

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy



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FROM THE EDITOR

Carlos Alberto Sánchez

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE APA COMMITTEE ON HISPANICS

ARTICLES

Robert Elí Sánchez, Jr.

Strengthening the Case for Latin American Philosophy: Beyond Cultural Resources

Christian Matheis

On Various Notions of “Relations” in Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation

BOOK REVIEWS

José Medina: The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations

Reviewed by Lori Gallegos

Enrique Dussel: Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion

Reviewed by Don T. Deere

CONTRIBUTORS



APA NEWSLETTER ON

Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

CARLOS ALBERTO SÁNCHEZ, EDITOR

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FROM THE EDITOR

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The spring 2014 issue of the newsletter begins with Robert Elí Sánchez's "Strengthening the Case for Latin American Philosophy: Beyond Cultural Resources." In this timely paper, Sánchez reconsiders the question regarding the value of Latin American philosophy *for us*, its readers and practitioners. With this in mind, he asks us to consider the following question: "What do we need to do to get our colleagues to take Latin American philosophy more seriously?" He answers that we must focus on Latin American philosophy's "disruptive potential." Partly a response to Manuel Vargas's "On the Value of Philosophy: The Latin American Case" (which appeared in the journal *Comparative Philosophy* in 2010), in which Vargas argues that we must take Latin American philosophy seriously because, as Sánchez notes, "we ought to take philosophy seriously," the essay endeavors to show that we ought to take Latin American seriously, not because it is *simply* philosophy, but because of its "characteristic" difference.

In "On the Various Notions of 'Relations' in Enrique Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation*," Christian Matheis reflects on Dussel's use of the notion of "relation," "relationships," and "relating" in *Philosophy of Liberation*, arguing that thinking of this concept is essential for properly understanding liberatory thinking. He challenges the commonly held belief that "relation" is philosophically unproblematic and proceeds to offer new ways to consider and reflect on "relation" as philosophically and politically important. The essay begins with a critique of the common use of spatial metaphors for relation, and the limited benefit of using these metaphors to conduct analyses of oppression, equality, and distributive justice.

This issue also includes two excellent book reviews. First, Lori Gallegos does readers of this newsletter a great service with her book review of José Medina's *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Highlighting the spectacular originality of Medina's work, while also pointing out its few drawbacks, Gallegos invites us to think with Medina about some of the most pressing issues effecting marginalized groups in our, or any, society. (Readers are also encouraged to visit Natalie Cisneros's interview of José Medina in the fall 2013 issue of this newsletter.)

Finally, Don Deere's review of Enrique Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* is an in-depth and robust introduction to this remarkable book, and to the thought of Dussel more generally. Deere does more than summarize the main themes in *Ethics of Liberation*; he also considers Dussel's place in the history of philosophy (particularly in relation to Hobbes) and invites us to consider the application of Dussel's insights to modern human sociality.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE APA COMMITTEE ON HISPANICS

After a two-year hiatus, the APA's committee on Hispanics cordially invites submissions for the 2014 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, which is awarded to the author of the best unpublished, English-language, philosophical essay in Latin American philosophy/thought. The purpose of this prize is to encourage fruitful work in this area. Eligible essays must contain original arguments and broach philosophical topics clearly related to the specific experiences of Hispanic Americans and Latinos. The winning essay will be published in this newsletter.

A cash prize accompanies the award along with the opportunity to present the prize-winning essay at an upcoming divisional meeting. [Information regarding submissions can be found on the APA website](#). Please consider submitting your work and encourage colleagues or students to do the same. Feel free to pass this information along to anyone who may be interested. The deadline is June 5, 2014.

The committee is also soliciting papers or panel suggestions for next year's APA three divisional meetings. The deadline for the Eastern APA committee session requests is rapidly approaching, so please send any ideas to Grant Silva (grant.silva@marquette.edu), who will relay these suggestions to the rest of the committee.

ARTICLES

Strengthening the Case for Latin American Philosophy: Beyond Cultural Resources

Robert Elí Sánchez, Jr.
THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY

"Precisely in our differences, we find the way. If we simply imitate, we lose. If we discover and create, we shall overcome."

—José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*

"The first step in attending to our education is to observe the strangeness of our lives, our estrangement from ourselves, the lack of necessity in what we profess to be necessary. The second step is to grasp the true necessity of human strangeness as such."

—Stanley Cavell, "An Emerson Mood"

PHILOSOPHY ON THE PERIPHERY

For three quarters of a century, philosophers in the United States have heard the phrase "Latin American philosophy." They may not have known exactly what it referred to, but since the 1940s philosophy journals in the United States and Europe have published articles representing a potentially distinctive kind of philosophy.¹ Despite the growing number of Latinas/os in the United States, however, Latin American philosophy remains at the fringes of work done in Anglophone philosophy departments. The major Latin American philosophers are still largely unknown in the English-speaking world; the majority of Anglo-American philosophers are suspicious of defining philosophy in terms of social identity (ethnic, cultural, or political); and the number of dissertations on Latin American philosophy is still dismally low. And because those of us working in the area believe that the widespread indifference to Latin American philosophy is problematic, both philosophically and socially, we would like to convince our colleagues to take Latin American philosophy more seriously.

Recently, Manuel Vargas has assumed this task by arguing that Latin American philosophy is valuable because, like philosophy more generally, it preserves, produces, and propagates what he calls "cultural resources."² He argues that we ought to take it more seriously because we are ignoring valuable philosophical work that may guide us in our own work, in the way much of the history of Western philosophy does. Simply put, he argues that we ought to take Latin American philosophy seriously because we ought to take philosophy seriously.

In the end, I don't think this kind of argument for the value of Latin American philosophy will succeed, in part because it misdiagnoses the source of the problem. The problem is not, as Vargas's account may lead us to believe, that philosophers in English-speaking parts of the world don't realize that there are thinkers in other parts of the world who worry about similar issues and produce excellent work.

The problem is that they often don't recognize their work as *philosophy*, and if they do, they are wary of recognizing it as distinctly *Latin American* or *non-Western*, as though philosophy were a distinct discipline in different parts of the world, or at different times. So, the challenge before us is two-fold: we have to convince our colleagues not only that the Latin American tradition has produced great works of philosophy but also, and more importantly, that there is value in recognizing Latin American philosophy as characteristically different. Ultimately, we need to do both. Vargas only attempts the former, and, as a result, he undermines the case to be made for the latter.

In my view, the widespread indifference toward Latin American philosophy stems largely from the peculiar position Latin American philosophy occupies in the Western tradition—on the periphery. It's both familiar enough for us to consider it philosophy at all, yet strange enough for us continually to doubt its legitimacy as philosophy. And this is problematic because, by playing up its similarities, we risk assimilating Latin American philosophy into a tradition in which it doesn't quite fit (i.e., turning it into something it's not), or arguing for the uncontroversial thesis that philosophy is produced on the other side of the Rio Grande, or, assuming it *is* characteristically different, losing sight of it altogether. On the other hand, by playing up its differences, we risk identifying it as something other than philosophy, which is another way of losing sight of it. Either way, not being able to reconcile this double bind hinders us from appreciating how Latin American philosophy may broaden the Western tradition through our effort to include it.

Our ability to reconcile the double bind—or even to recognize it—depends in large part on our understanding of what philosophy is. (Human psychology, a history of Western imperialism, and a distaste for what is foreign no doubt play a role, too.) So, in order to build on Vargas's defense of Latin American philosophy, we need to start with his account of the nature and value of (Latin American) philosophy. With this account in hand, we may be able to explain why he thinks certain tendencies in contemporary Latin American philosophy don't make it characteristically different.

PHILOSOPHY AS A CULTURAL RESOURCE

The primary aim of Vargas's article is to provide a framework for understanding the value of (Latin American) philosophy, which is based on its capacity to preserve, produce, and propagate cultural resources. The secondary aim, then, is to explain what cultural resources are and how they help us to make sense of the value of philosophy. Both aims are part of the larger project of developing a theory of the relation between philosophy and culture, a topic which Vargas correctly thinks too few "philosophers in the 'analytic' core of the profession" are concerned with. Vargas doesn't purport to offer "a fundamental ontology of culture" or an account of "culture *per se*," only to initiate a discussion that he believes is both valuable and currently ignored.

According to Vargas, a cultural resource is "any entity, practice, pattern of judgment, or collection thereof whose nature and origin depends at least in part on the shared

norms of a community of intentional agents.³ It is a material manifestation of the contours of normative public life—anything that expresses who we are, what we care about, what we are competent at, what one does, and how. Examples include “novels, wedding ceremonies, philosophy lectures, *telenovelas*, birthdays, felonies, and handshakes.”⁴ It is an expression, I think, of what Hegel called *Sittlichkeit*, a term I will return to shortly.

The term “resource” indicates that Vargas focuses on a particular aspect of culture—namely, those products of culture that exhibit “cultural utility”: practices and ideas that contribute to the “survival, flourishing, or perpetuating of a people or culture.”⁵ Such useful bits of culture range from the utterly simple (e.g., a single note) to the incomprehensibly complex (e.g., Beethoven’s *Grosse Fuge*). And they are useful in proportion to their complexity: “the greater the complexity, the more ways in which it is likely to have some kind of usefulness.”⁶ A cultural resource, then, is not just a material manifestation of culture, but one that we can identify and put to use.

On such an account, the humanities are valuable to the extent that they preserve, produce, and propagate complex cultural resources. What’s distinctive about philosophy, Vargas claims, is that it preserves and produces “complex cultural resources in domains where we have no reliable method for determining truth.”⁷ It provides useful resources—methods, ideas, arguments, skills, questions, instincts—that guide us as we walk off the beaten intellectual path. Just as importantly, it encourages us to explore the boundaries of what is certain. As an example, Vargas refers to recent developments in the philosophy of science, which confirm that social and political values—not to mention ambition—determine in part how we choose among competing scientific theories when the evidence underdetermines which is correct.

Concerning the value of Latin American philosophy, Vargas’s argument is relatively straightforward: if we agree that the value of philosophy consists in its capacity to iterate complex cultural resources, then we ought to agree that Latin American philosophy is valuable, too, since it also produces complex cultural resources in domains where we have no reliable method for determining truth. Perhaps there is no Latin American Plato or Kant (yet), but it would be naïve—if not chauvinistic⁸—to assume that Latin American philosophers have not produced *any* useful complex cultural resources. And it would also be false. To illustrate his point, Vargas refers to the work of the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos, who concluded decades before his Anglo-American counterparts that “in cases where the data does not favor one particular theory over another, things like cultural uplift, national development, and so on, can provide adequate reason to favor one view over another.”⁹ The suggestion, of course, is that had we been students of Latin American philosophy, “the figures we typically celebrate as having sparked this development might well have been unneeded,”¹⁰ and that there are resources in Latin American philosophy which we would benefit from studying today.¹¹ Importantly, Vargas is not suggesting that the only value of studying Latin American philosophy is that we might have discovered the same

complex cultural resources earlier than we did, but that we might not have discovered them at all. So *who knows what else we are missing?*

In summary, Vargas argues that “given that . . . [Latin American philosophy] has some valuable cultural resources in it, resources that are worth studying, we should study it. Since we largely do not, we should do things differently than we are doing them.”¹² He does not argue that we should study Latin American philosophy because it is Latin American. He thinks, instead, that Latin American philosophy is different from Indian, Chinese, and perhaps even African philosophy, for “only Latin American philosophy is clearly a part of the Western philosophical tradition and clearly concerned with similar issues, figures, and methods.”¹³ So, he hopes to encourage philosophers in the most influential parts of the profession to take Latin American philosophy seriously *because it is a valuable part of Western philosophy as we already define it*. But, for reasons I present in the next two sections, Vargas’s strategy is not likely to achieve our aim of convincing our colleagues.

LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNITED STATES

Heeding the lessons Vargas draws from philosophers such as Vasconcelos and José Ortega y Gasset, it is important to keep in mind the context of our arguments. We are not arguing for the value of Latin American philosophy in a vacuum, but for its value in the United States, speaking in large part to philosophers in the analytic tradition. In this context, we need to say what makes Latin American philosophy characteristically different, or uniquely valuable, which, as I argue in the next section, Vargas’s account of cultural resources keeps him from doing. Without such an account, our colleagues are less likely to take Latin American philosophy more seriously, even if they don’t actively refrain from studying it.

The thrust of Vargas’s argument is to show that Latin American philosophy is philosophy and valuable for the same reasons philosophy is valuable. That much is clear even from the title of his paper (“On the Value of Philosophy: The Latin American Case”). He is essentially arguing that there is as good a chance one will learn something valuable from Latin American philosophers as there is that one will learn something valuable from their Anglo-American or European counterparts. So, if Vargas’s argument is successful, Anglophone philosophers will no longer have a reason *not* to take Latin American philosophy seriously. However, as I suggested earlier, the main problem is not that Anglo-American philosophers are positively against studying Latin American philosophy—i.e., willing to say that others shouldn’t study it—but that they don’t have a strong positive reason to study it themselves. “Sure,” I hear them saying, “there must be interesting thinkers in the Latin American tradition who have thought about the same questions as I do and who have something helpful to say—how could there not be!—and if I ever get to the bottom of my never-ending reading list of philosophers I already need to read, I may consider studying them. And maybe a Chinese philosopher, too. But for now, my plate is pretty full.” So, in the current context, Vargas’s argument

against the view that Latin American philosophy is not valuable effectively translates into a *practical* reason not to take it seriously. Without an account of what makes a certain Latin American philosopher, or the entire tradition, unique or special or particularly helpful, it is unclear why one should study Latin American philosophy instead of, or even in addition to, the *already established* canon.

Another problem with arguing that Latin American philosophy is valuable because it is philosophy is that Vargas runs straight into the double bind mentioned earlier: either Latin American philosophy is so similar to Western philosophy that it makes no distinctive contribution and effectively disappears, or it is so different that its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt.¹⁴ And, because Vargas accepts that Latin American philosophy is “part of” the Western tradition, it’s unclear how he is offering an argument for the value of *Latin American* philosophy, if the success of his argument risks its effective disappearance. He may succeed in showing that there is more worthwhile philosophy than many Anglo-American philosophers are currently concerned with—again, not a very controversial thesis—but he does so at the risk of concealing what is characteristically different about the Latin American tradition, not to mention the opportunity of understanding our own tradition better by contrasting it with another. Patrick Romanell captures the combination of these risks well by stating that his introduction to Mexican philosophy is “motivated by a desire to show that we do not further the *understanding* of the spirit of the other America by a *misunderstanding* of our own.”¹⁵

What we need, then, are positive reasons to take Latin American philosophy more seriously that don’t conceal what makes it Latin American or fundamentally different from the Anglo-American tradition. This is important not just so that philosophers in the United States have a practical reason to read Latin American philosophy but so that they don’t miss the opportunity to better understand their own tradition or misinterpret those Latin American philosophers who are, or at least attempt to be, characteristically Latin American.¹⁶ However, to this case, we need a wider understanding of the value of philosophy than Vargas’s.

PHILOSOPHY AS A DISRUPTION OF AN ENTIRE CULTURE

On Vargas’s account, a cultural resource is a discrete thing, however loaded or complex it is. It is an object, a trope, a pattern, a note or melody, a philosophical idea or argument, etc. But, insofar as his account of cultural resources ties the relationship between philosophy and culture to what is useful, it’s too narrow to account for the value of integrating Latin American philosophy in the United States. Specifically, it conceals the possibility that the potential cultural value of philosophy is its ability to discourage us from becoming overly pragmatic—a key lesson in the work of early twentieth-century Latin American anti-positivists, such as Enrique Rodó, Antonio Caso, José Vasconcelos, and Samuel Ramos. More generally, it overlooks philosophy’s capacity to call into question or disrupt an entire culture or tradition. As a kind of bridge between Vargas’s account and mine, we might consider Socrates’s contribution

to the history of philosophy, as recounted by Hegel and Kierkegaard.¹⁷

To begin, recall the world into which Socrates was born and lived, that is, Hesiod and Homer’s world in which the notions of right, heroism, virtue, excellence, etc., were established by the gods, dictated by the oracle, sung in chorus, and confirmed through war, ceremony, and rituals such as the Olympic games. It was a culture in which shared norms of public life and human excellence were already established; in which they were produced, preserved, and propagated in material culture; and in which “philosophical” reflection was limited to instrumental reasoning.¹⁸ Then along came Socrates, according to Hegel, whose “principle [was] that man has to find *from himself* both the end of *his* actions and the end of the world, and must attain to truth *through himself*.”¹⁹

What distinguishes Socrates, in Hegel’s jargon, is that he was the first to reject *Sittlichkeit*, defined roughly as “the spontaneous, natural, half-unconscious (almost instinctive) virtue that rests in obedience to established custom (use and wont, natural objective law).”²⁰ *Sittlichkeit*, that is, is the positive manifestation in culture and history of established customs and norms, as well as the virtue of obedience. So, in raising the question “How should I live?”—emphasis on the “I”—Socrates rejected the authority of tradition, culture, and the state, in order to determine and justify his own subjective and, more importantly, fully conscious idea of virtue. Socrates, in other words, introduced what Hegel calls *Moralität*, the negative side of morality that requires one to reflect inward in order to discover and know oneself, and to decide for oneself what norms, customs, and culture ought to be established.

For Hegel, *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität* have since been locked in dialectical conflict: norms and traditions are established, then challenged or lost, and then established again, at each stage approximating ever more closely what he called absolute knowledge. On Hegel’s account, although Socrates’s “negativity” made him a world-historical figure—the first and greatest moral philosopher—it was “infinite” and “absolute.” That is, although Socrates succeeded in rejecting the authority of custom and demanded justification that satisfied him (the negative), he never emerged from his own negativity: he never wrote or produced in material culture a positive alternative to the society he accused of having fallen asleep. As F. M. Cornford might have paraphrased Hegel’s account, although Socrates took the first crucial steps into philosophical maturity, seeking freedom in thought and action by refusing to accept established beliefs and customs *because they were established*, he himself did not survive philosophical adolescence and develop his own positive beliefs or customs.²¹

It is worth introducing Hegel’s reading of Socrates here since it points to the great complex cultural resource that, more than anything else, Socrates left to posterity: what Hegel called “infinite absolute negativity” or what we more naturally call Socratic irony. Socratic irony was represented first in the peculiar character of Plato’s Socratic dialogues—in which no positive views are expressed or developed on behalf of Socrates, in which Socrates claims to be ignorant

and hopes to become a student of those who clearly don't know what they claim to know, and which end in *aporia*—then in Cicero's study of rhetoric, then in Montaigne's skeptical essays, then in the German Romantic notion of poetic existence, then in Hegel's view of self-consciousness and Kierkegaard's study of indirect communication, then in Nietzsche's rants—to name a few applications throughout intellectual history. It is a perfect example, in short, of a paradigmatically philosophical complex cultural resource that is used by philosophers over and over again. But it is not one that Vargas's theory can account for. To see why, consider a few essential characteristics of Socratic irony, according to Kierkegaard, who took his cue from Hegel.

First, Socratic irony is entirely or "infinitely" negative. Socrates did not write anything on his own behalf, and while he is famous for his style of conversation and commitment to truth, it is not clear that we value *his* style (as opposed to Plato's stylized re-presentation of Socrates) or what the nature of his commitment consists in. Nor will it ever be, according to Kierkegaard, for "[Socrates] has left *nothing* by which a later age can judge him; indeed, even if I were to imagine myself his contemporary, he would still always be difficult to comprehend."²² Second, Socratic irony is disruptive or destructive; instead of preserving his own culture or adding to it, he rejected Greek culture. Kierkegaard calls Socrates "the last classical figure" who "destroyed classicism."²³ Moreover, Socrates didn't reject this or that bit of culture—an idea, practice, game, point of view, pattern of judgment, etc.—but Greek culture in its entirety. Kierkegaard says, "For [Socrates], the whole given actuality had entirely lost its validity; he had become alien to the actuality of the whole substantial world. . . . [O]n the other hand, he used irony as he destroyed Greek culture."²⁴

What distinguishes Socrates for Kierkegaard is not that he contributed some *thing* to his culture, but that he seemed somehow not to belong to it, or to any culture. "Socrates' life," Kierkegaard says, "is like a magnificent pause in the course of history: we do not hear him at all; a profound stillness prevails—until it is broken by the noisy attempts of the many and very different schools of followers who trace their origin in this hidden cryptic source."²⁵ So, for Kierkegaard, the essence of Socrates's legacy doesn't consist in a positive, material, or discrete bit of culture, but in disobedience, a suspension, or a disruption. Socrates continues to be important, not for what he believed or did—which is lost to history—but, strangely, for our *inability* to penetrate his thought or comprehend his action. As Kierkegaard puts it, Socratic irony represents a kind of silence the achievement of which is, perhaps, a unique possibility in philosophy.²⁶

It would be a mistake to give in to the temptation to define "silence" or confuse it with "not saying anything." (We can be confident that Socrates was, at the very least, a great conversationalist.) Instead, as Jonathan Lear explains in his attempt to elucidate and amplify Kierkegaard's view, Socratic irony is a positive form of *existence* that "need not show up in any particular behavioral manifestation."²⁷ It is not the act of saying the opposite of what is meant to be understood, nothing at all, or some other indirect method of communication, but the capacity to provoke an

ironic experience, which is "a particular disruption of this inherited way of facing life's possibilities. This is not one more possibility that can simply add to the established repertoire. It is a disruption of the repertoire—and, in the disruption, it brings to light that the established repertoire is just that."²⁸ In short, "The point of Socratic irony is not simply to destroy pretenses [manifest in socially available practices, roles, institutions, or other complex cultural resources], but to inject a certain form of not-knowing into polis life."²⁹

Socratic irony is not any one thing or practice, but a way of being that is able to provoke, in oneself or one's interlocutor, the destabilizing experience of not-knowing. It is the ability to expose, in multiple forms or manners or circumstances, that the established repertoire is just that—an expression of what is already established. And the result is a feeling of uncanniness: the unsettling sense that what used to be ordinary and taken for granted is now strange and inadequate, and that fleeing back into the comforting everydayness and busyness of our lives is somehow no longer an honest option. Rather than contribute a positive, discrete, and useful bit of culture, Socratic irony produces the vague and disconcerting sense that one is, perhaps for the first time, all alone.³⁰

Regardless of whether Kierkegaard's or Lear's account of Socratic irony is the correct interpretation of the historical Socrates, it introduces a view of the value of philosophy that Vargas's notion of cultural resources cannot—but, given Socrates's stature in our tradition, should be able to—account for. Socratic irony, on their view, is not any one thing (as a capacity, it can manifest itself in any act, including the act of not writing anything at all); it is not necessarily positive (the effect of irony is often ending up with less than one begins with); and it is not a resource valued for its utility (implicit in Kierkegaard's "until [Socrates' silence] is broken by the noisy attempts of the many and very different schools of followers who trace their origin in this hidden cryptic source" is the criticism that the mistake in the literature on Socrates is precisely misunderstanding him by trying to put him to use). So, what Socrates represents is the potential value, perhaps unique to philosophy,³¹ of *not* producing, preserving, or propagating cultural resources—that is, the value of radically destroying pretenses, traditions, and cultural norms and of injecting a sense of uncanniness, not-knowing, and solitude into our lives.

Kierkegaard's understanding of Socratic irony provides a helpful contrast as we consider the value of Latin American philosophy in the United States, since thinking of philosophy only in terms of particular ideas, theories, methods, arguments, etc., can keep us from recognizing the critical or disruptive potential of Latin American philosophy. That is, it may help us to see Latin American philosophy, not only as a repository of positive or material complex cultural resources that already make sense inside our established tradition, and which will likely fall into a double bind, but as an external challenge to or disruption of the smooth flow of our tradition, one that may bring to light that it is just that, *our* tradition. This approach, I think, is more likely to intrigue our colleagues who aren't already convinced of the value of *Latin American* philosophy.

“OUR GREECE AND THE GREECE WHICH IS NOT OURS”

Some evidence for the claim that there isn't anything characteristically different about Latin American philosophy is that major Latin American philosophers themselves have argued that there isn't. In one of the earliest essays that raises the question, for instance, José Mariátegui says, “All the thinkers of our America have been educated in European schools. The spirit of the race is not felt in their work. The continent's intellectual production lacks its own characteristics. It does not have an original profile.”³² However, once again, we must keep in mind the context in which the question is asked. What Mariátegui wanted to know was whether there was anything original or characteristically different about Hispanic American thought and culture. Like other Latin American philosophers at the time, he was asking whether there was anything characteristically Hispanic American about *being* Hispanic American, which he believed would be reflected in the cultural and philosophical production. And, with this wide definition of “philosophy,” he concluded that there wasn't.³³ As Augusto Salazar Bondy would put it half a century later, Mariátegui believed that Latin American thought and culture had amounted to European thought and culture “passing through” Latin America.³⁴

In a different context, Mariátegui was simply asking a different question. Along with other prominent Latin American philosophers, he wondered whether Latin American thought and culture was *authentic*, or purely imitative, a worry that almost lacks significance in the Anglo-American analytic context. And since philosophy isn't something that we typically charge as authentic or inauthentic, it's not a contrast built into the significance of *our* questions concerning Latin American philosophy. Moreover, Latin American philosophers like Mariátegui weren't only questioning the authenticity of Latin American thought and culture; they were doing so in order to liberate themselves, by means of philosophy, from staggering inequality and a history of conquest, colonization, and cultural and economic imperialism. As a result, much of Latin American philosophy which ought to count as *Latin American* simply can't be made sense of outside of this context. For example, only with this social, historical, and intellectual context in mind can we hope to understand *and fully appreciate* José Martí's famous claim “[o]ur Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours”³⁵ or Samuel Ramos's discussion of the possibility of “Mexican science”³⁶—ideas that, without the proper context, are likely to offend the typical Anglo-American analytic philosopher.

This, however, still leaves unanswered a set of questions that we will eventually need to respond to if we hope to be successful in promoting Latin American philosophy: What *is* Latin American philosophy? What is characteristically different (and similar) about it? What is the difference between Latin American philosophy and philosophy in Latin America, for certainly not all philosophy produced in Latin America is Latin American solely by virtue of its geographical origin? If Latin American philosophy *is* characteristically different, how might introducing it into

the U.S. academy improve philosophy as such, as, for example, feminism or postcolonial studies promises to do?

The trouble with these questions, however, is that they conceal the disruptive potential of Latin American philosophy. What is potentially valuable is not only *what* distinguishes it, but a challenge to the kind of question we ask about it or the kind of answer that satisfies us. It's true that philosophers have largely been unable to define Latin American philosophy within a logo-centric understanding of identity—one based in the notion of substance, necessary and sufficient conditions (essences), and the law of excluded middle and non-contradiction—but this inability may just as well indicate the inadequacy of our model of identity in general, and of philosophical identity in particular. And it may cause us to reflect on our ability (or inability) to answer the more basic question “What is philosophy?” which we presumably should be able to answer if we are willing to dismiss major works in the Latin American tradition as *not-philosophy*. In short, not being able to define Latin American philosophy might, if it is presented in the right light, inject a certain form of not-knowing into professional philosophy.

It may also, more generally, enlarge our conception of Western philosophy by helping us to understand the relation between social and philosophical identity, or the connection between reason and the reasoner or community of reasoners. It may turn out upon closer inspection that all philosophy is ethnic philosophy or the philosophy of an ethnos, as Jorge J. E. Gracia has argued.³⁷ And in this respect, Latin American philosophy is particularly valuable because, based as it is in Latin American or Latino/a identity, it is particularly hard to identify within the logo-centric model of identity. Simply put, to be Latino/a is to be characterized more by diversity and contradiction than by sameness across change. In the case of Latino/a identity, the better question is not “What is characteristic of all Latinos/as?” but “How is it that ‘Latino/a’ is a meaningful designator despite the irresolvable heterogeneity of what it purports to refer to?” What it illustrates, perhaps better than other traditional group identities, is the need for a model of group identity that accounts for internal differences, a model which at the same time may allow or encourage philosophy to be more inclusive despite, and eventually because of, multiple differences. But again, this is not a lesson the philosophical community at large will learn if it insists on defining Latin American philosophy according to essential criteria and an already established definition of philosophy.

To mention just one more difference that characterizes much of contemporary Latin American philosophy, we might consider its emphasis on what Mexican philosopher Guillermo Hurtado calls “applied metaphilosophy.”³⁸ In addition to applying philosophy to specific issues, as in applied ethics, and to our personal lives, as in the idea that philosophy is a way of life, Latin American philosophy also demonstrates how one's circumstances can call for a new and different conception of philosophy. In other words, what the idea of applied metaphilosophy suggests is the possibility that what philosophy *is*, is determined in part by what it *needs to be*. I imagine that many, if not the majority

of, Anglo-American or analytic philosophers will find this strange, but again, that is kind of the point. If nothing else, philosophers—as philosophers—should not dismiss it without carefully considering it and its representatives, or do so as a matter of convenience. For if it is correct as a description of philosophy itself, not just Latin American philosophy, it indicates an important critique of many of the major branches of philosophy, perhaps especially metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of science.³⁹

The notion of applied metaphilosophy is also especially relevant in the United States today as philosophers become increasingly conscious of how exclusionary philosophy has been, and of the relative invisibility of Latinos/as in the profession. This awareness raises not only particular questions inside philosophy about the value of diversity (e.g., will ethnic diversity improve the epistemic reliability of certain beliefs?) but also critically important questions about whether the nature of philosophy is determined in part by who participates, and how we should respond if it is.⁴⁰ Traditionally, questions about the effects of demography in philosophy have been relegated to the “sociology of philosophical knowledge,” but Latin American philosophy may help us to appreciate the philosophical dimension of these problems and, as a result, may be more inclusive to those prospective philosophers who would like to deal with them as philosophers, and not just as professors of ethnic or cultural studies. Finally, it may help us to see that the binary expressed in the view that *whatever it is, philosophy is just philosophy* is itself a product of who has been able to philosophize, and, more to the point, of a history of claiming that *what you do is not philosophy*.⁴¹

I don’t mean to suggest that the belief that philosophy is ethnic philosophy (or other efforts to contextualize philosophy, such as historicism and perspectivism) and a concern with applied metaphilosophy are essential or exclusive characteristics of Latin American or Latino/a philosophy. Not only am I claiming that looking for essences is fundamentally misguided and misleading, but I’m also suggesting that the lessons of Latin American philosophy apply universally. If philosophical identity does reflect the contours of ethnic identity—as well as the needs, desires, and historical circumstances of its practitioners—it is a feature of philosophy as a human discipline, even for those who believe that philosophy is a pure science concerned with what Russell called, tellingly, the “not-Self.”⁴² Nor do I mean to suggest that all Latin American philosophers are concerned with these issues. There are many philosophers in Latin America who are not *Latin American* philosophers in any way other than the geographical sense. And we need to acknowledge that there is a real danger in highlighting the role of applied metaphilosophy, for Latin American philosophy may seem overly practical or ideological. In sum, in describing some potential values of Latin American philosophy as I have briefly done here, there is a real danger that we pigeon-hole and/or misrepresent certain philosophers in Latin America, or suggest that Latin American philosophy is simply not philosophy.

These are real dangers, but sidestepping them does not require us to overlook characteristic differences of the Latin American cast of mind and the philosophy that represents it. We ought to be careful not to misrepresent certain major Latin American philosophers—such as Leopoldo Zea, José Martí, Jorge Portilla, Samuel Ramos, and even critics of Latin American philosophy, such as Augusto Salazar Bondy and Risieri Frondizi, to name a few—by trying to squeeze them into a foreign conception of philosophy. Overall, I have tried to show that, despite these dangers, Latin American philosophy promises to broaden our conception of philosophy, perhaps at first by encouraging us to consider and develop the notions of ethnic and applied philosophy. Not only does it offer examples or resources for how to do so well (without falling into the double bind, pigeon-holing Latin American philosophers, or concluding that Latin American philosophy is not philosophy), but it also offers an overdue disruption of our tradition. Borrowing Lear’s language, Latin American philosophy “is not one more possibility that can simply add to the established repertoire. It is a disruption of the repertoire—and, in the disruption, it brings to light that the established repertoire is just that.” Or to paraphrase, the most immediate benefit of Latin American philosophy, and what should intrigue our colleagues who are interested in the nature of philosophy, is its capacity to show that the Western philosophical tradition is just that—one tradition among many, and an exclusive one at that.⁴³ At the very least, it presents a serious challenge to the view, common I believe among many philosophers after Russell, that philosophy is valuable, healthy, and pure only when it contemplates the “not-Self,” as well as the view that we know what philosophy is.

CONCLUSION

Implicit in my disagreement with Vargas is the idea that there is something strange about Latin American philosophy, and strange about the possibility of characteristically different philosophies. As I’ve tried to show, however, we ought to seek out the value of strangeness in philosophy, not (only) try to make the strange familiar. And I have tried to show that in order to accomplish this, we need to appreciate the “negative”—sometimes purely negative—value of philosophy: its power to disrupt without mending or inject a radical sense of uncanniness and not-knowing. Philosophy does produce, preserve, and propagate complex cultural resources—certainly. But it can also disrupt and destabilize our grip on the manifestations of a tradition or way of life. Sometimes philosophy encounters a difference that can’t be reconciled with the available cultural resources; and instead of producing more of the same, it might stop to appreciate its own limit and the dangers of familiarity. In the present case, it is philosophy itself on trial, and one hopes that, unlike the jury that sentenced Socrates to death, we are able to rise above the temptation to dismiss unsettling differences by assuming that we already know what philosophy is. To do this is to miss the opportunity, as Vasconcelos suggests, to discover and create.

NOTES

1. In the 1940s and 1950s, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* published several articles about philosophy in Latin America, some by Latin American philosophers, and did so, surprisingly, both in English and Spanish. And in 1952, Patrick

- Romanell published his excellent introduction to Mexican philosophy, *Making of the Mexican Mind: A Study in Recent Mexican Thought* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952).
2. Manuel Vargas, "On the Value of Philosophy: The Latin American Case," *Comparative Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2010): 33–52.
 3. Vargas, "On the Value of Philosophy," 37.
 4. *Ibid.*, 38.
 5. *Ibid.*
 6. *Ibid.*, 40. As an example of the relation between complexity and usefulness, Vargas mentions the *Iliad*, which he points out was a model for the *Aeneid*, which in turn inspired Dante's *Inferno*, which influenced Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and eventually *O Brother Where Art Thou*. Resources that are less complex, such as the average B movie, are less likely to achieve an equally profound and protracted legacy.
 7. *Ibid.*, 41.
 8. One explanation for the widespread indifference toward Latin American philosophy is that a Eurocentric point of view leads us to mistake the absence of recognizable cultural complex cultural resources with the absence of any. It may be that Latin American philosophy is valuable because it widens what is recognizable by challenging our point of view.
 9. *Ibid.*, 46.
 10. *Ibid.*, 47, fn. 14.
 11. In an earlier paper on the difficulty of integrating Latin American philosophy in the English-speaking world, Vargas claims that his knowledge of Latin American philosophy, specifically of José Ortega y Gasset, has influenced his account of agency and helped him to see the flaws that pervade "nearly all the contemporary literature on responsible agency." Manuel Vargas, "Real Philosophy, Metaphilosophy, and Metametaphilosophy: On the Plight of Latin American Philosophy," *The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 3 (2007): 77.
 12. Vargas, "On the Value of Philosophy," 49.
 13. *Ibid.*, 51.
 14. This is a close paraphrase of Robert Bernasconi who says, speaking of African philosophy in the Western tradition, "Western philosophy traps African philosophy in a double bind: either African philosophy is so similar to Western philosophy that it makes no distinctive contribution and effectively disappears; or it is so different that its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt." Quoted in Walter Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference," in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 82.
 15. Romanell, *Making of the Mexican Mind*, 8.
 16. It is surprising that Vargas says that Ortega y Gasset has had a major influence on his philosophy, since it was precisely Ortega y Gasset's perspectivism that encouraged philosophers in Mexico to pursue Mexican philosophy, that is, a philosophy that was distinctly and characteristically Mexican and an expression and creation of Mexican national identity.
 17. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane, vol. 1 (New York: The Humanities Press Inc., 1955); Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, eds. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
 18. We might say it was a culture in which norms were always already established, since the point is not that they had been established, but that they expressed the pervasive authority of "the establishment."
 19. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 386; emphasis added.
 20. This is the translator's note at the bottom of pages 387–88 of Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. For a more thorough discussion of the distinction between *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), §§31 and 141.
 21. In his effort to explain Socrates's elusiveness and historical significance, Cornford writes, "[The adolescent] becomes self-conscious in a new way. It is now his central concern to detach his individual self from his parents and the family group and from every other social group claiming to dominate his will and warp his personality. The individual has to find himself as a moral being who must learn to stand upon his own feet, as a man. . . .
Now in Greek society, after the Persian wars of the first quarter of the fifth century, we can observe, with admirable clearness, an analogous effort of the individual to detach himself from the social group—the city and its traditional customs. Until that time, the claim of authority to regulate the citizen's conduct had not been explicitly challenged." F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 40–41.
 22. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 12; emphasis added.
 23. *Ibid.*, 211–12.
 24. *Ibid.*, 264.
 25. *Ibid.*, 199.
 26. Stanley Cavell, a careful reader of Kierkegaard, endorses a similar view of Socrates and philosophy. He writes, "The figure of Socrates now haunts contemporary philosophical practice and conscience more poignantly than ever—the pure figure motivated to philosophy only by the assertions of others, himself making none; the philosopher who did not need to write. I should think every philosopher now has at least one philosophical companion whose philosophical ability and accomplishment he has the highest regard for, who seems unable to write philosophy. Were such a person content with silence he would merely be the latest instance of a figure always possible within philosophy, possible indeed nowhere else." Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, updated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxxv.
 27. Jonathan Lear, *The Case for Irony: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 30.
 28. *Ibid.*, 31.
 29. *Ibid.*, 36.
 30. We may again speak of Socratic irony in terms of adolescence, for it is related to what Octavio Paz calls "solitude" in his quintessentially Mexican *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. In its opening paragraph, Paz says: "All of us, at some moment, have had a vision of our existence as something unique, untransferable, and very precious. This revelation almost always takes place during adolescence. Self-discovery is above all the realization that we are alone; it is the opening of an impalpable, transparent wall—that of our consciousness—between the world and ourselves. It is true that we sense our aloneness almost as soon as we are born, but children and adults can transcend their solitude and forget themselves in games or work [or philosophy]." Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, trans. Rachel Phillips Belash (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 9. Socratic irony—now in Paz's language, which not coincidentally is very Kierkegaardian—is the capacity to effect the need for self-discovery or the realization that one is losing oneself in the clutter and chatter of our lives. Its measure of success is not a transferable product, a cultural resource, but the realization that one is alone, a feeling of being cut off from one's culture.
 31. Describing this peculiarity of philosophy, Cavell says parenthetically: "(It would make no sense to speak of someone as a great novelist who had never written a novel; nor of someone as a scientist who had made no contribution to science. In the case of the scientist, the contribution need not be his own writing; but one could say that he must affect what his *field* writes. His contribution, that is, may be oral, but it must affect a tradition which is essentially not oral. [. . .] If silence is always a threat in philosophy, it is also its greatest promise.)" *Must We Mean What We Say?*, xxxv.
 32. José Carlos Mariátegui, "Is There Such a Thing as Hispanic-American Thought?," in *The Heroic and Creative Meaning of Socialism*, ed. and trans. Michael Pearlman (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996), 118. For other notable criticisms of Latin American philosophy, see Risieri Frondizi, "Is There an Ibero-American Philosophy?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9, no. 3 (1949): 345–55, and Augusto Salazar Bondy, "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Thought," in *Latin*

American Philosophy for the 21st Century, eds. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004).

33. Salazar Bondy was operating with a similarly wide definition of "philosophy": "[Philosophy] is the conception that expresses the mode in which the community reacts before the whole of reality and the course of existence, and its peculiar manner of illuminating and interpreting the being in which it finds itself installed." It is an expression of culture, understood as "the organic articulation of the original and differentiating manifestations of a community." "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic Thought," 390-391. Similarly, in *The Making of the Mexican Mind*, Romanell discusses this idea of "a people's philosophy," to be contrasted with "a philosopher's philosophy." The former, he says, "is not bound between covers. It is no respecter of logical systems. It is a vast complex of memories, prejudices, inclinations and emotions with which the discipline of the schools has little to do" (13). This "pre-ideational" understanding of culture, as Romanell puts it, is also something that Vargas's view of culture doesn't quote account for with its emphasis on resources that we can identify and put to use.
34. Salazar Bondy, "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic Thought," 388.
35. José Martí, "Our America," in *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century*, eds. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), 248.
36. Samuel Ramos, "Profile of Man and Culture," in *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century*, eds. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), 283.
37. For a brief summary of Gracia's view in the context of competing views, see Jorge J. E. Gracia, "Identity and Latin American Philosophy," in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, eds. Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 253-68.
38. Guillermo Hurtado, *El búho y la serpiente: Ensayos sobre la filosofía en México en el siglo XX* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007), 18-19.
39. An emphasis on what I'm calling, after Hurtado, "applied metaphilosophy" doesn't by itself distinguish Latin American philosophy from other (potential) critiques of Western philosophy. There's a sense in which certain Marxist critiques, such as Mariátegui's examination of Peruvian reality, certain postmodern critiques, such as Foucault's account of the relation between power and knowledge, and other European critiques, such as Ortega y Gasset's or Nietzsche's perspectivism, are all challenges to the Western notion of philosophy as a science. So, more has to be said concerning what distinguishes Latin American philosophy from Marxism, postmodernism, or perspectivism. However, as there are important differences among Marxism, postmodernism, and perspectivism, there remains a question about the particular emphasis *Latin American* philosophers have placed on applied metaphilosophy, and that is something we still need to flesh out.
40. For a brief summary of some of the most recent work done by Latino/a philosophers on this topic, see my "The Process of Defining Latino/a Philosophy" in the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1-4, http://c.ygcdn.com/sites/www.apaonline.org/resource/resmgr/hispanic_newsletter/hispanicv13n1.pdf.
41. From its beginning, Latin American thought has demonstrated, sometimes in violent detail, the connection between philosophical identity and exclusion. In deciding whether the Indians were rational and thus fully human, Europeans continued to define the boundaries of philosophy either to exclude native systems of thought and assert European superiority and the right to dominate, or to resist that exclusion and the corresponding violence. The idea, then, that applied metaphilosophy, which many important Latin American and almost no Anglo-American philosophers are concerned with, is "merely sociology" is only the most recent instance of excluding by means of one definition of philosophy. And to be clear, I do not believe that sociology is somehow "lower" than philosophy. I'm not sure what such a criticism even means. However, status or hierarchy is an issue and such accusations have been made. See Santiago Castro-Gómez, "Latin American Philosophy as Critical Ontology of the Present: Themes and Motifs for a 'Critique of Latin American Reason,'" in *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed.

Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 68-79.

42. Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy," in *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 159. Here and elsewhere, Russell claims that philosophy is only valuable, pure, and healthy when it does not "fetter contemplation to Self." This, in a word, is his understanding of the history of Western philosophy, which he summarizes as follows: "From this point onwards [philosophy after Democritus], there are first certain seeds of decay, in spite of previously unmatched achievement, and then a gradual decadence. What is amiss, even in the best philosophy after Democritus, is an undue emphasis on man as compared with the universe." *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1945), 73; emphasis added.
43. Describing the fundamental difference between Mexico and the United States for *The New Yorker*, Octavio Paz wrote, "If the different attitudes of Hispanic Catholicism and English Protestantism [which he claims is the origin of their diverging and opposing "civilizations"] could be summed up in two words, I would say that the Spanish attitude is inclusive and the English exclusive. In the former, the notions of conquest and domination are bound up with ideas of conversion and assimilation; in the latter, conquest and domination imply not the conversion of the conquered but their segregation." "Mexico and the United States," in *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, trans. Rachel Phillips Belash (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 363.

On Various Notions of "Relations" in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation

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INTRODUCTION

When philosophers tell us that subjects "relate," what is it they have in mind?¹ Moreover, as theorists give analyses of conceptual frameworks, arguing for the ways in which key terms relate, what is it that they imagine by invoking concepts of "relation"? In this essay, I analyze concepts of "relation" as used in various ways by Enrique Dussel in his seminal work, *Philosophy of Liberation*.² In general, I intend to show that variations in how we implicitly and explicitly conceive of relations substantively alters broader theoretical propositions. More specifically, I intend to show that Dussel's theory entails a substantive notion of relation that complements common spatial metaphors, respects the importance of conceptions of space, and that also helps us to consider what we may need to endure for the sake of liberation.

In setting out the basis for his theory of liberation, Dussel proposes a distinction between relations he calls "proximity" and "proxemics"—concepts I discuss in more detail later. Yet, throughout the text, Dussel makes use of semantic terms referring to relations, but not consistent with the proximity/proxemic distinction. As I argue, Dussel assumes that readers share in common some basic notions of relations. If we do not grant that assumption, we might read Dussel as leaving notions of relation more or less to chance. Given the importance that concepts of relations have to theorizing liberation, we need to attempt to clarify the concepts at play since his complex and potentially liberatory notions of relation remain undescribed, unnoticed, and undertheorized in the text.

I show that Dussel implicitly and explicitly invokes particular concepts in consistent ways, allowing for a re-reading of his original ideas.³ Although there are ambiguities in Dussel's use of the language of relation, and the fact that his own notions of proxemic and proximity are complicated by these ambiguities, there is a substantive lesson to take from Dussel with regard to liberatory relations. Moreover, I propose that Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation* reveals a way of tracing a radical point of departure for validating some of the complexities of human relationships.⁴

I begin by expounding on the problem of under-theorizing relations, and the challenge this poses for philosophical arguments, particularly those engaged in discourse on ethics, morality, and politics. I continue by explaining the tendency to use a metaphor of space, structure, and position in place of a substantive description of relations, and the deficiencies involved in the use of the rhetoric of spatial references. I then explain Dussel's "proxemic"/"proximity" distinction as a starting point for an alternative description of relations. However, as I show, Dussel's concepts require some revisions in order to more clearly explain relations as spatial (proxemic), as well as what I call humane co-affective relations (proximity). In conclusion, I discuss the possibility that substantive linguistic descriptions of relations may not resolve certain mysteries about what happens when people relate.

**SPATIAL METAPHORS FOR RELATIONS:
OPPRESSION, EQUALITY, AND DISTRIBUTIVE
JUSTICE**

Throughout philosophical scholarship, theorists consistently invoke spatial metaphors of relations and yet take for granted what lies at stake in doing so. Predominantly, the category of relations we sometimes designate with the phrase "relative to" consigns subjects in an imaginary schematic of spatial orientations. Let us call this a "structural-positional" or "spatial" or "schematic" notion of relations—that is, referring to subjects as merely spatially located "relative to" one another while implying that relations involve something more complex.

Placing the normative dominance of schematic relations in question, I suggest that a spatial imaginary primarily conceives of structural-positional relations by assuming that persons and objects in the world are discrete, wholly distinct, autonomous fixations the core of which is inherently, essentially unchanged except by violent collision or internal, free will, self-adjustment. Nearness and distance are, therefore, relatively risk free with regard to the "integrity" of objects as "relative to" one another. Schematic notions of relation offer only limited explanatory use, yet they appear to be the most common version at play in linguistic references to relationships.

The following examples bring attention to the dominance of structural-positional semantics of relations:

- "She and I are *close*."
- "We've grown *apart*."

- "He and I have been *together* for fifteen years."
- "After what happened you seem so *distant*."
- "There is something really special *between* us."
- "There are some *deep divisions* in our community."
- "We need to find out what will *unite* our constituents."
- "I feel like we've lost the *connection* we used to share."
- "Oppression *separates* people, *divides* communities against one another."

The semantics indicate something more at stake in conceptualizing relations. However, inasmuch as theories of social relations, and broader theories of ethics and politics, appeal only to the limits of structural-positional relations, they are simultaneously incapable of two necessary moves. First, such theoretical models are inadequate for attaining accurate understandings of social circumstances that embattle individuals and groups, and, second, they are incapable of imagining more complex models of human social relations, such as might reveal, or make possible the creation of, notions of mutual cooperation, solidarity, and coordinated social policies that are at once theoretically substantive and practically potent for ameliorating injustices.

Moreover, to use the structural-positional metaphor tells us little or nothing about what happens to people when they relate. If semantic propositions like "in relation," or "relating" refer to nothing more than spatial arrangements, or merely to matters of distance, we can ignore the worry that relations involve something more complex.⁵ However, if something lies at stake in how we think about relations, the spatial metaphors do not give enough clarity to serious scholarly and practical concerns. Moreover, when dominated by only a limited, structural-positional notion of relation, philosophical analyses fail to account for critical descriptions of what happens when people relate.

Consider the implications for ontologies of relations, and scholarship on oppression and equality. By relying on metaphors to designate persons as relating amid structural and spatial social positioning, scholars can "interface" or "connect" subjects in order to conduct certain kinds of analyses. The ontological categories allow for an imaginary through which persons and groups interact "relative to" one another primarily in spatial-temporal schemes. From this category, we might consider one another in several ways, for instance, as positionally nearer and farther, higher and lower, visible and invisible, and so forth. Arguably, this has helped with contemporary analyses of oppression, as well as with theories of equality in terms of identity politics, intersectionality, distributive justice, and social justice.

Within the last century, theories of distributive justice have made extensive use of schematic metaphors for articulating important patterns of institutionalized injustices. Following from European Enlightenment discourse, studies of alienation, oppression, and corollary

analyses of equality have yielded necessary critiques of structural factors that limit social mobility, access to opportunity, and inequity in distribution of material goods. However, suppose we reconsider whether common categories of schematic “relations” and “relationships” convey the kinds of relational experiences necessary for liberation, emancipation, social justice, and similar visions? Will schematic metaphors of relations sufficiently explain what happens when people relate in various ways? As my analysis suggests, if scholars relegate concepts of relation to the predominantly schematic imaginary, by assuming that the spatial content conveys enough of what lies at stake, we may not adequately think and feel, individually or collectively, anything more useful than what we can find within the limits of ontological categories such as institutional “justice” and procedural “emancipation.”

As I explain in more detail below, Dussel illuminates some important points about the thin account of relations predominant in modern and contemporary philosophical scholarship. That is, the eras of globalizing modernity and post-modernity have given the Western world a tautology of relations that Dussel helps us begin to re-think and re-imagine. Consider this kind of question: What do we gain or lose by using a notion of liberation that cannot help us think more carefully about the possibilities and feasibilities of human relationships? As I argue below, theories predicated on structural-positional notions will ultimately prove abstract, doubtful, and unsatisfying for theorizing liberation. Philosophers must take the matter of relations more seriously in order to propose feasibly liberatory political programs.

RELATIONS AS “PROXEMIC” AND “PROXIMITY”

Dussel opens *Philosophy of Liberation* with an inquiry into phenomenology and spatial relations, specifically in terms of reconceptualizing “geopolitics.”⁶ He distinguishes between, strategic studies of spaces as “territories” and abstract idealizations of space. Modern philosophy, he explains, was born in existentially real spaces under particular circumstances, economies, and geopolitics (e.g., on the continent of Europe amid the proliferation of colonial economies). Taking geopolitical space seriously, he sets out to show how philosophy developed (and continues to develop) hegemonic biases—that is, through reifying beliefs about the dominance of Western historical narratives. From these Eurocentric biases emerge particularly narrow ontological categories. Thus, the predominant discourses in philosophy express the hegemonic dominance of the so-called Western world over subordinate eastern and southern peripheries.⁷

In this hegemonic scheme, ethics and politics do not require what Dussel calls “face-to-face relations” (borrowed from Levinas and Buber).⁸ The philosophy that “knows how to ponder” face-to-face relations will not develop from Eurocentric ideologies, Dussel argues.⁹ Likewise, such relations will not constrain our thought to functionalist notions, “whether structuralist, [or] logico-scientific.”¹⁰ Put differently, to think liberatory relations requires provincializing ideological abstractions and functionalist constraints on how we understand our encounters with one another. In this move from phenomenologies toward

concepts of liberation, Dussel distinguishes between “proxemic” and “proximity” as a basis for clarifying the importance of face-to-face relations.¹¹

“Proxemic” denotes physical closeness or distance.¹² “Proximity,” however, refers to how someone affirms responsibility to another person in a state of joy and justice, which comes with the confluence of the desire to relate with those with who are weak and in need, and the actuality of coexisting together with them.¹³ Dussel also writes of proximity as going “in search of the origin of the signified-signifier relationship, the very origin of signification.”¹⁴ From this, I read Dussel as arguing that proximity indicates the feasibility of relationships that are inclusive of and yet also more than proxemic, more than what structural and positional metaphors can delineate.¹⁵

Proximity, for the sake of liberation, would need to refer to relationships in which people actualize—or “make”—meaning and value through acting upon one another as peers (“person-to-person” relationships).¹⁶ This challenges the notion of “meaning” and “value” as abstract, yet useful ideas, by suggesting that when they are so abstract, they remain ethnologically relevant to only a certain kind of thinking. To understand relations for the sake of liberation seems to require that we emphasize a description of relationships as laborious (“making”), and not attempt to define relations solely as phenomenological abstractions and essential definitions. For the sake of liberation, people make meaning and value as they relate.

Yet, even by articulating proxemics and proximity as distinct, Dussel’s descriptions of relations reveal unresolved ambiguities. He provokes hope for a holistic understanding of relations but, I suggest, does not go far enough. Dussel consistently uses the terminology of “relations” as if the notion bears no additional philosophical investigation, or perhaps as if readers already share in a commonly understood notion of relations. It is a strange move to ask readers to begin a discourse on liberation by reconsidering relationships, but then leave the interpretation of “relation” to chance and colloquial metaphor throughout the work.

This reveals some challenges with regard to the integrity of notions like proxemic and proximity as reliable points of reference for understanding relations. There are at least three ways this occurs.

First, a textual analysis reveals a great deal of unqualified variation in Dussel’s uses of terminology, the language of relations involving terms such as relation, relationship, relate, related, connected, interconnected, and so forth.¹⁷ The language of relations is ever-present throughout *Philosophy of Liberation*, and in most cases Dussel leaves the specific intent of the varied terms to chance, open to broad interpretation.

Second, Dussel implicitly describes proxemic spatial positioning as the normative, reliable paradigms for people to use in understanding relations. In doing so he invokes proxemic relations with little attention to the nuances of how people differ in their perceptions and conceptions of spaces. This implies that in proxemic relations, persons

generally think and feel the same way about spaces. If this assumption does indeed lie beneath Dussel's notion of proxemic, then it is a precarious move for a philosopher to make when writing in the spirit of de-colonial/anti-colonial thought. Too much hinges on this to leave it to interpretation.

Third, and most relevant to this essay, the proxemic-proximity distinction necessarily privileges proxemic spatial relations as the backdrop, the validating counter-position of proximities.¹⁸ Even though he asserts that proximity matters more than proxemics, Dussel articulates spatial proxemics to a much greater extent than he does with proximities. In doing so he either defines proximity by negation of proxemic relations or, more accurately, he uses the negation of proxemic relations as the criteria for validating proximity. The allegedly universal, generalizable facts of proxemic relations serve as the verifying force, the original, substantive, and yet limited alternative to proximity.

If proximity merely boils down to the unstated, untheorized leftovers that linger after we eliminate references to proxemic relations, then what can we make of so-called face-to-face accountability we share with one another? Despite the intuitions about the importance of theorizing relations, this slim distinction between proxemic and proximity compromises proximity as a resource for further theorizing liberation. As it goes, the proxemic/proximity distinction gets us the important motivation to worry that those seeking liberation may somehow fail at or lose relations of proximity and return to solely proxemic relations. Let us grant that the motivated worry does some important work, such as alerting attention to the importance of relation as a substantive concern beyond what spatial metaphors and definitions-by-negation can elucidate. What can we say of proxemic relations in their own right?

FROM SPATIAL METAPHORS TO LIBERATION: HUMANE, CO-AFFECTIVE RELATIONS

The variations in Dussel's thinking about relationships may not provide immediate clarity about what exactly he means by human relations. Even so, his overall project in *Philosophy of Liberation* suggests that scholars can articulate a substantive, underlying notion of relationships that will make liberation a feasible philosophical project. Here, I outline some of the reference points by which we can draw from Dussel's overall theoretical commitments to fill in the missing conceptual clarity. I aim to show that the theory intimates a substantive notion of relations, and to elucidate that notion so as to show the importance it plays in the overall project. If successful, we can think of proximity in a way that (1) suggests what happens when people relate "face-to-face," (2) does not defer solely to the polar distinction with proxemic spatial relations, and (3) retains that structural-positional, geopolitical, and proxemic relations are important aspects of liberation.

Dussel explicates a notion of "exteriority"—exposure to one another—as elemental to relation.¹⁹ He announces his concern about the possibility of reading a spatial metaphor into exteriority.²⁰ This could prompt concern that structural-positional notions serve as the validating

backdrop of exteriority, except that exteriority begins from understanding one another, humanizing ourselves before one another, and does not, like proximity, begin in tandem with deterministic spatial schematics. Put differently, exteriority can validate relationships of proximity as interdependent with structural-positional relations, without necessarily privileging proxemic relations as originary.

How can we think of relations in terms of both proxemics and proximity? Exteriority marks the proper reality of persons in that another person can "appear in the world" as that person actually is. In doing so, through appearing real in the world, persons question, provoke, and disrupt self-centered beliefs and, thus, resist systems of thought that attempt to homogenize and/or marginalize.²¹

Exteriority describes persons revealing themselves to us, opposing us, as present before us to "rebuke us."²² This revelatory moment occurs as communicative, felt, and co-affective.²³ That is, exteriority implies experiences that change our beliefs, attitudes, and our being as a result of appearing more fully human to one another. Moreover, exteriority includes the ways in which another person "provokes justice" through their personhood.²⁴ In relationships validated by exteriority, another person has credibility with us *whether or not we understand the complexity of their lives*. Speaking for themselves, persons reveal their exteriority as other, and this can only matter to the extent that I/we trust the truth of what is spoken, or made exterior.²⁵ People become credible to one another as a result of making one another in this way.²⁶ This indicates what I call "humane, co-affective" relations, the fact that when we relate we risk making one another. To relate, we suffer one another to endure laboriously. I borrow this from an ancient concept that informed the work of figures such as Marx, Engels, and other materialists. Specifically, that what we make remakes us, that laboring changes both the object of our labors and the instruments of labor.²⁷ In laboring to endure one another, we make one another. To state it another way, humane, co-affective relation refers to the way that another person plays a role in laboriously making me, and that I play a role in making another person.

Taken too narrowly, the phrase "the will to" may sound misleading. This is not simply because of the connotations that "will" holds as a result of post-Enlightenment or post-Kantian thought.²⁸ What we can tentatively call a will to make oneself, a will to risk that another may play a role in making us, challenges conceptions of choice, acceptance, or *consent*. In Dussel's thinking, people carry out the will to relate when we consent to the risks of relation, leaving open the possibility of changing in part through encounters with another—and without the ability to control or mitigate some of what happens to us when we relate.²⁹ That may reveal the extent of "the will" if the term has any proper meaning with regard to relations.

I use the active term "humanizing" to indicate that we err to think of relations as temporally static. As dynamic, people continually undergo change as we relate. Stasis, fixation as a spatial, structural-positional point in a schematic, would dehumanize. Indeed, such fixation would seem to indicate "alienation" as Dussel has defined the term. That is,

annihilation of distinctions, eradication, and devaluation of uniqueness; totalizing systems foster alienation, which is denial of the other as other.³⁰ When alienated, people make one another into instruments of systems, merely taken into consideration as ontologically static things with exchange value. Alienation refers, then, to the negative corollary of “sacred exteriority.” When alienated, people endure the radical homogenization imposed by institutionalized systems. This destroys exteriority by unmaking “the very psychic structure of the child, of the person.”³¹

We may also think of humanizing relations in terms of what Dussel calls “mediations,” sense-perceptions transformed so as to have meaning and value.³² Mediations serve as the constructions of our biographies of reality through which phenomena are understood as complex, rich with content, and experienced by others as much as experienced by ourselves.³³ Dussel explains, “mediations are what we seize upon in order to reach the final objective of our activity.”³⁴ People and objects around us remain distant, objectified as mere sense-perceptions, without the mental activities of mediation.

As a result of the way people encounter one another in exteriority, humanizing relations may function as *mediations*. This notion of co-affective relations provides an explanation for the ways that people develop intentions and evaluations of one another, particularly as a result of influencing one another co-affectively. When people relate we endure one another. That I affect another person’s ability to affect me humanizes both of us, and that another person affects my ability to affect such a person does the same. Further, humanizing relations serve as mediations in that our biographies, our narratives about our respective understandings of reality, manifest relationally. That is to say, by treating co-affective relations as mediations we place great importance on shared material and narrative histories that influence but do not strictly determine our respective lives.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres offers a particularly relevant insight into Dussel’s notions of relation as “giving,” and, consequently, adds to this substantive account of relation. Maldonado-Torres explains, “we are looking, then, for a different and more radical point of departure that opens new venues for thinking. To locate this point of departure I focused on the relation between the self and the Other. The relation with the Other-qua-Other is described here as *goodness*.”³⁵ To make sense of the possibilities for this appeal to goodness, it is important to note that Maldonado-Torres does not argue that goodness is the result (or consequence) of an ethical relationship between the self and Other-qua-Other, but that goodness *is* the validating characteristic of relationships between the self and Other-qua-Other. He explains further,

Goodness designates the character of the difference between self and Other, or, what I have called following Dussel, trans-ontological difference. It refers not to the need for things, but to a desire for the Other that emerges beyond any complacency. Goodness means, in this sense, the gift of the self to the Other. By definition, evil

refers, in contrast, to the emergence of a concerted effort to put an end to the paradox of the gift and to render ethics unrealizable.³⁶

In terms of relation, goodness can refer to the gift of oneself to another person. In this way, people consider the giving of oneself to another or, as I propose, making one another by laboring and enduring one another. To that end, relations as *giving* involves active, dynamic activity. As anthropologist Lewis Hyde explains, “if the object is a gift, it keeps moving.”³⁷ Gifts are always in motion. There is no such thing as a static gift. Gifts-qua-gifts are *given*, always such to the extent that they are in the process of *giving*. Once frozen or stopped, the gift is no more. Similarly, once frozen or stopped—once imagined solely or primarily in a spatial schematic as structural and positional—the metaphor subsumes a more accurate conception of relation. Relating in terms of proxemics and proximities makes sense by elucidating the co-affective, laborious connotations without which social and political philosophies appeal primarily to structural-positional metaphors. When we relate we make another, co-affectively laboring and enduring one another, and in doing so we give to one another the shares of our material and narrative historical biographies.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that we may better understand Dussel’s theory of liberation by emphasizing the kinds of relations people labor to sustain. If this is the case, we ought not to take “relation” for granted as an inconsequential philosophical concept. Nor should scholars and activists think about relation as something dependent on a range of random interpretations by readers. If relations matter to intellectuals and activists laboring for the sake of liberation, then it may help to develop various tentative, propositional descriptions of what we have in mind when we invoke the terminology—perhaps no one description suffices. The structural-positional metaphors of relations do help to illustrate some important aspects of what lies at stake in institutional inequities and social norms, but these analytical resources do not tell us enough about what happens when people relate. For the sake of liberation, activists and scholars must begin to clarify what else we consider constitutive of our social lives.

Perhaps the colloquial and yet incomplete descriptions of relations can only suggest or alert us to what we have to notice, to what we should try to describe as carefully as possible, even if not fully. We may or may not consider the description above—humane, co-affective relations—familiar or accurate in all circumstances, and the descriptions of relations as such may also seem somewhat incomprehensible or lacking. Trying to give symbolic representations of relations in language may prove far more complex than what I have attempted here. After all, linguistic systems, at least in any conventional sense, tend to involve biases for the commensurability of structural-positional relations, and schematics translate more easily into symbolic terms than labor and emotions.

Moreover, some characteristics of relations may elude us as conceptually incommensurable, persistently mysterious, and, perhaps, even necessarily resistant to consideration

as philosophical propositions. But the inability to resolve certain mysteries may benefit liberatory movements. If some mysteries remain liberatory precisely by remaining mysteries, inviolable and/or incommensurable, and if philosophers need not violate all of the mysteries of relationships in order to theorize liberation, then perhaps it helps sometimes to accept the dissatisfaction of curiosity.

I suspect that more comprehensive understanding of relations will not likely result from intellectual abstractions in terms of meaning, experience, being, and discursive strategies germane to fields of phenomenology and metaphysics. Instead, I think we advance philosophies of relations by providing tentative, propositional descriptions about what happens when people relate. In doing so, scholars may invite people to tell the stories of their relationships that foster and nurture liberation, and also of those that merely plot persons as subjects in a grid. For some people in some specific contexts, the description of laboring to make one another co-affectively, as I have argued, may make sense. For some it may not. But, if relating does involve making of one another, perhaps this transforms and expands the usual schematic terrain of liberation into something unique—*liberation as collective acts of labor*.

Finally, revising notions of relation may hinge on understanding how and whether or not we even have any choices to permit another to play a role in making us. Vulnerability in the face of another person or culture about whom one feels uncertain, who poses us inviolable mysteries, may not necessarily pose us terrible troubles. To take relation seriously may involve enduring some facts about the vulnerability of human affect, and it may involve confessing to the dead of night feelings of anxiety that come from denial of humane relationships in a social context. Even though the mysteries of human individuality may make it impossible, and thankfully so, to speak with precision about all relations, perhaps we still want to *know* and *feel* something about humane relations for the sake of living together. If many of our scholarly forbearers who privileged *knowing* did not permit themselves to accept the risks that come with feeling something about one another, philosophers have a lot of work to do to make up for what our predecessors have omitted. To take humane relations seriously, one must accept the risks of certain kinds of vulnerability. In some cases the risks may result in “discomfort” and in some cases relations of some kind or another may pose us “danger.” Either way, it would benefit activists and intellectuals to employ a relational revision that at least makes it practical and compelling to consider the relative safety of “discomfort” of living in a world with people who are familiar and people who are strangers, each one with the power to make one another. If we hope to liberate one another from oppressive political regimes and/or pervasive cultural hegemony, then it matters to carefully consider what happens when we relate. That is, to consider what we may and may not suffer one another to laboriously endure as we make each other.

NOTES

1. I feel grateful for the advice and guidance of Alejandro Vallega, with whom I studied Dussel’s work during my time at University of Oregon, and the critical feedback on an early draft provided by graduate students and faculty in philosophy at Villanova University at their annual conference in March 2012.
2. Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock, 2003) 1-2.
3. As mere propositions, “relation” may imply (a) relations between subjects (actual persons), (b) relations between concepts (abstract terms), and (c) relations of a metaphysical kind that philosophers purport to explain other phenomena.
4. A brief note on strategy: To take up this analysis as strongly as possible within a limited discussion, I have chosen to primarily survey *Philosophy of Liberation*, in which Dussel makes extensive use of the language of relations. I also provide a brief account of relations as described by Nelson Maldonado-Torres in order to show the evolution of Dussel’s thinking among other scholars. To make the case from within these texts, I have cited only a few representative passages. However, even though the passages reviewed here are limited, the references available are far more extensive, much more than I can adequately review within the scope of this essay.
5. I have argued this point in the unpublished paper “Feminist in Solidarity: A Critique of Structural-Positional Relations within Theories of Oppression and Equality,” which was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Philosophy in the Contemporary World, Corvallis, OR, 2011.
6. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 1–2.
7. Nelson Maldonado-Torres is critical of Dussel’s commitment to geopolitics, arguing that Dussel “collapses metaphysics all too readily into geopolitical relations.” This essay follows a similar concern, though I attempt to show that Dussel’s reliance on exteriority and mediation help mitigate the worry about Dussel’s appeal to geopolitics since there are various ways of understanding social relations already present in Dussel’s thinking. Consult Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Enrique Dussel’s Contribution to the De-Colonial Turn, from the Critique of Modernity to Transmodernity,” *Against War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) 187–88.
8. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 19–20.
9. *Ibid.*, 9–10.
10. *Ibid.*, 15.
11. Here, Dussel relies on Emmanuel Levinas. The problems of codifying an encounter with another person are part of what Levinas struggled to bring to clarity in describing the face of the other. What does Levinas try to tell us about the face of the other? Does he intend to illustrate merely the spatial distances of structure and position in “between” you and I? Does the measured distance between one face and another explain the extent of human relations? No, Levinas refers to something very different when he says, “In that relation to the other, there is no fusion: the relation to the other is envisioned as alterity. The other is alterity. Buber’s thought prompted me to engage in a phenomenology of sociality, which is more than the human. Sociality, for me, is the best of the human. It is the good, and not the second best to an impossible fusion. In the alterity of the face, the for-the-other commands the I. Ultimately it is a question of founding the justice that offends the face on the obligation with respect to the face; the extraordinary exteriority of the face. Sociality is that alterity of the face, of the for-the-other that calls out to me, a voice that rises within me before all verbal expression, in the mortality of the I, from depths of my weakness.” Had Levinas sifted out a distinction between structural-positional schematics (exteriority) and the humane relation (for-the-other), he would find no benefit in constructing an abstract phenomenology of sociality that privileges spatial locations at the expense of humane relations. The “voice that rises within me before all verbal expression” would have its own credibility. Consult Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 103–104.
12. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 17.
13. *Ibid.*, 20.

14. *Ibid.*, 17.
15. A more extensive discussion of the temporal aspects of relationships would add to this line of thinking, but remains beyond the scope of this essay (19–20).
16. "Proximity is the most essential reality of a person, the beginning of the philosophical discourse of liberation, and metaphysics in a strict sense—real, reflective, and carefully thought out" (21). The notion of "making" endemic to materialist thought provides a potent description of what happens when people relate. As Elaine Scarry notes, the fact that what we make remakes us habituates the materialism that scholars such as Marx and Engels use to illustrate their critiques of labor, alienation, and to place emphasis on emancipation. Consult Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
17. As mentioned in the introduction, an exhaustive list of citations is too extensive to provide in this essay.
18. I remain unsure whether to pose this as "verifying" in the sense of demonstrating a justification, or as "validating" in the sense of showing accuracy. Both may work, but I leave this for another essay.
19. Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 103–104.
20. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 39–40.
21. *Ibid.*, 40.
22. *Ibid.*, 41.
23. Terms like "co-affective" may be problematic since they would validate relations from a primarily emotional place, potentially subordinating cognitive, intellectual, and physical aspects of experiences. Even those distinctions are questionable. Black feminist epistemology, particularly the work of Patricia Hill Collins, takes affect as philosophically substantive. In terms of liberation, Hill Collins discusses the need to understand "power" not as an abstract inactive concept but as active "empowerment." Citing Audre Lorde, Hill Collins argues that empowerment is powerful because of "deep feelings." As a liberatory experience, empowerment brings forth an understanding of the ways that structures of domination derive their hegemonic power solely by harnessing and governing "deep feelings." Conversely, "love relationships" tap the energy associated with deep feelings but do not colonize or co-opt these feelings. Patricia Collins, *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 150–52.
24. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 43, 45.
25. *Ibid.*, 46.
26. *Ibid.* Again, I take this as consistent with the extensive discussion of making/remaking found in Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 243–77.
27. *Ibid.*
28. What of freedom and autonomy in the case of humane relation? Perhaps only because of historical pre-occupations with centralizing ideas of "autonomy" and "freedom," there is some need to at least briefly respond to a popular worry about such things. Humane relation may involve true defenselessness, possibly the kind St. Augustine had in mind when writing in advocacy of the in terms of just war theory. However, Augustine describes the innocent in order to describe the possibilities of violating the innocent, giving the terms under which it might be acceptable to justify taking of a defenseless life. Even so, the principles of relations to the defenseless remain at play. Likewise, any propositions of freedom and autonomy that proscribe being remade by another are ostensibly designed to mitigate a certain kind of risk. Yet, conventional notions of freedom and autonomy serve to elucidate the terms under which there can be violations of freedom and autonomy through oppression and force. In humane relation, when two or more meet, one and another experience no assault upon the defenseless. To pose remaking as an assault or threat to autonomy is nonsensical. Consult Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Spire, 2005).
29. This humane version of relations may reveal some of the ways in which it is both possible and necessary to consider the realities of individuals as they experience remaking through the labors of daily life (reproduction and production). If the work we do, physical and psychological laboring, makes/remakes us—as Elaine Scarry and Karl Marx both argue—then we have some good reasons to consider the benefits and/or harms that certain kinds of relations entail. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 243–77.
30. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 52–53.
31. *Ibid.*, 55.
32. *Ibid.*, 30.
33. *Ibid.*, 37–39.
34. *Ibid.*, 29.
35. Nelson Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 239. Emphasis in original.
36. *Ibid.*, 239.
37. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

BOOK REVIEWS

The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations

José Medina (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). 332 pages. ISBN 978-0199929047.

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"Inequality is the enemy of knowledge" (27). This view forms the background of José Medina's *Epistemology of Resistance*, where Medina's principal aims are to explicate the epistemic dimensions of oppression and, more importantly, to explore how epistemic injustices are to be resisted. According to Medina, social injustices (in particular, marginalization associated with racism, sexism, and homophobia) generate situations in which members of privileged groups are rendered limited in their capacities to understand or relate to members of subordinate groups, who are in turn systematically silenced and dismissed. At the same time, epistemic injustices, or harms done to people specifically in their capacity as knowers, reinforce social inequality by contributing to the marginalization of those who are discounted as sources of knowledge. Therefore, if we hope to work towards an inclusive and just democracy, we must address the epistemic side of oppression.

In Medina's view, epistemology concerns not only the justification of knowledge but also the production of knowledge and ignorance, and the social structures and individual cognitive and affective structures that influence what knowledge is made possible. Hence, Medina's focus is on how epistemic agents are shaped by oppressive social contexts and on how they can offer resistance to social injustice. In chapter one, Medina addresses different epistemic virtues and vices we find in oppressive social contexts, such as humility or curiosity on the one hand, and epistemic laziness and closed-mindedness on the other. Medina is careful not to overgeneralize when he explains that these virtues or vices tend to (but do not always)

correspond to one's position within social hierarchies of power. In discussing the epistemic dimensions of oppression from the position of marginalized groups, Medina explains that oppressed people can sometimes have the advantage of a certain lucidity that results from holding a non-dominant perspective. He explains that members of marginalized groups may "have a richer (or more heterogenous) experiential life that they can use to dismantle the accepted description of reality that rules the day" (46). On the other hand, oppressed people can also internalize social stigmas, which undermines their confidence and erodes their epistemic character (42, 43).

Medina also addresses the ways in which people in positions of privilege can develop vices that contribute to their ignorance about the perspectives and experiences of oppressed others. To counteract this ignorance, Medina recommends exposure to epistemic counterpoints, arguing that through careful consideration of alternative views, one can come to experience productive epistemic friction, or epistemic resistances that "[force] one to be self-critical, to compare and contrast one's beliefs, to meet justificatory demands, to recognize cognitive gaps, and so on" (50).

Engendering epistemic friction is not a simple endeavor, however. In chapters two and three, Medina argues that those occupying positions of privilege tend to be not only insensitive to the experiences of the oppressed, but meta-insensitive (Medina also uses the term meta-ignorant), or ignorant of their ignorance. This double-ignorance poses an additional epistemic barrier for the privileged individual, insofar as evidence challenging his or her standpoint will be met with an additional layer of resistance. Medina offers as an example white subjects who, in believing their attitudes are unaffected by racial stigmas, claim to not see racial difference. These subjects, however, are not only insensitive to the racialized experiences of people of color and ignorant of their own position of privilege; they are also unaware that they exhibit racial insensitivity at all. The notion of meta-insensitivity helps to differentiate first-order ignorance about particular situations or others from an overall attitude about "who counts as a relevant other for me, in what way, for what purposes, in what set of relations, and so on" (149).

In chapter four, Medina weighs in on discussions about the requirements for responsible agency and whether we are sometimes culpable for our ignorance. He argues that the requirements for responsible epistemic agency include having not only a certain degree of self-knowledge but also minimal social knowledge of others and empirical knowledge of the world. Determining when ignorance is blameworthy must be carried out on a case-by-case basis. Medina introduces three maxims for helping us to prioritize our epistemic obligations, including (1) to hold as eminently relevant those with whom we sharing spaces and resources, (2) to be ever-vigilant about the limitations of our social perceptions, and (3) for individuals and communities to work together to discover the relations among different groups of people (156–58). Ultimately, the knowledge for which subjects are responsible depends on the social position they occupy and the set of relations that constitute their particular social contexts.

One of Medina's most important insights, in my opinion, is developed in chapter five, where Medina argues that the different barriers to acquiring knowledge are not only cognitive but also affective in nature. That is, prejudice-based insensitivities involve not only certain beliefs about the world but also "the inability to feel concerned and to have an entire array of emotions such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, and so on" (210). Because insensitivities like racial prejudice influence both cognitive and affective dimensions, overcoming the epistemic vices that can plague those in positions of privilege will involve a deep reorientation of the attitudes, habits, and practices that form the basis of our perceptions and judgments (213).

Another of Medina's key contributions (also brought out in chapter five) concerns the question of who bears the responsibility for correcting epistemic injustices. On the one hand, individuals do have the obligation to question their own epistemic habits, to search for their blind spots and insensitivities, and to work to listen to and try to understand the voices of marginalized others. On the other hand, many habits of communication are deeply entrenched, socially produced, and often unconscious, so changes on the level of normative structures are required. Medina argues that societies and individuals (both privileged and oppressed) share responsibility for confronting epistemic injustices. In a fascinating analysis of the figure of the epistemic hero, Medina persuasively shows how the resistance activities of people like Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Rosa Parks are deeply inseparable from the social forces and chains of events of which the acts are a part. He points out, for example, that although Sor Juana's transgressive writings and intellectual accomplishments were powerful forces in challenging prevailing gender norms, her influence must be understood in the context of the contributions of Latina women before and after her, in terms of her membership in the Carmelite religious order, which made her intellectual and social prominence possible, and through the supporters and critics of her ideas, who took her seriously enough to engage with and echo her thought (233–34).

While I find Medina's analysis inspiring throughout, some places in the text call for further discussion about how to fulfill our epistemic obligations. For example, in chapter six, Medina argues for the transformative potential of imagination, which can expand our epistemic sensitivities. He shows that while a stigmatizing social imaginary generates insensitivity to the suffering of some people, resistant imagining has the capacity to foster more ethical relations to the excluded. In particular, imagination is effective when it uncovers "the specificity of human experiences, the concreteness of human life, and the distinctiveness of individuals, groups, and cultures" (309). It is this type of imagination that is rich enough to pose potent epistemic counterpoints and generate crucial affective sensibilities, such as empathy and solidarity. In light of Medina's compelling arguments for the importance of resistant imaginations, we might wonder how we should go about cultivating resistant imaginations. Are there certain skills that are key for effective imagining? Or is exposure to existing diverse perspectives enough? If so, are there certain kinds of exposure to difference which would best facilitate the cultivation of resistant imaginings?

Similar kinds of questions arise regarding Medina's discussion of the epistemic barriers faced by the meta-insensitive person. It is not entirely clear how to intervene upon the mutually reinforcing cycle of first-order and meta-ignorance. If exposure to others is distorted by meta-insensitivities, and if meta-insensitivities are confirmed by what one encounters, where precisely can we find hope for transformation? What specific practices, experiences, encounters, or educational approaches would disrupt the cycle of insensitivity? Medina's work provides fertile ground for future explorations of these sorts of issues.

In order to reveal the connections between epistemology, ethical agency, and our social and political context, Medina draws from a variety of methodological resources, including feminist standpoint theory, race theory, pragmatism (especially that of William James), Latina feminism, and virtue epistemology, among many others. He brings this diversity of approaches into conversation, grounding the discussion in an original and helpful set of core concepts and principles. The text is astonishingly multi-directional, yet the analysis is sustained and approachable, even for those readers who lack familiarity with some of the many theorists with whom Medina deals. One reason this ambitious enterprise is successful is that Medina never loses sight of the real-world problems that his theoretical explorations are tied to. The book should appeal to multiple audiences, including those who are interested in epistemology, in the dynamics of social movements, in philosophy of race or feminist philosophy, or to anyone who is interested in how the study of philosophy is influenced by social and political context. Finally, the *Epistemology of Resistance* is also a thought-provoking and genuinely useful guide for those who are seeking to become more responsible epistemic agents.

Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion

Enrique Dussel. Translated by Eduardo Mendieta, Camilo Pérez Bustillo, Yolanda Angulo, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). 752 pages. ISBN 978-0822352129.

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Enrique Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* brings together the diversity of traditions and problems on which he has worked throughout his career. The presence of his engagement with Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Heidegger, which plays a more central role in his earlier work, for example, in *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977), is here informed by his extensive study of Karl Marx developed in his trilogy during the 1980s (1985–1990), and his subsequent engagement with the discourse ethics of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas (1994 and 1998). Here, Dussel engages in a broad dialogue with thinkers from other traditions. Dussel offers us an ethical Marx who is critical of the destruction of life and the alienation of the human

under modern capitalism, coupled with a concern for the responsibility to the *other*, the excluded, the victim (foci taken from Levinas), and the necessary emphasis on the intersubjective character of ethics developed in Apel. Yet, Dussel's thought is not reducible to the work of any one of these thinkers: he offers us a singularly new work, one which must be worked through in great depth and studied with care if we are to answer the challenge of developing an ethics of liberation. The challenge of developing an ethics of liberation is a call to produce the flourishing of human life in an age where there is a greater degree of poverty and exclusion of large portions of humanity than at any other moment in human history. Dussel presents a challenge that is not just a theoretical call to revise and rethink our own ethical categories as we work beyond the impasses of neo-Aristoteleanism and neo-Kantianism, but a practical call: a philosophy which has as its aim not merely the interpretation of the world but its transformation. This call to transformation is the task of a practical and critical-material philosophy in the same vein for which Marx famously advocated in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach.

The most central category of this ethics is undoubtedly life. As Dussel reminds us at the outset of each chapter, "This is an ethics of life" (55, 108, 158, 215, 291, 355). Life not understood here in an abstract sense "but rather [as] a *mode of reality* of each concrete human being who is also the absolute prerequisite and ultimate demand of all forms of liberation" (xv). Human life is a mode of reality in the sense that it evaluates its situation and responds to its circumstances. The process of human life is open and exposed to the experiences of privation, pain, and suffering but also to satiation, pleasure, and flourishing. That is to say, Dussel begins from the fact of human life as never fully indemnified from pain and suffering—that is, a life that also strives towards an experience of flourishing and reproduction of its existence.

At the individual and collective level, Dussel points out the vulnerability of human life and the inevitable exclusion or oppression of some over all the rest. Not only is it impossible for each individual to be indemnified from suffering, it is empirically, though not logically, inevitable that victimization will occur to some degree. On the one hand, human life is naturally exposed to suffering, yet, on the other hand, there are always social and political systems in place that produce victims. Critical ethics always begins from the "real existence of the 'victims,' . . . That is to say, the 'fact' that there are victims in any and all systems is a categorical conclusion, and it is because of this that criticism is equally inevitable" (379). The negative point of departure of this text begins then from this inevitability of suffering and of systemic processes which produce victims, coupled with the urgent demand to respond critically to such a system. In the last instance, the critical exigency of *Ethics* springs from the imminent destruction of the human species on a mass scale. "*Ethics* is an ethics grounded in an avowed affirmation of life in the face of collective murder and suicide that humanity is headed toward if it does not change the direction of its irrational behavior" (xv). This starting point also points to the necessity of a geopolitics of knowledge, which shifts the geography of reason away from the center of the world-system, a center which is

blind to the victimization of such a system, and towards the periphery where the urgency of the struggle against the destruction of life is grasped immediately. A liberation philosophy begins from the borders and the spaces of exclusion and it displaces the unexamined presupposition of the center.

In broad brushstrokes, these are the main foci of Dussel's *Ethics*. I turn now to a discussion of how the book is structured. The book is divided into a lengthy introduction and two major sections: the foundational ethics and the critical ethics. The foundational ethics is divided into three chapters that offer respectively the material universal principle of all ethics, the principle of intersubjective validity, and ethical feasibility. That is to say, the first chapter provides the foundation of ethics in a material principle of life, which is then established in its validity, intersubjectively (chapter two), and, finally, this principle and its intersubjective possibilities are considered in terms of feasibility and application (chapter three). The second part of the book, the critical ethics, is also divided into three chapters that mirror the concerns of the foundational ethics, yet in a critical vein. The critical ethics first considers a number of critiques of ethical and social systems from the standpoint of the destruction of life, or the failure to live up to the material universal principle (chapter four). The next chapter develops the discursive formation of the community of victims to critique the system that produced their exclusion. In the final chapter, Dussel develops the liberation principle, analyzing the creative and strategic practices through which the victims struggle for the development of life and irrupt into history.

This immense body of text is preceded by a lengthy introduction, which is a "small monograph" unto itself.¹ The introduction offers a world history of ethical systems in their interregional character from Egypt and Mesopotamia, the "Indo-European" region, the Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean, up to the first "world-system" which was constituted after 1492. Here, Dussel reframes the entire history of ethics and displaces the possibility of a Hellenocentric or Eurocentric reconstruction. The introduction also develops and deepens some of his earlier work, especially *The Invention of the Americas: the Eclipse of the "Other" and the Myth of Modernity*.² In this text, Dussel had already resituated the history of modernity to consider its two paradigms and its origins as the result of the centering of Europe after 1492, as opposed to the traditional Eurocentric accounts of a spontaneous and self-contained movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries internal to Europe. In the *Ethics* he develops a more detailed account of this first modernity, which began at the end of the fifteenth century. The central conclusion of this analysis is that modernity was itself the result of a managerial rationality, the set of techniques through which Europe governed and managed its centrality in the first world-system. We can only fully grasp this instrumental-managerial rationality if we consider modernity in its planetary horizon, which situates it as the product of the first world-system. This is opposed to the traditional Eurocentric view that sees modernity as spontaneously constructed within Europe, as unconditioned by circumstances of power and politics, and as having universal claims to validity.

These are the two paradigms of modernity: the first paradigm remains trapped in a Eurocentric perspective, claiming that "modernity is *exclusively* European" (24). In this view, modernity had the perfect set of internal circumstances to give birth to universal values, and its only lineage of descent is one that can be traced back to Greece through Rome. Furthermore, it was a universality that was born exclusively in Europe, and it became the task of Europe to spread this universality throughout the world based on a diffusionist myth. Dussel cites Weber: "in *Western civilization*, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and validity."³ Dussel exposes this myth of the unique universality of Europe and demonstrates that instead this claim rests on the situation of Europe as the first power to emerge as the center of the first world-system, the modern world-system that we still have yet to escape. Prior to this point there was no world-system, there were only interregional systems. Prior to 1492, Europe had been a peripheral power on the very western edge of an interregional system in which it looked east towards India. However, the only reason Europe stumbled upon America was because its only route East was to go through the West, with all other routes East blocked by the Turks.

The second paradigm of modernity is issued by Dussel as a corrective to the first. It conceptualizes modernity from a "planetary horizon" and understands that modernity was the first culture of the center of the first "world system" (25). Modernity is thus the result of the *management of this "centrality"* with respect to the periphery of the rest of the world. European claims to *universality*, then, cannot be understood without situating Europe within the planetary horizon in which it emerged as the *central* power of the world-system and the *management of rationality* that coincided with such a relationship between European claims to territory and the rest of the earth. In this situation Europe commits the "reductionist fallacy" of identifying European culture and identity with *universality*. As Dussel writes, "Under such circumstances, when the philosopher belongs to a hegemonic system . . . his or her world or ethical system has the claim of presenting itself as if it were equivalent to or identical with the epitome of the human 'world'; while the world of the Others is that of barbarity, marginality, and nonbeing" (41).

By understanding modernity from its "planetary horizon," we are able to see the conditions upon which Europe situated itself as the exclusive domain of pure thought and pure being, reducing the rest of the world to the barbarian, marginal, exterior. It was this spatial colonization of center over periphery that has dominated modernity and must be overcome with a project of liberation. For Dussel, the corrective move to this colonization of thought is to shift the perspective to the underside of modernity, to that of the victims and the oppressed, the exterior or the periphery. The philosophy of liberation is then developed as a critical material affirmation of the life of the victims, and requires a shift in the geography of reason from the perspective of the dominating (*ego conquiro*) to that of the dominated.

Question 1 – On the Materiality and Normativity of Individual and Collective Life:

As is clear from the above, Dussel presents an ethics of life based on the material and universal principle that proclaims the duty to preserve, produce, and reproduce human life. Life is, moreover, a mode of reality in which the human engages the world and not an abstract concept. Here I would like to analyze whether this material principle is grounded primarily at the individual level of self-preservation of each particular person or at the collective level that involves a responsibility for the preservation of the other. The immediate answer that comes out of the *Ethics* is that it must be both. However, at certain points it is not clear whether the primary referent is the duty of each individual to preserve her or his own life, or the responsibility of each individual to preserve the lives of others and the community. That is to say, as uniquely self-responsible beings, how do we distinguish between our obligation to ourselves versus our obligation to the community and to the lives of others?

To be clear, Dussel’s formulation of the material universal principle emphasizes the life of the community when he describes this principle as “the obligation to produce, reproduce, and develop the concrete human life of each ethical subject in community” (55). However, the elaboration of this principle appears to emphasize the individual preservation of life, and interdiction of suicide, over and above the life of the community in many of its key foundations. The first section of this chapter draws out the principle in relation to an evaluative capacity that is imminent to life itself as a process and mode of reality. Life can always judge that more life is good and that life itself ought to continue and be reproduced. This is what allows for the movement from the statement of fact that “John is eating” to the normative statement that “John ought to continue eating” (97–103). Dussel’s claim is that the first statement, “John is eating,” already contains within it the evaluative capacity which leads directly to the unpacking that he ought to eat to continue to live. Here I will not delve in depth into the issue of the naturalistic fallacy; it is an issue which Dussel addresses and aims to circumvent by reference to the imminent evaluative capacity, and which has been discussed by James L. Marsh and responded to by Dussel in *Thinking from the Underside of History*.⁴

The center point of this argument here is a version of the claim that life is normative all the way down (the facts of life themselves already contain norms) or that the natural mode of reality of the human is already one in which ordinary norms are produced in favor of the preservation of life. My question is more specific: Towards whom is the duty to preserve life directed? Is it each individual qua individual who must strive to live and not stop eating, not commit suicide, etc., or is there a larger sense of the duty to preserve the life of the other? Dussel certainly states that it must be both an individual duty to preserve one’s own life and duty to preserve the life of the community when he writes,

I will call the *universal material principle of ethics*, the principle of corporeality as a “sensibility”

that contains the instinctual, cultural-valorative (hermeneutical-symbolic) order of every norm, act, microphysical structure, institution, or system of ethical life, from the criterion of human life in general: the one who acts ethically *ought* (as an obligation) to produce, reproduce, and develop self-responsibly the concrete life of each human subject, in a *community of life*, and inevitably out of a cultural and historical “good life.” (104)

However, it is not clear how we move from the corporeal and instinctual level to the cultural-valorative, or how we move from “John ought to continue eating” to “John ought to ensure that Sally eats” and ultimately “John ought to ensure the entire community eat.”⁵

To take as a contrast to this framework, a contrast that closely mirrors some of the analysis of a material and evaluative body but lands us in a markedly different terrain, far from a philosophy of liberation, I would like to consider the materialism of Hobbes. It is certainly a matter of debate whether Hobbes comes before the liberal tradition or whether with his thought that very tradition commences, but at the very least he shares its imperative of individual self-preservation. Hobbes’s philosophy is a materialist philosophy of the body: this is his starting point and this is what will bear out all subsequent points on the state of war, natural law, and eventually the need for an absolute Sovereign to control our passions and keep us in awe. The fundamental premise of Hobbes’s materialist philosophy is nothing more than a body in motion, which desires to continue and preserve that motion without imposition. The body’s motion and preservation is the process of life for Hobbes. According to Hobbes, the body seeks to obtain those things that increase its pleasure, its power, and its ability to persevere in life and seeks to avoid pain, and anything that diminishes its power. However, for Hobbes the vitality of the body is not yet fully normative in that it cannot produce general norms applicable for all: prior to the establishment of political laws, for Hobbes, there is no justice and no sense of good and evil beyond that which pleases and displeases each individual. The passions and strivings of each individual body and their sense of “good” naturally conflict, and this conflict is what takes us into a state of war and the need to fundamentally alter the human community through law and the sovereign.

Yet, through this maelstrom of passions and bodies in conflict, rules of reason still emerge based on a universal principle that seeks to preserve life. The natural right of each individual to everything is superseded by a higher striving that sees the need to preserve one’s life and sees the impossibility of doing so within the state of war. As Hobbes writes, “[a] Law of Nature, (*Lex Naturalis*,) is a Precept or general Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same.”⁶ Natural law is then the reason that emerges out of life and allows for the formulation of general rules for the preservation of life, which can escape the particularism of each individual passion. Natural law forces individuals to lay down their right to everything (which is, in its most extreme, even a right to the life of the other), and to instead “seek peace

and follow it," not for the sake of the communal life but for the sake of individual self-preservation (92). For Hobbes, life is the one sacred thing that must be preserved at all costs by the individual, and it is only accidental that this happens to coincide with a need to lay down our right to harm the other. For Hobbes, the genesis of norms occurs through an evaluation of the body that begins with fractious particularity and eventually leads, through a violent learning process, to the generality of natural laws. So much for Hobbes.

My worry here is that the "evaluative-affective cerebral system" discussed by Dussel can bring us dangerously close to Hobbes and the fractious particularity of individual bodies striving for self-preservation. Drawing from neuroscientific literature and thinkers such as Antonio Damasio, Dussel writes, "In principle (that is to say, as fundamental objective state), what leads to the reproduction of life produces pleasure; pain as a system of warning announces death, ultimately" (64). The danger is that Hobbes would agree here absolutely, yet the reproduction of life for some would mean the destruction of life of others under his materialism. My question then is this: Must we situate the universal material principle primarily at the collective level of the reproduction of life of the community, rather than at the individual level of evaluative-affective capacities of individual bodies? I think this is precisely what Dussel has already claimed in the full formulation of the material universal principle above, and what he claims later in *Twenty Theses on Politics* when he writes,

The human being is a living being. All living beings are herd animals, and the human being is a collective being by origin. Since human communities have always been threatened by their vulnerability to death and to extinction, such communities maintain an instinctive desire to remain alive. This *desire-to-live* of human beings in a community can be called a *will*. The *will-to-live* is the originary tendency of all human beings.⁷

Yet, I think the desire to live of human beings in the community, or the desire to produce the life of the community here, contrasts with the evaluative-affective capacity, and here I am interested about how to develop further this notion of the will-to-live of the community. In other words, how we do get from the principle that "John ought to eat" to "John ought to ensure that Sally eats" and, ultimately, "John, and every individual like John, ought to ensure that each and everyone in the community eats"?

Question 2 – On Individual and Collective Suicide:

I raise now a second question, related to the first, interested again in the relationship between individual and collective life, but here from the negative perspective of individual versus collective suicide. If the material universal principle proclaims that we must persevere in life and produce and reproduce life, the negative formulation would be that we should never diminish our life or commit suicide, and neither should we diminish the life of the community and commit collective suicide. If we return to the example of

John eating, we see that the inverse of preserving his life would be the failure to eat: "to not eat ought to be judged suicide. But suicide is ethically unjustifiable" (102). My first question here is whether the duty is directed at John in that he is responsible for his own life and must eat to continue his own life, or if it is more strongly directed at the community which must provide the conditions in which it is possible for John to eat and not to starve. The former would be a prohibition on individual suicide while the latter points to a prohibition on what Dussel calls collective suicide, which is the creation of an unjust system that does not allow the individual to reproduce his or her own life and leads to starvation and death. I believe the former prohibition points us more towards the concerns of the liberal tradition with its emphasis on self-preservation,⁸ but the latter points us towards the more radical insights of the ethics of liberation.

I refer here to one example to highlight a possible tension between the individual and collective levels on the question of suicide—the vivid and shocking moment which first sparked the eruption of the Arab Spring in Tunisia: the self-immolation of a humiliated street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi. Bouazizi sold produce in the "informal sector," and he was constantly harassed by the police for not holding the proper permits. As a result of his precarious position, his scales were confiscated, his produce confiscated, and large fines sent to his home (the last was a fine equivalent to two months' wages). He was also a well-known figure within his community and well-respected for his concern for the preservation of human life, giving "free fruit and vegetables to very poor families."⁹ Bouazizi surely lived his life with the aim of reproducing the life of the community and that of his family by selling fruits and vegetables, and providing free produce to the poorest. However, the social and political conditions under which Bouazizi lived were those of what Dussel names collective suicide—conditions that aimed to make it more and more difficult for him, his family, and his community to survive and to persevere in life. In protest of this collective suicide, he took his own life in a public venue of protest through self-immolation, an act which reverberated profoundly through the Arab world.

My question here is whether in certain cases the collective ethics of life supersedes the individual ethics of life, and so makes suicide ethically permissible. Perhaps, this question takes us beyond the framework of the foundational ethics and the material principle of the first half of the text, and brings us to some of the questions raised in terms of critical practice of liberation struggles in the latter parts of the book. Yet, the worry would still remain if the tactics of liberation struggles were seen to be in conflict with the universal material principle, which is supposed to ground and justify any such praxis. Dussel's ethics is surely a project built out of respect for struggles such as the sort in which Bouazizi was trapped, and in this respect I think a discussion of self-sacrifice and self-harm might serve to strengthen the collective principle of life, especially when it is carried out in the name of the opposition to a collective suicide.¹⁰ In the more limited sense of self-sacrifice, we might consider cases in which individuals and groups seek to diminish the conditions of their own lives through fasting or hunger strikes in order to expose with greater

clarity the contradiction and violence of a larger collective suicide that is taking place.

I have pointed to these questions with respect to the individual and collective levels of life because I think that the ethics of liberation has offered us a truly new ethics and one that brings us far beyond the confines of liberal and capitalist individuality. I think the will-to-live of the community that Dussel points to is a radically new departure, one that is needed for an ethics in the age of the systemic destruction of life in the periphery. This is, undoubtedly, a much needed intervention into the discourse of philosophy almost always blind to the violence perpetuated on behalf of the center.

I also think Dussel has taken us beyond some of the tired debates between ethics and politics, which would seek to polarize the two as if ethics always leads to a quietistic inaction and politics always leads to a violation of ethics, and a possible violence against the other. Dussel has shown us the necessity of a new ethics in this age of exclusion, and yet this does not lead to an empty respect for the other that would cleanse our need for political action. Instead, the exigency of life points to the immediate need to struggle against exclusion and against the destruction of the other. The praxis of liberation points to strategies that seek to transform the systems of exclusion in the world. Further, Dussel does not offer us a moderate view where the ecological destruction of the planet or systemic privation of life could be rectified through a reform of the system; instead, a wholesale transformation is needed. 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.

In the end, I must say that this is a book that everyone who cares about justice should read. It is a book that should inform our reflections on ethics, life, suffering, and struggles for liberation, not to mention critical theory and Marxism, for decades to come. It should challenge the given philosophical landscape and force us to rethink previously unquestioned presuppositions. Furthermore, the *Ethics of Liberation* brings forth a challenge to the way we engage the world. With the urgency of Marx's eleventh thesis, this book calls philosophy to move beyond the confines of armchair interpretation towards an engagement and transformation of the world. It is my hope that many will continue to engage the challenge of this critical-material ethics.

NOTES

1. Eduardo Mendieta, "Review Essay: Ethics for an Age of Globalization and Exclusion: Enrique Dussel, Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de Globalización y de la Exclusión," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 25, no. 2 (1999): 118.
2. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: The Eclipse of the "Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995).
3. In Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; quoted in *ibid.*, 24–25.

4. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, eds. *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 60–64, 272–75.
5. This is a point where Levinas can also help strengthen the argument for our pre-originary responsibility towards the other, that they have food in their mouth before we do, but this approach diverges sharply from the evaluative capacity for life and instinctual corporeality, which would produce such an ethical relation to the other.
6. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 91.
7. Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. George Ciccariello-Maher (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 13.
8. It might be recalled here that the only time in which rebellion or escape from the contract with the sovereign is permitted in Hobbes is when the individual's life is threatened by the sovereign (even for just cause): for to sit by idly would be equivalent to suicide and this is an impermissible contradiction of life.
9. Yasmine Ryan, "The Tragic Life of a Street Vendor," Al Jazeera, last modified January 20, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html>.
10. The language of someone being "suicided" by society or by the system in which they live could also be an interesting choice here echoing Dussel's notion of collective suicide. In this case, we might say that these individuals who have extreme acts, sometimes even suicide, as their only recourse are not individually responsible for suicide (as an individual ethical failure) but rather that it is the community that is responsible and that has "suicided" them. Antonin Artaud makes a similar argument in "Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society," in *Artaud Anthology* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1965), 135–65.

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