacy presupposes if there is indeed a matter of fact that I have a will to live, that matter of fact does not entail that I ought to reproduce my life. Let us be clear. Dussel is not arguing that the proposition “I will to live” logically entails the proposition “I ought to reproduce my life.” He argues that human life is not merely a “matter of fact” but that it already includes an “ought” in its essence (Dussel 1998/2013, 137 [143]). The will to live is an effort that contains within itself *an exigency* to persevere in existence. *Conatus* is this very exigency. The living subject does not first exist and then, in a second moment, seek to reproduce itself. Its very existence, its metabolism, is characterized by the effort of self reproduction.

The conceptual bridge between the primordial instinctive will to live and the self-conscious responsibility to advance human life (normative principle) is found in the reflexive nature of each singular human life. This bridge is not a formal deduction, but rather a making explicit what is implicit in the will to live prior to reflection. Dussel refers to this particular case of making explicit what is implicit as a “dialectical founding” of the normativity implicit in human life (Dussel 2001, 95). The living human subject is inherently a being already engaged in evaluating possible dangers and pursuing mediations for satisfying vital needs. “The demand of the *ought-to-live* of life itself can be made *explicit* from the *living reality* of the human subject, precisely because *human* life is reflexive and self-responsible, taking into account the autonomous and solidaristic will it engages in order to be able to survive” (Dussel 1998/2013, 102 [110]).<sup>13</sup> The will to live becomes aware of itself, as an exigency to reproduce itself, in the act of reflection and thereby becomes *responsible* for this exigency at a self-conscious level. “This self-conscious, self-referential ‘reflection’ (of *human* life *on* its own life, and taking ‘charge of it’ as subject) is exactly the moment in which human life becomes the responsibility of the human subject... because life is already there *always*

<sup>13</sup>Dussel says: “The need to ‘accept’ the *passage* from the factual to the normative judgment is grounded in an exercise of practical-material reason, which articulates the relationship between the ‘life’ of the living human being, because of the *ethical* impossibility of suicide, and the unavoidable responsibility of pursuing the reproduction and development of that life: biological-cultural *necessity* is ‘imposed’ upon us as an *ethical obligation*” (1998/2013, 530, note 289).

(for the subject) to be constituted through self-responsibility as action and ethical project” (Dussel 1998/2013, 101–102 [109]; see also 2001, 94–95). As James L. Marsh (2000) points out, for Dussel:

Because our lived body is already making evaluations about what is good and what is bad, what is healthy and what is unhealthy, and because our lived body spontaneously desires to live, ethical reasoning simply unfolds and makes explicit the spontaneous evaluation already going on. Ethical reasoning simply takes up and subsumes and integrates this spontaneous bodily evaluation into a complex human context; the evaluation is not simple or merely animalistic. (54)

Practical reason “subsumes and integrates this spontaneous bodily evaluation” not as a disinterested ego; practical reason is the expression of that self same “spontaneous bodily evaluation” but now at a reflective level.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE LIVING SUBJECT AND NATURE

In *Ethics of liberation* (1998/2013) Dussel suggests that the material ethical principle should be given an additional foundation besides the biological and phenomenological groundings discussed above. He urges that “a *negative*, or *ad absurdum*, grounding is also and equally needed, to demonstrate the impossibility of its opposite” (1998/2013, 105 [112]). What Dussel has in mind here is the need to develop a principle or criterion whose transgression would constitute a “performative contradiction.”

The claim of this type of grounding would be to show that no ethical norm, human act, microstructure, just institution, or system of ethical life may contradict the enunciated principle. It is a universal principle, which may be improved in its formulation, but is not *falsifiable*—even taking into account the uncertainty of finite reason, because if it were falsifiable we would lose the ethical grounding of falsifiability, of reason itself; we would fall into an originating and abysmal performative contradiction. (105–106, [112])

What Dussel is looking for here is a grounding that is analogous to the pragmatic transcendental grounding that we will see deployed in the case of the formal and feasibility principles. With regard to the material ethical principle, however, this task had been left for a future project. In

2018, Dussel indicated that “the recent doctoral thesis of Jorge Zúñiga in Frankfurt has completed this fundamental aspect [of grounding the material principle] with help from the principle of impossibility of F. Hinkelammert” (2018, 32, note 85).<sup>14</sup> Dussel credits Zúñiga with providing the negative or ad absurdum argument by means of the elegant “principle of impossibility of the living subject and nature.” This principle articulates a criterion of human practices as well as an important tool for developing social science theory. I will briefly rehearse the main outlines of the argument for this principle and show how it provides an additional grounding of the material ethical principle. I will also suggest a possible objection to the principle as formulated and offer a reply.

Drawing on the arguments of Franz Hinkelammert’s *Critique of Utopian Reason*, Zúñiga (2017) maintains that the empirical impossibility of attaining the ideal of certain socio-economic systems, especially given the limitations of human knowledge, sets parameters for theorizing about what is empirically possible to achieve. For example, Hinkelammert (1984) argues that neither perfect competition (the neoliberal ideal) nor perfect planning of the economy (under real socialism) are empirically possible of achievement. “In perfect competition no one competes. The social process of market competition presupposes that competition is not perfect. If there were perfect competition, there would be no reason to compete” (67, see also 178). In the case of centralized planning of the economy, human beings simply do not have the infinite capacity to take into account the multitude of ever-changing economic factors in real time (139). In both the ideal perfectly competitive market and real socialism, empirical impossibilities, by setting parameters within which laws of what is empirically possible can be developed, can help inform social and economic theory about what is empirically possible to achieve.<sup>15</sup> What is important about these examples for our purposes is that human endeavors cannot circumvent the very empirical conditions that make those endeavors possible. Once these empirical limiting conditions are proven, one can formulate a principle that clearly expresses this

<sup>14</sup>See Zúñiga (2017). Dussel referred the author to this article by Jorge Zúñiga in an interview, January 10, 2018, Mexico City.

<sup>15</sup>Hinkelammert argues “planning ‘of everything’ is impossible, but planning of society ‘as a whole’ is without a doubt possible, if only it is in approximate and imperfect terms, as everything in this world is imperfect” (1984, 193, 228).

non-circumventability.<sup>16</sup> To be more precise, a principle of impossibility “should express a non-circumvent[i]bility ... of practical reality, or the so-called social reality” (Zúñiga 2017, 47). What most interests us here is the impossibility of circumventing the need for the existence of the living human subject and nature as conditions for the possibility of human practices.

Zúñiga draws from arguments in Hinkelammert and Dussel that approximate but do not yet clearly formulate the *principle of impossibility of the living subject and nature* as such, but do show the non-circumventability of human life and nature. With regard to Hinkelammert’s arguments that approximate this principle, Zúñiga focuses on the importance of life as a condition of possibility for having ends. If we examine means-ends reasoning, we find that the living human subject who engages in the task of determining the most efficient means to arrive at an end is in a sense part of the means. After all, without the living human subject, there is no agent to determine and realize the means toward the end. This means “strategic-instrumental reason presupposes the life of the subject and of nature after all. Without a living subject and a nature no end could be reached in the long run” (Zúñiga 2017, 48). Strategic reasoning which does not take human life and nature into account may lead to the destruction of humankind and the earth’s ecosystems, and in such a scenario, strategic rationality would undermine itself.

A second argument that Zúñiga takes from Hinkelammert is that “a society whose productive relations appear as incapable of reproducing the concrete life of human beings and that of nature, destroys itself and is not sustainable in the long run” (Hinkelammert, cited by Zúñiga 2017, 49). Here, Hinkelammert comes very close to formulating the principle of impossibility by showing life is a necessary condition for production, and therefore a system of production that undermines human life undermines itself.

Zúñiga also argues Dussel’s discussion of human life in relation to rationality likewise indicates the non-circumventability of the living subject, and cites the following passage in *Ethics of Liberation*:

<sup>16</sup>Zúñiga indicates that the term non-circumventability is taken from Karl-Otto Apel’s transcendental pragmatics (2017, 54).

Human life is a ‘mode of reality’; it is the concrete life of each human being from which reality is faced, constituting it from an ontological horizon (human life is the preontological point of departure of ontology) where the real is actualized as practical truth. ... Human life is never the ‘other’ of reason; rather it is the absolute intrinsic material condition of rationality; and that material rationality has human life as criterion and ultimate ‘reference’ of truth and absolute condition of its possibility. (Dussel, as cited by Zúñiga, 2017, 51)

Zúñiga reads this passage as pointing to the living human subject as the condition of possibility for the exercise of practical rationality “to produce, reproduce, and to develop human life” (51). As we have seen above, and Zúñiga points out, Dussel argues critical ethical rationality pursues the growth not only of the singular human life but a community of human life as well. Since the living subject is a necessary condition of practical rationality and practices that make the production, reproduction and development of human life in community possible, and such rationality and practices constitute ethical acts, Zúñiga concludes that, for Dussel, “life is a material criterion of ethical acts” (52). By “material criterion” Zúñiga means condition of possibility. For without life and nature as preconditions of the exercise of reason and performance of practical behaviors, ethical practices would not be possible.

What both Hinkelammert and Dussel share in common with regard to approximation to the principle of impossibility is that “both proceed from the assumption that life is a ‘condition’ of possibility to act in the coming time or in the future. In other words: Any human act and any kind of [human] reality presupposes the life of the subject and of nature” (Zúñiga 2017, 53). It should be noted that this non-circumventability of human life and nature is not yet the expression of the principle of impossibility. Hinkelammert and Dussel show the non-circumventability of human life and nature indicate necessary conditions for practical behavior or any human reality. The principle of impossibility formalizes and makes explicit this non-circumventability.

To summarize, Hinkelammert demonstrates that life is a condition of possibility for having ends and that any practice or institution that undermines life undermines its own condition of possibility. Dussel shows that the existence of the living human subject and nature make both practical rationality and ethical behaviors possible. For one cannot think or engage in behaviors at all if one is not already in a living metabolic relationship

with nature. What is most important for Zúñiga's purposes is that both philosophers establish the "non-circumvent[i]bility" of life and nature for any human practical behavior and that any practice that would undermine life and/or nature would undermine its very own possibility for existence in the future. Thus both philosophers "present the life of the human being and of nature as a factual presupposition for the acts and practices within a community as the condition of possibility for any kind of practical reality" (Zúñiga 2017, 54).

What is lacking in both Hinkelammert and Dussel, argues Zúñiga, is a precise statement of a principle that expresses the objectivity and universality of the non-circumventability of the living human subject and nature. The principle Zúñiga has in mind, he insists, is not itself a moral principle, as we find in Dussel's material ethical principle, "but a principle that outlines just the starting point of the practices and the construction and transformation of a practical reality" (Zúñiga 2017, 54). The normative content of the material ethical principle, argues Zúñiga, is a "second moment," that is, it comes later. The material ethical principle of Dussel has then, an additional grounding in the principle of impossibility, as Dussel himself recognizes (54).

The principle of impossibility takes the form of two related statements:

1. No human act nor any practice is factually possible without the living subject and nature.
2. No human reality can be realizable without the living subject and nature. (Zúñiga 2017, 55)

I take the second version of the principle to be broader than the first, but both have substantially the same implications: Any act, practice, institution, or system that undermines human life or nature would ultimately make that act, practice, institution, or system unviable. Taking into account the conditions of possibility for any human reality, including communication communities, therefore, provides us with certain non-circumventability parameters for rational practical behaviors as well as for developing social, ecological, and other fields of research.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>See Zúñiga (2016b) for a discussion of the application of the principles of impossibility to institutions, including communication communities.

While the principle of impossibility does indeed present, in clear terms, the non-circumventability of life and nature as empirical conditions of possibility for ethical practices, it does divest the mere fact of the existence of the living human subject of intrinsic normative content. If, as Dussel argues in *Ethics of Liberation*, the arguments for the material ethical principle do not commit the naturalistic fallacy, then it would seem Dussel wants to maintain the existence of the living human subject cannot be adequately conceived as a non-moral moment prior to the establishment of the material ethical principle. Or to put this in the form of a question, if there is no fallacy in moving (by making what is implicit, explicit) from the fact of human life to the normative principle that we ought to produce, reproduce, and grow human life in community, then does not the fact of the living human subject already include a moral criterion? Not exactly. In note 337 of *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel says “the principle of human life is not intrinsically ethical, but is instead the foundation of all possible ethical orders. To *negate* life is the evil; to *affirm* life is what is good. But life in itself is neither good nor evil” (1998/2013, 508). Moreover, Dussel does separate the empirical exigency of life prior to reflection on one’s life, from the emergence, upon reflection, of a normative moment in the very essay in which he defends the material ethical principle against the naturalistic fallacy. *Dussel distinguishes the moment of biological exigency from the moment of ethical responsibility*. “It appears that this ‘necessity’ [to eat in order to live] is not yet a normative ‘obligation’. But being a human being, as we have said, a self-reflective being, responsible for one’s own life, means one has one’s own life as ‘one’s charge’” (Dussel 2001, 98). It is not until one grasps explicitly (thematically) one’s implicit responsibility for one’s life that there is normatively. “The ‘responsibility’ for life itself is the condition of possibility of the normative as such” (Dussel 2001, 95). When discussing suicide, Dussel remarks that “life being the absolute condition of the ethical subject, suicide leaves the subject and the ethical without existence” (98). This may be splitting hairs, but these statements do show that for Dussel, the fact of (pre-reflective) human life can indeed be considered, as Zúñiga argues, as an empirical criterion, not yet normative, for the very possibility and practical implementation of the material ethical principle.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>We need to be careful here about allotting and denying ethical status. Parts of the earth’s biosphere that are not reflective can still be considered moral *patients* and therefore have dignity. The requirement for moral agency, however, is the ability to act deliberately in accordance with ethical principles.



Zúñiga recognizes that while human life and nature are conditions of possibility for implementing the material ethical principle, the reproduction of that very life is in turn realized by praxis in accord with the material ethical principle.<sup>19</sup> I must first be alive and there must be a viable biosphere if I am to produce and reproduce my life. And my efforts to produce and reproduce my life in community and conserve nature in turn support the very conditions (existence of the living subject and nature) that make this practical behavior possible! For “No human act nor any practice is factually possible without the living subject and nature.” Zúñiga has provided the *negative* or *ad absurdum* principle that Dussel had sought for in *Ethics of Liberation* in a manner consistent with Dussel’s analectical, biological and phenomenological arguments for the material ethical principle.

### THE FORMAL ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

Whereas the material ethical principle is that we ought to promote the production, reproduction, and increase of human life in community and in harmony with Mother Earth, the formal principle provides the procedural rules and conditions under which the community of human life ought to deliberate in order to realize the material principle in praxis.

In *14 tesis de ética*, Dussel offers a concise statement of the formal principle:

*Act in such a manner that the acts and institutions are decided having always as a presupposition the symmetrical participation of those affected in order to reach a consensus shared by the entire community, by means of a debate in which rational arguments are presented, without violence. (2016, 84 [6.71]; see also 1998/2013, Ch. 2)*

This formal principle introduces another dimension of the community of human life: it is also a community of communication. For Dussel, as an *ethical* communication community, we remain bound in our decision making by the material ethical principle and are therefore co-responsible for the production, reproduction, and growth of human life in harmony with the biosphere. In such a communication community, ideally, each

<sup>19</sup>Personal communication of the author with Jorge Zúñiga, January 13, 2018.

participant has a voice in symmetry with other participants and all those impacted by a policy decision are included in the conversation. In this way, everyone's argument is to be heard and considered.

An ethics of liberation sees the transformation of the prevailing system as necessary for bringing about a more just order of things. A communication community that assumes the prevailing capital system, with its structural inequality, is an inevitable state of affairs, cannot claim, in good faith, to be promoting maximal symmetrical participation of all who may be impacted by the policy decisions of such bodies. For those who are being dominated or excluded will not be at the table or will be at the table at some disadvantage in relation to those who dominate. And if the material principle does not inform the *content* of the conversation, the communication community could end up advocating and implementing policies that undermines human life and nature. For example, the theory of justice of John Rawls presumes that a hypothetical communication community that engages in a profound and impartial reflection on the principles of justice would end up presupposing that the capital system and the democratic liberal state, as well as economic and social stratification, are invariable features of economic and social life.

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971/1999), Rawls asks us to engage in a thought experiment in which we place ourselves behind a veil of ignorance, pretending for a moment that we are in the original position of persons who do not know what their vocation, race, gender, or other characteristics would be upon the institution of a new society. We should imagine that we are rational, self interested, and get to set basic rules for the new society. We are also supposed to assume that there are natural and necessary structural inequalities that stratify social relationships according to differences in wealth and status. It is no surprise then, that one of Rawls's basic principles of justice is called the "difference principle" which specifies rules for the distribution of society's presumed inequalities. Rawls argues that these preferred positions ought to be open to all and must be such that the existence of higher status positions improves the lot of the least advantaged (see Rawls 1971/1999, 65). This original position, Dussel and other left critics of John Rawls point out, is not so original after all, because it assumes the very capital system which would not be presupposed from an analectic perspective (Dussel 1998/2013, 115–120 [122–128]).

From the point of view of critical ethical reason, there is no empirical necessity for the existence of such gross economic and social inequalities. Critical ethical reason does not see natural laws at work in the prevailing order of things, but a historically conditioned state of affairs that reproduces residues of the past. With this insight in mind, there is arguably no ethical justification for the violence and domination that brought about actual primitive accumulation of wealth by means of colonization of Amerindian peoples and enslavement of millions of Africans (Dussel 2014a, 69 [5.15]). Even if we imagine we are behind a veil of ignorance and get to make rules of a new society, there is no logical or empirical necessity in positing a capital system or a bureaucratic real socialism or any other model that would victimize millions of citizens. Rawls's theory of justice, like some social contract theories, assumes there is no alternative to capitalism. "The unsuspecting reader [of Rawls] will ask herself: Why are political or formal 'equalities' admitted and at the same time *economic* and social 'inequalities' proposed? Should we not have to formulate, at least in principle, an *economic* and social equality as point of departure" (Dussel 1998/2013, 117 [125])? For Rawls, apparently not. Rawls appears to be committed to taking economic inequalities generated by the prevailing capital system as "*simply natural facts*" (Rawls, cited by Dussel, 118 [126]).<sup>20</sup>

Rawls's veil of ignorance does not transcend the ontology of the prevailing system and perhaps for this reason fails to take the material principle adequately into account. From behind the veil of ignorance, or rather, in Dusselian fashion, from the more radically exterior analectic point of view of alterity, we can imagine a different outcome to the thought experiment, one in which those who devise principles for a new just society include the approximation to economic and social equality among its basic features.

## DISCOURSE ETHICS AND THE MATERIAL PRINCIPLE

Dussel takes issue with the theoretical omission of the material principle as *foundational* in his ongoing dialogue with discourse ethics. Here we will focus on Dussel's dialogue with Karl-Otto Apel. When introducing

<sup>20</sup>See also Dussel (2016, 74–76 [6.3]) on "Rawls's moral formalism." We will revisit some of the basic features of social contract theory in more detail in Chapter 5 of this monograph.

Apel's views on discourse ethics, Dussel remarks "since 1989, he [Apel] and I have engaged in a dialogue, which underpins the writing of *Ethics of Liberation*" (1998/2013, 122 [129]; see also 2018). This credit given to Apel is no exaggeration. While the first ethics of Dussel (1973/2014b, 1973/2014c), was based in large part on existential phenomenology and the analectic method, and did not yet develop the three principles of the ethics of liberation (material, formal, and feasibility), Dussel found the formal principle developed by discourse ethics compelling and incorporated this into his second ethics (1998/2013).<sup>21</sup> While Dussel acknowledges the importance of Apel's insights into the formal dimension of a universal ethics, he critiques Apel's prioritizing this formal dimension over its material feature. For Apel, since each culture has a different ethos and view of human life, the material principle is considered culture relative. "[Apel] does not discern that all cultures, as well as the postconventional modern one, are *concrete modes* to historically organize ... 'the reproduction and development of life in each human subject in community'" (Dussel 1998/2013, 123 [129]). Dussel also observes:

Every culture is different and particular with respect to the others, but human life is that which founds the particular values of every culture, and as such is one and universal. Life is the universal principle and each culture a particular way of exercising that life. We discovered thus that the exigency of affirming human life in community was the universal presupposition; it was a new principle: the material principle of every possible ethic. (2018, 32)

The debate between Apel and Dussel hinges on whether, for the theory of practical rationality, the material ethical principle is *co-foundational* with the formal principle. First, I will briefly outline Apel's version of the discourse ethics argument. Then I will summarize points of divergence and convergence of Apel's view with Dussel's argument for inclusion of the material principle as a co-foundational feature of practical rationality.

<sup>21</sup>By using the terms "first" and "second" ethics here I do not mean to imply that the second completely supersedes the first but that it is later and incorporates much of the first into the second.

### APEL AND THE BRIDGE FROM REAL TO IDEAL COMMUNICATION COMMUNITIES

In "The Communication Community and the Foundation of Ethics," Apel starts off his essay with a discussion of the global challenge to the survival of the human species posed by the underside of science and technology, in particular the threat of nuclear war and the ongoing environmental devastation wrought by industrial pollution. The "paradoxical" problem posed by presumably value free scientific reasoning is that the ethical standards urgently needed to address such global challenges are not matters of fact and are therefore relegated to various forms of moral relativism. Moral relativism, however, cannot provide a practical compass for overcoming negative fallout of unrestrained science and technology. Here is the problem. While natural science enjoys the status of disciplines that aim at objectivity, ethics, in the analytic philosophical tradition, has generally been viewed as a socially and historically conditioned phenomenon lacking any supra-conventional basis. Yet there is a practical need for collective responsibility and commitment across cultures to at least some universal norms to address these urgent planetary issues. "A universal, i.e., intersubjectively valid ethics of collective responsibility thus seems both necessary and impossible" (Apel 1972/1980, 229).

Apel does not look for the resolution of this paradox in privileging any one conventional morality over all others, as this could lead to a "closed, logical circle of presuppositions" (Apel 1972/1980, 232). Nor does the instrumental rationality deployed in technical fields, which by itself lacks norms for social and environmental responsibility, provide a universal ethical standard. For instrumental rationality, although indispensable to means-ends reasoning for achieving any goal, does not ethically justify the choice of any particular technically possible practical goal over another. What is needed, argues Apel, is a norm that "makes it a duty for all individuals to strive, in principle, for a binding agreement with other people in all practical questions and furthermore to subsequently adhere to this agreement" (239).

Apel's solution to the paradox embraces the value neutrality of the presumed ideal (though far from actual) rules of discussion within the scientific community. Apel's strategy is to apply pragmatic-transcendental

reflection on the pre-conditions that make rational discussion in scientific communities possible, to communication communities more generally. Such adherence to the norms that make rational discussion and inter-subjective consensus or validity possible is arguably not unique to the scientific community. "In the community of argumentation," says Apel, "it is presupposed that all the members mutually recognize each other as participants with equal rights in the discussion" (1972/1980, 259). In such a community, participants are committed to rational argument, open to revising their positions in the face of the better arguments, all without any violence or coercion, in order to reach a consensus. It would be inconsistent for one to argue, within a communication community, against the deployment of such norms, as in such a case the one arguing would have no basis for maintaining that others ought to listen.

Apel's vision of the sort of ethical commitment involved in sincerely taking part in an argumentative community appears to aim at maximal inclusion: "Anyone who takes part in an argument implicitly acknowledges all the *potential claims* of all the members of the communication community that *can* be ju[s]tified by rational arguments." The members "are also committed to considering all the potential claims of all the potential members—and this means all human 'needs' inasmuch as they could be affected by norms and consequently make *claims* on their fellow human beings." For Apel then, "all human 'needs' are ethically *relevant*" (Apel 1972/1980, 277). The ethical relevance of considering human needs of "all the potential members" brings Apel close to admitting a material element into the conditions of possibility of a discourse community and therefore as a co-foundational feature of practical rationality. But he does not make that move.

How does Apel account for the lack of consideration of meeting human needs of the Other in some of the real communication communities? Apel was realist enough to distinguish an *ideal* communication community (A) from the *real* or actual ones (B). The real communication communities are embedded in particular lifeworlds and participants of these communities bring their socially and historically conditioned sense of morality to the discussion table. The ideal communication community, as a regulative idea, is one in which the particularity of local norms are transcended by means of an agreement that consensus ought to be sought through acknowledgment of the better arguments.

Apel also recognized existing material inequalities create a gap between real and the ideal communication communities. Apel even acknowledges that an understanding of and sincere commitment to the ideal is still not enough to guarantee fidelity, within the real communication community, to the a priori transcendental principles that make intersubjective validity and consensus possible. “Even those who have achieved complete insight into the moral principle cannot as a result immediately become members of an [ideal] unlimited community of communicating people who share equal rights. On the contrary, they remain bound to their *real* social position and situation” (Apel 1972/1980, 278–279). It is this gap between the real and ideal communication communities that draws our attention to the need to complement the formal principle with the material principle.

#### DUSSEL’S RESPONSE TO APEL

Dussel begins his analysis of the formal ethical principle with an analectical reflection on the “metaphysical exteriority of the Other.” So Dussel starts his analysis not from the hegemonic real communities of communication which presumably strive toward the ideal, but from the Other who is excluded from real hegemonic communication communities (Dussel 1992/2012; see Schelkshorn 2000, 100).<sup>22</sup> To be sure, both Apel and Dussel agree that symmetry among the participants in a communication community is a necessary condition for achieving intersubjective validity. But while Apel posits norms of an ideal communication community that do not include an a priori commitment to structural

<sup>22</sup>In *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel makes a clear distinction between the point of departure of discourse ethics versus the ethics of liberation: “The essential difference on this point between discourse ethics and the ethics of liberation is found in the very point of departure. While discourse ethics begins with the community of communication, the ethics of liberation departs from the excluded-affected from such a community. These are the victims of noncommunication. As a result, discourse ethics is practically situated in a position where the fundamental moral norms become ‘inapplicable’ ... in ‘normal’ situations of asymmetry (not particularly exceptional situations). The ethics of liberation, on the other hand, locates itself precisely in the ‘exceptional situation of the excluded,’ that is to say, in the very moment when discourse ethics discovers its limitations” (Dussel 1998/2013, 294–295 [280]).

economic reform as a precondition for setting up a symmetrical discussion, Dussel insists that overcoming alienation brought about by socio-economic structures of domination and exploitation are essential features of symmetrical participation in discourse (Dussel 1992/2012, 72, 77–78, 81–82). What Dussel is suggesting here is that the formal principle must be linked to the material conditions of human life in order for the formal principle to have critical ethical application in the real world.

In Apel's pragmatic transcendental reflection, the pre-conditions of argumentation in a communication community constitute the basic norms upon which other more particular norms are determined in the course of deliberations. These subsequent norms may include ones that impact material conditions for human life. Dussel's concern is that the material principle, as secondary, does not necessarily inform the *content* of deliberations. So a real communication community can conceivably reach intersubjective validity on a policy that undermines the basic needs of the Other who is excluded from deliberations.

Apel seeks to employ an *ethics of responsibility* to address the problem of material inequality. An ethics of responsibility would aim at creating symmetry among the participants of communication communities. "Apel sees the need to reintegrate the entire sphere of material ethics" observes Dussel. "But now it is too late. And furthermore, he only accomplishes a juxtaposition, because he is never going to be able to formally and coherently deduce an ethics of responsibility (which should have material principles and motivations in order to bring about the desired symmetry) setting out from a discourse ethics" (1998/2013, 126 [133]).<sup>23</sup> For Dussel, the ethics of responsibility, motivated by material needs of more than half of humanity, ought to be an *integral* part of the effort to constitute intersubjective validity.

<sup>23</sup>Dussel argues that recognition of the Other by ethical-preoriginary reason is a condition of accepting the Other as an equal participant in a communication community. "If I am right on this," remarks Dussel, "it is clear then, that discursive reason is a moment founded upon 'ethical-preoriginary reason.'" (1998/2013, 301 [286]). One cannot receive the Other as an equal interlocutor without recognizing his or her humanity, and one cannot conceive of the Other's humanity apart from his or her will to live and grow in community.



This is really a very concrete practical issue. Dussel has good reason to be suspicious of the accords arrived at in real communication communities of the Global North that impose an economic dependency and political subordination on Latin America and other peripheral nations of the Global South. On January 1, 1994, the same day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and its supporters staged an uprising in Chiapas to protest an accord that would exacerbate their already precarious economic conditions. The workers and farmers of Mexico did not have a seat, let alone a symmetrical voice, in the hegemonic communication community of the elites in the US and Mexico who would make policy decisions impacting their daily lives. So Zapatistas formed their own communication communities of the oppressed in order to reach intersubjective validity based on their need to live and develop in community. What is essential for an ethics of liberation, is not the “we” of a type of discourse which can become a closed community of those who dominate others, but the “Other” who is exterior to unrepresentative communities of communication and who stands in a “trans-ontological” (and nevertheless lived) relation to their accords (Dussel 1992/2012, 72–73; see Schelkshorn 2000, 104).

To be fair, Apel does indeed take care to include in the norms of discourse that all of those who may be impacted be able to participate in deliberations. The affected presumably include the Other about whom Dussel is so concerned. The problem indicated by Dussel is that “before being ‘affected’ [the Other] was ‘excluded’.” So in addition to the good will expressed in seeking to include all those affected, it is also important to take into account “the conditions of possibility of *being able* to effectively *participate*, ‘to be part’ of the so-called *real* communication community” (Dussel 1992/2012, 77).

From the analectic point of view, discourse ethics does not sufficiently consider that some interlocutors simply cannot participate as equals in terms of making decisions about matters that affect them directly. As Marsh points out, “if one or more participants is materially deprived, however, lacking food, housing, education, medical care, and so on, then he is not able to participate as an equal. The required moral symmetry of communication is violated and rendered inoperative by a real, lived, material inequality of living conditions” (2000, 57). This “violation” of moral symmetry can be heard in voices of victims of hegemonic

communication communities. The cry for help (*interpelación*) is a speech act emanating from beyond the totalizing system and its instrumental rationality. The one who cries out “I am hungry” and demands justice may be so debilitated that he or she may not even be able to sit at the table of deliberation. And of course, being alive and able to communicate are obviously conditions of possibility of participation in any communication community whatsoever. One is first a member of the community of human life before one can be a member of a community of communication.<sup>24</sup>

Again, Apel does not deny the need for ever-increasing inclusivity; this is, after all, what is intended by the regulative idea of the ideal communication community and the ethics of responsibility. The exclusion of subalternized peoples, however, is not a matter of unintentional omission, but is based on ideological and structural features of socio-economic reality reproduced by the policies and practices of hegemonic real communication communities. Such communities can arrive at intersubjectively valid policies that negate the life of the Other without further approximation to the ideal communication community unless the material principle informs and guides their deliberations.

Dussel argues that all of those affected by deliberations of the real communication communities ought to become more equal *in economic and social terms* before one can claim that the rules of the communication game are bent toward fairness. Only then can their inclusion have a real and symmetrical impact on deliberations and policy. The remedy is not, as Apel suggests, to afford “an oppressed class or race” the “a priori *privilege* ... to bring about equality even prior to acknowledging the rules that only have to be accepted once real equality exists” (Apel 1972/1980, 279; see Schelkshorn 2000, 108). This is close to acknowledging the material principle. But it still does not go far enough. In practice, the goal is to transform *systemic* causes of oppression reproduced by hegemonic real communication communities. Dussel’s point is that socio-economic concerns are not merely side issues but are also ethical concerns (Dussel 1998/2013, 120 [128]).

<sup>24</sup>See J. Zúñiga (2016b, 88–90) for a discussion of the life of the human subject and nature as conditions of possibility for social practices, including the deliberations of communication communities. As we discussed in the section on the material principle, Zúñiga explains this situation by formulating two principles of impossibility related to these conditions.

There is no easy fix to the lack of symmetry, when some of the interlocutors are the owners of the means of production and others have only their labor power to sell (Dussel 2014a, 244–267; Thesis 14). The upshot from the point of view of an ethics of liberation is that the prospective member of the real communication community is not only a being that thinks and argues, but also one that *produces* in order to reproduce his or her own life. We produce speech only by reproducing first our lives in a given socio-economic context. It is for this reason, says Dussel, that “the *real* communication community’ is not able to avoid determining and being determined by the ‘*real* community of human life’” (1992/2012, 93). Dussel argues:

Although ethically one always already presupposes transcendently that one has the same rights as the owner of a business upon agreeing to enter into an argumentative process, nevertheless, *empirically* the owner should be able, by the *force of (unjust) law*, to discount his or her [the worker’s] opinion or leave [the workers] outside the community of communication, of the business assembly. The theme of property ... has therefore a fundamental sense with respect to the consensuality of the legitimate management of the economy. (Dussel 2014a, 260 [14.56])

Dussel seems to say here that a fully developed set of norms presupposed by an ethical communication community ought to include a commitment to overcoming material inequalities generated by the capital system in order that all those affected are able to live and grow in a community of communication *and life*. Moreover, Dussel argues that it is the Other who will be the main protagonists for bringing about a more just communication community. “It will be the dominated and excluded themselves ... who will be in charge of constructing a new symmetry; it will be a new real, historical, critical, consensual community of communication” (Dussel 1998/2013, 155 [159]; see also 1992/2012, 81).

As Schelkshorn points out, “both of them [Apel and Dussel] want to develop ethics as macroethics—Apel because of the planetary expansion of modern science and technology, Dussel because of the global dimension of the North-South conflict” (2000, 102). Democratic participatory deliberation should be considered as a means by which a community of communication *as a community of human life* may advance its interests and overcome the structures of oppression it suffers due to the prevailing system (Dussel 1998/2013, 127–128 [134–135]). Discourse ethics does

not itself, however, include as foundational the material principle which would obligate the real communication community to ensure the actual symmetry of voices at the discussion table. "The acknowledgment of the ethical subject *as equal* is an exercise of ethical-originary reason ... prior to the use of discursive reason as such" (151 [157]). Apel's discourse ethics then, is arguably lacking in the insight of ethical-originary reason by means of which it would recognize the socio-economic equality of the ethical subject as a condition of symmetrical participation in the *real* communication community.<sup>25</sup>

The existence of a communication community of the Other and the hegemonic communication community sets up two different sorts of consensus, the one being a dominating community and the other a dominated one. Such a scenario puts in the clearest relief the importance of placing conditions, derived from the material principle, on the content of procedures followed by those making policy as well as of ensuring the symmetrical participation of all those who may be impacted by the decisions.

The *old* community of communication in which those worse off were excluded is now transformed into a *dominating* community, and if the community of those worse off and excluded reach among their participants a valid and critical consensus in a process of increasing legitimacy, by definition, the *old* consensus of those now revealed as dominators is transformed into a *dominating* consensus in crisis of delegitimization.... (Dussel 2018, 34)

So here we have two communication communities, each in conformity with formal principles of discourse ethics, and each arriving at intersubjective validity by reaching consensus. Dussel points out that without considering the *material implications* of both communities, it is not possible to compare the two communities to assess the ethical significance of this relation of domination.

To summarize, Dussel takes the formal and material principles to be complementary *foundational* features of ethical reasoning. It is by means of symmetrical discourse that a real communication community, guided

<sup>25</sup>As Schelkshorn points out, "the idea of consensus not becoming a chimera depends entirely on the possibility of understanding the claims of the Other from his own life world" (2000, 104).

by the material principle, can reach consensus with regard to the policies and institutions that will most likely advance human life. “Both [the formal and material principles] *are necessary* in order to reach the full ethical content of the decision of the concrete or final practical-normative judgment that unleashes the properly ‘fulfilling’ process of the ethical feasibility of the act that can have a goodness claim ... but both are different and not sufficient separately” (Dussel 1998/2013, 150 [156]). The new consensual community of communication that Dussel has in mind here will subject themselves to the guidance of the formal and material principles, but these principles themselves are to also be informed by a further condition that limits ethical praxis to those courses of action that are feasible given the current circumstances. This brings us to the third ethical principle, the principle of feasibility.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF FEASIBILITY

The singular human life is not only steeped in the present, with all its residues of the past; it is also, as ability-to-be (*poder-ser*), directed toward the future. As the singular human life becomes more and more thematically aware of itself as a being-in-the-world, the mediations by means of which it reproduces itself become more complex and deliberate. Ideally, the reproduction of one’s life is a communal, free, and fulfilling process. Yet today human life is all too often alienated from the creative source of its production and reproduction, namely, its own living labor, as well as from other human beings. An ethics of liberation seeks to overcome these forms of alienation in accord with the material and formal principles in ways that are feasible. It assumes that the doors to a planetary humanism are open, if only we have the practical ethical rationality, will and fortitude to stay the course.

Despite the claims of the champions of neoliberalism that history had ended with the collapse of real socialism, Dussel is sympathetic to the Zapatista declaration, from the Lacandon Jungle, that “another world is possible,” one that rejects bad government altogether. This declaration “opens again the debate over the feasibility of overcoming [capitalism], and it is no surprise that this declaration originates in the geopolitical South, among the most exploited and forgotten original peoples” (Dussel 2016, 92 [7.31]). The struggle to realize the possibility of overcoming systemic negation of human life and degradation of earth’s ecosystems, is, from the point of view of an ethics of liberation, a categorical

imperative. What is not possible, in the sense of morally acceptable, is to succumb to the imposition of permanent war, an indefinite state of exception, growing economic and social inequality, and the reduction and degradation of the earth's ecosystems. The principle of feasibility provides the means-ends rationality that sets practical parameters for challenging these maladies of the prevailing system.

### FEASIBILITY: LOGICAL, EMPIRICAL, TECHNICAL, ETHICAL

In *14 tesis de ética* (2016), strategic or technical rationality conditioned by the two other ethical criteria (material and formal) is called *operability*. The principle at hand is clearly directed at moral operability (*factibilidad moral*), not feasibility per se (Dussel 2016, 88–89 [7.11–7.12]). Such *ethical* feasibility is attained by linking strategic rationality to the material and formal principles.

How then, do we conceptualize the idea of feasibility in the ethical sense of operability? Marsh, in “Principles in Dussel’s Ethics,” summarizes Dussel’s concept of feasibility neatly in terms of sorts of possibility: “logical, empirical, technical, and ethical” (2000, 57). In the order presented “the latter in the series presupposes the former” but not vice versa (57). For example, it was technically possible for the US to deport Salvadoran refugees back to conditions of civil war during the 1980’s, which means it was also empirically and logically possible, but it was ethically impossible because it denied thousands of Salvadorans the right to refuge from fear of persecution, disregarded their appeals, and resulted in loss of life, thereby violating the material and formal principles.

What is later in the list of types of possibility presupposes what goes before. So, for example, since it was ethically possible (because it was in accord with the material, formal, and feasibility principles) in some towns, universities, and places of worship in the US during the 1980’s, to provide sanctuary for undocumented refugees (though it was illegal), it was also technically, empirically, and logically possible. Marsh points out that “a socio-economic system is impossible if one or more of these criteria ... is violated.” Based on this premise, and the further premise that capitalism violates the material and formal principles, it follows that “though it [capitalism] is logically, empirically, and technically possible, it is ethically impossible” (Marsh 2000, 58). But capitalism arguably violates more than the material and formal principles. If it is the case that globalizing capital in the long term undermines human life and the

earth's ecosystems, and a condition of possibility for means-ends reasoning is the existence of the living human subject and nature, capitalism in the long term is not technically feasible.

Marsh's analysis of ethical feasibility is relevant to Dussel's dialogue with the work of Franz Hinkelammert, and in particular, *Critique of Utopian Reason* (Hinkelammert 1984; see Dussel 1998/2013, 181–203 [184–203]). Dussel notes that “a ‘critique of utopian reason’ frames the limits of instrumental reason within its possible and ethical feasibility” (Dussel 1998/2013, 194 [197]). By possible, here, Dussel is referring to technical, empirical, and logical possibility, for again, these latter sorts of possibility are prior to ethical feasibility. For Hinkelammert, empirically impossible ideals such as perfect competition or perfect planning of the economy set parameters to what is empirically possible. For this reason Hinkelammert's critique of utopian reason takes aim at both capitalism and real (bureaucratic centralized) socialism (1984). He argues that the free market, in its ideal form of perfect competition, is empirically impossible, and therefore he argues it is also neither technically nor ethically possible. Perfect competition, however, can be taken as a theoretical construct to indicate a hypothesis about the *tendency* of actual markets toward a point of equilibrium (see Hinkelammert 1984, 85–86).

The champions of free-market economics argue that capitalism is the best possible economic system if there is minimal state intervention with the market's natural dynamics. There is mounting evidence, however, that contemporary capital in the form of neoliberalism is generating growing economic and social inequality worldwide and taking a heavy toll on the earth's ecosystems. “The thesis that the market produces equality and distributes goods in an equitable manner is purely ideological,” argues Dussel, “and is not supported by any empirical evidence” (2016, 93 [7.36]). While the neoliberal model of free markets, short of perfect competition, might have been empirically and technically feasible in the short run, in practice it is undermining human life and nature in the long term. For this reason Dussel argues, “not everything that is technically or economically feasible (and even politically, and ideologically, etc.) is ethically and morally possible ...” (Dussel 1998/2013, 189 [191]). Moreover, as Hinkelammert points out, means-ends reasoning itself requires the existence of the living subject. So totalizing global capital may not even be technically feasible as it now threatens the conditions of possibility of any means-ends reasoning at all: human life and nature. Hinkelammert also critiques real socialism and argues perfect planning

is empirically impossible, for the unlimited knowledge that would be required at the speed required to plan what to produce and at what volume to produce it is not within the limits of human comprehension (and I would add, probably not even within the limits of computer simulation with real time data!).

What then is the ethically feasible path between an empirically impossible perfectly competitive market and an empirically impossible entirely centrally planned production and distribution system? Dussel suggests a prudent and admittedly fallible transformation of the market that avoids both extremes can provide a corrective to unbridled free markets as well as bureaucratic centralism. In such a case planning would be “formulated by the people themselves ... in coordination with the respective levels of the State, within the parameters of the needs of a population which knows how to participate actively in democracy” (Dussel 2016, 97 [7.48]). We will discuss this issue in more detail in Chapter 6 on the ethical dimension of economics.

Although Hinkelammert does not explicitly acknowledge a material ethical principle, he does recognize the reproduction of human life as a necessary condition for the feasibility of any economic system. “A society that does not guarantee, ensuring the satisfaction of necessities, the life of everyone, is impossible in the sense of unsustainable” (Hinkelammert 1984, 14).<sup>26</sup> But it is also impossible in the ethical sense. When Hinkelammert says “duty follows possibility; it does not precede it” he means that I must first be able to live before I can be obligated (14). The sort of rationality that Hinkelammert views as applying “the criterion of the fulfillment of the needs to the selection of ends” is reproductive reason, which Dussel identifies with material practical reason. Dussel credits Hinkelammert with redefining “in a rational, universal and *material* manner (as an ethics of content) the entire problematic of the fulfillment of praxis and institutions” (1998/2013, 185 [188]).

For Dussel, strategic reasoning, as operability, is informed by material and formal considerations. Taken in isolation from the two other ethical principles, strategic or instrumental reasoning simply determines

<sup>26</sup>“The practical subject cannot act unless it is a *living subject*. One has to live in order to be able to conceive ends and to undertake them ... To live is also a project that has its own conditions of possibility and fails if it does not achieve them ... Only that subset of ends that are integrated to a project of life is feasible” (Hinkelammert, cited by Dussel 1998/2013, 184 [187]).



the most efficient means to an end. Yet the viability of strategic reasoning itself presupposes human life and nature as its conditions of possibility. Should instrumental reason become autonomous and efficiency itself become the compass for successful practical behavior, humans could be reduced to a mere means to a capricious end, placing life itself in jeopardy. Such a “formal fetishized self-referentiality ... can turn against the life of the human subject or against his or her free, necessary participation” (Dussel 1998/2013, 190–191 [193]). Critical theory had raised the alarm bells of the disastrous consequences of the instrumentalization of human beings enhanced by technology at the service of a totalizing fascism (Dussel 1998/2013, 192 [194]). Today, in the form of Western instrumental rationality, strategic reason is a threat to the survival of life on the planet. “For us,” insists Dussel, “this instrumental reason ought to be framed within the requirements of practical truth (reproduction and development of the life of the human subject) and intersubjective validity (full egalitarian participation in practical argumentation by those affected) and positively subsumed within action” (186–187 [189]).<sup>27</sup> Instrumental reason then, ought to be placed at the service of the will to live and grow in community and set parameters to deliberations carried out by symmetrical communication procedures.

In *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel states the principle of feasibility:

[The one] who proposes to carry out or transform a norm, act, institution, and so on, cannot leave out of consideration the conditions of possibility of its objective, material and formal, empirical, technical, economic, political, and so on fulfillment, such that the act will be *possible* taking into account the laws of nature in general and human laws in particular. It is a matter of choosing the adequate or efficacious mediations for determined ends. (1998/2013, 188 [191])<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>In “Where Do We Go from Here,” M. L. King, Jr. warns about science without morality: “When scientific power outruns moral power, we end up with guided missiles and misguided men. When we foolishly minimize the internal of our lives and maximize the external, we sign the warrant for our own day of doom” (Washington 1986, 621).

<sup>28</sup>In *14 tesis de ética*, Dussel draws attention to the requirement of feasibility for a goodness (or ethical) claim: “All human acts or community institutions have a goodness claim if, and only if, in addition to affirming life (first principle) and by agreement of those affected (second principle), they are empirically possible according to the diverse fields and systems that enter into their concrete accomplishment” (2016, 97 [7.51]).

Only if one acts in accordance with all three ethical principles, can one make a goodness claim about the action one takes in the various practical fields (Dussel 2016, 188–189 [14.12]).

### THE THREE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The three ethical principles mutually inform each other (Dussel 2016, 106–107 [8.4]). An act cannot be considered ethically good unless all three principles are in play. There are a number of ways to conceive of this tripartite relationship. None of the principles stands on its own. The material ethical principle is applied in practice through the formal procedures of rational discussion among equals in order to obtain intersubjective validity. The formal or procedural principle gets its basic direction from the material principle. This means deliberations by constituents about norms and institutions are to be guided by the objective of building a world in which all persons can live and grow in community (Dussel 1998/2013, 106–107 [113]; see also 124 [130]). The feasibility principle ought to condition formal deliberation because what is decided by a symmetrical community of communication in accordance with the material principle ought to be achievable (technically, empirically, and logically possible). Finally, strategic reason itself, as operability, is informed by the formal and material principles; this means strategic reason ought not select ends merely because they are technically feasible, but *only* because they can achieve the material end in accord with symmetrical communicative procedures.

### ETHICAL CRITICISM AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE PREVAILING SYSTEM

After developing the three major ethical principles in Chapter 2–4 of *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel discusses the application of these principles, in both the critique of the prevailing system and its transformation, in Chapters 5–7. The ethical critique is aimed at negation of the negation of human life and Mother Earth. This liberatory project is motivated by a love of justice and the desire to realize the material ethical principle in the world by ultimately transforming the prevailing system, by democratic means, into one that makes it possible for all singular human lives to grow in community and in harmony with Mother Earth.

Critical ethical consciousness then, is faced with a twofold task: negation of the negation of human life and the transformation of the oppressive features of the globalizing capital system to create a “world in which many worlds fit”.

In effect, in order for there to be justice, solidarity, and goodness in the face of the victims, it is necessary to “criticize” the given order so the *impossibility of living* for these victims is transformed into the *possibility of living* and of living better lives. But in order to accomplish this end it is necessary to “transform” the prevailing order, to make it grow, to create a new one. (Dussel 1998/2013, 289 [274])

The three ethical principles, by taking on a critical as well as constructive role, guide liberatory praxis on the exodic path to liberation.

In Chapter 6 of *Ethics of Liberation*, “The liberation principle,” Dussel focuses on the principle of feasibility or strategic reason. As we have seen, strategic reasoning aims at bringing about transformations of the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions in ways that make it possible for all singular human lives to grow in community. This requires moving beyond critique, to deconstruct the hierarchies of domination and build new systems, institutions, and practices. The principle of feasibility takes the balance of forces in any given context of oppression as the object of analysis and deliberation with the goal of determining the best strategy for advancing the material ethical principle: “Politically effective action, from a strategic point of view, ought to ponder the structures of forces in play, ought to analyze the state of the exercise of power at any given moment, in order that the intervention would have a result of stabilization or transformation ...” (Dussel 2009, 477 [419]). The determination of what is feasible, for Dussel, must take into account “the community’s own strengths, its organization, and the conjunctures most favorable to it” (1998/2013, 419 [390]). He is speaking here, of the concrete application of the ethical principles as norms of the fields within which the project of transformation takes place. In the next two chapters we apply the ethical principles as norms intrinsic to the political and economic fields with a view to the liberation of the community of human life from the growing inequality and violence generated by the capital system and its self justifying ideology.

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## The Ethical Dimension of Politics

The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women. The collective building up of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on the historical scale. Otherwise, there is anarchy, repression, and the resurgence of tribal parties and federalism. The national government, if it wants to be national, ought to govern by the people and for the people, for the outcasts and by the outcasts. No leader, however valuable he may be, can substitute himself for the popular will; and the national government, before concerning itself about international prestige, ought first to give back their dignity to all citizens, fill their minds and feast their eyes with human things, and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign men dwell therein. (Frantz Fanon 1961/1963, 204–205)

### OVERVIEW

As early as *Filosofía ética Latinoamericana IV*. (*Latin American Ethical Philosophy IV*.) published in 1979, Dussel employed the analectic method to work out the general outlines of the exodic path of the Other from subjugation, to critique and deconstruction of the totalizing system, to finally building new forms of governance. The Other, declares Dussel, “is Latin America as peripheral exteriority; it is the dependent and neo-colonial nation as political alterity; it is the marginalized class, oppressed

or subaltern, but as positively ‘for itself’ *beyond* the dominant social order” (1979, 76).<sup>1</sup>

In order to give an account of this subjugation and how it may possibly be overcome, Dussel introduces the same basic distinction in the political field as we observed in the analectic moment: singular human lives have both intrasystemic and extrasystemic dimensions. As intrasystemic, one has a function within the system. But insofar as one exists for oneself in the exterior of the totalizing system, one is not subsumed by this functionality. For this reason one can, from an extrasystemic point of view, negate, in the sense of critique with a view to transformation, a political system that negates human life and the biosphere. This negation of the negation is based on the primordial affirmation of human life in community and in harmony with Mother Earth, that, as we saw in Chapter 4 of this monograph, Dussel developed into the material ethical principle. This material principle, together with the formal and feasibility principles, when subsumed as norms of the politics of liberation, does not guide a praxis whose comprehension is limited to the dialectic of a closed system; the proposal is more radical. The politics of liberation aims at overcoming the relation between center and periphery, exploiter and exploited, capital and labor, oppressor and oppressed; it deploys an ana-dialectical method aimed at building a new world. The construction of this new world is not the work of a totalizing ego that takes itself to be the universal ideal of all humanity. In such a case, we would be trading one master morality for another. The politics of liberation aims at passage to an “analogical Totality” which recognizes both the similarities and diversity of world cultures, an idea that anticipates Dussel’s later concept of a pluriversal transmodern world (Dussel 1979, 121–122).

Although Dussel develops a description of the basic stages of political struggle for liberation in *Filosofía ética Latinoamericana IV* (1979), it is in later works on political philosophy that Dussel works out clearly

<sup>1</sup>For Dussel, national liberation without popular liberation likely gives way to new neo-colonial forms of exploitation and therefore yet another stage of struggle for liberation: “The oppressed classes, workers, peasants, marginalized, are the *people* of our nations. Latin American liberation is impossible if it does not attain national liberation, and all national liberation is *definitively* in play if it is popular liberation, that is to say, [liberation] of the workers, peasants, and marginalized. If these last do not come to exercise power, the political Totality of the States of the ‘center’ will recolonize our nations and there will be no liberation. The poor, the Other, the people (*pueblo*) is the only [actor] who has sufficient *reality, exteriority* and *life* to bring to fruition the construction of a *new order*” (1979, 78).



the categories of political dynamics: *potentia* (constituent power) and *potestas* (constituted power); *hyperpotentia* (a critical *potentia* aimed at recuperating constituent power from a corrupted *potestas*); the crisis of hegemony; and the fetishization of constituted power.

I will start with the basic subsumption of the ethical principles in the political field which Dussel first developed as six theses in *Hacia una filosofía política crítica* (2001) (*Towards a Critical Political Philosophy*).<sup>2</sup> I will then distinguish Dussel's critical political reason from the rationality behind some tendencies in social contract theory. Finally, I will use Dussel's more recent work to articulate the role of critical political principles in recuperating alienated constituent power from corrupted constituted power.

### POLITICAL RATIONALITY

A politics of liberation subsumes the three ethical principles (material, formal, and strategic) and applies them to the critique, deconstruction, and transformation of the prevailing political order. No political project can be considered just if it does not promote human life and respect Mother Earth using democratic procedures to arrive at policies and actions that are feasible. The first three theses of "Six Theses Toward a Critique of Political Reason," are abstract and provide general principles of political reason. The second three theses are critical and therefore consist of principles that apply the first three theses to the critique and transformation of political systems that, intentionally or not, violate one or more of the norms described in the first three theses.

Liberatory political rationality is complex. It incorporates material, formal, and strategic features. Thesis one articulates the duty to ensure the material conditions of the very possibility of engaging in political practice at all; this duty is expressed by *practico-material political reason*. As we saw in Zúñiga's statement of the principle of impossibility (Chapter 4), without the existence of the living human subject and nature, neither politics nor any other human reality is possible. Thesis one also subsumes the material principle as a norm of political praxis. Stated concisely, the practico-material feature of political reason

<sup>2</sup>I will refer hereon, for Chapter 2 of *Hacia una filosofía política crítica*, to the English translation in "Six Theses Toward a Critique of Political Reason: The Citizen as Political Agent" (Dussel 1999).

“concerns the political duty of production, reproduction, and development of human life for all humanity, and as its condition of possibility, also the preservation of the biosphere” (Dussel 1999, 84). How will a politics of liberation advance the *practico-material* feature of *political reason*? A legitimate political process will use democratic procedures.

Thesis two articulates the subsumption of the formal ethical principle into political rationality as *practical-discursive political reason*. It states that “*Ratio politica* should discursively, procedurally, or democratically achieve validity (formal legitimacy) through the effective, symmetrical and democratic public participation of all the affected, who are citizens as autonomous subjects, and who exercise the complete autonomy of the political community of communication” (Dussel 1999, 84). As we saw in our discussion of the formal principle in Chapter 4, Dussel argues that without the material principle we could end up with a hegemonic communication community that negates the lives of those excluded from the “democratic” procedures. On the other hand, if we engage in a politics that does indeed advance human life and preserves the biosphere but has not been achieved by means of symmetrical procedures, it will lack intersubjective validity and therefore lack political legitimacy. So both principles, as expressed in theses 1 and 2, mutually condition each other in the constitution of a politics of liberation.

Finally, thesis 3 articulates the subsumption of the feasibility principle in the form of strategic political reason. Stated succinctly: “*Ratio politica*, in its dimension of strategic or instrumental feasibility, should consider the logical, empirical, ecological, social, historical, etc., conditions of *real possibility* of the implementation of a maxim, a norm, law, acts, institutions, or political system” (Dussel 1999, 87). If I can do something, it does not mean that I ought to. And if I ought to do something, it must be something I can do. Strategic political rationality alone could be disastrous for human life and the biosphere as well as to democratic institutions when tied to dictatorial or totalitarian ends. Therefore, this strategic feature of political rationality must be guided by the material and formal features. And these two latter principles, in turn, are only operational within the limits of what is feasible.

Dussel continues his articulation of ethical political rationality by applying these three theses to the case in which the prevailing institutions and practices “produce ecologically destructive effects on human victims” (Dussel 1999, 89). Theses four through six then, articulate the transformation of *ratio politica*, in all its complexity, into critical political

reason “insofar as it ought to assume responsibility for the *negative* effects of decisions, laws, actions, or institutions” (89).

Thesis four expresses the duty to assume, to whatever degree possible, the point of view of the oppressed, that is, those denied the material basis for life and participation in symmetrical democratic procedures. As critical political reason, it exposes those features of governance, institutions, laws, policies, and political acts that are not true (because they negate human life), not legitimate (because the constituents do not have democratic involvement), and not feasible.

Thesis five expresses the duty not only to engage in a critique of the prevailing system but also to “organize new social movements so as positively to propose alternatives to the existing political, legal, economic, educational, etc., systems” (91). The emphasis in this thesis is on *critical-discursive political reason*, so such organization and proposed alternatives should deploy democratic procedures. Only in this manner can a new emerging consensus have the democratic legitimacy required to challenge the old eroding consensus. A crisis of hegemonic consensus may ensue when “these critical social movements have a growing claim to *legitimacy* (critical validity) before the decreasing legitimacy of the political order in power” (91). Dussel works out this moment of crisis in detail in *Twenty Theses on Politics* (2006/2008) which we will discuss below.

Thesis six addresses the deployment of *critical-strategic-political reason* to bring about a transformation of the prevailing order in a manner consistent with the material and formal features of political practical rationality. “The person who acts according to responsibility for the Other and in compliance with the indicated conditions,” says Dussel, “may make a claim to be able to establish a more just order” (94). Dussel intended these theses as “general hypotheses” that would receive further elaboration later. For this more detailed development of the politics of liberation we turn Dussel’s later works on the subject.

### THE DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

The six theses on political ethical rationality articulate the subsumption of the ethical principles into critical political theory. In subsequent work on the politics of liberation, Dussel provides more insight into the dynamics of political transformation. In the second volume of *Política de la liberación (Politics of Liberation)*, Dussel insists that “the *normative* question in the political” is of the utmost importance: “Without those

[the political principles] neither citizens nor professional politicians in general, are able to exercise delegated political power, that is, any liberation whatever” (2009, 347 [365]). The normative political principles are critical to a politics of liberation because they ought to guide the actions of both constituent power (*potentia*) and delegated constituted power (*potestas*) on the path toward liberation. Again, constituted power is only a *conditionally* delegated power because in the relationship between constituent power and constituted power, it is constituent power of the people that is the ultimate site of sovereignty and it retains this sovereignty even when under attack by corrupted institutions and practices. When constituted power takes itself as the major point of reference and is disobedient to constituent power, or when it seeks to retain its hegemony by means of coercion, it is up to constituent power to reclaim its rightful sovereignty.

A politics of liberation seeks to recuperate democratic participation in the exercise of delegated power and establish institutions that are obedient to the will of the people. In *Carta a los indignados* (*Letter to the Indignados*), Dussel argues that the history of the concept of the sovereign has undergone an evolution; it began as a feature of divine power and gradually descended to the level of constituent power where in truth it had always resided:

In the beginning, the only sovereigns were the gods, which dictated the laws of the community. Afterwards, gradually, the gods gave this delegated power to the kings as we see in the *Code of Hammurabi* in Mesopotamia. In the Roman republic, the Senate had sovereignty, a very small oligarchy. The historic process will terminate in the understanding that sovereignty pertains only to the entire political community, the people [*pueblo*]. The people are the *only sovereign*, the first and ultimate instance of self-determination in the creation of all of the institutions ... in the promulgation of a constitution ... in the establishment of laws and in making fundamental political decisions .... In every case, the ultimate site of the exercise of power is *popular sovereignty*. (2011a, 120)

Dussel refers to the site of popular sovereignty as the people’s power, which is constituent power or *potentia*. *Potentia* refers to the original power of the autonomous community of human life that underlies the establishment of formal institutions. Popular sovereignty is an expression of this autonomy. Frantz Fanon links sovereignty to human dignity in a similar way in *The Wretched of the Earth*: “The African peoples were

quick to realize that dignity and sovereignty were exact equivalents, and in fact, a free people living in dignity is a sovereign people” (1961/1963, 198). Sovereignty belongs first and foremost to constituent power, and only in a derivative and conditional way, to the constituted power of institutions, including the state. Exercise of this original power, however, is often usurped by the very institutions to which it had given rise.

The priority of constituent power over constituted power is important for understanding that constituted power depends on consent and active participation of constituents for its institutional legitimacy. Dussel argues that this prerogative of constituent power is compromised in social contract theories that do not sufficiently condition transfer of power from constituents to governing institutions, thereby providing an apologetic for the corruption of constituted power and a justification of authoritarian rule. Dussel’s critique of social contract theory hinges on his view of human nature and his rejection of liberal notions of innate human egoism and a natural right to private property.

### SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Dussel critiques some of the presuppositions of early modern social contract theories that justify the fetishization of constituted power at the expense of sovereignty of constituent power. In such liberal political theory, human beings in the state of nature are viewed as a-moral, egotistical, and competitive. In social contract theory, with some exceptions (such as Rousseau), it is generally *after* the social contract that ethical principles and norms in each practical field are established. Moreover, in place of solidarity and community spirit reawakened in the analectic moment, the egocentric and competitive features of free markets are projected into the state of nature. “This hypothetical model,” argues Dussel, “as [a] proposal to overcome [the] ‘state of nature’, will be the theoretical-political model of Modernity, lacking from its contractuality the original natural *communitarian* intersubjectivity” (Dussel 2007/2011b, 281–282 [141]). A few examples will illustrate these points.

Thomas Hobbes’s version of the social contract is that in the state of nature each individual is out for him or herself in a war of all against all. In the state of nature, there is no sense of community, let alone a communitarian instinct (Dussel 2007, 246–247). The only way to ensure against the greater evil of being attacked by others is to go for the lesser evil of negating one’s own tendency to go after one’s own advantage

without limit and in this act of negation transfer a measure of one's individual liberty to the all powerful sovereign. This transfer gives the sovereign executive, legislative, and judicial powers. As part of the agreement, citizens consent to obey the sovereign so long as the sovereign can provide protection for civil society. With the exception of the right to defend one's life, "the liberty of a subject, lieth therefore only in those things, which in regulating their actions, the Sovereign hath praetermitted" (Hobbes 1651/1962, Ch. 21, 161; see Dussel 2007, 250; 2007/2011b, 257–270 [131–135]).

In Baruch Spinoza's version of social contract theory, human beings in the state of nature are each finite expressions (modes) of an effort to persevere in existence (*conatus*) and increase his or her power to exist.<sup>3</sup> This effort to increase one's power does not recognize a limit until it encounters an obstacle, such as a competing effort of another human life. So in order to avoid mutual harm, some type of pact is required. The pact is entered into for purely utilitarian reasons. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza says: "We may therefore, conclude that a compact is only made valid by its utility, without which it becomes null and void. It is, therefore, foolish to ask a man to keep his faith with us forever, unless we also endeavor that the violation of the compact we enter into shall involve for the violator more harm than good" (Spinoza 1677/1951, 204). The natural effort to persevere in existence puts itself under the domination of the sovereignty of the political state for utilitarian reasons. The pact is the first consensus, and only through the pact are norms for moral behaviors first instituted by the constituted sovereign will.

John Locke's theory of the social contract projects the right to possession of private property, as a characteristic of humankind, into the state of nature. This privilege of the few is thus naturalized despite its prejudicial impact on the many. Locke's ideas about democracy limits participation in formal democratic procedures to an elite sector (male landowners) who have an exclusive franchise to deliberate on public affairs. So the exclusion of the majority from the ability to live and grow in community is presumably inevitable. The institution of private property is alleged to be in accord with human nature as we find it prior to the social contract.

<sup>3</sup>For Spinoza, the individual human life is a finite expression or mode of substance. The human mind is the idea or consciousness of this effort to persevere in existence, and this effort seeks to increase its power for existence.

Neither Hobbes's *Leviathan* nor Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, recognize the communitarian feature of human life and its intrinsic rationality.<sup>4</sup> Both look to a post-pact constituted power for the source of practical norms. Locke, argues Dussel, presupposes that the political or civil state includes the natural order of a nascent capitalist system. Locke is very clear that one of the main motivations for forming a commonwealth is to protect private property from transgressions of other persons (including the majority who do not own private property): "The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property" (Locke 1690/1952, 71; see Dussel 2014a, 61–62 [4.41–4.43]). It is important to note that Dussel does not take issue with Locke's notion of the presence of a political community prior to the formation of a commonwealth. Dussel rejects Locke's privileging of consensus among property owners, as well as Locke's discounting the interests of wage laborers and farmers. Political liberalism has sought to cover over the historic disenfranchisement of subjugated and colonized peoples by professing formal equality of "all" people while naturalizing material inequality. In Locke, the principle of consent of the governed, which affords democratic legitimacy, is severely compromised even prior to the civic compact. The people who "expressly" consent to the commonwealth are the property owners. The others who toil are, by the "tacit consent" of their mere presence, expected to obey the sovereign (Dussel 2007/2011b, 300–305 [149–151]). The state, which has a monopoly on violence, is geared toward protecting the interests of citizens who "explicitly" consent to the civic or political state.

It is Adam Smith who most clearly links the market to a natural state of affairs. For Smith, in the "early and rude state" of society, the more one commands the labor of others, the more wealth he or she is able to accumulate. This blatant exploitation built into the capital system does not prevent Smith from seeing a silver lining in free markets. Although each pursues his or her own interests, the "invisible hand" of the market ensures an ever increasing utility for all of society. Smith's socio-economic model presupposes that the capital system is natural and in some ways

<sup>4</sup>"Human life has as an *intrinsic* constitutive rationality (because it is 'human'), and the intersubjective and truthful exercise of rationality is an exigency of life itself: it is the 'cunning' of life. Human life is never the 'other' of reason; rather it is the absolute intrinsic material condition of rationality" (Dussel 1998/2013, 434, Thesis 3).

self-correcting. Smith also maintains that despite the hardships and shortcomings, the market system is ultimately utilitarian (Dussel 2016, 187 [14.02]). For Smith, the negative effects of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the capitalists for supposedly benevolent ends must be borne patiently by the toiling workers of the system (Dussel 2007/2011b, 325–338 [159–164]).

In *16 tesis de economía política: Interpretación filosófica* (2014a) (*16 Theses on Political Economy: Philosophical Interpretation*), Dussel points to another argument in Smith that severs the organic link between the ethical and the economic fields. For Smith, the communitarian values that one is expected to express in private life are considered virtues, but these virtues do not extend to the norms of the economic field; self-interest is the appropriate motivation for behavior in the marketplace. Here is the relevant passage from Smith:

As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestic industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. (1776/1904, IV.2.9)

Dussel comments that “it is here that the *normative* principles begin to be put in parentheses: Economics will produce an *ethical suspension* in its scientific discourse” (2014a, 192–193 [12.15], note 12). The ethical suspension occurs because there is no transfer of ethical principles from a pre-compact community of human life to the socio-economic field. The egoistic pursuit of self-interest is fetishized as both natural and in accord with utilitarian values.

Dussel rejects the historical reality of a state of nature (2014a, 23 [1.52]; 2016, 46 [4.04]). He argues that “the human being originally and by genetic disposition is not only neither narcissistic nor egoistic, but



also is encountered in a position of openness to the Other ...” (2014a, 35 [3.25]). Moreover, Dussel argues that there is empirical evidence of instances of communal systems of production, distribution, and consumption where the producers manage the community’s resources in an equitable manner (45 [3.73]). There is nothing inevitable or natural about the capitalist mode of production.

Among the social contract theories, Dussel suggests Rousseau took a step forward by making an *abiding* consensus a feature of the legitimacy of the compact that institutes the general will. The general will maintains its legitimacy by reflecting the interests of the community that formed the pact. On this interpretation “the general Will is the concordance of the particular wills when they are united effectively around a political cause that constitutes them as a political entity, as an agent with an empirically verifiable moral personality (the *potentia*).” The general will does not completely absorb the individual wills. “The particularity is subsumed (not negated) in what is universal to the community” (2007/2011b, 349).

It is when the general will (or in Dusselian language, conditionally delegated constituted power) takes itself as the point of reference “as the *potestas* [constituted power] over the *potentia* [constituent power]” that it becomes corrupted (Dussel 2007/2011b, 349 [169]). Unlike social contract theories of the transfer of power from the people in a state of nature to the sovereign of political society, Dussel insists *potentia* “is not an initial empirical moment in time but rather a foundational moment that always remains in force *beneath* institutions and actions (that is, beneath *potestas*)” (2006/2008, 21 [3.2.2]; see also Dussel 2011a, 203–204).

To be clear, the sovereign people which “always remains in force beneath institutions and actions” is often alienated from those institutions. With regard to politics, this alienation is caused by the divergence of interests of those at the helm of political institutions from interests of constituents. Dussel refers to this separation as the fetishization of constituted power. Power is fetishized when representatives of constituted power take themselves or some foreign interests, instead of the interests of constituents, as the point of reference when making and implementing public policy. Such fetishized power cannot dissemble its betrayal of the sovereignty of the people for long. When constituents awaken and seek to reclaim their autonomy, the fetishized constituted power can either obey constituents or resort to a dialectic of spiraling repression and violence.

## THE PEOPLE ARE SOVEREIGN: POTENTIA AND POTESTAS

We now leave the language of the social contract to look more closely at Dussel's account of the politics of liberation. The notion of sovereignty of the originary power of the political community resolves the practical problem in some versions of contractualism whereby the general will, having surrendered too much of its power to a sovereign, then stands to an excessive degree at the mercy of that power. The potential problem of such a surrender is that the corrupt sovereign may take itself as the point of reference rather than constituents in decision making and the exercise of institutional power. This, again, is the fetishization of political power. From the point of view of a politics of liberation, however, political power is not originally surrendered by constituents, but rather, it is conditionally delegated to constituted power. Moreover, delegation does not end with one solemn act such as an election, repeated at certain intervals; conditional delegation continues throughout the exercise of constituted power by means of continued democratic participation of constituent power in political processes. The tendency of institutional actors toward reference to themselves as the source of power is at once misappropriation of delegated power of *potentia* and corruption of *potestas* (Dussel 2006/2008, 23, [3.33]). The recuperation of corrupted constituted power by constituents, therefore, is a major concern of the politics of liberation.

### HYPERPOTENTIA AND THE RECUPERATION OF CONSTITUTED POWER

Even if the strategic political principle is diligently put into practice and is guided by the material and formal political principles, the moment of institution building is nevertheless always a process involving potential corruption. For Dussel, corruption cuts both ways: constituent power is corrupted by allowing disobedience of constituted power and constituted power is corrupted by taking itself as the point of reference for the exercise of political power (Dussel 2006/2008, 4 [1.1.5]; 2016, 167 [12.53]). In the case of constituted power, corruption is a form of fetishization. In the case of constituent power, corruption is sometimes due to an abdication of citizen responsibility to hold public officials accountable.

In Mexico, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) was acutely aware of the importance of citizen power and in their Sixth

Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle urged that civil matters be democratically decided in the villages. In order to guard against corruption, they recommended spokespersons be democratically elected on a rotating basis: “Now we are passing the work of safeguarding good government to the Zapatista support bases, with temporary rotating positions, so everyone learns and carries out this work. We believe a people that doesn’t watch over its leaders is condemned to be enslaved; and we fight to be free, not to change masters every six years” (Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas 2006, 80).

The abdication of citizen responsibility is not always a result of corruption. Those who are alienated from political society because they are left out of policymaking may come to view politics as an inherently dirty game. In *Carta a los indignados*, Dussel says “The participatory power of the political community or of the people can become alienated (not fetishized) when it lacks the clear awareness of being the ultimate seat of the exercise of power ...” (2011a, 46). But alienation happens even with this “awareness of being the ultimate seat of the exercise of power” when constituents are unable to effectively institutionalize their power. I am referring here to the instance in which constituents seek redress against the corruption of constituted power, but such constituted power does not cede to constituents by implementing systemic reform. Instead, it continues to turn against constituents by resorting to coercion: “When the oppressed and excluded achieve consciousness of the situation, they become dissidents, and the dissidence leads hegemonic power to lose its consensus, and without obedience this power becomes fetishized, coercive, repressive” (Dussel 2006/2008, 79–80 [12.2.1]; see also 1973/2014b, 78–79). Critique of the prevailing corrupt system aims at exposing the fetish by drilling down into the self-referential nature of coercive power and exposing its self-serving economic and political policies. It shows “how coercion is transformed into violence when it loses legitimacy” (Dussel 1998/2013, 399 [374]).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>For the ethics of liberation, when is coercion by constituted power legitimate? Dussel argues “legitimate coercion is ethical, insofar as it is exerted fulfilling the demands of the material, discursive, formal principles of ethical feasibility: to guarantee the life of all those affected, who symmetrically participate in the decisions of ethically feasible mediations” (1998/2013, 400 [375]; see also 1979, 113–120).

As we saw in Chapter 3, Dussel describes in concrete terms, referring to the autobiography of Rigoberta Menchú, how the awakening of oppressed people to fetishized power of corrupt states and institutions can lead to an organized critical dissensus of those excluded and oppressed by the system (1998/2013, 296–303 [282–288]). This dissensus seeks to recover delegated, but now corrupted, self-referential and therefore fetishized power of the state and other compromised institutions and practices. This recovery begins, from an analectic perspective, with a negation (critique) of the negation of human life perpetrated by corrupted constituted power. Further, dissensus of the critical ethical political community then seeks to transform prevailing socio-economic institutions and practices to a model that makes it possible to produce, reproduce, and grow human life in community and in harmony with Mother Earth. This does not mean those who are excluded by a corrupt system now seek inclusion in an order of things that continues to produce victims. As US American philosopher Don Deere points out, for Dussel, “A humanistic and reformed capitalism that would live up to the ethics of liberation is not possible; instead, a new system of producing and reproducing the flourishing of human life must be created through the struggles that emerge from the community of victims” (2013, 16). “The political project of liberation,” argues Dussel in an early work on the politics of liberation, “is the comprehension that the people, the oppressed themselves have alterity or exteriority, not in so far as they are an alienated ‘part’ *in* the system, but rather in so far as they have an existence *exterior* to the system” (1979, 96). It is not inclusion within or reform of an alienating social, economic, and political system that is sought by the politics of liberation, but a dismantling of the old and construction of the new: transformation.

In *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel indicates that reform of a system intrinsically antagonistic to those whom it exploits leaves in place systemic instrumentalization or exclusion of the victims (1998/2013, 388–399 [366–373]). And in *Twenty Theses on Politics*, Dussel clearly states, “The excluded should not be merely *included* in the old system—as this would be to introduce the Other into the Same—but rather ought to participate as equals in a new *institutional moment* (the *new* political order)” (2006/2008, 89 [14.1.3]). By ‘Same’ here, Dussel refers to the totalizing system in its quest to instrumentalize every singular human life on the planet as well as the biosphere to serve as resources for its

self-expansion.<sup>6</sup> Those who subscribe to a politics of liberation adhere to another logic, one that respects the dignity of all human life and the biosphere and resists subsumption of these into the Same.

Political ethical rationality, which as we saw subsumes the three ethical principles, seeks to build a new hegemonic consensus of the Other which challenges the hegemony of the Same. Progressive social movements in Latin America and beyond are not clamoring to privatize the commons, enter into free trade “agreements”, dollarize their currency, militarize public security, implement austerity, and lift labor protections and environmental regulations. On the contrary, they reject the neoliberal gospel and seek to create “a *new* community, a new institutional-ity...” (Dussel 2001, 164).<sup>7</sup>

In *Twenty Theses on Politics* (2006/2008), Dussel introduces the concept of *hyperpotentia*, which is the “power of the people.” *Hyperpotentia* is the power of the popular sectors which takes initiative upon the exhaustion of a *potentia* no longer advancing a liberatory project: “The power of the *people—hyperpotentia*, the new power of those ‘from below’—becomes present from the beginning, in its extreme vulnerability and poverty, but is in the end the invincible force of life ‘that desires-to-live.’ This Will-to-Live is more powerful than death, injustice, and corruption” (94–95 [15.0.2]). To be sure, *hyperpotentia*, is still a form of constituent power, but one deeply concerned about the corruption that has politically captured constituted power. This “new power of those ‘from below’” can only transform fetishized power if it can resist cooption, maintain its autonomy from state institutions and political parties, and engage in frequent self-criticism, while building new institutions obedient to voices of constituents.

Not all constituents take issue with the corruption of constituted power. Some just accept it. Some apologize for it. Some benefit from it and will even defend it with their lives. Those committed to structural

<sup>6</sup>Redundant labor by definition cannot be instrumentalized and would therefore have no value for the Same.

<sup>7</sup>This can take the form of a constituent assembly, which ideally returns political power to *potentia*. We have seen such refounding of nations with new constitutions in Venezuela (1999), Ecuador (2008), and Bolivia (2009). These new constitutions were only the scaffolding of new beginnings; transformation requires sustained use of participatory democratic procedures and continued obedience of constituted power to constituent power.

transformation, however, will form alliances based on common goals. Dussel refers to the convergence of social movements and popular forces arising from *hypercentia* as the “analogical hegemon” or “social bloc of the oppressed” (2006/2008, 75–77 [11.3]). This bloc consists of a diversity of sectors each with different interests, all of which converge on the goals of seeking the common good, overcoming the multiple hierarchies of domination, establishing economic and social equality, and building participatory democratic institutions. From the point of view of *hypercentia*, a new world is empirically and technically possible as well as ethically imperative.

In response to challenges posed by *hypercentia* to fetishized power of corrupted state and public institutions, the state in turn may either implement reforms or step up its repression in an attempt to regain a dissolving political hegemony and prevent the formation of a new hegemonic consensus. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the police state and universal surveillance in the United States have been increasingly deployed against legal and pacific forms of dissent, targeting civil and human rights movements, environmentalists, undocumented immigrants, and generally activists who promote social and economic justice. The real danger of the state’s deployment of increasingly coercive means of social control is the criminalization of dissent at the very time a new consensus, or better, a planetary humanism, is urgently needed to prevent the march toward even greater economic and social inequality and the catastrophic consequences of ever-expanding militarism.

Dussel describes the fear of ruling elites in the face of any perceived threat to their domination: “It is known, essentially, that the established order is inconsistent and that the Other, negated beneath the domination, is more alive, stronger, belonging more to the future, because he or she exists in justice, in reason, and as free being” (1973/2014b, 88–89). This dynamic between *hypercentia* and corrupted constituted power can take many forms, and both the dominated and dominators, in some cases using different points of reference for what is legitimate and lawful, seek to do what is feasible to advance their respective objectives. There ensues a struggle over the competing claims to democratic legitimacy. Media campaigns are launched to support one or the other narrative. In the battle for hegemonic consensus, the spectacle may become even more prominent and have more impact on public perceptions of reality and on the balance of forces than facts on the ground! The mainstream corporate media often limits the parameters of debate and generally

reproduces the narrative of corrupt constituted power while social and independent media often provide a diversity of narratives that broaden the parameters of debate.

In the case of transitional moments, the old corrupt system is challenged by a new emerging dissensus, and the horizon of hegemonic consensus becomes fractured. At such a crossroads the self justifying ideology of corrupted constituted power is increasingly called into question by *hyperpotentia*. This is the moment of crisis for the old hegemonic consensus and a moment of opportunity for the growing dissensus of *hyperpotentia* to become a new hegemonic consensus (Dussel 2016, 160–163 [12.21–12.26]). It is a moment fraught with the highest hopes for real change and the greatest danger that fetishized constituted power will resort to the criminalization of dissent, electoral fraud, soft coups, or even a reign of terror.

The philosophy of liberation movement seeks to accompany popular struggles for liberation avoiding, in its analysis and praxis, both conservatism and adventurism. The hegemonic system will often not surrender the privilege of the few over the disenfranchized many without a fight. The exercise of coercion by bad government, however, only further erodes democratic legitimacy of the state and its apparatus of enforcement and compliance while legitimizing the growing dissensus of the oppressed, assuming, of course, that the dissensus itself has democratic legitimacy. “Their [the oppressed] critical consciousness creates a *critical* consensus within their oppressed community, which now stands opposed to the *dominant* consensus from a position of dissidence. I am referring here to a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ and a ‘crisis of hegemony’—the moment of chaos that emerges prior to and in anticipation of the creation of a new order” (Dussel 2006/2008, 80 [12.2.2]; see also 103–107 [16.1]). The intermediate period of the eroding legitimacy of the established system and the emerging legitimacy of the new political actors pits the interests and rights of different factions against each other. “The time of a change in power” says Dussel “is at the same time, a change of legitimacy” (2001, 168; see also 1979, 120; 2015, 70–72). The critical consensus of the people is the “principle of *new* legitimacy” (Dussel 2015, 215). The conservative, argues Dussel, will deplore the chaos created by the emerging power bloc of the analogical hegemon, while for strategic ethical reason, a transitional period is necessary for the liberation of those excluded by an increasingly illegitimate, fetishized, and coercive power of corrupt state actors and institutions.

During moments of eroding democratic legitimacy of constituted power, critical ethical political reason faces its greatest challenges. The fetishized power of the state, being fully exposed and losing its hegemonic grip over constituents, only has raw force, and sometimes the reign of terror, as its last resort to hold onto power. The delegitimized state may resort to a “State of exception” which suspends the law in order to impose social control by force. Such a dictatorship, however, could be challenged by a “State of rebellion” whereby *hyperpotentia* seeks to reclaim power which it had only conditionally delegated to the constituted power of the state (Dussel 2011a, 203–204). The resolution of such an impasse could take weeks, months, years, or even decades, such as the cases of dictators Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah) of Iran; Mobutu Sese Seko, of the Congo; Gen. Augusto Pinochet Ugarte of Chile; and Ferdinand Marcos, of the Philippines to name just a few, each of whose rule ended in infamy. The liberatory project then, can be stalled in the desert, suffer setbacks, before regrouping and resuming its advance.

A politics of liberation is immediately relevant to such crossroads between the old and the new because it seeks to accompany and promote the emergence of a new consensus aimed at dismantling or renovating corrupted institutions and building new ones through direct participatory democracy as well as representative democracy. These new institutions ought to be obedient to the critical ethical expressions of constituent power (Dussel 2006/2008, 26 [4.2.2]). To be clear, participatory symmetrical democratic procedures give political *legitimacy* to the faithful exercise of delegated power (62–63 [10.1.1]; 2016, 79 [6.54]). These procedures ought to be guided by material political reason to ensure policy decisions of communication communities provide for basic human needs. And strategic political reason ought to ensure that such policy decisions are feasible.

The politics of liberation, inspired by the face-to-face encounter and guided by critical ethical consciousness, is a noble vocation and “above all that action which aspires toward the advancement of the life of the community, of the *people*, of humanity!” (Dussel 2006/2008, 61 [9.3.4]). Unlike the Hobbesian or Spinozist social contract theories, critical ethical principles are not derived from post compact conventions but themselves inform the norms in the practical fields, including the political and economic ones. These political and economic norms seek the transformation of a totalizing corrupt system into one that is conducive



to human life. The path is long and arduous. It requires both a commitment to realistic goals and an acknowledgment of the imperfection of any human enterprise (Dussel 1998/2013, 427 [399]).

Progress on the path of liberation will not come about either through left-wing anarchism that rejects a positive role for institutions nor right-wing anarchism of “unregulated” markets (Dussel 2006/2008, 47 [7.3.1], 90 [14.2.2]). Dussel rejects the former because the division of labor and functions that can provide for communal needs requires institution building (22 [3.2.3], 23 [3.3.2]). Dussel rejects the latter, because the mythical unregulated market itself, enforced by capital’s obedient executors within the state and mediating institutions, in practice reproduces social and economic inequality. Both forms of anarchism close off the empirical possibility of radically improving the chances of those who have been excluded and exploited to live and grow in community (45–46 [7.2]; 1998/2013, 423 [396]).

To be sure, Dussel is not utopian in the naive sense of the term. Dussel distinguishes between *kakotopia* (an impossible ideal) and *eutopia* (a utopia that is really possible). He always means the latter term when referring to the liberatory project (Dussel 2014a, 291 [15.54]; Dussel 1979). Dussel is a realist. In *Ethics of Liberation*, he argues that “it is empirically *impossible* that any norm, act, institution or system of ethnicity *could be perfect* in its implementation and consequences” (1998/2013, 279 [268]). In *14 tesis de ética*, Dussel argues that this imperfection is due to the ambiguous nature of institutions: “Every institution alienates with time, and goes from serving the life of the community to serving itself” (2016, 49 [4.33]). In *Twenty Theses on Politics* (2006/2008), Dussel points out that this tendency of institutions toward self-reference (or fetishization) is precisely the source of corruption of constituted power. It is this corruption, fetishization, and self-serving tendency of constituted power that politically alienates constituents.

Even progressive governments have regressive tendencies and if these tendencies are not addressed by self-critique and rectification, the slide toward fetishization will generate new victims. For this reason, ethical political rationality must remain vigilant and continue to ensure constituted power remains obedient and accountable to constituent power. In short, every revolution will go through a “classical period” of renovation and creativity. The classical period is likely to be followed by a “period of institutional crisis” when it starts to degenerate, eventually claiming new

victims and posing ever new challenges to the liberatory project (Dussel 2006/2008, 24 [7.2.3]; 1979, 121).

None of this makes Dussel into a fatalist. Far from it. Dussel points out that the anti-utopian argument of Karl Popper, who warns against tinkering too much with the prevailing market system, “intends to show the inviability, the practical impossibility of realizing postcapitalist utopias, [and] founds fetishism by means of a path that is subtly more efficient: it pretends to show the impossibility of antifetishism” (1980, 88). By maintaining post capitalist utopian projects threaten chaos and destruction by aspiring after the impossible (a perfectly planned economy) while undermining the market’s tendency toward equilibrium, Popper and other conservatives fail to call into question the fetishization, violence, and chaos that infects the prevailing system (Dussel 2016, 90–97 [7.2–7.4]). The solution to violence and exploitation wrought by the prevailing system then, is not paralysis, cynicism, or anti-utopian conservatism, but rather a liberatory praxis that exercises constant self-criticism and correction (Dussel 2001, 84 [2.1.3]; 2016, 189–190 [14.14]).

The liberatory project does not pursue an illusory goal of a perfectly planned economy, but an approximation to democratic communal control over the economy based on what is feasible. We will discuss this issue more in Chapter 6 on the ethical dimension of economics. For now, it is important to emphasize that the politics of liberation does not pretend to be the harbinger of a perfect world; it seeks to realize only what is feasible, given the current balance of forces, in order to advance all human life in community and in harmony with the earth’s ecosystems.

In *Carta a los indignados*, Dussel offers concrete suggestions about what a politics of liberation might look like, though he does not presume that there is only one path or one formula that fits all efforts at political, economic, and social transformation. Nevertheless, there are some basic features common to any transformation that make it more likely that those governing will do so in a manner that is obedient to constituent interests. First and foremost, protagonists of the new order must be principally those who have been oppressed, along with their allies, by the prevailing system. “When the oppressed and excluded of these historic socio-political systems develop a *critical* consciousness of their situation” says Dussel, “the collective actor is born who feels responsible for the historic transformation, that unifies groups, movements, sectors around new hegemonic projects” (2011a, 17). Second, this new collective actor, *hyperpotentia* or the *analogical hegemon*, having established direct forms

of participatory democracy as well as representative institutions, ought not detach itself from political life, but rather continue to engage in symmetrical communication communities.

Dussel argues that both participatory democracy and representative democracy ought to work in a co-responsible manner to advance *practico-material political reason*, always in ways that are feasible. In this dialectical relationship, the two types of democracy mutually inform each other. Dussel recognizes, however, that there ought to be a clear deference going to participatory democracy because sovereignty pertains first and ultimately to the political community (*potentia* or *hyperpotentia*) and only by delegation to the state and its institutions. For this to work, participatory democracy must be institutionalized in such a way as to inform and collaborate with public or state institutions. Moreover, this deference of the state institutions to organized expressions of popular power ought to be designed and practiced in a manner that provides a constant check on the inevitable drift of constituted power toward taking itself, rather than its constituents, as the point of reference for the exercise of political power.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, without vigilance by institutions of participatory democracy as a watchdog on government planning, spending, and practices, constituted power is more apt to become fetishized and corrupt (Dussel 2011a, 19, 20, 28–29). This corruption, if not checked, can spread to sectors of constituent power itself in the form of clientelism and undermine the morale of grassroots participation in governance.

While participatory democracy is a distinct form of self-governance, Dussel sees the political party as a possible means of linking representative democracy with the grassroots. Of course, the political party, just as any constituted power, may become alienated from its constituent origins. This common malady of political parties often takes the form of a party leadership that has become detached from the electoral base, chooses its own candidates for office, expels dissident voices, centralizes decision-making in a *cúpula*, and practices a demoralizing clientelism. Dussel suggests base committees ought to participate in policies and elect representatives of the party. Just as in the case of communal councils, such committees could be organized at the neighborhood level

<sup>8</sup>An example of such deference of public power to popular power, in theory, is expressed in the Laws of Popular Power promulgated in Venezuela. For a detailed discussion, see Ulises Daal (2013).

and then link to city, departmental, regional, and national levels, with the party taking full advantage of information technologies to coordinate meetings and other actions as well as disseminate information. Dussel offers quite a bit of detail of what such committee meetings would look like. For example, there would be time allotted for political theory, for discussion of the present state of affairs, and finally for an action plan to address the concerns and opportunities raised by the current state of affairs (Dussel 2011a, 141–144).

Not only should the political party practice participatory democracy to maintain its legitimacy, Dussel suggests that it should maintain its independence from the government, otherwise it risks becoming an electoral machine, subordinating itself to the will of elected officials.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, the party ought to retain the ability to critique the government, even when some of its members hold representative power in the branches of government. Ideally, says Dussel, the party ought to also be a school for political education and debate (Dussel 2011a, 157–160).

### THE ROAD AHEAD

The politics of liberation opens an exodic path by means of lessons learned from the lived experience of victims of Western instrumental rationality. As a dimension of critical ethical consciousness, this form of politics proceeds from the option of assuming co-responsibility, as part of the *analogical hegemon*, for building a new world “in which many worlds fit.” There have been and will be advances and setbacks along the path toward liberation. For example, since the late 1990s, a pink tide in Latin America led by the Bolivarian revolution, progressive social movements and parties, as well as Original peoples, brought about a period of progressive governance in much of the region. But this tide has been challenged by a neoliberal restoration in Argentina with the election of Mauricio Macri (2015); in Brazil, where Michel Temer became president in what was arguably a parliamentary coup (2016); and in Honduras, where President José Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a coup (2009) and most recently Juan Orlando Hernández was sworn in as President despite indications of electoral fraud (2018). And the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which has been a major force for

<sup>9</sup>See Raúl Zibechi’s (2012) insightful discussion of the potential political co-opting of social movements by left leaning political parties (152–158).

Latin American integration and independence after the election of Hugo Chavez as President in 1998 (who served until his death on March 5, 2013), is presently undergoing a severe economic crisis, political polarization, and relentless interference by a US backed right-leaning bloc within a disintegrating Organization of American States (OAS). While it is true that progressive governments in this region have harbored some regressive tendencies, it is up to the organized expressions of constituent power, not US imperial intervention on behalf of transnational corporate interests, to address these tendencies in order to critique, correct, and continue the advance of liberatory projects. To those who propose that the pink tide has now subsided and given way to the neoliberal reaction, Dussel responds:

Those for whom the “progressive cycle” in Latin America has come to an end in 2017, I ought to respond that the suffering of the oppressed impedes its end, its termination, and once again life springs forth in the face of the dominating violence that aims at destroying the creative changes that have been produced by a left still in its stage of growth in the exercise of delegated power in Latin America. (Dussel 2018, 14)

Despite efforts by US policymakers to rehabilitate the Monroe Doctrine and reestablish US hegemony in the region, we have already entered the epoch of a multipolar world. Today’s challenges to Latin American independence and sovereignty, though formidable, are not insurmountable, so long as those committed to advancing a liberatory project stay the course toward resisting foreign domination and dependency in the process of building “a world in which many worlds fit.”

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## The Ethical Dimension of Economics

Is a new alternative that rationally and ecologically regulates the market, that permits a certain degree of regulated competition and at the same time promotes the maximum autonomy of the communally managed enterprise possible? Is it possible for the creative enterprise and the competitive market to be regulated by a new participatory democratic State that permits the construction of a Reign of Liberty? Is another world economic order that takes its point of departure from the affirmation of the life of the community and the democratic management of production by the same producers, with an efficiency or productivity whose criteria would not be the *quantitative* increase in capital, but rather the *qualitative* growth of human life? We believe [the answer is] yes, and the discussion of these themes is the objective of these theses on political economy.... (Dussel 2014a, 327 [16.78])

### OVERVIEW

For Dussel, the basic distinction between totality and alterity as well as the analectic experience that unfolds in the face-to-face encounter with the Other, sets the conceptual framework and methodology for the ethical critique of political economy just as it framed the discussion of the politics of liberation (Dussel 2014a, 59 [4.31–4.32]). In both of these fields, the community of human life, despite its alienation *within* the totalizing system, maintains an exteriority which is the trans-ontological space of autonomy and solidarity. It is from this exteriority that Dussel develops his arguments for an ethics of liberation,

the principles of which are subsumed as norms in every practical field. Here, our focus is on the subsumption of the ethical principles by the economic field. Our discussion will begin by situating economics as a subfield of ecology. Next, we will discuss Dussel's humanistic interpretation of Marx's theory of surplus value, the alienation of labor, and how this alienation might be overcome in ways consistent with the norms derived from an ethics of liberation.

### ECONOMICS AS ECO-ECONOMICS

The field of economics is conceived as a subfield of eco-economics in keeping with Dussel's commitment to viewing the economic field as conditioned by the limitations of the earth's ecosystems. For example, in *14 tesis de ética* (2016) (*Fourteen Theses on Ethics*), Dussel marks out economics clearly as a subfield of ecology (52 [4.53]). Human life, considered as a gift, is part and parcel of the life force that animates all living things. As Enrique Tellez-Fabiani points out, human life as well as nature is essentially dignified (2015, 4). Nature (which includes here not only life but the chemical constituents of life) does not *have* value; it is the origin and source of value (9). For traditional Amerindian cultures Mother Earth (*la pachamama*) is not reducible to a mere object with an exchange value. Mother Earth is a subject worthy of respect.

The Earth (with capital letters) is an object that becomes a subject for those communities most rooted in the planet, and, for this very reason, demand that it be considered 'someone', almost with the same status as a mother because it is creator, offers food, is part of the enjoyment of life but also suffers and communicates its suffering. (5)

Tellez-Fabiani further distinguishes between the natural use value of nature and the produced use value of nature. The natural use value of an apple consists in its nutritional value for humans without the need to transform its natural state. To use apples to bake a pie, however, creates a produced use value (Tellez-Fabiani 2015, 7–8). It is the instrumentalization of Mother Earth that denies its dignity and extracts its use value not to fulfill human needs, but to profit by means of realizing its exchange value as a commodity. Tellez-Fabiani argues that on account of the imposition of free market economics "the rate of consumption of the use values have been more than the regeneration of nature such that the threat we are facing today is the possible destruction of the basis of life"

(8–9). Once ecological value is annihilated, there is no way to regenerate it, as this value is precisely the source of all regeneration, and therefore of all living things.

It is this violation, through commodification of Mother Earth viewed as an unlimited good, that puts the future use value of nature at risk, and with it, all life on the planet. In concrete terms, life on earth is now threatened with extinction on account of global warming, the threat of nuclear war, pollution of air, earth, and water, and an overdependence on fossil fuels. Dussel goes so far as to argue that “the criterion of every rational economic decision ought to set in motion that mediation which makes life on the Earth possible, and in particular human life, *forever*, that it to say, for the long term of the next millenniums” (2014a, 227 [13.61]; see also 293 [15.64]; 2007, 145–154).<sup>1</sup> Our co-responsibility for promoting *perpetual human life* is thus extended to the source and sustenance of life given to us by Mother Earth. This commitment to Mother Earth will impact the norms of both the political and economic fields (Dussel 2014a, 230 [13.67]).

### HOW TO ETHICALLY ASSESS ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

In the economic field, the perspective of living labor and its metabolic relation to nature is the point of departure for the critique of political economy and the development of norms for an economics of liberation. As Dussel explains, “We think that the *ethical* principles are *subsumed* in the economic *field* and are *transformed* in this way into *normative* principles of the economy, ceasing to be merely *ethical* principles” (2014a, 201–202 [12.34]). Economics, then, like politics, subsumes the material, formal, and strategic principles as norms of its particular field of praxis. In short, “Economics, to be such, ought to develop its activity [to promote] the affirmation and qualitative growth of human life (*materialmente*), in the free and valid participation of the members of the community (*formalmente*) [in a way that] responds to objective conditions with efficiency (*factible*)” (203 [12.41]).

The claim to justice of any economic system depends on its conformity to material, formal, and strategic norms. The ethical implications of an

<sup>1</sup>In an interview with the author, Dussel drew attention to dead (or hypoxic) zones in the ocean with such low oxygen levels from pollution that fish suffocate upon entering these waters. This, indicated Dussel, is an example of the urgent need to take measures to stop the devastation of the biosphere and prevent the disappearance of humanity. Mexico City, January 10, 2018.

economic system, however, are not always self-evident. There is often a divide between how economic phenomena appear and their underlying essence or reality. Marx argues “all *science* would be superfluous if the phenomenal form and the essence of the thing immediately coincided” and that “it is a task of *science* to reduce the visible and purely phenomenal movement to the real internal movement” (Marx, cited by Dussel 1988/2008a, 289–290). Simply put, things are not always as they appear. In the case of the capital system, the full impact on human life and the biosphere of the real internal movement of capital is covered over by bourgeois economic theory and the liberal ideology that provides its ideological justification. It is the task of critical (as opposed to merely functional) economic theory to uncover that real internal movement of capital and its impact on human life and the earth’s ecosystems. Dussel finds in the work of Karl Marx an ethical critique of political economy that un-conceals this real internal movement of capital as a process of the alienation of living labor and indicates how this alienation may be overcome.

### DUSSEL’S HUMANISTIC INTERPRETATION OF MARX

In three books dedicated to a study of Marx’s life work, as well as *16 tesis de economía política: Interpretación filosófica* (2014a) (*Sixteen Theses on Political Economy: Philosophical Interpretation*), Dussel argues that humanist and ethical concerns of the young Marx are sustained throughout Marx’s life and that some of the central themes of the ethics of liberation, including the analectic method, are implicitly already contained in Marx’s work. Dussel’s detailed study of Marx preceded the publication of *Ethics of Liberation* and informed some features of Dussel’s development of the material ethical principle. In what follows, we will enter into Dussel’s interpretation of Marx’s ethical critique of the capital system, with a focus on alienation of living labor and principles of a transition to postcapitalist economic models that can potentially overcome this alienation.

### THE ALIENATION OF LABOR

The capital system is, from the point of view of an ethics of liberation, unethical because it exploits human life and the biosphere as a means of private accumulation without regard for the dignity of life. This exploitation takes the form of alienation of living labor from the very process by

means of which it produces and reproduces its ability to live. Alienation is the major theme of Dussel's humanistic interpretation of Marx. In "The Manuscripts of 61-63 and the Philosophy of Liberation" Dussel says

The *Philosophy of Latin American* liberation has much to learn from Marx. The "science" of Marx was a "Philosophy of liberation" of alienated living labor in the capital [system] as salaried labor in the Europe of the second half of the nineteenth century. Today, our "Philosophy of liberation" ought to also be the science of alienated living labor of the classes, of the peripheral peoples, underdeveloped, of the so-called Third World, who struggle in the *national* and *popular processes* of liberation against capitalism of the center and periphery, at the end of the twentieth century. The "new society," utopian, beyond capital, is still the most pertinent theme in Latin America, keeping a measure of ethical exteriority... that permits science as critique. (1988/2008a, 310-311)

The analysis and overcoming of alienation is not only an important endeavor for exploited workers within developed nations, but it is also a concern for peoples in the periphery who are often victims of economic dependency on, and political subordination to, the dominating metropolis.<sup>2</sup> It is through an analysis of living labor that we can comprehend living labor's self-alienation and simultaneous subsumption, as labor power, by capital in the act of production.

Marx's account of the alienation of living labor by capital, as a case of instrumentalization of the Other by the totalizing system, is understood in terms of the metaphysics of alterity (in this case living labor) and the ontology of totality (in this case the capital system). Living labor is able to reflect, from the exteriority of its self and world transcendence, on its own socio-economic condition within the ontology of the

<sup>2</sup>Dussel discusses dependency theory and the transfer of surplus value from the peripheral to the central (countries) in *16 tesis de economía política: Interpretación filosófica* (2014a, Theses 10 and 11); Section 18 on the Grundrisse and the "question of dependency," in *La producción teórica de Marx: Un comentario a los Grundrisse* (1985) (*The Theoretical Production of Marx: A Commentary on the Grundrisse*); and Section 15 on "the manuscripts of 61-63 and the 'concept' of dependency," in *Hacia un Marx desconocido. Un comentario de los manuscritos del 61-63* (1988/2008a) (*Towards an Unknown Marx: A Commentary on the Manuscripts of 61-63*). While important to Dussel's application of Marxism to dependency theory as it impacts Latin American politics and economics, a discussion of this issue is not within the scope of this monograph.

prevailing capital system. Living labor exists as the self-transcending lived body that is both a being-for-itself in the exterior of the capital system (as metaphysical) and a being-for-the-other in so far as it is a functional part of the capital system (as ontological).<sup>3</sup>

How can we conceive of living labor as at once a form of alterity and as a functional part of the totalizing capital system? In *Hacia un Marx desconocido* (1988/2008a), Dussel begins to address this question:

“*Living labor*,” in so far as it is human labor, actuality of the person and manifestation of his or her dignity, is situated as such *outside, beyond, transcending* or, as we have called it in other works, in the *exteriority* of capital. “*Living labor*” is not “objectified labor.” The first is the man himself, activity, subjectivity, the “creative source of all value”; the second is the thing, the product, the value produced. In this way the *critique* of capital (as a totality of *things*) is effected through the *exteriority* of “*living labor*.”... The “reality” of “non-capital”... is the place from which one accomplishes the *critique* of the *totality* of value that valorizes itself (thing): the critique of capital. (293; see also 1990/2014b, 366–367)

In this loaded passage, we note several ideas that need some unpacking. First, living labor, as situated “in the *exteriority* of capital” can be mapped onto Dussel’s notion of the analectic method, that is, living labor, at least in one of its features, constitutes the self and world transcendence of the living subject that makes alterity possible. Dussel also argues that living labor, though the source of value in so far as it sells its labor power to capital, does not itself have utilitarian value. It has dignity as an essential feature of its being and as such it is the “*creative source of value*” (Dussel 2014a, 74 [5.42]). As having dignity, human life (as living labor) polarizes things and practices in the world in terms of their potential value for fulfilling vital needs or their potential for putting life in danger (Dussel 2007, 138–143; 2016, 16 [1.12]; see also Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012; 1942/1963). Moreover, living labor has no utilitarian value because it is not a thing; as such, it cannot be entirely subsumed into a network of assignments. When a tree is cut down for wood and ultimately formed into a chair by a carpenter, the *living* tree is lost to the world and the chair has utilitarian value. The life energy

<sup>3</sup>As we discussed in previous chapters, this two-dimensionality of human life does not constitute a substance dualism; human life is always a lived body in a metabolic relationship to its means of production and reproduction. Yet, given its reflexive nature, human life has both intrasystemic and extrasystemic dimensions.

exerted by the carpenter, mediated by tools and machines, ends up contributing to the form of the commodity-chair. Thus, in this act of creation, of forming the chair out of wood, living labor of the carpenter becomes externalized or objectified in the product. At the same time, however, living labor still retains its autonomy and distinctness from all of its products as well as from the production process in which its labor power has been expended and objectified.<sup>4</sup>

In order to advance our analysis of the alienation of labor, it is important to recall our discussions of the distinctions between totality and alterity, as well as between ontology and metaphysics. Given the dual status of living labor, analogous to the duality of the Other (as metaphysical ability to be) and the other (as functional entity), the question at hand can be framed in the following manner: how does living labor become alienated (instrumentalized) and retain its metaphysical status at the same time?<sup>5</sup> There must be mediating categories between living labor and objectified labor that preserves living labor's autonomy from complete subsumption by capital in the very act of self-alienation. Let us look closely at how Dussel interprets Marx's argument.

### LIVING LABOR, CAPACITY TO LABOR, AND LABOR POWER

Marx does not always distinguish clearly between living labor, capacity to labor, and labor power, but for Dussel, the differences between these determinations of living labor are important to unraveling the puzzle of how living labor retains its autonomy even as part of its life force is subsumed by capital in acts of production. Marx says "By labor power or capacity to work we understand the combination of physical and spiritual faculties that exist in the *corporeality*, in the *living personality* of the human being" (Marx, cited by Dussel 1990/2014b, 135). In a clarification of an idea that Dussel thinks Marx ought to have made more explicit, capacity to work is distinguished as the *potential* to engage in work, "*prior* to the use or consumption of labor." Labor power, on the other hand, is "the *actual* use of living labor" (138; see also 165–166).

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion on the relation between living labor and labor power, see Mario Saenz (2000, 214–230).

<sup>5</sup>By *dual status* I do not mean to attribute substance dualism to Dussel. Living labor is always a feature of the lived body and never a mind body dualism. I mean only to draw attention to the exteriority versus functionality of living labor.

Here are the mediations we had sought earlier, between living labor as autonomous Other on the one hand, and living labor as objectified labor on the other.

Dussel makes a further clarification about the distinction between living labor and capacity to work. The capacity to work has a value because it is bought and sold on the labor market through contracts or agreements to work. Living labor, on the other hand, in the strict sense, is “the subjectivity (personhood and corporeality of the worker) without value, that has ‘capacity’ and ‘power’ as its determinations” (Dussel 1990/2014b, 138). On Dussel’s reading of Marx, as determinations of living labor, capacity to work and labor power do not exhaust the essence of living labor. Living labor, by means of its agency and corporeality, is *the creative source of new value*, but it retains this agency and corporeality even as it sells its capacity to labor and expends labor power, its life force, for an alien being, the capitalist (Dussel 2016, 126 [9.42]).

Mario Saenz (2000) maintains that although Dussel “wants to argue that living labor is in itself, outside the sphere of Capital,” nevertheless, “it is one’s living labor [when forced to sell itself for a wage] that *is* also alienated, *besides* one’s ‘labor power’” (220). Saenz argues:

The exteriority of living labor to capital is metasytemic vis-à-vis capital and it is, therefore, a priori to capital. However, it is a posteriori and *intrasystemic* to capital once it has been integrated into the movement of capital production, that is, once it has been through the historical expropriation of the instruments of labor by a nonlaboring class ... alienated from the laborer as labor power to be bought and used in the production and creation of value. ... Furthermore, living labor is a posteriori and *extrasystemic* (or *metasystemic*) to capital in the sense that it has a history that precedes the rise of the capitalist system and incorporates other past systems .... (239)

I do not see how living labor can move from being subsumed by the intrasystemic logic of capital and later resume its extrasystemic life. Saenz does refer to what is alienated by capital production as “labor power” but does not seem to take this as distinct from living labor. On Dussel’s reading of Marx, living labor *qua* capacity to labor and ultimately *qua* expended labor power, does indeed externalize itself, yet, at the same time, it continues to retain its autonomy and alterity with regard to its own exploitation within the capital system. Should living labor itself



become alienated from the singular human life, the subject would be reduced to a thing and no longer have dignity. “Living labor,” insists Dussel, “is always transcendental—before, during, and after” its labor *power* is subsumed by capital.<sup>6</sup> The retention of this autonomy is critical to the singular human life’s ability to resist exploitation and ultimately overcome alienation by taking collective control of the means of production. Workers fight for better wages and working conditions, sometimes at great cost to themselves and their families, because they retain their dignity and can imagine a better future even as they toil.

We have drawn the bare outline of the alienation of living labor by means of reference to labor power’s subsumption by capital, but we have not entered into the economic process that accounts for and reproduces this alienation. We can briefly analyze alienation of living labor by examining the process of accumulation of value by capital at any phase of the transformation of value. Now we will enter the process at the point of exchange between living labor and money-capital.

### LIVING LABOR AND MONEY-CAPITAL

When money as representing, in part, the value of previously objectified labor, is exchanged for the capacity to labor by means of a work contract, money-capital subsumes the capacity to labor within the process of capital. Dussel identifies the moment that this capacity is actually put to work as *labor power* as central to the alienation of labor: “Only in this moment the ‘capacity’ becomes ‘power’: from capacity to labor it becomes ‘*labor power*’” (Dussel 1988/2008b, 69). To be clear, in order for living labor to be incorporated into capital it must offer itself in the form of a capacity to work. That capacity to work can be employed as labor power. The labor power then becomes externalized, as the worker engages in production, and this labor power ultimately becomes externalized or objectified in products of labor.

The secret of the power that the product of labor subsequently has over workers themselves is in the nature of commodities. Commodities have both a *use value* and an *exchange value*. For example, the use value of a pair of shoes is in our ability to walk in them. The exchange value is the purchase price. The capitalist is most interested in exchange value.

<sup>6</sup>The author’s interview with Enrique Dussel, January 10, 2018, Mexico City.

The sale of products realizes their exchange value. Once products are sold (exchanged for money) labor power that had been externalized and objectified in those products returns in the form of money in the hands of the capitalist. This money-capital form of value can then be deployed as a wage by the capitalist to command the worker who *must* sell his or her labor once again. The worker thereby alienates his or her labor in exchange for a wage in order to survive. Again, that wage, in the present example, takes the form of money, money that had been obtained in the exchange of a commodity.

As we can see from the distinction between living labor, capacity to labor, and labor power, the purchase and use of labor power by the capitalist does not completely subsume the autonomy of living labor within the ontology of capital. “The worker is ‘the other’ of capital—*ante rem*. But once alienated, sold, [the worker] does not on account of this cease being potentially or actually again *the other* than capital” (Dussel 1985, 340). Living labor constantly reproduces its life force, thereby renewing its capacity to work. And capital, which exploits this labor, realizes an exchange value that can then be used to employ more labor. While labor power is the lifeblood of capital, the capitalist has the upper hand in this dynamic relationship because he or she controls the means of production and thereby the distribution of realized exchange value. In the struggle to win bread for oneself and one’s family, the worker is subject to domination by capital while retaining his or her dignity as an autonomous singular human life that transcends capital.<sup>7</sup> Of course, as capital sets up a race to the bottom wage, sometimes a worker can find it hard to make ends meet, and his or her dignity thereby does come under assault.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the autonomy of living labor as a subjectivity exterior to capital is a condition of possibility for ending exploitation. For this exteriority is the perspective from which the Other, exploited labor, can critically comprehend the fetishization of profit as well as the mystification of the money-labor relation.

<sup>7</sup>We have already defined alterity as this extrasystemic space. It is not that of the Cartesian solipsistic ego. It is not a being that exists substantially distinct from its body. Human beings are lived bodies in community and in a metabolic relation to Mother Earth, however, much one might entertain the illusion of oneself as being an incorporeal spectator consciousness.

<sup>8</sup>As reported in the New York Times, on February 5, 2018, New York City livery driver in his 60’s, Doug Schifter, “killed himself with a shotgun in front of City Hall in Lower Manhattan, having written a lengthy Facebook post several hours earlier laying out the structural cruelties that had left him in such dire circumstance. He was now sometimes forced to work more than 100 hours a week to survive.” Bellafante, G. (February 6, 2018).

## THE FETISHIZATION OF SURPLUS VALUE AS PROFIT

Capitalist political economy fetishizes profit by explaining it as the result of the self-expansion of capital. Its as if capital were creating value, like a God, out of nothing (Dussel 1993/2017). By means of analyzing categories of the process of capital, one arguably discovers the essence of profit is the extraction of surplus labor time and thereby surplus value from labor. Once this process is understood, the *appearance* of surplus value as profit gives way to comprehension of its *actual essence* as unpaid labor (Dussel 2014a, 122 [7.26]).

Within the concrete totality ... surplus value essentially founds the phenomenal and superficial appearance of profit. The failure to differentiate between surplus value and profit, as determinations, concepts, and categories, and of their diverse levels of abstraction, is the cause of the fundamental confusion of capitalist political economy.... (Dussel 1990/2014b, 59)

The “fundamental confusion of capitalist political economy” lay in what on the surface appears to be an equal exchange of a wage for labor power. According to the theory of surplus value, that wage does not cover the value of total labor time of the worker who is employed by the capitalist. As a result, the wage paid to the worker does not compensate the full value of labor power objectified in production and circulation of value in its various forms. Marx argues “*the salary form erases all sign of the division of the work day between necessary labor and surplus labor, between paid and unpaid labor. All labor appears as paid labor*” (Marx, cited by Dussel, 441).

To fill in just a bit more detail, unpaid labor time is surplus labor time, which though unpaid, produces value that gets incorporated into the product of labor and subsequently other various determinations of capital (Dussel 1990/2014b, 44). This appropriation of surplus labor time and its externalization in the production of commodities and subsequent sale expands the value available to capital (creating surplus capital) to repeat the cycle of exploitation. In this way capital can command ever more labor to produce more surplus value.

This is still an oversimplification of Dussel’s interpretation of Marx’s theory of surplus value. But already from this brief discussion, we can see how the theory of surplus value calls into question the fetishized concept of capital as the motor of the creation of value. Marx then, rejects the view

that capital is a self-expanding totality which includes labor as a commodity and therefore an expense, among other inputs. For Marx, it is labor that is the creative source of value that, as exterior to capital, is in some sense non-capital (Dussel 1990/2014b, 408). The totality of capital, far from being able to expand itself by means of its own resources must instrumentalize living labor (qua labor power) and turn that labor into itself. “All value is *living labor* objectified, and all profit is *surplus value* placed in the ‘Being’ of capital by the creative source from nothing: ‘living labor’ that ethically speaking is robbed” (404).

For Dussel, critical economic science recognizes that the instrumentalization of living labor by means of labor power’s subsumption in the process of capital is unethical.

Ethically speaking, this alienation of labor, this negation of its alterity, its exteriority, this having degraded the “face-to-face” [encounter] in proximity, in order to constitute the other as mediation, instrument, subsuming labor as mere “use value” founded in the being of capital, is the originary *evil*, the *ethical perversity* par excellence of the capitalist reality and for this reason of its [capital’s] morality. (Dussel 1985, 354; see also 1986/1988, 119–120)

An economics of liberation seeks to overcome alienation, that is, the dehumanizing instrumentalization of human beings by the capital system. In its affirmation of human life, an economics of liberation studies ways to overcome the alienation of labor in accord with norms that subsume the material, formal, and strategic ethical principles.

### OVERCOMING ALIENATION

The struggle to transform the structure of the economy requires both a critique of the prevailing capital system and a praxis that aims at building a world in which the economy is no longer a function of the expansion of capital, but rather of the production, reproduction, and growth of human life in community and in harmony with Mother Earth. By means of the analectic method, living labor can attain awareness of itself as an economic class and critique the mechanisms of exploitation and alienation. An ethical economics, born in the face-to-face encounter with the Other, acknowledges our collective responsibility for transforming the economic system in a way that humanizes the production and reproduction of human life in community.

Overcoming alienation of living labor requires the transformation of the economic system in a way that organizes the cycle of production in accordance with norms derived from the three main ethical principles (Dussel 2014a, 268–296, Thesis 15). “In every historical *system*,” says Dussel, “each determination or category is subsumed in a distinct totality, and for this reason gets a new content” (2014a, 269 [15.12]). From a dialectical point of view, each determination of an ethical economic system impacts the relation between all other categories or determinations, and all of these determinations would have their sense and structure within the systematic whole (274 [15.18]).

A society in which communitarian values prevail would presumably include, among other forms, communal ownership of the means of production. Such a means of ownership would then impact other determinations of the economic system. If freely associated workers have input into production and distribution of their products, the use value of products would likely take priority, and *excess value* (as opposed to surplus value) would be managed with community input. In this way the excess product, as “property” held in common, would not be appropriated by a private proprietor; it would belong to the community of producers. The community of workers would democratically decide, within the parameters set by democratically determined local, regional, and national goals, how to dispose of excess product. Members of this economic community would relate to each other as freely associated productive human beings, who, in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, aim at meeting community needs. Neither the capital system nor the real socialism that was practiced by the Soviet Union afford such worker democratic control over the means of production and the excess product (Dussel 2014a, 307–310 [16.32–16.34]).

On the question of the role of competition and state regulation of the economy, an economics of liberation seeks to avoid both the laissez-faire pretensions of neoliberal economics as well as the centralized planning and regulation of the sort imposed under real socialism of the twentieth century. Both systems generate alienation in distinct ways by negating democratic control over the economy and are therefore inconsistent with norms of an economics of liberation.

The champions of unregulated markets presuppose an invisible hand that, in an extremely complex marketplace, if left to its own dynamics, leads inexorably to a point of equilibrium, or an approximation of such a point, between supply and demand. Labor, as a commodity in this sort

of market, presumably is also subject to the law of supply and demand, and giving labor leverage through collective bargaining with regard to compensation and work conditions would be a distortion of “free” market forces. Here, the goal of the system is to perpetually increase the rate of profit. What we observe, however, is that even with only limited regulation, the globalizing capital system generates periodic crises, growing social and economic inequality, social antagonism, political capture of states by corporate interests, and environmental devastation. As István Mészáros (1995/2000) points out, for Marx, “the innermost determinations of the capital system—based on a set of mediatory relations articulated for the domination of labor, in the service of the necessary extraction of surplus labor—were irremediably *antagonistic* and ultimately not only destructive but also *self-destructive*” (32).

The bureaucratic centralism of real socialism sets the goals and plans for national production, distribution and consumption patterns and suppresses competition and worker participation in planning and management of production, distribution, and consumption. Here, the goal is to increase the rate of production. Real socialism eliminates competition, leads to inefficiency and a lack of innovation and also alienates labor from the means and products of production. “We can see then,” says Dussel, in the case of real socialism, “that we are dealing with a new kind of *alienation* that does not have its foundation in private property, but in undemocratic and non-participatory management by the worker in the enterprise in which he or she works” (2014a, 308 [16.32]; see also Hinkelammert 1984).

Dussel comments that an ethical organization of production would avoid both the despotism of centralized planning as well as unregulated free markets; it would be “‘social’ from its foundation, and the place of work would be a human space of the face-to-face, of proximity, of real freedom, of the just equality of concrete fraternity” (1985, 91). How is it possible that the proximity of face-to-face encounters and a praxis of liberation can prevail even as we labor? While he does not advocate a one size fits all economic model, Dussel suggests some combination of local planning and control over production and national level planning that are in each case democratically determined. Dussel also suggests the promotion of a measure of competition (not based on the private accumulation of socially produced surplus value!) sufficient to incentivize innovation and efficiency (2014a, 280–282 [15.31–15.34]).

For Dussel, economies ought to operate in function of the mediation of the reproduction and growth of human life in community, and the only way to ensure such alternatives is to have democratic control over the economy. The establishment of democratic procedures requires symmetry among the participants in economic policymaking and therefore an end to the domination of a minority who own most of the property and wealth over the majority of humankind who have only their labor to bring to the market. The inclusion of communal forms of ownership of the means of production is a necessary condition for such symmetry:

*All decisions (technological, productive, organizational, making publicity, etc.) of the new productive enterprise are legitimate, while within the parameters of the political decisions with regard to the economic field, when the affected (workers, employees, etc.) are able to participate in a symmetrical manner in the practical decisions at all institutional levels (of production, distribution, exchange, etc.), this participation being guaranteed by means of community or social ownership of the means of production, discursively managed... taking into account the necessities of every type not only of the productive community but also fundamentally and as service and responsibility of society as a whole, and ultimately of humanity, within the limits framed by the principle of feasibility and the affirmation of human life as a common good.* (Dussel 2014a, 254–255 [14.42], italics in original)

Here, we can see the combination of the three ethical principles at work as norms in the economic field. Critical economic science thus asks this fundamental question of any economic system: Does the system provide for the mediation of the community of human life to liberate that life for its growth in harmony with the earth's biosphere, or, on the contrary, does it instrumentalize human life at the service of some fetishized end? The project of the politics and economics of liberation is to create a world ultimately determined by the sovereignty of the community of human life, a life that underlies all political and economic systems, but is, as Rousseau remarked, "everywhere in chains."

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## Conclusion: Toward a Transmodern Pluriverse

We propose ... under the name of *Transmodernity* (for the lack of another word), the horizon that opens before our eyes. It is not a question of a new stage of Modernity, but rather of a *New Age* of the world, beyond the assumptions of modernity, of capitalism, of eurocentrism, and of colonialism. An age in which the requirements for the existence of life on Earth have required a change in the ontological attitude toward the existence of nature, of work, property, and other cultures. (Dussel 2015, 100)

### OVERVIEW

Today we stand at a crossroads. Western instrumental rationality now threatens to destroy the very conditions that make human life on the planet possible. As István Mészáros (1995/2000, 2015) points out, global capital is generating social antagonisms it cannot resolve. Despite the challenges, we cannot succumb to nihilism or fatalism without betraying those who suffer most from domination and exploitation. We can address these challenges by taking co-responsibility for the production and reproduction of human life and the conservation of the earth's ecosystems. The ethics of liberation assumes this co-responsibility, along with all those, who from a diversity of cultures and perspectives, share a common vision that a new world is possible. In this concluding chapter, I describe the idea of a transmodern pluriversal world and an intercultural dialogue aimed at advancing its goals. I also argue that the analectic method and three fundamental ethical principles of the ethics of liberation are consistent with a diversity of liberatory projects.

ETHICS OF LIBERATION, TOTALITARIANISM,  
AND PLURIVERSAL TRANSMODERNITY

The ethics of liberation is anti-totalitarian and promotes a pluriversal transmodern perspective. Just as we approach the epiphany of the Other with the utmost respect for the Other's dignity, so too, we can approach the ethos of other cultures without seeking to interpret them solely in terms of our own cultural horizons. Some critics have raised questions, however, about whether by privileging the Other as the main protagonist of transformation, the ethics of liberation introduces a new totalizing subject in place of the old, and whether by maintaining universal ethical principles, it stands opposed to a pluriversal world (see Schutte 1993, 188; Castro-Gómez 1996/2011, 35, 38; Cerutti-Guldberg 1983/2006, 366)?<sup>1</sup>

First let us address the objection that the ethics of liberation introduces a new totalizing subject. In concrete terms, the objection is that in place of globalizing capital, now the Other turns the tables and seeks to impose a new closed totality on everyone else. Such an objection misunderstands both the analectic method and the idea of alterity in Dussel.

In the analectic moment, the one responding to the appeal or epiphany of the Other considers the Other not as an instrument or function within the lifeworld, but as a being for him or herself, transcendent to any order of things. The analectic perspective is a transcendence of the totality and is *both critical and ethical*. As such, critical ethical consciousness does not attempt to reduce singular human lives of others, whether they be dominators or dominated, into an instrument of its own ends, but actually seeks to negate such reduction of human beings into mere instruments and overcome the relation of dominator–dominated altogether. The analectic method which gives rise to critical ethical rationality is clearly *anti-totalitarian*.

It is also important to point out that the analectic perspective does not claim that alterity is intrinsically ethical. Dussel does not maintain, as philosopher Ofelia Schutte seems to suggest he does, that exteriority is always “pure, uncontaminated” (1993, 189). Dussel is well aware that even those who are oppressed may adopt the very ideology of the oppressor and even betray the interests of his or her own community. Being

<sup>1</sup>As Linda Martin Alcoff points out, “the problem with metanarratives, as we know, is their totalizing character, and subsequent dismissal of any and all particulars that resist subsumption into the grand scheme” (2012, 61).

Other does not make someone ethical. We recall here Dussel's use of the autobiography of Rigoberta Menchú to illustrate the critical awakening of the oppressed in the case of an Indigenous community in Guatemala. The experience of Menchú illustrates that the historical subject of liberation does not always start out with a critical awareness of the causes of his or her oppression. The movement from naive to critical ethical consciousness is usually a long arduous process of self discovery. So the Other is not an intrinsically "pure, uncontaminated" subject, but must first decolonize his or her mind and, as Paulo Freire points out, recognize the limit conditions that are the causes of oppression, before being able to collectively transform the prevailing reality (Freire 1968/1984).

Now let us address the objection that universal ethical principles set up a totalitarian ethos or culture. First it is important to define what is totalitarian. A principle, system, or practice is totalitarian if it instrumentalizes singular human lives to its own ends, turning the Other into a moment or determination of the Same. Human beings who are not considered useful by the totalizing system are marginalized as redundant. Now let's apply this definition to the three principles at hand.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the ethical principles stand in a relationship of mutual determination. These are the principles subsumed as norms of political and economic practices. To recall here just one of these principles in relation to the other two, the material principle promotes the production and reproduction of human life in community and in accord with symmetrical democratic procedures that include all those who may be impacted by the deliberations, and these deliberations themselves are conditioned by what is feasible. This is clearly a pro-democracy decision-making process that respects the autonomy of others as well. The principles of the ethics of liberation, which mutually inform each other, are actually *anti-totalitarian*.

While the liberatory project is anti-totalitarian, it does not claim perfection. For this reason, even when there are advances toward participatory democracy and social and economic justice, the work of critical ethical praxis is never over. Constituent power will inevitably err. And constituted power will tend toward taking itself, instead of constituents, as the point of reference. Dussel harbors no illusions about human finitude:

The uncertainty of every decision, of every consensus, *inevitably* conceals its imperfection: no human act can be perfect.... This is to say, this praxis inevitably contains some ethical defect, though it not be conscious.... For this reason, the *positive* praxis of liberation or the construction of the new

system always contains some ambiguity inherent to the human condition; that is to say, it inevitably contains an imperfection that manifests itself in *negative effects* that someone will suffer; he or she is the new victim in the construction of the new ethical system. (2016, 159 [12.11])

The important point of this recognition of the imperfection of human praxis is that those committed to the liberatory project ought to engage in collective self critique, acknowledge and take responsibility for their mistakes, correct their errors, and resume the praxis of liberation (Dussel 2001, 147; 2008b, 346; 2016, 110–111 [8.7], 159 [12.11]).

### ETHOS AND THE TRANSMODERN PROJECT

Having addressed some of the criticisms of the ethics of liberation, we will now articulate the concept of pluriversal transmodernity. We begin by distinguishing transmodernity from the modern, totalizing ethos. Dussel acknowledges that every philosophical tradition is to some degree ethnocentric; each tradition takes certain insights of its own cosmology, cosmovision, mythology, ethics, and anthropology to be universal. But it is important to distinguish the totalitarian nature of the European myth of modernity from what Dussel calls the transmodern project. The former ethos takes itself to be universal without qualification. It measures other world cultures against its own historical development and ideals.<sup>2</sup> The latter acknowledges both the similarities and differences among the great diversity of world cultures (Dussel 2008a, 12–14; 2015, 24, 83–85).<sup>3</sup>

As we discussed in Chapter 2, the conquest of Amerindia, beginning in 1492, not only dominated the economic, social and political spheres of the lives of Amerindian peoples and enslaved Africans, but also

<sup>2</sup>As Alcoff (2012) points out, for Dussel, for European modernity “the knowing I is imagined to be both universal arbiter and neutral or perspectiveless observer and as such need not give an account of its own prejudgments or accord presumptive authority to others. Such an epistemic solipsism is affected through subsuming ‘the Other under the Same’ or refusing to entertain the possibility that there is a plurality of reasonable founding premises and conceptual categories. When my particular standards of judgement ... become the universal, I can judge the Other under a cloak of neutral anonymity with no need for hermeneutic humility” (63).

<sup>3</sup>According the Eurocentric narrative, bonafide philosophical thought originated in early Greek thinking, as if there were not already philosophical traditions developed in Asia, Africa and Amerindia, each with its own forms of expression (Dussel 2015, 18).

denigrated their mythic, religious, and philosophical ideas. The colonality of power aims at dominating not only the Other's body, but his or her mind as well. How have some pre-modern traditions survived five hundred years of domination and exclusion? Dussel points out that the contempt with which the dominant European ethos held pre-modern cultures actually provided a subterfuge for some subalternized traditions to survive, in some form, the long night of colonialism.

This contempt ... allowed them [subaltern cultures] to survive in silence, in obscurity, with the simultaneous contempt of their own modernized and westernized elites. This negated "exteriority," this always existing and latent alterity indicates the existence of an unforeseen cultural wealth, that is slowly reborn like the flames of the fire of embers buried by the sea of ashes left by centuries of colonialism. *This cultural exteriority is not merely an uncontaminated and eternal substantive "identity"*; it has been evolving in the face of Modernity itself: it is an identity in the sense of process and growth, but always as exteriority. (2015, 282, italics added; see also Dussel 2002, 232)

As Dussel makes clear in this passage, the cultural exteriority of the Other is not "merely an uncontaminated and eternal substantive 'identity'." It has evolved in the face of modernity and retains an exteriority with regard to the colonality of power. Does this Other who mobilizes to bring about transformation of an oppressive system, inevitably threaten to become an authoritarian subject, as some of Dussel's critics have suggested? Alcoff puts the key question succinctly: "How do we move to a decentralized, pluriversal (rather than universal) approach that avoids relativism?" (2012, 64).

Unlike the Eurocentric ethos, the transmodern approach to social, political, and economic transformation does not seek to impose a single model on other nations and cultures. For example, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, since the election of President Evo Morales in 2005, we have seen the contribution of the cosmovision of Original peoples to the progressive politics of the nation. Far from being a totalizing force, the new constitution of 2009, which incorporates some of the insights of this cosmovision, recognizes the rights of 36 nations as well as Afro-descendent Bolivians to preserve their own traditions and participate in the democratic life of the country. While these nations within the plurinational state generally share a common goal of *buen vivir* (living well, in harmony with Mother Earth), no one ethos seeks to dominate the others. The Bolivian experience, though not perfect, demonstrates that a new world is indeed possible.

## THE FRONTIER HORIZON AND DIFFERENTIAL RATIONALITY

As we have seen, the transmodern perspective does not seek to impose one ethos on all the world. In this sense it is postmodern. It is a horizon of comprehension that is open to dialogue with other cultures without itself pretending to be a master culture. It also critically incorporates certain features of modernity into its transmodern horizon. In "Philosophy of Liberation, the Postmodern Debate, and Latin American Studies," Dussel clearly delineates the difference between his critique of modern reason and irrationalism as well as authoritarian forms of rationalism:

The critique of modern reason does not allow the philosophy of liberation to confuse it with a critique of reason as such, or with particular types of rationality. On the contrary, the critique of modern reason is made in the name of a differential rationality (the reason used by feminist movements, environmentalists, cultural and ethnic movements, the working class, peripheral nations, etc.) and a universal rationality (a practical/material, discursive, strategic, instrumental, critical form of reason). The affirmation and emancipation of difference is constructing a novel and future universality. The question is not difference or universality but rather universality in difference and difference in universality. (2008b, 346)

The philosopher of liberation takes neither a fundamentalist approach to any regional tradition nor completely rejects every feature of modernity. The idea is to critically combine the wisdom of suppressed ancestral and hybrid cultures with an ecological use of the innovative and scientific rationality of modernity. "The critical intellectual," urges Dussel, "ought to be someone located 'in between' the two cultures (one's own and the Modern)" (2015, 290). It is from this frontier region between one's own culture (and here Dussel has postcolonial peoples in mind) and certain positive features of modernity, that a planetary humanism can be constructed:

The affirmation and development of cultural alterity of the postcolonial peoples, subsuming at the same time the best of Modernity, ought to promote not a cultural style that tends towards a globalized unity, undifferentiated and empty, but rather a *trans*-modern pluriverse (with many universalities: european, islamic, vedanta, taoist, buddhist, latin american, bantu, etc.), multicultural, in critical intercultural dialogue. (294)

The orientation of transmodernity is not a “globalized unity, undifferentiated and empty” but a pluriverse with “many universalities.”<sup>4</sup> Transmodernity recognizes that universal philosophical questions (*núcleos problemáticos universales*) about the origin of the universe and the place of human beings in the universe are common to all traditions. These “common core problems” form the a priori bases of intercultural philosophical dialogue (Dussel 2015, 25). The transmodern perspective acknowledges that the diversity of ways of addressing the core questions all merit consideration (Dussel 2015, 11–12). The “prism” offers an image of a pluriverse in which no one culture holds itself up as the most advanced form of human development or rationality. Each cultural community, in dialogue with other communities, retains and develops its unique contribution to a planetary humanism while finding points of convergence within ever larger communication communities (Dussel 2015, 283).

There is no Hegelian subject underlying the dynamic of the intercultural dialogue. The “differential rationality” is not subsumed by a master Logic. The popular sectors worldwide and their allies, now engaged in a praxis of liberation, retain their alterity and difference not only in relation to the oppressive ontology of the totalizing system, but to other communities engaged in a liberatory project as well (Dussel 1998/2013, 423–424 [397]). Dussel refers to this feature of such intercultural solidarity as *analogical pluriversality*.

Rational dialogue ought to have as an ethical principle an attitude of respect for the “analogical pluriversality” of humanity which permits progressive mutual comprehension, accepting without contradiction the pretension to truth of the other culture, without the main intention being to refute (that is *to falsify*) but rather to jointly undertake the long path of the gradual but ever more profound comprehension of the sense of the linguistic and conceptual components of the other cultural world, in order to assimilate the experiences of other cultures from the fusion of horizons based on *similarity*, that in any case will not reach an identical consensus, but rather an understanding, ample, necessary and sufficient for a world that sets as a postulate perpetual life and peace. (Dussel 2018, 55)

<sup>4</sup>Such an open horizon is not a wholesale rejection of everything modern or European. As Alcoff (2012) points out, “it holds out its hand to Europe to rescale its self-understanding and come along in solidarity through egalitarian dialogue” (64).

The analogical feature of pluriversality respects both similarity (not sameness or identity) and difference among peoples. The face-to-face encounter, we recall, is not a relation between two determinate objects and neither party to the relation seeks to subsume the Other within its own subjectivity. At the world wide level, from a pluriversal transmodern point of view, no one people or nation would be subsumed as an instrument for the realization of any other people's project. What then is the analogical feature of the pluriversality of cultures? As part of a *transmodern* project, the intercultural and inter-philosophical dialogue aims at creating a post-capitalist, multi-polar world of participatory democracies in which the great diversity of cultures, South and North, live in harmony, advance the growth of human life in community, with complementarity and mutual respect among nations.

### INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

Dussel proposed both South-South and North-South dialogues as early as 1974. The first phase of these conferences have largely been focused on promoting South-South encounters; in this way those who have experienced coloniality first hand could set the major themes for a subsequent North-South dialogue (Dussel 2015, 49, 82–101, 291–292). For example, in 1976, an international conference to advance a South-South dialogue was held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which led to follow up conferences in Delhi, Ghana, Sao Paulo, Colombo, Manila, Oaxtepec and other venues. These dialogues have continued into the twenty-first century. “These conferences,” remarks Dussel, “have given us a new direct panorama of the great cultures of humanity” (2015, 265). Some of the major themes early on included imperial culture, liberation of popular culture, and more recently, post-globalization, decolonization, and transmodernity (266). The intercultural dialogue is “an arm of liberation” because, among other topics, it critiques the myth of modernity, contests the coloniality of power, and critically revalorizes the richness of peripheral cultures that continue to develop in relation to and in transcendence of modernity (293).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>At a conference held in Quito on July 30, 2009, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia, David Choquehuanca, spoke about *Vivir Bien*: “We are beginning to revalorize understanding of our history, it is not that we have not had history, we have had history. We are recently starting to valorize ourselves, we are already speaking of Rumiñawi, but we are not only speaking of this, we are also speaking of the great men like Simon Bolivar, who allowed us to return to our roots, and also of the Campaign of 500 years of resistance” (2009, July, 67).



## TOWARD A NEW AGE OF THE WORLD

In a presentation before the XXII World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul, South Korea (August 2, 2008) entitled “A new world age in the history of philosophy,” Dussel suggests that “the start of the twenty-first century offers an opportunity to inaugurate an inter-philosophical dialogue” (2015, 25). As mentioned above, a North-South dialogue was deliberately designed to follow a South-South dialogue in order that the latter could set the agenda for future North-South encounters. Today, this agenda includes the themes of a decolonized epistemology and the critical recuperation of the contributions of non-Western philosophical traditions, and in particular, those traditions that had been marginalized or suppressed since the fifteenth century (40, 49, 90). The agenda is mindful that “there is still the presence of the phenomenon of cultural, economic, and political colonialism” and that even after five centuries, “the philosophical communities of the post-colonial countries, with their problems and philosophical responses, are still not accepted by the hegemonic metropolitan communities” (25).

What Dussel has in mind is not a dialogue in which each interlocutor merely transmits a particular canon. “To be critical, philosophers ought to take on the ethical-political problematic that can explain the poverty, domination, and exclusion of much of the population of their respective countries, especially in the South (in Africa, a large part of Asia and Latin America)” (2015, 29). This means that each participant is invited to take a point of view that critically transcends the myth of modernity “from outside the modern horizon, from another geopolitics, from another world that has been ignored, negated, exploited, from the ‘not-being’ of Parmenides” (Dussel 2018, 60–61). The plurality of horizons that transcend modernity open to a dialogue of mutual respect of differences. The goal is not to homogenize diverse philosophical traditions, but rather to transcend the myth of modernity toward a planetary humanism that is truly pluriversal and transmodern (30).

In June 2012, Dussel delivered “Agenda for an inter-philosophical South-South dialogue” at a South-South Dialogue organized by Unesco in Rabat, Morocco. The goal of the South-South dialogue, argued Dussel, is “to arrive at a consensus that makes it possible to elaborate a minimal agreement, sufficient and necessary for a future planetary philosophy (not only of the South, but equally of the North)” (2015, 82). Dussel suggested a starting point for the conference:

It is not necessary to discuss a specific theme in this first conference, but to reflect on the meaning of the present status of postcolonial philosophy, of the causes of its prostration, of its alleged non-existence, of its invisibility before the eyes of the very philosophers of the so called periphery. How has it come to this? How can the apparent non-existence of regional philosophies of the South be reversed? What are the themes that should be studied and in what order? ... A discussion of the factors that impede the development of our regional philosophies of the South is offered as the first theme of the agenda to be considered with full awareness of its importance. (82–83)

One answer to this question is that along with the coloniality of power came the ideological domination of Western philosophy in the academy throughout Latin America. To reverse this trend requires the continued study of the impact of the coloniality of power on the academy. With regard to the “themes that should be studied” Dussel is not proposing regional postcolonial philosophies find points of convergence at the expense of diversity. Dussel employs the concept of *analogical pluriverse* (*pluriverso analógico*) to describe an inter-cultural dialogue in which a number of diverse constituencies and peoples who have been victimized by totalitarian systems share a similar interest in overcoming Western instrumental rationality, as well as every other totalizing system, without, however, compromising the unique and mutually enriching contributions of their diverse philosophical and religious traditions (99–101).

### PLANETARY HUMANISM

The main impetus for a planetary humanism comes from the social movements and popular sectors which are most affected by the structural inequality of the capital system and apparatus of subordination and violence. The philosophy of liberation is one of many expressions of the aspiration of peoples around the world for economic, social and political democracy. From an analectic perspective, if we assume our co-responsibility for the Other and for Mother Earth, we will be more anxious about complicity with growing economic inequality, unjust war, xenophobia, gender discrimination, white supremacy, mass incarceration, and climate change than about the risk of becoming a substitute for the victims. Dussel makes no apologies for the preferential option for the Other:

The philosopher of liberation neither represents anybody nor speaks on behalf of others (as if this were his sole vested political purpose), nor does he undertake a concrete task in order to overcome or negate some

petit-bourgeois sense of guilt. The Latin American critical philosopher, as conceived by the philosophy of liberation, assumes the responsibility of fighting for the other, the victim, the woman oppressed by patriarchy, and for the future generation which will inherit a ravaged Earth, and so on—that is, it assumes responsibility for all possible sorts of alterity. And it does so with an ethical, “situated” consciousness, that of any human being with an ethical “sensitivity” and the capacity to become outraged when recognizing the injustice imposed on the other. (2008b, 342)

The critical intercultural dialogue, motivated by an ethical sensitivity to address “the injustice imposed on the other” seeks to challenge the growing economic and social inequality and devastation of the earth’s ecosystems imposed by globalizing corporate capital and its mechanisms of social control and domination. This dialogue can only promote transformation of the prevailing system if it engages with social movements and other organized expressions of popular power in symmetrical communities of communication.<sup>6</sup> A growing dissensus, worldwide has the potential to form a new hegemonic consensus that can stop the march toward collective suicide and save our planet.

Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned such a planetary humanism as a *worldwide fellowship* aimed at overcoming the three great evils of racism, poverty and militarism. I believe it is ethically imperative for progressive forces around the world to join hands in the exodic journey from the wasteland of global corporate capital through the desert of transformation to bring about a pluriversal world, that is, “a world in which many worlds fit.” Otherwise we are lost.

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<sup>6</sup>These voices include ecological movements, the Foro de São Paulo, the Zapatistas, the Comuneros in Venezuela, MST (El Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales sin Tierra), La Vía Campesina, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the resistance at Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, and immigrant rights movements.

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**Frederick B. Mills** is Professor of Philosophy at Bowie State University, USA.

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