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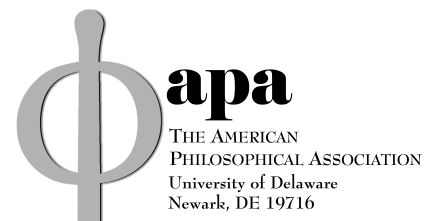
BOOK REVIEW

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Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy

Bernie J. Canteñas, Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

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The fall 2010 issue of the *Newsletter* contains Carlos Alberto Sanchez's "Against Values: Culture and Phenomenology in Jorge Portilla and Max Scheler." Sanchez's essay compares the "European crisis of value" with the "Mexican crisis of identity" through Max Scheler's work *Ressentiment* and Jorge Portilla's work *Fenomenologia del relajo*. Sanchez argues that it is convenient to contextualize Portilla's analysis within the existential phenomenological tradition because it places Portilla's philosophical method and examination within a well-known tradition, providing an important background for understanding his philosophy. At the same time, it allows us to draw important differences between Portilla's and Scheler's thinking, highlighting the significant historical and cultural differences within which the philosophical reflection arises. *Relajo* is an attitude of spontaneous, chaotic "goofing off" that suspends seriousness and interrupts the order of caring and valuing. However, Sanchez challenges Portilla's interpretation and proposes a more transcending interpretation of *relajo*. Sanchez writes: "I want to propose that *relajo* can be construed in a positive light as an act of defiance before the colonial legacy and axiological imperialism which the legacy instituted." His provocative suggestion is that, perhaps, *relajo* is not a purely negative disposition and a will to nothing, or an attitude that absolves all commitment to values; rather, it is a form of resistance and defiance of Eurocentric paradigms of rationality, a necessary attitude for anti-Western liberation.

Next, in "Philosophy Beyond Pernicious Knowledge, from a Latin American Perspective," Alejandro A. Vallega argues that Western thought has developed certain hegemonic views of what is to count as authentic philosophical thought. Vallega argues that the inherent exclusivist view of Western philosophy is directly connected to colonialism and is antithetical to a more profound and open conception of philosophical thinking. Vallega contends that we can go beyond the Western tradition and "coloniality" of power by radicalizing Enrique Dussel's insights of thinking out of "total exteriority." Vallega calls for a "broadening of the history of philosophy" to include the "radical peripheries" of thought and the vantage of "total exteriority."

The third article is Nythamar de Oliveira's "Towards a Phenomenology of Liberation: A Critical Theory of Race and the Fate of Democracy in Latin America." De Oliveira argues that what is required for successful egalitarian democracies to take root in Latin America is a recasting of Liberation Philosophy that takes seriously the social phenomena of racism and race relations, or what de Oliveira calls "a new way of doing social

phenomenology." De Oliveira's thesis is developed in three parts: (1) Philosophy of Race, (2) Liberation Philosophy, and (3) Critical Theory. According to de Oliveira, this new social phenomenology will avoid the "objectivist claims of Marxism" and "subjectivist 'representations' of postcolonial and cultural studies." De Oliveira adopts a "weak social constructionist" conception of race. He understands that any account of race in Latin America will be intertwined with political and social psychology, and his philosophy of race intends to deconstruct racial democracy myths or scientific and historical conceptions of race, and Eurocentric myths of liberation such as democracy, liberalism, and socialism. De Oliveira concurs with Ofelia Schutte's critique of Dussel's "totalizing, dualistic approach to the task of liberation," and he embraces Schutte's critical theory of liberation because it encompasses, at its core, a conception of cultural identity. He sets forth a program of what a phenomenological philosophy of liberation that takes race into account would entail.

This issue concludes with a review by Grant J. Silva of *Latin American Philosophical Thought, from the Caribbean to the "Latino" [1300-2000]: History, Currents, Themes, Philosophers*, edited by Dussel, Mendieta, and Bohóroquez.

ARTICLES

Against Values: Culture and Phenomenology in Jorge Portilla and Max Scheler

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1. Introduction

The many crises to which European philosophers have responded over the last one hundred years have been crises of value. While philosophers such as Husserl and Heidegger, Sartre and Levinas, have understood the crisis as one of foundations, their lack, or their concealment, these foundations are themselves constituted by values, namely, the value of science (Husserl), or the value of the *question* of being (Heidegger), the value of engagement (Sartre), or the value of respect (Levinas). The Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea suggested some decades ago that if there is a European crisis there will be a Latin American crisis, a burden rooted in the colonial heritage and the post-colonial dependency. In Latin America, but especially in Mexico, the European crisis of value has manifested itself as a crisis of identity. The question here is not necessarily a question of foundations, but a question about what values, if any, constitute a post-colonial subjectivity that can properly call itself "Mexican." In the 1940s and 1950s, Zea,

along with several other Mexican philosophers, ventured a phenomenologically validated list of values that *could possibly* constitute the Mexican subject—they called this constitution the “being” of “lo mexicano.” One of these Mexican theorists, Jorge Portilla, went further and proposed a *reason* for the Mexican crisis of identity, of values, and of *being*. Half a century earlier, the German philosopher Max Scheler proposed similar reasons for the German/European crisis of foundations; he called it *ressentiment*.

What follows deals with Scheler’s phenomenology of *ressentiment* and with what I consider a *Mexican response* to Scheler’s very German analysis by the Mexican existential phenomenologist Portilla—treatments which appear in Scheler’s iconic work *Ressentiment* and Portilla’s intriguing, but generally unknown, *Fenomenología del relajo* (hereafter *Fenomenología*).¹

The goal is to explore Portilla’s phenomenology of *relajo* and its relations of sameness and difference with Scheler’s phenomenology of *ressentiment*. In the process I hope to highlight the extent to which Portilla’s philosophy remains within the existential phenomenological tradition of Edmund Husserl and Scheler, and, at the same time, how this philosophy is *other* to that tradition—we will see, for instance, how Portilla appropriates Husserl’s method to treat of a Schelerian theme, but brings to his own analysis a sense of historical urgency missing in both. In the end, I argue that Portilla’s philosophy (i) represents the ultimate encroachment of the existential phenomenological tradition in Mexico, and, perhaps, Latin America, and (ii) its most significant interruption—an interruption, however, limited by a characteristic hesitation endemic to the *mestizo* philosopher when confronted with the dilemma of breaking from the appropriated tradition or remaining loyal to the encroachment.

2. Phenomenological Bloodlines

The blood runs thick in twentieth-century phenomenology.² Thus, while neither of the works to be discussed explicitly proclaims an allegiance to any particular school, it is important to recognize that both Scheler’s and Portilla’s accounts are firmly nestled in the phenomenological tradition, one that considers human life as value-centered or value-oriented. The value-orientedness of life, so says this tradition, is due to the fact that consciousness is intentionally directed to or through the valuable, or the significant. Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological observations on the structures of consciousness show that all conscious acts experience the world through value-clusters, or “noemata.” Scholars disagree on whether Husserl’s concept of noema is one which mediates our interaction with the world or whether noemata are experienced directly.³ Do we experience a tree *through* value-clusters, e.g., do green, pleasing, cool, leafy, etc., mediate our experience of a tree, or do we experience the tree *as* a value-cluster, where a tree *just is* green, pleasing, cool, leafy, etc.? Whatever the *real* philosophical story turns out to be, Husserl makes one thing clear: experience is valuable—human experience is the experience of value in some way (as a medium) or another (directly).

The suggestion here is that human life is saturated with value. Nevertheless, in spite of this saturation, human beings tend to *seek* or *prefer* values which *stand out* in the realm of experience. These stand-outs are usually values which orient one’s life in specific ways, thus values which stand out among other values will be ones related to particular life-projects or those which constitute one’s social identity. Because of their personal specificity, life-orienting values have a great deal of emotive weight. Subjects are thus intimately attached to values. Ultimately, the full realization of these life-orienting or identity-defining values corresponds to moments of personal

individuation and self-assertion, of community building, solidarity, and world-constitution.

But these values are fragile. And so is one’s attachment to them. A simple subjective act of value negation can destabilize life-orienting values and one’s attachment to them in significant ways—not to mention significant historical acts which not only destabilize but *destroy* values. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, the most common form of value destabilization, of de-valuing or value-inversion is *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* brings about an inversion of values whereby “higher” values are supplanted by lesser, or “slave,” values. *Ressentiment* subjects desire the destruction of values which orient a higher, “nobler,” kind of life. A culture in which this type of destruction and substitution is common, where life-orienting values are displaced by lesser or *life-denying* values is a *ressentiment* culture, and, Nietzsche says, this is a slavish and sick culture.⁴

Max Scheler’s phenomenology of *ressentiment* continues the Nietzschean analysis of this phenomenon which doesn’t only destroy values, but, Nietzsche says, is “creative and gives birth to values.”⁵ Scheler, however, does not follow Nietzsche’s socio-historical analysis of *ressentiment* into a devastating critique of culture or religion. Rather, Scheler pauses with *ressentiment*, breaking it down to its component structures to those emotive forces which make it possible. From this analysis, Scheler moves on to a consideration of those sectors of European society that dwell in this attitude, transitioning afterward to a prescription for its overcoming, what Scheler calls “resignation.”⁶

Jorge Portilla’s *Fenomenología del relajo* is Husserlian in method but Schelerian in concern. It is perhaps the best example of the existential phenomenological encroachment or *intervention* in the Latin American world. I call it an “intervention” because in true colonial fashion it forces itself onto the Latin American scene and, in uncharacteristically pragmatic fashion, promises to unconceal the inner-life of subjects despite their historical or political marginality—it promises an unprejudiced interrogation. At a time when neo-Kantianism, neo-Thomism, and positivism seem to have exhausted the patience of the Latin American for philosophy itself, phenomenology *intervenes* and reveals new realms of conversation and analysis previously occupied by the totalizing forces of what Richard Rorty has called the “universalist grandeur” of Western metaphysics. In Mexico, the promise of phenomenology is not any less grandiose. But it is grandiose in a different direction: it promises an eidetic understanding of the particular, of the native, of the Mexican.

Unapologetically situating himself within a tradition that includes Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler, Portilla appropriates the intervention and develops a rigorous analysis of Mexican subjectivity and culture. He focuses on a theme reminiscent of Scheler’s analysis of *ressentiment*, what he calls “relajo.” His own analysis will be situated in the history and culture of Mexico, and will not tend toward *universalist* grandeur or concern. In this way, Portilla inserts himself into the phenomenological tradition by producing a very non-European analysis of what he thinks is a very non-European crisis. As we will see, like *ressentiment*, *relajo* is a disruptive attitude toward moral and non-moral values which has cultural, historical, and social force, but, unlike *ressentiment*, it is revealed as a phenomenon which is situated in that culture, history, and society wherein it is revealed—as such, it is *other* to *ressentiment*.

3. Ressentiment

It is Nietzsche who first problematizes *ressentiment*. In several texts, but particularly in *The Genealogy of Morals*, *ressentiment*, spelled in its French form to preserve intonations of hatred and

rancor, becomes thematic. Nietzsche charges the phenomenon of *ressentiment* with instigating the slave revolt of morality by becoming a “creative” source of values. Of course, the values that it births are lowly, weak values which deny instinct and nobility; *ressentiment* says “No” to higher, nobler, and powerful values. Nietzsche writes: “This inversion of the value-positing eye—this need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is the essence of *ressentiment*.”⁷ For our purposes, it suffices to say that *ressentiment*, for Nietzsche, is an expression of weakness, impotence, and self-hatred manifested as a disruption or an undermining of those values representative of vital forces, of powerful wills, and of master virtues.

Following Nietzsche, Max Scheler picks up the theme of *ressentiment* a few decades later, this time as root cause of the European crisis of values. Scheler’s phenomenology, sometimes referred to as *subliminal phenomenology*, because, as Manfred Frings puts it, “it emphasizes the emotive aspects of consciousness or the subliminal ‘reasons’ of the heart,”⁸ differs from Husserlian, or pure phenomenology, in that the scope of philosophical intuition is extended far beyond sensible and categorical givenness.⁹ This means that attitudes and manifestations of emotion, like hatred or *ressentiment*, can also be intuited and grasped.¹⁰ In Scheler’s analysis, *ressentiment* is treated as the ultimate expression of human divisiveness and self-hatred. According to Scheler, this suggests that Nietzsche was wrong in at least one important respect: the slave revolt of morality is not *essentially* religious, as those overcome with *ressentiment* must only be impotent in the presence of power, regardless of their *a/theism*.

Scheler describes *ressentiment*’s complex constitution with a surprisingly simple formula, one in which all the elements that make up *ressentiment* are given simultaneously and immediately in its manifestation. This is *ressentiment*’s form:

A is affirmed, valued, and praised not for its own intrinsic quality, but with the un verbalized intention of denying, devaluing, and denigrating B. A is “played off” against B.¹¹

Ressentiment’s intentional or emotive structure is thus one where a particular instance of conscious attention is directed away from a value or value horizon in an act of disruption or deference that re-directs *another’s attention* to a different, deferred, or illusory value or value horizon, simultaneously depleting the significance of both the original value and the attentive gaze itself (or the subject’s “attachment”).¹²

The end result of *ressentiment*’s presence in individual subjects is a social *crisis of value*. This crisis, proliferated by *ressentiment*-individuals, is seen as “the values themselves are inverted: those values which are positive to any normal feeling become negative.”¹³ Scheler’s historical situatedness becomes apparent: the *crisis* of European humanity is maintained by the “man of *ressentiment*” who

cannot justify or even understand his own existence and sense of life in terms of positive values such as power, health, beauty, freedom, and independence. Weakness, fear, anxiety, and a slavish disposition prevent him from obtaining them.¹⁴

Ultimately, Scheler’s *subliminal phenomenological* accounts for an aspect of the European condition in the wake of modernity’s triumphs. There, its “form” can be seen everywhere: for instance, patriotism is valued not for its own sake but in order to devalue difference, ending with a playing off of love for country against fidelity to tradition and custom. Frings illustrates the form of *ressentiment* with Aesop’s fable of the Fox and the Grapes. The Fox is unable to reach the sweetest

grapes, so she values the most bitter in a *pre-reflective* effort to devalue sweet grapes. Socially, Scheler picks this out in his own, industrial, age: people value pleasure not because pleasurable things and experiences are intrinsically valuable, but in a habitual routine of devaluing the spiritual and the holy, which, in their hearts, they feel impotent in attaining.

4. Relajo

Mexican philosophy properly understood boasts of a few great thinkers worthy of inclusion in any and all philosophical histories. The better known of these, Leopoldo Zea, Jose Vasconcellos, Antonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, Samuel Ramos, and Luis Villoro have received their fair share of attention in the United States over the last decades of the twentieth century, partly due to a concerted effort by a few philosophy professors in the U.S. academy who find it necessary to discombobulate the Eurocentric philosophical canon with *outsiders*. For reasons beyond the scope of the present paper, Jorge Portilla is not one of these *outsiders* to which attention has been paid. This is unfortunate, since Portilla is by far more *outside* than the rest—in fact, the rest find approval precisely because they don’t stray too far afield, keeping to themes in tune with the Western cannon. The reason for the lack of attention paid to Portilla has to do with his output, restricted as it is to a handful of essays and one book, *Fenomenología del relajo*. The *Fenomenología* is a study of that “mode of conduct” he calls *relajo*, which, like Scheler’s *ressentiment*, ensnares a *pueblo* in a crisis of values.

Relajo and *ressentiment* are different modalities of a similar attitude to human value—for this reason alone it is worthwhile to compare the two corresponding accounts. It might be objected that the significance of Portilla’s analysis could be judged on its own accord without the *need to compare* and contrast that thought with someone else’s. However, the fact that in his *choice of topic* Portilla’s phenomenology violates certain implicit tenets of phenomenology proper, it is necessary to situate him along with a more familiar outsider if we are to have an *opportunity* to appreciate his philosophical contributions—for instance, the opportunity to speak about Jorge Portilla at any one of the meetings of the APA requires that I contextualize his thought in a familiar setting. On this note, it is fruitful to consider “relajo” in the context of Max Scheler’s idea of *ressentiment* for three reasons: (i) it allows us to locate Portilla within a general phenomenological tradition, which helps with intelligibility—and perhaps comfort; (ii) it allows us to understand *relajo* as a form of value inversion, akin to *ressentiment*; and, perhaps most importantly, (iii) it allows us to *differentiate* Portilla’s *thinking* from Scheler’s in such a way as to draw attention to the cultural, historical, and *methodological* differences that separate them and their phenomenologies—particularly as it pertains to the final analysis of the role of value “defiance” (disruption, inversion, destruction, etc.) on the cultural and spiritual life of persons.

Portilla does not assimilate Scheler’s *subliminal phenomenology*. Rather, Portilla’s phenomenology emphasizes *method*, i.e., *epoche*, rational intuition, and accurate or legitimate description based on a clear, rational, *seeing* of what is given in subjective experience. Unlike Scheler’s *subliminal* approach, Portilla places the phenomenon of *relajo* within the realm of the noetic-noematic correlation which Husserl identifies with the intentional life of consciousness. In fact, Portilla writes, echoing Husserl:

the “noema” of *relajo* is a value...the full noema [of *relajo*] is the thought “negated value,” “parenthesized value,” “neutralized value,”...etc. ...The noematic nucleus (value pure and simple) remains always invariant together with its essential appeal to my

freedom, but the aura of negation that unites with the nucleus so as to constitute the full noema retrospectively addresses the noema: “negation of value,” “comparative degradation of value,” etc., as mere noetic correlate and not as *psychological act*.¹⁵

With this account, Portilla methodologically aligns himself with Husserl for whom the only “source of justification” is the kind of intuitive givenness which deals with direct experience and according to which methodological suspension is key. But he also differentiates himself from those before him who in an effort to ground a Mexican philosophical tradition confused psychological facts for philosophical insights.¹⁶

In this manner, Portilla pursues the Mexican crisis of value in *relajo*’s phenomenological givenness. He finds that *relajo* gives itself as a mode of human behavior which Portilla claims to capture in a clear, and rational, intuition. It exhibits a *form* similar to *ressentiment*’s. Portilla deconstructs it into three distinct, yet simultaneous, *moments*:

In the unity of a single act we find: in the first place, a displacement of attention; in the second place, a position taking in which the subject situates himself in a disassociation [*desolidarizacion*] in respect to the value which is proposed to him; and, finally, in an action properly so called that consists in exterior manifestations of words and gestures, which constitute an invitation to others to participate in the disassociation.¹⁷

This “form,” of course, mirrors Scheler’s phenomenological account of *ressentiment*, where A is affirmed (position taking) while intending to devalue B (displacement of attention), and A is “played off” against B (the act of disassociation).¹⁸ The “form” of *relajo* can also be understood as an intentional relation, one exhibiting a “double intentionality”: “There is in *relajo* a double intentionality: it is constituted as much by my disassociation as by my intention to involve others in it, creating a common atmosphere of indifference in the face of value.”¹⁹ But is this double intentionality something which is given, like, say, the intuition of the color red? Ultimately, the *evidence* for the *form* of *relajo*, which is notably similar to *ressentiment*’s “form,” will be the action of this double intentionality upon *value*.

Portilla’s analysis of “*relajo*” shows it as simultaneously similar in *form* to *ressentiment* but as radically different in *content* (point ii and iii above). The difference in content comes down to *relajo*’s priority: “This process [of *relajo*] can...tend towards an acute feeling of failure as something irremediable and determined from outside and it can in this way open the *possibility* of *resentment* and every form of suicide.”²⁰ *Relajo* is prior to *ressentiment* in that it “opens” the way for it. In this way, *relajo* is more primordial, which, in Portilla’s phenomenology, means that it is more *familiar* and everyday. The everydayness of *relajo* means that, unlike *ressentiment*, it is located in the social realm, viz., it is much more of a *participatory* form of disruption than *ressentiment*, which has the character of a personal, individual, affliction. *Relajo*, on the other hand, spreads like fire through crowds and populations who will then *together* suffer its negations. Portilla summarizes his results thus:

Relajo can be defined as the suspension of seriousness in the presence of a value which is proposed, or proposes itself, to a group of people. This suspension is realized by a subject who tries to commit others to suspend, through repeated acts in which he/she expresses a rejection of the conduct required by the value. With that, the conduct regulated by the corresponding value is substituted by an atmosphere of disorder in which the realization of the value is

impossible. By extension, the real situation provoked by the described intentionality is likewise called “*relajo*”: the “accomplished” *relajo*, the state of things created by a subject who has realized his purpose of making impossible the incorporation of a value through acts that, without much clarity, we have called suspensive of seriousness.²¹

Portilla’s phenomenology of *relajo*, like Scheler’s, is at the same time a phenomenology of value.²² It shares a similar “form” with *ressentiment*. Thus, the *relajiento*, or person who brings about *relajo*, values inactivity and de-solidarity not because sloth and laziness is valuable, but, rather, in a pre-reflective, perhaps historically conditioned move, to devalue *seriousness*—i.e., the conscious adherence to established social, historical, political, values. Drunkenness is valued, not because drinking and being drunk are intrinsically valuable, but with the, perhaps unreflective, *intention* of devaluing sobriety. In the political and social arena, de-solidarity is valued not because separation and disengagement is valuable in and of itself, but with the intention of undermining the value of community and participation. In such cases, what is *given* as evidence of *relajo*’s presence is a dislocated value together with a communal effort to maintain the dislocation.

5. *Relajo*: Freedom and Negation

Of course, Portilla’s deconstruction of *relajo* can also be considered independently of Scheler’s *ressentiment*-analysis. But, in principle, it cannot be considered independently of the phenomenological tradition. According to readings of Portilla’s texts which do not adhere to this principle, readings which start and remain in what Husserl would call the “natural attitude,” *relajo* is carelessly translated, and thus characterized, as “goofing off.”²³ But although careless, this is, in fact, a *natural* characterization. In Mexican culture, *relajo* has to do with a particular kind of atmosphere created by the chaotic, easy-going, spontaneous, sometimes festive, always interruptive, yet seemingly purposeless behavior of people who are “just there” (to the question: *que haces?* The answer: *aqui, nada mas*). It is commonly used in the phrase “*echar relajo*”—what in Anglo culture is described as *throwing care to the wind*. But from the point of view of the *phenomenological* attitude, *relajo* reveals itself in a more sinister guise. Portilla describes the situation in the following way: “The sense of *relajo* is to frustrate the efficacy of a spontaneous response which accompanies the apprehension of value. *Relajo* suspends seriousness, that is, cancels the normal response to value, and thus, absolves me [*desligándome*] of a commitment to the value’s realization.”²⁴ Put differently, *relajo* is more than “throwing care to the wind,” it is a *throwing* meant to disturb the order of *caring*, a *throwing* which not merely absolves me of the commitment, but which absolves me of any possibility for caring, for valuing; the *wind* here does not simply carry my cares away, it sucks them into its funnels, negating caring itself in the process.

Let’s look at this description a bit closer. Two points are significant:

- (a) *relajo* “suspends seriousness,” and,
- (b) it “cancels the normal response to value.”

Regarding (a), Portilla says that seriousness is an “adherence to a value which has been placed on one’s liberty.”²⁵ So to suspend seriousness is to render seriousness ineffective, to put the value or values which determines it *out of play*. This requires a disruption of the adherence to that value regulating a situation by displacing the value, and redirecting the adherence to a non-value, or to nothingness, thereby disrupting seriousness itself. In this way, (b) the “*normal* response to value” is now *abnormal*, it involves devaluing, inverting, or disrupting a value which has

been “placed on one’s liberty.” The response is “abnormal,” of course, because it does not follow the premeditated instructions immanent to the valuable situation; the “normal” response would be to do what is *expected, instructed, or demanded* by the *status quo*, society, history, culture, colonial fear—each one heavy with “seriousness.”

The first point, (a), shows that if anything *relajo* is defiant—a defiance which becomes more interesting when we consider the place of “seriousness” itself in the history of modern thought. Kierkegaard, for instance, writes that “what edifies is seriousness,” referring to Anti-Climacus’s belief that what is contained in *The Sickness Onto Death* is *sincere* and well thought out, hence serious.²⁶ The well-thought-out standard of seriousness is what Portilla has in mind as the object of what *relajo* suspends; *relajo* suspends both the value placed on this standard and this standard *as* value. Behind this suspension is rooted a Nietzschean worry over the origins of the standard, over the standard’s *objectivity*. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: “they call it ‘taking the matter seriously’ when they work with this machine and want to think well. ...The lovely beast, man, seems to lose its good spirits every time it thinks well: it becomes ‘serious.’” In Portilla’s analysis, *relajo* is an offense to the “lovely beast” who “becomes serious.” This act is defiant against the purported *edification* of social rules and customs, inherited rules for progress, order, and civility; seriousness edifies, sure, it makes one think well, but *relajo* defies these virtues as impositions “placed on one’s liberty” by the “machines” of institutional government, colonialism, modernity, the U.S., Europe, etc.

Consequently, *relajo* can be construed as an act of *resistance* against value when value is thought to be an imposed *obligation to respond*. Portilla emphasizes the demanding nature of value:

All meaning, as it is apprehended, appears saturated with an aura of exigencies or demands, endowed with a certain weight, a certain gravity that carries it from its pure ideality toward the world of the real. Value solicits its realization. The simple apprehension of value is tied to the value of that demand, of that call for its own realization in the world; and to this demand, which appears by the objective aspect of the experiences of value, corresponds, on the part of the subject, an act, a movement that is like a “yes,” as an affirmative response. The first sketch of what reflectively apprehended we call “duty.”²⁸

Thought of in this way, value is one more restriction on one’s liberty; it’s one more imposition. But it is the most pervasive imposition if life indeed is saturated with value. Value solicits itself and is *realized* when the solicitation is heeded, when one acts according to its exigencies. The subject’s “yes” is thus both an affirmation of the value and obedience to its call. Portilla describes this “yes,” however, as a burdensome affirmation, as a yes which is *required* by something outside the subject. In other words, it appears that the “yes” demanded by value forces itself onto subjects through hegemonic processes immanent in the social sphere, as a universalized affirmation to the value—the “yes” justifies the value’s existence in that social sphere. Consequently, any show of resistance to this *duty* is an act of defiance—however simple or rarefied that defiance turns out to be. *Relajo* gives itself as the defiance of that duty in the form of a displacement of attention away from obligation and to non-binding disruption and chaos—it gives itself as a negation within freedom.

And it is precisely freedom, along with the fragility of value, which guarantees the possibility of the crisis which Portilla

locates in Mexico. Within freedom, Portilla says, “one can refuse to follow the fragile suggestions of value.”²⁹ This refusal takes the form of a suspension of value, a displacement of attention, or a negation of a subject’s intentional relation to the value, where the “negation is not a direct negation of *value*, but rather of the essential link [*vinculo esencial*] that unites the subject with the value.”³⁰ Breaking the essential link that unites the subject with the value is the accomplishment of the refusal to obey its fragile suggestions. Value’s fragility, however, is manifested in the ease in which its call of duty can be resisted in communal settings, e.g., in a crowded and serious lecture hall which breaks out into laughter and chaos at the sound of a “weird” noise or an inappropriate comment. Whatever value holds the scene together easily gives way. Portilla illustrates the process of breaking down fragile values as a process of repetition:

For instance, one joke that interrupts the discourse of an orator is not enough to transform the interruption into *relajo*. It is necessary that the interruption, which suspends seriousness, is reiterated indefinitely, whether or not the agent achieves an interruption. It is necessary that the interruptive word or gesture be repeated continuously until the vertigo of complicity in negation [*complicidad en la negación*] overtakes the group—which forms the most paradoxical of communities: the community of the non-communicators, as the negative ground which makes impossible or useless the activities of the agent of value.³¹

This is another reason why *relajo* is not like Scheler’s *ressentiment*, since *ressentiment* seems to poison individuals in the quiet of their *cogito*, while *relajo* plays itself out in the sphere of the *mit-Sein*. Portilla puts it thus:

Relajo in solitude is unthinkable or, better yet, unimaginable. Following the line of thought suggested by the expression “echar *relajo*” [“to let go in *relajo*”], one could say that in solitude there is no “place” in which to let it go. The existential space where *relajo* is “let go” is limited by the community of those who are present.³²

As a social spectacle, *relajo* draws others into its “play.” Again the “form” of *ressentiment* is here mirrored in *relajo*’s “double intentionality”: simultaneously devaluing A for the sake of B and playing A against B.

But just as it *destroys* a group’s adherence to *what must be done* via a repetitive interruption, it simultaneously *creates* the *semblance* of liberation and rationality. This semblance is a dangerous compliment of *relajo*, as it has the power to *convince* those who fall “victim” to *relajo* that established values are not sacrosanct, especially the values of the ruling classes, the powerful, or the divine. But it is merely this: a convincing semblance. It is convincing due to its context: the Mexican context—a context where a genealogy of values might reveal different degrees of institutional coercion at the root of each value. As a semblance, however, *relajo* is confused with an organized and rational form of resistance which subjects *freely* take up to spite their oppressors. On the contrary, essential to *relajo* is its disorganized, and spontaneous, appearance. Value dislocations, inversions, and interruptions are done as though from an internalized *impulse* to defy—an impulse corresponding perhaps to an internalized recognition of one’s oppression. Portilla writes that “none of this is about a deliberated, voluntary or reflexive attitude or an action...in the very instance in which it is put into action, it would have completely abandoned the reflexive attitude.”³³ All of this points to *relajo*’s illusory nature, as less than a rational, organized, *free* act of liberation, it is non-rational, chaotic, and non-binding

act.³⁴ The dislocation of attention is an act which takes place immediately, at the instant of derision or expressed negativity, and not an act in which one judiciously and rationally re-focuses one's attention on a new value so as to devalue or displace. This idea we find in Nietzsche and Scheler, and it suggests that this sort of value perception is somehow historically conditioned by a particular *claim of injury* which has silently found its way into the human heart and infected its reasons.³⁵ In Portilla's case, this might just be the case.

6. Formalism and Chaos

We can thus see some significant similarities between *relajo* and *ressentiment*. Given Scheler's enormous influence in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century, one has to suspect that these similarities are not accidental.³⁶ Ultimately, however, the relevant similarity between *relajo* and *ressentiment* seems to be the displacement of value essential to both. Beyond this, we begin to observe some important differences. For instance, *ressentiment*, while capable of overrunning an entire culture, overruns that culture by overrunning individuals; *relajo*, while instigated by individuals (i.e., *relajientos*) takes over communities. *Ressentiment* is personal; *relajo* is public. *Ressentiment* usually manifests itself in acts of comparison carried out by the "ressentiment man" from the depths of interiority; *relajo* usually manifests itself in acts of interruption and disruption carried out by the "relajiento" from outside the self.

The retreat into self of the "ressentiment man" is a non-defiance. Scheler writes: "Therefore he comes to feel that 'all this is in vain anyway' and that salvation lies in the opposite phenomena: poverty, suffering, illness, and death."³⁷ Scheler's *ressentiment man* has surrendered to his weakness and now waits to be saved by those values which have replaced those of strength, virility, and adventure. "The *ressentiment*-laden man, who in his insufficiency is oppressed, tormented, and frightened by the negative judgment on his existence which flows from an *objective* hierarchy of values—and who is secretly aware of the arbitrary or distorted character of his own valuations—'transvalues' the idea of value itself by *denying* the existence of such an objective hierarchy [of values]."³⁸ In other words, *ressentiment man* is twice tormented: by the objectivity of the values he tries to negate and by the realization that they are, in fact, negated only in so far as he continues to negate them. Portilla's *relajiento*, or "man of *relajo*," does not suffer from this torment. Portilla says that "The man of *relajo* responds to nothing, risks nothing, he is, simply, a good-humored witness to the banality of life."³⁹

The torment of the *ressentiment man* and the "good humor" of the *relajiento* motivate the different processes of overcoming which Scheler and Portilla *prescribe*. For Portilla, the feeling of impotence, the good-humor of the witness to banality, the recognition of the absence of power, and the will to nothingness—a will nurtured by colonialism and centuries of oppression and value-imperialism—can be overcome if these are made thematic and exposed, what we can call Portilla's "pragmatic phenomenology." The aim of this pragmatic approach is to highlight and *put to use* that impulse to resist which is essential to *relajo* itself, but which *relajo* perverts in acts of disassociation, dislocation, derision, and nihilism. Portilla thinks that owning up to that impulse to resist is an owning up to the past, to history, and to responsibility. He says, "To the extent that I learn to count on [my shortcomings], that is to the extent that I make them clearly mine, I free myself from them. They trip me and torment me only if I refuse to integrate them in my comportment just as they are; if I refuse to count on them."⁴⁰

Scheler's approach to overcoming *ressentiment* is not rooted in the pragmatism of autognosis. Instead, Scheler thinks

that we can transcend the evils of *ressentiment* in an act of *letting go*. Scheler calls it "resignation":

The act of resignation proves that a thing can be appreciated even when it lies beyond one's reach. If the awareness of our limitations begins to limit or to dim our *value* consciousness as well...then we have already started the movement of devaluation which will end with the defamation of the world and all its values. Only a timely act of resignation can deliver us from this tendency toward self-delusion.⁴¹

Of course, it is one thing to achieve individual liberation through resignation; it is quite another to achieve cultural, social, and political liberation through the same. Perhaps Portilla realizes that it is resignation before the power of colonialism, before the demands of the West, before the allure of the North, before the *idea* of America, which has sown the *seeds of resentment*, seeds which sprout in overt acts of *relajo*. While *relajo* can be an act of *letting go* of the duty to what is valued, to seriousness and obligations, it is *not* an act of resignation; the inversion of value which takes place in "dislocation" and "disassociation" is an act of resistance which, as far as I understand it, is rooted in a certain internalization of marginality and oppression.⁴²

7. Flinching at the Post-Colonial

I want to propose that *relajo* can be construed in a positive light as an act of defiance before the colonial legacy and the axiological imperialism which that legacy instituted. Portilla, it turns out, disagrees. He writes: "*relajo*, the conduct of dissidents, can be the expression of a will to self-destruction."⁴³

This last point is important as it draws a thick demarcating line between the two thinkers I've been considering and as well as between Portilla's own program. Portilla calls *relajo* the "conduct of dissidents" in the same breath that he calls it "an expression of a will to self-destruction." We should presume from this that dissidence is not an affirmative position as it is tied to a will to death. But while dissidence may at times be intrinsic to a will to death, it is not always negative. Dissidence, after all, can be a catalyst to political and social action. That *relajo* is both of these things suggests a tension of which perhaps Portilla was not aware—one nestled deep in his own *mestizaje*. That is, Portilla is torn between, on the one hand, an affirmation of *relajo* as a form of resistance in the face of the oppression and axiological imperialism and, on the other, a denial of *relajo* as a will to nothingness before the demands of Western rationality.

We are brought to a point in which we must recognize a certain *difference* between Portilla and the tradition in which he situates himself. For instance, we have to recall that Scheler's axiology is a response to the *crisis of European culture* to which most European thinkers were responding to at the time, e.g., Oswald Spengler, Jose Ortega y Gasset, Edmund Husserl, to name but a few. It would be a mistake to say that Portilla was, either when he emerges as a recognizable figure in Mexican thought in the mid-1940s or when he wrote his *Phenomenology of relajo* (published posthumously in 1966), responding to a European crisis. What Portilla is responding to, what he is addressing, is a Mexican problem. He writes: "[This work is] an attempt to bring to consciousness an aspect of Mexican morality of which I do not intend to say the last word."⁴⁴ This means that Portilla's *Fenomenología* aims to draw attention to a Latin American crisis, one represented by the proliferation of *relajo* as an expression of a *historical difference*, i.e., that *relajo* itself is a response to a general condition of "seriousness" toward values which is historical, which means that it is rooted in centuries of colonialism, oppression, and value-imperialism. To break the bonds of seriousness is to break the bonds of an

oppressive system of values which are, of historical necessity, European. Seen in this way, *relajo* is thus truly the “conduct of dissidents”!

And this is my point. The dissidents who in *relajo* manifest a will to nothingness are trapped in a dialectic of power which they are impotent in overcoming. And, while *relajo* is not, as Portilla suggests, the means through which Mexicans will throw off the yoke that binds them to their colonial past and move forward into a post-colonial utopia, I nonetheless see it as an expression of power, a valuation which inverts what is other to the status quo. At the same time, it is an expression of a difference characterized as an insufficiency which colonialism has nurtured through the imposition of values and value hierarchies representing the seriousness of imperialism and the power of coloniality; values of sobriety and order and progress—serious values inherited from colonialism and kept alive today as a power that itself colonizes.

Ultimately, the significant difference between *ressentiment* and *relajo* is rooted in a historical contingency. For Scheler, *ressentiment* is the expression of an impotent will, one that *envies* master values and strong dispositions; for Portilla, *relajo*, while also an expression of impotence, is at the same time an expression of power, the power to defy and suspend the seriousness of culture, a tradition, or a project. This power to resist totalization flows, I’d like to suggest, in a will that longs to defy and deride values it has internalized as oppressive, and demeaning; in Mexico, or elsewhere on the fringes of modernity, these would be the colonial values which represent an oppressor who, through a history of violence and paternalism, has nurtured a culture of death and a will to nothingness, an oppressor, indeed, unlike the “master” personalities Nietzsche’s *ressentiment* man opposes.⁴⁵

It so appears that *relajo*—as an act of suspension and value inversion—is a manifestation of human freedom; it appears in the realm of what the human being *can do*. As something within the “sphere of freedom,” the consequences of *relajo* must be evaluated in accordance with moral standards which evaluate all acts—one must be held responsible for *relajo*. What exactly is one responsible for? If *relajo* is a manifestation of a will to nothing, then the answer is straightforward: nothing. Consequently, Portilla, “the humanist,” is not a fan of *relajo*, since this attitude signals the end of responsibility for value. He writes: “In effect, a degradation of value is something threatening. The act of value-degradation opens the horizon for a possible universal degradation of all values and, moreover, of an absolute extinction of value.”⁴⁶ The insinuation here is that a culture in which there is a “universal degradation of all values” will be a value-less culture. Indeed, a culture in which the possibility exists for the “absolute extinction of value” will be much worse than a *ressentiment* culture, in both Nietzsche’s and Scheler’s sense.

The normative scrutiny to which Portilla subjects *relajo* is ultimately mired in the specifically Western prejudice that seriousness is the way to progress. In the end, Portilla contrasts *relajo* to irony via an appeal to Socrates, who he describes as one who labored for truth from the depths of seriousness and responsibility. He goes on to conclude that because Socrates’ negations were ironic and not meant to suspend seriousness, then *relajo* “is a negation which founds a pseudo-freedom which is purely negative, and furthermore, infertile.”⁴⁷ The charge of infertility is consistent with the view that *relajo*, like *ressentiment*, is an expression of a will to nothingness. But this same charge also holds a more stubborn commitment, namely, that the progress of a people is tied to a certain view of rationality and responsibility which is particularly *Eurocentric*. Following the Socratic example, to be serious is

to be responsible. But perhaps Portilla missed Ortega’s remark that “We owe innumerable things to the Greeks, but they have put chains on us too.”⁴⁸ On the cusp of breaking through the Western paradigm and to an idea which we could call “post-colonial,” Portilla flinched at the thought that perhaps *relajo* was a particularly anti-Western form of liberation—a *reaction* to colonial seriousness. He opted for the traditional prejudice favoring the wisdom of Western rationality. But perhaps I’m just reading too much into his hesitation. Nevertheless, if we attend just to the phenomenological *givenness* of *relajo*, in which this behavior is given *as* defiance and resistance, then we see that Portilla does fail to see that the imputation that *relajo* breeds infertility and irresponsibly is itself an *extra thought*, perhaps one arising from commitments to literary and philosophical values to which he feels himself responsible. My suggestion, of course, is that Portilla’s hesitancy might also indicate a more seductive suggestion, namely, that *relajo* as an act of resistance and defiance is necessary in order to usher in an age of beyond seriousness, one in which options are always open and non-conformity is the norm.

Endnotes

1. This unknowability is the same in the U.S. as it is in Mexico for reasons beyond the scope of this paper. I will also forgo a more detailed introduction to Portilla’s person and philosophy. I refer the reader to my “The Phenomenology of Jorge Portilla: *Relajo*, *Gelassenheit*, and *Liberation*” (this *Newsletter*, Vol. 06., No. 2), “Heidegger in Mexico: Emilio Uranga’s Ontological Hermeneutics” (*Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 40, No. 4 [2008]), and “The Demands of a Mexican Philosophy of History” (*Dissidences: Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism*, Vol. 5 [2008]).
2. For this reason, it could be the most deceptively imperialistic philosophical school since positivism.
3. See more on this discussion in Dagfin Follesdal, “Husserl’s Notion of Noema,” *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. LXVI, No. 20 (1969): 680-87; Jaakko Hintikka, “The Phenomenological Dimension,” *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, eds. Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 78-105; John Drummond, “Phenomenology and the Foundationalism Debate,” *Reason Papers*, Vol. 16 (1991): 45-71.
4. Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1989).
5. *The Genealogy of Morals*, p. 36.
6. It is the prescriptive tendency in Scheler’s phenomenological approach to culture which attracted Mexican philosophers during the first half of the twentieth century. Scheler was especially influential in the philosophers of the previous generation, like Alfonso Reyes and Samuel Ramos. For a fragmentary account of this influence, see Martin S. Stabb, *In Quest of Identity: Patterns in the Spanish American Essay of Ideas, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967). What makes Scheler appealing is that, unlike Husserl’s “pure” phenomenology, or even Heidegger’s ontology, his work is not afraid of addressing those problems of existence usually reserved for “philosophical anthropology” (as Heidegger calls Scheler’s philosophy in *Being and Time*). Scheler’s *existential* phenomenology delves into individual life, culture, and other historically determinate phenomena. Ultimately, the attraction has to do with his idea that phenomenology is not a method, but a perspective, and if philosophers on the margins of world history have anything, it is perspective (cf. Manfred Frings, *The Mind of Max Scheler* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997). Scheler, in fact, turns out to be a pivotal figure in the history of what is called “Latin American philosophy”—or, what the purists would call philosophy *in* Latin America.
7. *Genealogy of Morals*, §10, pp. 36-37.
8. *Mind of Max Scheler*, p. 182.

9. As Frings explains: “All perception, willing, and thinking are borne by the emotive experience of values.” *Mind of Max Scheler*, p. 189.
10. As a particularly emotive phenomenon, *ressentiment* could not be subjected to phenomenological scrutiny by the phenomenological purists, say, Husserl, who would consider *ressentiment* a type of “feeling,” and as such, unable to give the sort of evidence required for proper phenomenological insight. But given the nature of Scheler’s phenomenology, there’s ample room for such subjection and analysis.
11. Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), p. 42.
12. It is important to keep in mind that emotive acts are cognitive acts. Scheler says, “‘feeling’ or ‘preferring’ a value is essentially an act of cognition.” In *Ressentiment*, p. 35.
13. *Ressentiment*, p. 48.
14. *Ressentiment*, p. 48.
15. Jorge Portilla. *Fenomenología del Relajo* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984), 22n2.
16. The revered Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos (1897-1959), whose *magnum opus Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* appears in 1934, argues that Mexican existence can be defined by a “complex of inferiority” which belongs particularly to Mexicans. “If the disproportion which exists between what the Mexican wants to do and what he can do is too great, he will undoubtedly fail and immediately his spirit will be overcome by pessimism. Reflecting on his situation, without acknowledging his true error, he will imagine that he is incapable; from that moment on he will lose his self confidence. In sum: the sense of inferiority will germinate in his soul.” In Samuel Ramos, *Perfil del hombre y cultura en México*, 10ma Edición (based on the 3rd edition) (México: Espasa Calpe Mexicana, S.A. 1982), p. 12. Ramos blames this germinating sense of inferiority on the historical circumstances which have clearly disadvantaged Mexicans to the benefit of Western progress. The virtues of this work are too many to name in a footnote, but it is important to keep in mind that contemporaries of Ramos found his analysis overly psychological, pedantic, and, most seriously, damning to the Mexican psyche. While also influenced by Scheler’s philosophy, this work is meant to psychoanalyze the Mexican character so as to “reform” it (p. 10). Other works of or after this time meant to do the same, i.e., reform Mexican culture (Portilla included), but they aim to do this through a strictly philosophical approach (as apposed to a psychological one). Ramos was an influential teacher during the time Portilla began work on *Fenomenología*, so it is probable that the latter had Ramos’ most obvious oversight firmly in mind.
17. *Relajo*, p. 19.
18. *Op. cit.*, *Ressentiment*, p. 42.
19. *Relajo*, p. 23.
20. *Relajo*, p. 41.
21. *Relajo*, pp. 25-26.
22. There are, of course, other obvious differences between Scheler’s and Portilla’s accounts. Most obvious are differences between them in regards to certain metaphysical commitments. Primary among these is their attitude toward value itself. Scheler is an objectivist about value, insisting that values and value hierarchies exist independently of human constitution; Portilla is *not* an objectivist about value, but neither is he a subjectivist, or an idealist. For Portilla, as with Sartre and Heidegger, for instance, values are encountered in our engagement with the world around us. Experience is the space of values, hence, the space for *relajo*. He writes: “it must be maintained that the descriptions here contained refer to the spontaneous attitude of the living consciousness, to the world of experience in general, without introducing any reference to a theory of value as such” (*Relajo*, p. 31). There is, of course, something subjectivist about this approach, however, as *context* and experience (or as Ortega y Gasset would say, *circumstance and vocation*), will ultimately condition the values one experiences and how. Of course, this idea is not original to Portilla, but it is important nonetheless in understanding the cultural origins of *relajo*. Modern Mexican values don’t reflect a slave morality, as in Nietzsche’s Europe, but rather a master morality—a colonial morality!
23. See Bradley A. Levinson, *We Are Equal: Student Culture and Identity at a Mexican Secondary School* (Duke University Press, 2001). This excellent account of trying to teach and organize students who would rather not learn or be organized, appeals to, and attempts to apply, Portilla’s concept of “relajo” to explain why this is the case. Because they are students, it is easy for Levinson to employ such a colloquial translation, since “relajo” in this case would seem to manifest itself in kids goofing off. What Levinson fails to recognize, however, is that “goofing off” does not capture the severity of the act of suspending the efficacy of values. I can goof off all day long without disturbing in the least the values which my community employs to navigate existence. More importantly, it does not seem to be the case that students who goof off in my courses are “liberating” themselves from the oppressiveness of the course syllabus. On the contrary, it would seem that they are allowing the requirements to oppress them further. Liberation would require an act which would unsettle the seriousness of my rules; when goofing off, all my students are doing is prolonging an event which they will have to deal with eventually, not attempting to avoid it altogether.
24. *Relajo*, p. 19.
25. *Relajo*, p. 18.
26. Søren Kierkegaard. *The Sickness Onto Death*, trans. Alistair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1989).
27. Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §327.
28. *Relajo*, p. 18.
29. *Relajo*, p. 82.
30. *Relajo*, p. 20.
31. *Relajo*, p. 24.
32. *Relajo*, p. 23.
33. *Relajo*, pp. 25-26.
34. Likewise with *ressentiment*: “[attending to something in *ressentiment*] signifies here,” Scheler writes, “simply the direction of intentionality toward an object and not an ‘effort of attention’ in the psychological sense.” In *Ressentiment*, p. 20.
35. If we identify *relajo* with *ressentiment*, as we could based strictly on their formal structure, we could say that Portilla’s version is closer to our common understanding of the term. P.F. Strawson’s “Freedom and Resentment,” to cite someone outside the tradition which concerns us here, gives us a good idea of what this “common” understanding would be. Strawson defines resentment as “a reaction to injury or indifference” (p. 15). Portilla’s idea of *relajo* can be understood as *subconscious*, historically conditioned, “reaction to injury or indifference.” See P.F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 15.
36. Comments regarding the importance of Scheler to Latin American philosophers during the first half of the twentieth century abound. I refer the reader Antonio Zirion Quijano’s *Historia de la fenomenología en México* (Morelia: Jintanjafora, 2004), which is littered with references to this influence.
37. *Ressentiment*, p. 48.
38. *Ressentiment*, p. 103.
39. *Relajo*, p. 39.
40. *Relajo*, p. 56.
41. *Ressentiment*, p. 35.
42. Emilio Uranga, a friend and contemporary of Portilla, pointed to “indifference” as the spiritual sickness of Mexicans. His positive prescription was likewise *not* resignation, but

“generosity.” He writes: “Indifference [*desgana*] is found in the antithesis of generosity. Generosity is, in effect, resolute commitment [*decidida elección*] to collaborate, a will to sympathize, to enter into auxiliary contact with things, with history, with social movements. ...If history contains an essential indeterminacy and if freedom can force the indeterminacy to a lower level of indeterminacy and a higher level of unequivocal precision, then not to insert [*injetar*] that additional force to this likelihood through a *plus* of determination and, further, to refuse to make history as far as that act concerns us, that is a lack of generosity, a lack of joy for the abundance that overflows which is precisely a lack of will [*desgana*]” (Uranga, *Análisis del ser del mexicano* (México: Porrúa y Obregon, 1952), 31).

43. *Relajo*, p. 34.
44. *Relajo*, p. 14.
45. Colonial power, that is, is not necessarily an expression of a will to power.
46. *Relajo*, p. 47.
47. *Relajo*, p. 71.
48. Jose Ortega y Gasset. *Man and People*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1962), 30.

Philosophy Beyond Pernicious Knowledge, from a Latin American Perspective

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Introduction

The modern Western philosophical tradition has played out its crisis in many ways in the last century, and each time on the name of philosophy as a whole and the destiny of humanity. At the same time, the articulation of this universal crisis repeats certain dispositions that situate philosophical thought within the way modern Western tradition understands the history and future of philosophical thought. As I show in the following pages, this crisis is sustained by a way of thinking that is ultimately pernicious to philosophy. This perniciousness results from dispositions that underlie the modern philosophical tradition. These dispositions repeat certain elements that link modern philosophy directly to the development of colonialism, a world system centered around Western modern rationalism, and the perpetuation of their underlying relations of power to date. The issue then is how to think beyond this pernicious knowledge. My concern here is not the Eurocentric set of issues and critiques of how the Western tradition may think beyond its ontological tradition. My question is how other philosophies from other histories and geopolitical spaces may find their distinct voices without repeating the modern dispositions and pernicious outcomes.¹ Given my intention I will not offer a detailed critique of Western thought but I will only outline some specific characteristics of modern philosophy viewed from a Latin American perspective. By radicalizing Enrique Dussel's insight that philosophy begins from the living call of the lives of those peoples in the periphery, from total exteriority, in the following discussion I offer an alternative way to understand philosophy today beyond the double bind between Western coloniality and its “other.” My discussion closes with some of the implications such relocation of philosophical thought may have for the development of distinct world philosophies, a development I believe can only enrich philosophy and bring it to fecund living grounds in new configurations.

The Uncovering of Coloniality

The last sixty years in Latin American thought are marked by rigorous self-criticism and transformation, a movement towards not only a sense of Latin American philosophy but to its powerful and creative role in the development of world philosophies beyond the Western hegemonic control of the idea of what philosophy has been and may mean today. In 1942, in light of the great crisis in European culture, Leopoldo Zea makes his famous call for a Latin American philosophy out of the cultural history of Latin America.² In 1968 the Peruvian Augusto Salazar Bondi responds to this project with a fiercely clear critique of the very possibility of having a Latin American philosophy.³ According to Salazar Bondi Latin American philosophy and its history are mostly the derivative and imitative of Western ideas; this results from Western social, political, military, economical, and cultural colonial domination over other nations.⁴ For Salazar Bondi Western cultural imperialism and its robust control over Latin America make any Latin American philosophy impossible. What is required then is a decolonizing of the Latin American mind. Salazar Bondi's critique stands at the beginning of what he and Enrique Dussel among others will call the Philosophy of Liberation.⁵ In his development of the Philosophy of Liberation the Mexican-Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel not only recognized the structures of dependency that seem to make a Latin American philosophy impossible, but he goes further and uncovers a new source for thinking about modernity and philosophy, namely, the underside of modernity. The lives of the oppressed and excluded, of the faceless and nameless peoples outside the Western center of power put into question modern philosophy and its claims to justice, equality, and human freedom. And it is from them, out of their peripheral existences, out of their total exteriority, that new ways of thinking would arise.⁶ But however radical this move may seem, as Santiago Castro-Gómez shows in *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* (*Critique of Latin American Reason*), Dussel's relocation of philosophy at the margins may be seen not as an overcoming of Western supremacy but as a “contra narrative to modernity,” one that still remained incapable of exposing and critically overcoming the very power relations that had constituted and that continued to sustain the relation between center and periphery. Dussel and philosophy of liberation had so clearly recognized.⁷ The criticism from Santiago Castro-Gómez serves to introduce another principal figure in the development of Latin American thought, Anibal Quijano, who develops a theory of “coloniality” (to be differentiated from colonialism). In a manner similar to Foucault's genealogy of Western modernity, but in his case beyond Foucault's Eurocentric concerns and orientation, Quijano traces power relations that develop during the colonization of the Americas.⁸ As he shows, European modernity is created during the colonization of the Americas through the development of certain racial-economic-epistemic structures of power, structures that will allow for the placement of the European *ego cogito* at the center of world order and that will be imported to the rest of the peripheral worlds during the development of European colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Quijano indicates in coining the term “coloniality,” this system of powers does not end with the end of colonialism, and it is not overcome by theories of post-coloniality, since the relationships and structures (racial, economic, and epistemic) remain operative and sustain the advent of liberalism and contemporary globalization. Quijano's exposure of this coloniality of power serves as the ground for further developments towards the decolonizing of the Latin American mind. In his book *La hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)* (*The Hybris of Zero Point: Science, Race, and Enlightenment in New Granada (1750-1816)*) the Colombian thinker Santiago

Castro-Gómez takes this work a step further. Castro-Gómez takes these insights and moves towards a decolonizing turn and the deconstruction of power structures by exposing the very way colonial cities were created precisely as the sites for the placement of subjects under such structures of power, and how subject and casts were developed that followed the objective scientific claim of an objective knowledge accessible to certain specific racial subjects.⁹ Two other developments worth mentioning take the thought of Quijano in powerful and significant direction for philosophy. Walter Mignolo develops the issue of the coloniality of power in terms of its epistemic sense as the coloniality of knowledge (only the modern Western white male thinks, or is capable of objective universal knowledge).¹⁰ Nelson Maldonado-Torres moves further and in resonance with Franz Fanon identifies a coloniality of being a coloniality in the very lives and compartments of Latin American-Caribbean peoples and other peoples outside the West who do not exist for themselves under the gaze of Western modern rationalist knowledge.¹¹

This long process towards the decolonizing of the Latin American mind leads to a curious misplacement of Latin American thought with respect to its direct implications for philosophy. Given the centrality of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, and the issues inherently at play such as race, political, economic, and military oppression, the work of these thinkers becomes acknowledged in such fields of study in North America and Europe as sociology, political philosophy, ethnic studies, and comparative literature. But their implications for philosophy remain almost completely unrecognized, with a few exceptions. Indeed, for most North American and European philosophical academies Latin American philosophy is still a second order field that has little to offer to contemporary dialogues: either by virtue of being seen as derivative of the primary Western sources, or by being seen as a matter of political and cultural studies. In the latter case it is the subject matter of coloniality that is reread into the tradition by assigning it already determined epistemic spaces, the spaces of political, economic, and sociological facts, which are differentiated from philosophical knowledge. In this case the turn towards the exteriority of the philosophical tradition is simply ignored since the phenomena remain defined according to the tradition as a matter other than what is fittingly philosophy. In contrast to this displacement of the philosophical sense of Latin American thought, in what follows I argue that Latin American thought is philosophy, in the sense that Latin American thinkers introduce the possibility of understanding philosophical thought as a thinking in radical exteriority. Thus, Latin American thought provides powerful and promising spaces for the unfolding of new ways of thinking and understanding philosophy and its future possibilities, well beyond the self-assigned centrality of the Western philosophies and towards the development of rich fields of world philosophies born in dialogues across all the Souths and underbellies of the “developed” world. But in light of the development of the various senses of coloniality one must first clearly recognize the elements in modern Western philosophy that repeat and perpetuate what I would call a coloniality of thought.

The Coloniality of Thought: Modern Philosophy as Pernicious Knowledge

In light of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being that distinguishes the space of philosophy in Latin America appears a difficult question: What are the specific forms coloniality takes in modern philosophy?¹² This is a necessary question because the relationship between coloniality—its sets of relations and modalities of knowledge—and modern Western philosophy must be made explicit if one aims for an accurate critique. While

it is not a given that philosophical knowledge is determined by economic and political interests as those of colonialism, it is the case that the project of a modern rational subjectivism and the deployment of its transcendental knowledge seem to go hand in hand with colonialism, liberalism, neo-liberalism, and globalism. Even if one were to grant that unlike these movements philosophical thought does not seek by definition economic or political power as its primary aim, it is not of lesser importance to recognize philosophical knowledge is never beyond issues of power. Conceptual knowledge in its articulations of senses of beings is always a source of power, and the configuration of practices and institutions that will sustain specific ideas are clearly instruments of power. At the same time, even this type of framing of the issue does not tell us how we may understand Western North American and European modern philosophy in relation to coloniality.

The relationship between coloniality and modern Western philosophy concerns a set of dispositions and expectations operative in the very configuration of what one may call philosophical questioning. This set of expectations and practices may be broken down into various elemental aspects:

1. The ontological attitude—all responds to one Being or totality.
2. The onto-historical attitude—all philosophical determinations of beings respond to the single history of Western philosophy, which begins with the ancient Greeks and finds its apogee in modernity and its post-modern critics. This historical model also has serious implications for the understanding of temporality (fundamental to modern Western philosophy at least from Heidegger on). The idea that all other histories and civilizations are behind the spearheading development of the West is sustained by the development of a new sense of time under the unfolding of coloniality in the Americas. As Anibal Quijano explains, the future is no longer seen as the extension of the past. Rather, the future becomes the figure of a new time, a time of progress, which, given the racial stratification of knowledge, becomes the burden and task of Western thought as the single movement of human development (barbarism-civilization) and of the destiny of humanity.¹³
3. The subjective rationalist attitude—the meaning of all ways of being is given to the Western rational subject (*ego cogito*), that is, to a particular transcendental consciousness, to a way of knowing characterized by a universal objective rational knowledge that affects and comprehends all senses of beings while remaining untouched by that which it defines and names.
4. The traditional phenomenological attitude—only that which I see I may know; and that which I see may be taken as given to the “I” or a transcendental consciousness, for its understanding, calculation, and manipulation.¹⁴ And, as a corollary to this one may add the insistence on seeking something authentic and objectively knowable, such as, for example, the search for what is “Latin American” in the case of a thought from the southern cone.
5. The appropriative attitude—the idea that all that is beyond the Western tradition is “its other” and as such is available for reason as its negativity, which means, available for it to determine its meaning, and ultimately its value. “The other” living being, the other culture, and their sense are held in question by Western modern reason. The contemporary tendency

has been to replace the direct appropriative attitude with a more complex strategy, in which “the other” is required to undergo the loss of her identity for the sake of entering into the post-modern philosophical discourse.

(I leave the association of these attitudes with specific philosophers and systems in Western philosophy to the discretion of the reader.)

In order to avoid misunderstandings I must indicate that these observations do not call for the abandonment of the history of ancient and modern Western philosophy, nor reason, nor science, but aim to make explicit certain attitudes or dispositions that trap and limit philosophical thought under the project of modern Western philosophical rationalism and subjectivism.¹⁵ At the same time, as I have indicated before, the issue is not that of the reception and dialogue between North-South, center-periphery, but that of the arising of philosophies that in their distinctness unfold and develop dialogues and encounters well beyond and outside these colonial paradigms.

The Question of Philosophy Beyond Pernicious Knowledge

As I have just indicated above, modern philosophy is sustained by a series of dispositions I find antithetical to the development and understanding of philosophical thought. In saying this, one puts into question not just Western hegemony but the very sense of philosophical thought. If one were not to put into question the sense of philosophical thought, to speak of engaging Latin American thought as philosophy would be tantamount to condemning again Latin American philosophy to the poverty of a series of discourses subject to coloniality in their dependency and imitation of the Western tradition, cultural expectations, and philosophical concepts and issues. But I think that already the question of the sense of philosophy gives us a direct clue: philosophy requires first of all putting philosophy into question.

But how may one put into question a tradition that seems to have total control and over-determine every possible path for philosophy? As Santiago Castro-Gómez, echoing Foucault, clearly shows in his *Critique of Latin American Reason*, one is always in danger of repeating the modern gestures I have identified above. Indeed, as Castro-Gómez shows, even the attempt to rethink the ethical out of the periphery that grounds the philosophy of Liberation may be read as a repetition of the way the modern philosopher finds him or herself in a transcendental position from which the sense of being may be conceptually determined. However, I believe that one may radicalize Dussel’s insight concerning the possibility of beginning to think out of a total exterior to the Western tradition and its relations of power. Such radicalization will lead us to think about the sense of philosophical thought beyond the Western tradition and the coloniality of power.

In 1977 in his *Philosophy of Liberation* Enrique Dussel writes:

Philosophy ponders the non-philosophical: reality... *in total exteriority* [my emphasis]. ...Distant thinkers, those who had a perspective of the center from the periphery, those who had to define themselves in the presence of an already established image of the human person and in the presence of the uncivilized fellow humans, the new comers, the ones who hope because they are always outside, these are the ones who have a clear mind for pondering reality.¹⁶

It is this idea of thinking out of total exteriority that I find helpful in order to move beyond the bind of the coloniality of

power, knowledge, and being. For Dussel exteriority is that life of the oppressed and excluded that calls for thought—that phenomena that thrust thought out of thoughts already operative and comfortable self-determination. This occurs as pulsating life releases thought beyond its conceptual frameworks and determinations. In this sense thinking occurs as exposure. At this point though, in light of Castro-Gómez’s criticism of Dussel’s move to elaborate another ethics that repeats the objective rational position over the phenomena I will remain with Dussel’s insight and further explore what exteriority might mean to thought, staying a bit longer with the questioning the sense of philosophy.¹⁷

This sense of philosophy out of total exteriority offers a very rich and intensely dense space for the development of the understanding of philosophy beyond the modern Western paradigms and dispositions I have outlined above as a coloniality of thought. At the same time such position of exteriority also may serve to reconfigure in a non-pernicious manner the engagement between what is considered the Western tradition and thought that arises from Latin America or from any other places in world philosophies. Rodolphe Gasché’s concise articulation of the sense of philosophy in terms of exteriority will serve us well at this point. As he writes,

Philosophy is not only an inquiry into limits, into enabling grounds, reasons, and conditions of possibility, but, as far as its technical side is concerned, it is determined by diathesis—distinction and the setting of limits. Philosophy is above all an inquiry into its own origin, into the *Grenzerfahrung*, the limit experience from which it originates. ...If philosophy is, first and foremost, a concern with its own sources, that is, with the limit from which it comes into its own, then these other limits that philosophy recognizes as its own limits, as limits that belong to it, that are properly philosophical such as the founding limits from which it originates...are perhaps no longer simply the limit of philosophy anymore.

A space for thinking for understanding the senses of philosophy with and beyond the Western tradition opens with the violation of the genitive “of.” This violation does not situate thought within the modern Western philosophical tradition. Rather, it recognizes that thought occurs out of experiences beyond the delimitations and dispositions of what the tradition may call philosophy.

From the point of view of Latin American thought this opening indicates how thought out of Latin America may occur as an inceptive force in the reconfiguration of the understanding of philosophy. To take thought from Latin America as thought means to engage that limit that is not “of” the tradition, not “of” philosophy proper. This would mean putting into question the ontological and conceptual claims of the tradition, its onto-theologico-historical myth, and the rationalist projects that accompany it into modernity and today’s globalizing projects. Such thinking would also figure a putting into question of the very idea of a single tradition upon which depend all senses of beings and the destiny of humanity. Furthermore, in its own terms, such Latin American thought would put into question/play its own understanding of the character, task, and sense of philosophy. As such, Latin American thought as philosophy would figure a continuous unsettling of both external and internal structures and concepts that perpetuate and sustain oppression and exploitation, while at the same time contributing critically to world philosophies from distinctive perspectives.

What I have said about philosophy in this section may be understood in terms of movements of thought. Philosophy does

not begin from its principles as a return to those very origins. Nor is it a matter of a traditional hermeneutic move, where “the other” comes to be translated into the Western tradition or vice versa. Rather, in the way I have characterized it, ultimately philosophical thought arises in the exposure of the already operative conceptual structures *from what is outside* them to *what does not belong* to them. Thought then figures a movement from total exteriority towards determinations of senses of being; in the sense of the *diarhesis* that happens in language. Furthermore, such conceptual distinctions and determinations will mark new spaces of encroachment and unsettling of them through further movement from exteriority. Ultimately then, philosophical thought would escape and liberate, in its constant movement from exteriority towards exteriority. One may see some primary implications of this thinking in exteriority if one considers such diverse thinkers as Gilles Deleuze and Walter Mignolo. In terms of Deleuze, one implication of such a way of thinking is that it not only acknowledges the fundamental alterity of thought, but in situating philosophical thought beyond philosophy proper and yet as inseparable from the senses of philosophy, it crosses the borders between literary, social-political, and economic issues. This crossing is not an erasure but it occurs as the igniting encounter between specific configurations of knowledge, which in their difference give rise to thinking each field anew. Thus, the reading of the thought from Latin America as political, social, or literary par excellence becomes a matter of a decision among many and, as such, a decision always in question. Considering Walter Mignolo’s development of Quijano’s coloniality of power in terms of the irreducible spaces of the *colonial difference* in language may further develop this explosive implication. As Mignolo sees it, language becomes the space for the unfolding of a thought from an irreducible colonial difference. But this colonial difference ultimately points to a total exteriority. Here language is not between discourses but it is the locus in which distinct experiences of knowledge beyond correspondence arise. Thus, language itself must be contested and uncovered, created anew. It is a matter of having to learn to speak/think again out of sheer distinctness. This unfolding of a thought from total exteriority is the point at the heart of Mignolo’s colonial difference. In Mignolo’s words in *Local Histories Global Designs*:

If as Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano argues, geopolitical coloniality of power and its consequences, historicostructural dependencies, implies “eurocentric hegemony as epistemic perspective,” “double critique,” “an other thinking,” “epistemological Creolization,” “double consciousness,” and “new mestiza consciousness,” are all theoretical articulations of border thinking breaking away from “eurocentrism as epistemological perspective.” The form that this breaking away is taking is the irreducible difference established between the monotonic critique of modernity from the perspective of modernity itself, still “in custody” of the monotonic of abstract universals (e.g., a critique of the imaginary of the modern world system) and the pluritopic and double critique of modernity from the perspective of coloniality (i.e., a critique of the epistemic imaginary of the modern world system from its exterior). It is precisely this perspective that, in the last analysis, could be articulated in the context of the coloniality of power ingrained (but invisible) in the epistemological imaginary of the modern world system.¹⁸

Here the ultimate perspective remains the concrete situation of a speaking that articulates, bespeaks an “irreducible difference,” that is, a being in total exteriority out of which new

ways of knowing beyond the modern Western paradigm may begin to unfold.

In light of such vital exposures one must ask: Limits, differentiations, and the senses of living and praxis in which these arise and come to pass, are these issues that belong to a Western tradition? To modernity? To prior cultures that may be recovered? To the coloniality of power? I think not. They are the issues we engage given our distinct human conditions, our precarious sense of being in alterity (in the strangeness of coming to a determination of self) and towards alterity (as we are situated by that which never belongs to us): a fragile exigency the philosopher, the artist, the intellectual seem to engage with distinct intensity as they expose selves, concepts, bodies, and imaginings to what does not belong, that which no relation of power already operative may claim to situate or determine.

Some Instances of Latin American Thought as Philosophical Thought (from total exteriority)

Thinking in total exteriority figures an exposure to the concrete distinctness of thought’s situations, in a manner that does not remain descriptive or objective (thus repeating the transcendental positioning of a rational Cartesian subject over the phenomena). As is shown by what follows, the very phenomena that may seem merely historical, economic, sociological fact, takes a radical philosophical force when considered out of total exteriority: a significance by virtue of transformative and originary encroachments on the already operative structures of thought, relations of power, and conceptual determinations of the very spaces and configurations of senses of lives out of which thought occurs. In closing I will remark on two moments in this way of thinking, distinctly out of Latin American experiences: two moments that transform and diversify how one may think of philosophy today.

Out of total exteriority one sees the impossibility of speaking in terms of one being and its historical destiny. We may begin by looking at October 12, 1492, and by considering how in that inceptive moment not only does an unknown continent enter into European history but European history and onto-theological metaphysics simultaneously are forever transformed as well. By entering a world they could not conceive before or articulate thereafter, Europeans themselves would be altered in ways they never could have fathomed. Hernán Cortés in his *Cartas de Relación*, a series of letters written to the king and queen of Spain, relates the story of how the peninsula today known as Yucatán came to have its name, and in doing so makes the argument that would give him the name of discoverer of Mexico.¹⁹ According to Cortés the conquistadors who had arrived to that land before him had met a number of natives and had asked them for the name of the place, the name by which the conquistadors came to identify and claim possession of the new found land. He then explains that when the Spaniards had asked the natives for the name of the peninsula the natives could only say, “*Yucatán, Yucatán*,” which literally means, “I don’t understand anything.”²⁰ With this “naming”—this mark of not understanding, worlds open. On the one hand, voiceless or sequestered worlds eventually were gathered under the perplexing name Latin America. On the other hand, we find a transformation within European existence itself (the decentering of its very claim to centrality, objectivity, and rationality) that with few exceptions still remains concealed.

In this doubling one discovers a Europe that in inscribing *Yucatán* into its historical and ontological discourse now speaks in tongues, since it does not understand what it names and persists in naming without understanding. Western history and onto-theological thought’s naming—in giving a place and

identity to the named—ultimately point to nothing except their inadequacy in terms of the temporality and the ontological way of recognizing and giving articulation to any and all existence. This inadequacy is not a result of the encounter of Western history with *its* other, with a stranger, the barbarian or colorful indigenous hope that can or should be recognized and inscribed in opposition to Western history, rationality, and civilization. The problem of Western thought is not resolved by the improvement of the Western apparatus as it learns to recognize its other. But, we may ask, what does *Yucatán* figure if not a challenging encounter with the other?

Yucatán speaks the inadequacy of that very Western ontological and historical tradition/myth when confronted with what is not *its* other. *Yucatán* marks simply, and literally, the barbarous, it is a matter of that which is beyond the Western appropriative historical writings and its allocation of existences under the requirement for a single history and original identity.²¹ To phrase what *Yucatán* speaks in terms of a break in the Hegelian historic dialectic: *Yucatán* marks a space of non-recognition, a non-dialectical space. This marking of a non-recognized and non-dialectical space occurs because the native does not appear to the Western modern mind as native in any way other than as that as what (and who) is not understood. More specifically, the native appears as its other, that is, as that which is included by exclusion as the Western modern project constructs its exotic non-rational other. In this sense there is no knowledge that may be understood as a fulfilled rational consciousness.²²

In general the issue for us is the unsettling suffered by Western history and onto-theological thought as this thinking makes its claim to what it does not understand and cannot subsume. At this point, *Yucatán* becomes part of Western historical writing and understanding, and with this the conceptual structure of values and the modality of the very configuration of identity that has oriented the West in its developing the modern *ego cogitans* and its privileged epistemic place from the outset is undone. *Yucatán*, not understanding, belongs now to the unfolding of Western history and its metaphysics of identity. Much like the plague that came to Europe by way of a ship that never seemed to touch European ports, the deconstruction of Western history and metaphysics already begins when *Yucatán* is taken over as part of what belongs to the identifying instrument that is the history of the West.²³

In positive terms, one may look at the recovery of this moment of irreparable or radical difference as a call for thinking in terms of being in distinctness rather than in terms of universals; one may look at the recovery of this moment in terms of histories and peoples' concrete lives, instead of in the terms of a single historical destiny.²⁴ A crucial implication appears here, one that follows Quijano's insight concerning the kind of horizon for existence that is configured under the development of the coloniality of power. As Quijano explains, with the rise of the Western subject appears a single linear history and with it a specific temporality organized in terms of a past either uncivilized or on its way to modernity, and a progressive present that belongs only to modern Western existence, and that in it contains the future. Given the interruptive character of thought, the very understanding of temporality as a single ontological problem should now be rethought in light of the distinctive experiences of temporalities that occur in the unsettling and originary transfiguration of our understanding of philosophical thought and the configuring of senses of beings. Such interruptive thinking from exteriority is not predicated on the futurity of the thought but on a poly-temporal exposure in which what is traditionally considered past may very well be a parallel temporal-spatial existence or

an outright encroachment and interruption of the present and its futurity. In other words, time cannot be a single horizon for thought, since modern philosophy is no longer the future of all other past/future civilizations.

The second aspect of this thinking in total exteriority follows from this last observation: Given the poly-temporal character of philosophical thought in the unsettling double origin of the modern world one may begin the reinterpretation of the history of Western philosophy from the experience of the excluded. One notable example is the way in which we understand the arising of the modern transcendental subject at the center of philosophical knowledge. From whence did this determination of philosophical knowledge come?

Traditionally we trace modernity to Descartes and Kant's second Copernican revolution: these instances understood as the critical uncovering of the power of the rational mind in its objective apprehension of transcendental concepts. In this sense, Europe becomes the center of the world by being the site of the discovery of reason, and with it human dignity and freedom, under the figure of the central "I." But in light of what has been said above, one may begin with another story: One may trace the rise of the Western modern transcendental subject to its dense histories, which are those histories populated by the excluded. The modern transcendental subject can only assert itself as itself precisely through its construction of its other, through the production of a value difference between its self-identity (*ego cogito*) and the other.²⁵ Thus, the question is: When and how does "the other" appear? For only when the other appears, the modern subjective rational consciousness may take its seat at the center of all meaning.

One may begin to trace the configuration of "the other" by once again going back to 1492. In August of that year, the decree of Granada results in the expulsion of Arabs and Jews from Spain. As Enrique Dussel has argued, this is the first time in their history Europeans are freed from the East. At the same time, the East has always been with the Europeans, so the sheer "otherness" of European rational consciousness cannot be derived from the East. Hence the other appears as the barbarian and cannibal and the rise in fear of the non-rational over and against the rational is perpetuated in perniciousness. Europe, and later North America, will build and sustain their project of modern rationalism against this fear of the barbaric other. In October 1492, two months after the decree of Granada, Columbus encounters the new world. Thus begins the construction of "the other," and the production of a central modern Western consciousness is now on its way.²⁶ Ultimately, behind their passionate appropriation of the Americas was the desire for the production of a self, and inseparably and necessary, the dark desire and need for Caliban, the other of reason.²⁷ These seemingly mere historical facts take philosophical weight if one considers that here one uncovers another way of being at play in the very configuration of the modern philosophical project. In other words, when viewed from the vantage of total exteriority, modern Western thought may only be understood in light of the history no one ever taught, that is, the hidden history of modernity's underside. As a distinct example of this radical transformative interpretation, one may think of the need for a recovery of the history of modern philosophy in light of its radical periphery, that is, by reconsidering its origins but not according to the monolithic myth of Western rationalism as founded by Descartes and then nurtured through the Enlightenment and French Revolution. The recovery of this hidden history would understand itself rather in its full engagement with such fundamental elements of modernity as African, Caribbean, Sephardic, and Arab cultures and thought.²⁸ Such broadening of the history of philosophy does not mean the reduction of reason

to the irrational or some exotic other; nor is it the case translating these distinct thoughts back into the modern Western way of understanding philosophy. The historical broadening simply points to experiences and thinking that even today too often remain buried, ways of thinking that will be transformative by virtue of their very assertive distinctness.

Conclusion

Once one takes seriously the alterity of thought and its concrete exposure to a distinctness that always constitutes the limits towards thought necessary in any conceptual delimitation of senses of beings philosophy belongs to no one. In such exposure in total exteriority one finds an originary renewal of philosophy and with it openings, spaces for carrying on, playing out, and hearing those burdens, those tunes of suffering and humanity that for so long have seemed lost or alien to philosophical thought.

Endnotes

1. I use the term *distinct* in order to indicate a contrast between it and *different*. In our lineages, more often than not, difference means different from what is self-same. I use *distinct* to indicate that which occurs in its concrete events and determinations without depending on the idea of a self-same other that will situate, determine, and judge its senses of beings (God, Being, or the modern Western rational transcendental subject).
2. "To be a Latin American was until very recently a great misfortune, because this did not allow us to be European. Today it is just the opposite: the inability to become European, in spite of our great efforts, allows us to have a personality; it allows us to learn, in this moment of crisis in European culture, that there is something of our own [*algo que nos es propio*] that can give us support. What this something is should be one of the issues that a Latin American philosophy must investigate." (Leopoldo Zea, "En torno a la filosofía americana," *Cuadernos Americanos* 3 (1942): 63-78; *En torno a una filosofía americana* (México: El Colegio de México, 1945); *Filosofía de lo americano* (México: Nueva Imagen, 1984), 34-49. Translated as "The Actual Function of Philosophy in Latin America," *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Prometheus, 1986), 223.
3. Augusto Salazar Bondi. "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Philosophic Thought." *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century*, eds. Jorge E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004). I refer to the essay as M & P.
4. M & P, 395-396.
5. Enrique Dussel. *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martínez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1985). Available online from Servicio CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 1996/2002.
6. "...from the shadow that the light of being has not been able to illumine. Our thought sets out from non-being, nothingness, otherness, exteriority, the mystery of non-sense. It is then a 'barbarian' philosophy." Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martínez and Christine Morkovsky (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 14. Also published in Jorge E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 428.
7. Santiago Castro-Gómez. *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* (Barcelona: Puvil Libros, S.A., 1996), 158-170.
8. Anibal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification." *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, eds. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 181-224.
9. Santiago Castro-Gómez. *La hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2005).

10. Walter Mignolo. *The Idea of Latin America* (London: Blackwell, 2005); *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).
11. "The Cartesian formulation privileges epistemology, which simultaneously hides both what could be regarded as the coloniality of knowledge (others do not think) and the coloniality of Being (others are not)." Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, Nos. 2 and 3 (March/May 2007): 252. *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (London: Duke University Press, 2008).
12. One may also rephrase the question in a simpler way: What is the direct relationship between colonialism and modern philosophy?
13. Anibal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification." *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, eds. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 195.
14. Here we find an indication of the interior relationship between the *ego conquiro* and the *ego cogito*. Vide ft. 14.
15. "Before the *ego cogito* there is an *ego conquiro*" (Dussel, Enrique. *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martínez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1985), 3.) Thus, Enrique Dussel points to these dispositions when he points out the relationship between the *ego conquiro* that takes full force in the colonization of the Americas and the Modern Cartesian identification of the human as *ego cogito*. Nelson Maldonado-Torres in his work on the coloniality of being and in his book *Against War* develops the sense of being that results from these dispositions, particularly with regards to the warring attitude that sustains the conceptuality of the Western Modern tradition. (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008).)
16. Enrique Dussel. *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martínez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1985), 3-4.
17. "To think culture with the aim of uncovering some 'fundamental instance,' such as is Dussel's intention, involves continuing to produce a first degree observation, in which the very action of the observer as much as what is observed are projected as the other of history. In this way the illusion of being able to observe "from outside" is created..." (My translation). Santiago Castro-Gómez, *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* (Barcelona: Puvil Libros, S.A., 1996), 168. This issue brings forth a crucial point for the rest of this essay: to speak of total exteriority does not mean to speak from outside, but rather to begin to engage the alterity at play in the very configuration of thought and conceptual determinations. This means that one must take the phenomena and interpret it not within the system but out of that which calls for questioning the system. As Nelly Richard points out, when we look at the situation today in a neo-liberal globalized world, culturally speaking we do not have a center and periphery, hence we cannot speak of total exteriority in the sense of being outside the system of coloniality. (Nelly Richard, *The Insubordination of Signs*, trans. Alice A. Nelson and Silvia R. Tandeciarz (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 98.) But, I would argue that transgressions and transformations, as small as they may seem, may only occur in light of a thought from and towards an exteriority that occurs otherwise than in terms of the teleology already operative in coloniality. In part the point is that philosophical thought is not the same as cultural studies.
18. Walter Mignolo. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 87.

19. Hernán Cortés. *Cartas de Relación, "Preámbulo"* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1993), 3.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Enrique Dussel points to the distinctness of Latin American thought as it engages its experience and situation: "...from the shadow that the light of being has not been able to illumine. Our thought sets out from non-being, nothingness, otherness, exteriority, the mystery of non-sense. It is then a 'barbarian' philosophy." Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martines and Christine Morkovsky (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 14. Also published in Jorge E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 428.
22. Of course, this is the point Frantz Fanon makes when he writes, "Le noir n'a pas de résistance ontologique aux yeux du Blanc." Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 89. "The black man has no ontological resistance on the eyes of the white man." Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Fact of Blackness," trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110.
23. Antonin Artaud. "Le théâtre et la peste." *Le théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).
24. A single document that may serve as a case for discussion is the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* from circa 1550. A document much like *Yucatán*, the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* does not have a place; and as a result, its lacking of place, its displacement, indicates so much. (*Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995). Vide José Rabasa's "Elsewheres: Radical Relativism and the Limits of Empire," *Qui Parle* 16:1(2006): 71-96. "Franciscans and Dominicans Under the Gaze of a Tlaculio: Plural-World Dwelling in an Indian Pictorial Codex" (Morrison Inaugural Lecture Series, University of California at Berkeley, 1998). In its pages one finds Aztec pictographic language, Latin, and Castilian alphabetic writing side by side in a manner that challenges the very idea of a single historical consciousness bounded to alphabetical writing as the rarefied form of knowledge and reason. We find in that insurmountable difference between pictographic language and alphabetic writing a site of interruption—the interruption of the appropriation of existences that Walter Mignolo has clearly shown takes place in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* through the rise to supremacy of alphabetical writing and that specific way of understanding all senses of beings (Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).) At the same time, we can also find in this moment, as well as in the other examples mentioned in this section, a possible *crisis*, that is, a possible moment of decision incommensurable to the limits of Western onto-theological history. By virtue of their asymmetric encounters with the Western tradition's historical conceptual structures, these are sites, places, moments, and opportunities for a beginning to unfold. Such a beginning, I would suggest, may be an articulate thought in its diversifying identities, a thought fecund in its situated exteriority. Such a situated exteriority does not keep one out of the center, but shows us to be at that fluid margin that is human existence today with its evanescent borders, perpetual migrations, and immediate proximities in radical exteriority.
25. This is the central point articulated by Quijano in his genealogy of coloniality of power, as well as by Mignolo when he speaks of "the colonial difference." "By colonial differences I mean... (and I should perhaps say 'the colonial difference') the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, and energy and a machinery to transform differences into values." This translates into the value system in which the white Westerner has more epistemic and existential value than *its* others. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 13.
26. Such an account is compelling in part because it explains the violence of Europeans towards the indigenous in the form of the Spaniard, Portuguese, and so forth by their desires for self-edification. At the same time, this account also explains the imaginative fascination Europeans had with the New World.
27. 1542-1551- Bartolomé de las Casas (Dominican missionary), *Destruction of the Indies*, written in 1542 and edited in 1551: chronicle of the violent destruction of indigenous culture and life in the Americas at the hands of the conquistadors. The Valladolid debate (1550-1551) concerned the treatment of natives of the New World. Dominican Bishop of Chiapas Bartolomé de las Casas argued that the Amerindians were free men in the natural order and deserved the same treatment as others; Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda insisted the Indians were natural slaves, and therefore reducing them to slavery or serfdom was in accordance with Catholic theology and natural law.
28. One crucial example is Ibn Rushd, or Averrões as he is more commonly known (1126-1198, Cordoba, Al-Andalus (711-1492)), who is considered the father of secular philosophy, and in this sense leaves the deepest imprints in the inheritance Al-Andalus leaves for the development of modern Western thought. Among Ibn Rushd's positions four seem immediately apparent: 1. Theology is separated from science; 2. All humans partake of the same intellect; 3. Existence precedes essence; 4. Averrões rejected the eccentric deferents introduced by Ptolemy. He rejected the Ptolemaic model and instead argued for a strictly concentric model of the universe. He writes on the Ptolemaic model of planetary motion: "To assert the existence of an eccentric sphere or an epicyclical sphere is contrary to nature. [...] The astronomy of our time offers no truth, but only agrees with the calculations and not with what exists." (Owen Gingerich, "Islamic astronomy," *Scientific American* 254, no. 10 (April 1986): 74.) One might also keep in mind the intellectual and cultural life of Al-Andalus, the major center for the translation of the ideas that underlie Western modernity, with its 70 libraries, some of them with up to 600,000 books.

Towards a Phenomenology of Liberation: A Critical Theory of Race and the Fate of Democracy in Latin America

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Let me begin with a couple of quotes from European travelers in Latin America. The first one stems from a French traveler, Louis Agassiz, who went to Brazil in 1865 on a scientific expedition: "Let any one who doubts the evil of this mixture of races, and is inclined, from a mistaken philanthropy, to break down all barriers between them, come to Brazil. He [sic] cannot deny the deterioration consequent upon an amalgamation of races, more wide-spread than in any other country in the world, and which is rapidly effacing the best qualities of the white man, the Negro, and the Indian, leaving a mongrel nondescript type, deficient in physical and mental energy" (apud Skidmore 1974, 32). The second quotation comes from Swedish travel writer Fredrika Bremer's 1851 journal during her stay in Cuba: "I am told here that nothing but severity will answer in the treatment of slaves; that they always must know that the whip is over them; that they are ungrateful people. ...It is amid circumstances such as these that one may become enamored of the ideal communities of socialism, and when men such as [Amos Bronson] Alcott seem

like the saviors and high-priests of the earth... How beautiful appear to me associated brotherhoods on the earth, with all their extravagance of love, when compared with a social state in which human powers are so awfully abused, and human rights trampled under foot!" (apud Hahner 1998, 76f.)

The contrasting views expressed here typically highlight the Eurocentric approach to the problem of the Latin American Other, either to depreciate the Native, indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and mixed-race inhabitants of the subcontinent or to thematize the Other of imperial domination and colonial conquests. Hence, like Maria Graham, Flora Tristan, and other European women who traveled to Latin America in the nineteenth century, Bremer succeeds in critically overcoming what Mary Louise Pratt has dubbed the "imperial eyes" model and its self-other dichotomies, as their travel writings unveil an interesting cross-fertilization of class, race, and gender perspectives, paving the way for transculturation, hybrid cultures, and the hopes for egalitarianism, mutual recognition, and the celebration of diversity in the very search for cultural identity (Pratt 1992).

A Latin American phenomenology of liberation will seek precisely to rescue these race-gender correlates which were somewhat neglected or downplayed by the original, first-generation writings on liberation, so as to pave the way for the future of liberation and deliver its promises of emancipatory democracy. While critical race theory started from a critique of liberalism (Delgado and Stefancic 2000), its U.S. American-oriented analyses have inevitably been also targeted by Latin American liberationist thinkers, even as they tend to get closer to a critical-theoretical account of liberation. In this sense, critical race theory stands somewhat closer to critical legal studies than to liberationist approaches to critical theory in Latin America, in spite of the Marxian-inspired class reductionisms that tend to eclipse race and gender conflicts in the latter (Unger 1986).

In this brief paper, I am not as much interested in revisiting the archeology of race theories in Latin America as calling into question some North Atlantic, paternalist approaches to Latino and Hispanic identity overall and the rendering of Latin American philosophy as just another Department of State scholarly accomplishment. After all, as Gracia remarked, "Latinos and non-Latinos belong to different social groups, but these groups are not homogeneous and should not be regarded as foreign to each other," insofar as "they are not like nations" (Gracia 2008, 210). Therefore, in this paper I am rather focusing on the Latin American recasting of a critical-theoretical account of liberation that takes the phenomenology of sociality and the social phenomena of racism, racialization, and race relations seriously. Even though Latin American Liberation Philosophy has systematically dealt with the question of the Other from its beginnings in the 1970s, the preferential option for the poor and the Marxist analysis employed by liberation theologians and philosophers in the 1960s throughout the '70s and '80s tended to eclipse gender, racial, ethnic, and environmental issues, which only came to the fore in the '90s and in this new century. Witness the developments of public discussions and debates on the scope of liberationist thought which have been taking place in different editions of the World Social Forum from 2001 through 2010. The shift from economic determinism towards cultural, social, and ecological analyses that take into account problems of race, ethnicity, gender, environment, and sustainability broadly construed characterizes the kind of phenomenological, perspectival approach to Latin American philosophy that I am proposing here. I am thus dividing my brief presentation on Latin American Philosophy in three main axes, namely, Philosophy of Race, Liberation Philosophy, and Critical Theory.

Let me formulate, from the outset, the guiding thesis of this essay: the fate of democracy and the future of liberation in Latin America are bound to *our* own self-understanding of the correlative concepts of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity—and as much could be said of the gender and environmental correlated conceptions. This is both an empirical, historical constation and a normative statement, and even though I cannot elaborate on this thesis here, I am assuming that a social, phenomenological perspectivism succeeds in reconciling cultural relativism with both normative and agonistic accounts of morality, analogous to the approach suggested by Alcoff's "Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment" (Bernasconi 2001, 267-83). Furthermore, I only emphasize the first person plural in order to stress the Latin American perspective *we* are speaking from, as opposed to a supposedly neutral, universalistic standpoint often adopted by philosophers when dealing with race problems in American and European societies. Even as we realize that "democracy," "race," and "Latin America" are themselves European inventions, one cannot talk about "race" without a systematic hermeneutics of suspicion toward its Eurocentric origins, interests, and ends (Bernasconi and Lott 2000). In phenomenological terms, both the *arché* and the *telos* of any theory of race translate and betray geopolitical, economic strategies of domination. From the very start, I am thus fully endorsing the premise that no account of race can be dissociated from a critique of power and a social, historical ontology of ourselves. This simply means that a Latin American philosophy of race is inevitably bound to both politics and social psychology, or, in Foucauldian terms, to power and subjectivation. It is my contention here that a Latin American account of race and racial relations must go beyond the *dialogues de sourds* between modernists and postmodernists and the ongoing debates between liberal, republican, procedural, and communitarian accounts of democracy and self-other relations. My working hypothesis is that the social, political gaps that one finds in most otherwise interesting proposals can be filled in by a phenomenology of liberation that takes both a philosophy of race and critical theory into account. What I have dubbed elsewhere the phenomenological deficit of critical theory allows thus for a phenomenological recasting of a philosophy of liberation, precisely at the level of a weak social constructionism that mitigates and mediates some of the too-strong, objectivist claims of Marxism in liberation philosophy and some of the too-weak, subjectivist "representations" of postcolonial and cultural studies. In this sense, the future of liberation philosophy in Latin America hinges upon the very fate of democracy, itself bound to the ups and downs of globalized capitalism in developing societies. Insofar as there is no ontological commitment to an essentialist universalism in globalization, liberation, ethnic studies or world ethics (*Weltethos*), I prefer to think here of a pragmatic perspectivism in semantic, phenomenological terms.

II. Even though one might be careful enough to avoid any dogmatic definition of race and ethnicity, I must confess in a straightforward gesture that I am adopting a weak social constructionist version that fits quite well into social scientists and historians' approaches to Latin American identity and culture. As George Reid Andrews put it bluntly, "race is not a scientific fact but a social, cultural, and ideological construction" (Andrews 2004, 6). Of course, from a philosophical standpoint, it would be, however, too simplistic to simply eliminate "race" from any scientific talk about natural history, social evolution, and ethnology. This is neither meant to simply discard whatever importance biological, genetic variables might have for some scientific analyses nor to merely equate race and ethnicity, but within the perspective of a social philosophy, I am committed here to a weak social constructionist that reflects a pragmatic,

phenomenological perspectivism. I believe that a Latin American philosophy of race aims at both deconstructing racial democracy myths (which is in itself a deconstruction of scientific, historical conceptions of race) and liberating narratives (deconstruction of Eurocentric myths of liberation, including democracy, liberalism, and socialism), without being reduced to any aristocratic, libertarian, or nihilistic view. In this sense, I think liberation philosophy recasts Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault's hermeneutics of suspicion in normative-agonistic terms that take into account the mixed blessings of critical theory both in the agonistic, negative dialectics of first-generation exponents (Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Bloch, Marcuse) and in the normative claims of social philosophers of the second and third generations (Habermas, Honneth).

I think that Andrews has correctly understood the peculiar, paradoxical contribution of the Latin American ethnic, racial makeup in terms of the idea of mixed race and miscegenation, which has been evoked not only by European travellers but also by the very proponents of a certain Latin American identity. If Bartolomé de las Casas, often regarded as the patron saint of liberation, exemplifies the universalistic strain within the synthetic paradigm of race, and José Martí the particularistic, revolutionary one, José Vasconcelos combines these approaches in his utopian project of a cosmic race. Even if we don't regard "utopian" as "Romantic" in a pejorative sense, I agree with Carlos Fuentes's critical take on Latin American, self-deceptive racial myths, epitomized by José Enrique Rodó's Ariel: there is indeed a tendency towards reverse prejudice, either to demonize Anglo-American or to romanticize Iberian-Latin influences. The myth of racial democracy can be thus evoked here in order to make sense of *mestizaje* (racial mixing)² and the deconstruction of purity, as there is obviously no such a thing as a pure mestizo. Among Latin American social pathologies relating to myths of racial purity, the most intriguing ones were the whitening and browning that reflect Latin American self-understandings of their own identity and difference problems. Still, we must grant that both Las Casas and Martí engaged in moral projects that were ultimately political and emancipatory. As Vacano pointed out, "the belief that beneath apparently accidental and superficial dissimilarities lies a basic human sameness that although it may lie dormant must be made explicit, is a particularly Latin American conception of race" (Gracia 2007, 2).

It is also a notion that borders on the concept of a people or ethnicity: for Martí a race is not only defined by its phenomenal characteristics, but by its cultural, historical life. Therefore, the essence or what others might call the universal substance or underlying set of properties is the same for all races, if one thinks of the "human race" broadly construed. Martí does not elaborate on this point, but it seems that a spiritual and moral desire to be free is what is common to all men. We can easily infer that most Latin American accounts of race ultimately refer to a philosophical anthropology and humanist conceptions. The dramatic and traumatic encounter of Iberian and other European colonizers and travelers with Native, indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans in Latin America was not only decisive for the emergence of racially mixed identities but also for the spectacularization of tropical, anthropofagic subcultures and the consolidation of a self-identity of exotic cannibalism. I agree thus with Velazco y Trianosky in that "to be a mestizo [in Latin America] is clearly not to begin from the experience of racelessness. In this respect the Latin American struggle to liberate oneself and one's community through the subversive reinterpretation of mestizo identity is much more akin to the struggles of African Americans than it is to the in-between experience faced by Hispanic immigrants to the United States" (Velazco y Trianosky 2010, 295). Furthermore, a Latin American

philosophy of race challenges the hyphenated-American and typically state-regulated immigration-oriented conceptions of racial policies meant to reflect and determine imaginable identities. (Corlett 2003, 72f).

Because of variously conceiving of a pure race or pure conceptions of race, racism will inevitable arise. Hence, the deconstructing motif of *mestizaje* or mixed race proves to be a quite pervasive one as a countermovement, as it were, to inevitable surges of racism. In effect, most Latin American philosophers would agree that Latin American identity seems to favor such a privileged conception of mixed races through the very contingencies that led to the development of *mestizos*, *mulattos*, *morenos*, *pardos*, *zambos*, and all kinds of mixed-racial combinations in the subcontinent. In this sense, Linda Alcoff has rightly attacked Samuel Huntington's controversial remarks about Hispanics and Latin American immigrants having to become like Anglo-Americans in order to accomplish the American Dream.³ As Stephen Satris also denounced, racial supremacy unveils the white qua pure as opposed to the colored other (Zack 1993, 54). After all, the Other will always be a threat whenever one takes ethnic identity as an exclusivist view of homogeneous, fixed cultural traits or ritual features such as religious, customs, daily practices. In effect, if there is anything universal—not necessarily eligible for a Kantian ideal of universality—it is racism or racist conceptions of race, regardless of scientific and ideological justifications (Bernasconi 2001, 12ff). The Rawlsian distinction between concepts and conceptions (to oppose his own conception of justice as fairness to competing concepts of justice, such as folk concepts of a sense of justice and theoretical accounts) has recently been evoked by Joshua Glasgow's *A Theory of Race* (2009), which sought to recast the normative grounds of the semantic-ontological problem of race, by propounding Racial Reconstructionism as a third-way substitutionism between the Anti-Realism of eliminativist conceptions of race (i.e., that we should eliminate race-thinking entirely, e.g., Appiah, Blum, Corlett, Zack) and the Realism of anti-eliminativists who advocate some form of Racial Conservationism (Du Bois, Outlaw, Sundstrom, Taylor). According to Glasgow, "the race debate is about whether to eliminate or conserve contemporary, public, folk racial discourse." In order to make sense of folk concepts of race, however, specialists in racial theory tend to rely on what historical experts mean by "race" (Glasgow 2009, 42). In order to avoid normative and empirical gaps between the thick semantics of scientific, biological accounts and the thin conceptions of social constructionists, Glasgow resorts to a Rawlsian reflective equilibrium that seeks to strike a normative balance between our theoretical, categorical, and possible case intuitions to warrant modifications in our theories (for example, when evident mixed-race identities push us to eliminate the one-drop rule), and vice-versa, as our policies and practices are affected by our theoretical conceptions.

Even though I find Glasgow's proposal of a Folk Empirical Theory highly original and seducing, I believe that its semantic indeterminacy of race leaves much to be desired. Even if one grants that it is not a matter of simply replacing one term with another, say, politically correct, in order to denounce racial slurs and various forms of racism, there remains the semantic-ontological problem of the social interactions and use of language in intersubjective, everyday practices, dealings, and communication—what has been identified, since Husserl and Schutz, with the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) and practical interplays of the familiar and the strange (*Heimwelt* and *Fremdwelt*) in a phenomenology of sociality, thoroughly cultural and historical (Steinbock 1996, 198). It seems that a crucial social, phenomenological deficit betrays thus the normative gap between Glasgow's articulation of ontology and semantics—to

my mind, a frequent blind spot in many analytic accounts. Whether racial terms purport to refer to natural or social kinds, so that the ontological is said to be prior to the normative, whether the semantic is manifest prior to the ontological and our task mainly consists in establishing normativity and finding an adequate ontological and semantic framework, so as to eliminate biological pretensions and semantic distortions, we still have to face the social reality of racism. It seems, instead, that racism must be tackled from the three fronts at once: ontological, intersubjective, and semantic-linguistic. This is precisely what I have dubbed a phenomenological correlation that takes the three perspectives as conceptual framework references to map and address the question, which Glasgow has correctly raised: What do we mean by race today? As it could be argued in terms of a philosophy of liberation, we cannot simply discard historical, empirical conceptions of race, however wrong and misleading they were, precisely because of our commitment to moral normativity. In my own understanding of human reality, history has taught us both particularism and universalism, both cultural relativism and moral normativism. History does teach us some great, valuable things, of truly moral value, but, echoing Arnold Toynbee's dictum, we are bad students of history. In order to reread the making of Latin American identities from history's underside, we must revalue all values, as it were, precisely because no value was positively given in the first place (Alcoff and Mendieta 2003, p. 407 ff.). No one in her sound mind dares to call into question today the moral evils of racism as historically recorded in genocides, slavery, ethnic persecutions, and monstrous events such as European pogroms and the Holocaust (*Shoah*). One cannot fix the moral errors of the past but we all (Latin Americans, Americans, Asians, Africans, and Europeans alike) can responsibly avoid repeating the same historical, moral errors. This certainly hinges upon a moral view of the world, as Nietzsche suspected, but this poses no problem, as I am assuming that moral realism, in the least analysis, cannot be sustained: there are no moral facts, only moral interpretations. Anti-realism in ethics and political philosophy can be thus said to be correlated to the historical realism of events and social institutions. *Mutatis mutandis*, a weak version of social constructionism is anti-realist to the extent that it refuses universalism, it resists essentialism, and it refers back to the empirical realism of particular, historical facts and social ontology. To quote Naomi Zack's take against biological racism, "there are no scientific facts about race that support the ordinary concept of race. There are historical facts about 'race' as a social concept" (Zack 1993, 10).

III. As pointed out in the first part of my paper, folk conceptions of race—in Latin America, in the U.S., and elsewhere—assume, in our common lifeworlds, that there are whites, blacks, Asians, and indigenous peoples (usually identified as Indians, Native Americans or Amerindians, in Latin America). *Grosso modo*, geographical, historical, and cultural (especially, ethnic and linguistic) features would be decisive here. Color perceptions might vary, but color does play a decisive role—especially in Latin America—and it has often been more associated with biological as opposed to social, ethnic features. Hence, gradual variations in things like skin color, hair texture, or bone structure, although not allowing for a neat distinction of human races, seem to refer to something real or natural (biological features, such as dark vs. light skin) as opposed to racial prejudice, discrimination, racism, which betray the social construction of racial concepts and are also to be found in self-identity and self-understandings of race, such as in U.S.-American and Latin American conceptions. By stressing the paradoxical self-perceptions of *mestizaje* and racial ideologies of whitening and browning in Latin America,

I think that we can now better understand my strategy in recasting a deconstructing view of liberation philosophy.

It is generally assumed that the philosophy of liberation emerged with the publication of five volumes on the ethics of Latin American liberation, written by Enrique Dussel between 1970 and 1975 (*Para una ética de la liberación latinoamericana*). According to Dussel, we can divide the historical conception and developments of Liberation Philosophy into four main periods, following the European invasion of the sixteenth century (Dussel 1996, 2):

1. The critique of the conquest (1510-53): "implicit" Liberation Philosophy
2. The philosophical justification of the first emancipation (1750-1830)
3. The "third Liberation Philosophy being articulated now" (since 1969)
 - 3a. Antecedents: José Carlos Mariátegui, the Cuban Revolution of 1959
 - 3b. First explicit phase: from 1969 to 1973 ("stage of constitution")
 - 3c. Second phase: from 1973 to 1976 ("the stage of maturation")
 - 3d. Third stage: from 1976 to 1983 ("the stage of persecution, debate, confrontation")
- 4d. Fourth stage: "up to the present...the stage of growth and response to new problematics"—where Mendieta, Alcoff, and others have situated the political-philosophical problem of liberation vis à vis critical theory (Alcoff and Mendieta 2000; Mendieta 2003a).

My own self-understanding and critical appropriation of liberation philosophy is to be situated right here, at the intersection of Latin American liberation with the semantic, pragmatic transformations of Critical Theory from its first utopian, negative critique of technological, capitalist domination towards the theory of communicative action and recognition to be found in Habermas and Honneth. In effect, to the extent that it systematically seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer 1982, 244), the social philosophy of praxis associated with the Frankfurt School, known as Critical Theory (*Kritische Theorie*), as opposed to "traditional" theory, can be fairly characterized as a liberationist critique of totalitarianism and late capitalism's structures of oppression and social pathologies. It is no wonder that several thinkers relating to the Frankfurt School, such as Benjamin, Bloch, Fromm, and Marcuse, exerted indeed a decisive influence upon Latin American liberation theologians in their struggles for recognition amid military dictatorships and authoritarian violation of human rights in the '60s, '70s, and '80s. The arduous paths leading from authoritarian to democratizing lifeworlds in Latin America attest to the normative thrust implicit in the so-called "transition to democracy," whose structural transformation properly deserves to be described and understood in critical-theoretical terms as an alternative to both revolutionary and reformist models.

On the other hand, as Bresser-Pereira has argued, it remains to be shown, elsewhere but particularly in Latin America, how one can get actual democratic institutions, an egalitarian political culture, and a democratic ethos without presupposing a capitalist, bourgeois revolutionary process (just like the English, American, and French revolutions led to the establishment of economic and political liberalism in these countries) (Bresser-Pereira 2009). That being said, the so-called Marxist analysis used by liberation theologians and

philosophers must be critically reexamined, beyond the facile polarizations of Cold War ideologies. In effect, the grassroots movements associated with third-world struggles for liberation transcended theological circles and Latin American territories, as attest the educational, social, and political activism led by Paulo Freire, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Frantz Fanon, and then metal worker leader Lula da Silva (Brazil's current president). The liberationist appropriation of Frankfurt thought is quite problematic, to say the least, and the equation of the theological movement with a supposedly relevant "philosophy of liberation" is, to my mind, as misleading and problematic as the idea of a Christian philosophy. Nevertheless, some of the first-generation liberation theologians were also trained as philosophers and did write and publish seminal works on a certain philosophy of liberation. Enrique Dussel, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Juan Carlos Scannone were among the most important representatives of such a constellation. Other thinkers, such as Leopoldo Zea, Augusto Salazar Bondy, Arturo Roig, and Horacio Cerutti could be also mentioned, but I am particularly interested in Ofelia Schutte's contributions to an ongoing intercultural, interdisciplinary conception of liberation philosophy, which tends to depart from Dussel's post-Heideggerian, Levinasian reformulation of a Marxist ethics of liberation and takes into account recent developments in Latin American philosophy of race and ethnicity, especially in light of the contributions by Linda Martín Alcoff and Jorge Gracia. I am deliberately leaving Eduardo Mendieta as I tend to side with him in my critical-theoretical approach to the phenomenology of liberation (Mendieta 2003b).

From a Latin American liberationist perspective, we must inevitably start from a given historical, social condition of oppression, colonization, and domination. The social ontology at issue, as Dussel reminds us, is to be thought, as it were, *in der Praxis*, both in its material, economic conditions and in its historical, existential openness toward social transformation, as already thematized by Marcuse's utopian project of liberation, successfully combining a Hegelian reading of Marx with a post-Heideggerian reading of alterity (esp. Levinas and Sartre). "Liberation," as Dussel and the earlier liberation thinkers pointed out, emerges first of all as a radical hermeneutic, semantic turning-point within the Latin American social reality that drastically changed after the Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959. In order to counter communism, there were military coups all over the subcontinent, with a little help from the CIA and U.S. national security ideologies. In fact, many of the greatest phenomenologists in Latin America were forced into exile because of military regimes that took power in Argentina (1962-1963, 1966-1973, 1976-1983), Brazil (1964-1985), Chile (1973-1990), and Uruguay (1973-1985). The most important cultural movement in Latin America in the second half of the last century was thus closely tied to peasants and grassroots social movements which sought to resist military authoritarianism. Many Continental thinkers related to phenomenology (such as Sartre, Levinas, Ricoeur, and Foucault) or to the Frankfurt School (Benjamin, Bloch, Marcuse, Apel, Habermas) were then evoked by liberation thinkers in the '60s, '70s, and '80s (Alves, Gutiérrez, Boff, Dussel).

It is very interesting to recall that Foucault's lectures on biopower and biopolitics in the 1970s were then articulated (some of them, for the first time, in several talks he gave in Latin America), as he attempted to investigate how racial struggles, race wars, and racial discourses were used by governmental institutions to manage entire populations as another systemic form of normalization. Even though Dussel mentions some of Foucault's archeological and genealogical contributions to critical analyses in Latin American struggles for liberation, he seems to dismiss them, together with Habermas's critique of

ideology, as still belonging to European analytic and dialectical conceptions that failed to bridge theory and praxis, as neither takes into account the Marxian continuum between social life and economic conditioning, particularly reified in alienated labor and false consciousness.

As I have shown elsewhere, the critique of late capitalism and the ongoing democratization of emerging societies and developing countries remain a complex process that has engaged diverse segments of civil society (De Oliveira 2004). Now, I think that Dussel has correctly identified some of the difficulties inherent in the Habermasian systemic-lifeworldly paradoxes of modernity. I also believe that Dussel has convincingly refused to embrace a Foucauldian-like postmodernist demonization of social institutions. However, I am not convinced that his ethics of liberation has sufficiently explored some of the very problems that both Foucault and Habermas unveil in their respective attempts to account for the contradictions and paradoxes of modernity, in order to make a case for liberation in systemic and lifeworldly terms. For one, Dussel seems to avoid dealing with the normative and sociological deficits that Habermas and Honneth have rightly spotted in the first-generation accounts of critical theorists, namely, the very idea of a democratic ethos that is missing in most egalitarian accounts that tend to downplay individual freedoms and civil rights. On the other hand, both Foucault and Habermas have offered insights into the technological transformations that have revolutionized our geopolitical, juridical views of society, socialization, and power relations. Finally, both Foucault and Honneth have renewed a pragmatist approach to self-development and intersubjective accounts of alterity and recognition that allows for interesting rapprochements with psychology and ethnology.

I thus fully endorse Ofelia Schutte's critical theory of liberation as she sets out to "understand the relationship between liberation, cultural identity, and Latin American social reality from the standpoint of a historically rooted critical philosophy" (Schutte, 1993, 1). In effect, for Schutte, the quest for cultural identity is precisely what brings about a philosophy of liberation, whose ultimate goal is "to provide methods of critical analysis and models for practical action [...so as] to defend the cultural, political, and economic integrity of the people of the region" (Schutte 1993, 173f.). Furthermore, beyond the properly social, political dimensions of liberation Schutte argues for a view of liberation that "reaches also into the personal," including thus "a psychological and existential component to the liberation process" (Schutte 2004, 184). Hence Schutte critiques Dussel's totalizing, dualistic approach to the task of liberation (according to which the Other's morally good alterity must overcome the absolute evil of the dominating Totality). Schutte ends up unmasking the supposedly radical thrust of its liberatory program, as it unveils a metaphysical, idealist, and essentialist conception of power, akin to Mariátegui's economic determinism in his approach to "the problem of the Indian," as the problem of race is not properly thematized in philosophical terms. Dussel seems to go a step further but remains somewhat hostage to the materialist Marxist analysis insofar as the oppression of the Amerindian belongs to a broader framework of systemic oppression.

Now, Dussel has of course revised his own position, following Schutte's critical remarks, and as it was pointed out before, there have been substantial shifts within liberationist thought so as to include environmental, ethnic, race, and gender-related issues in their discussions on liberation. I firmly believe that, insofar as it remains bound to the fate of Latin American democratic institutions, the future of liberation must take the deconstructing path of a critical, social philosophy of race whose normative and empirical fields of interdisciplinary,

intercultural research hinge upon the phenomenological correlation of a social ontology, an intersubjective theory of alterity, justice, and recognition, and a moral grammar of liberation. After all, a normative-democratic model of liberation is not necessarily opposed to an agonistic one, insofar as it is to be accomplished not only by social movements from below (such as the landless workers and the liberationist ecclesial communities) let alone by governors, the elites or intellectuals, as it were, from above, but ultimately by civil society as a whole and its reflective commitments to solidarity and networks of social cooperation. It is in this sense that different social philosophers such as Foucault, Habermas, and Honneth can contribute to our own search of a new way of doing social phenomenology. It is thus by undertaking anew the radical hermeneutic turn inherent in Liberation Philosophy, by deconstructing liberation both in a pro-active, constituting and in a passive, historically constituted sense, that a Phenomenology of Liberation seems to be in order in Latin America today. In effect, to a certain extent, one cannot speak of Latin American philosophy in the same way that we usually refer to, say, French, British, German, or American philosophy, as both the factual and modal claims that “there is or there could be a characteristically Latin American philosophy” remain under suspicion (Nucetelli 2003, 524). As Gracia pointed out, it turns out that the phrase “Latin American philosophy” (*filosofía latinoamericana*) in Latin America is taken to be inferior, weak, and derivative, in comparison with ‘European’ or ‘American’ philosophy” (Gracia 2005, 415). And yet it seems reasonable to speak of Liberation Philosophy as one of the best and most original samples of Latin American philosophy—in the way, say, one might refer to Cartesian rationalism, British empiricism, German idealism, or American pragmatism as established schools and trends in these countries. Therefore, the moral and political philosophy proposed and developed by several neo-Marxist and social thinkers in Latin America constitutes an important chapter in the formation of Latin American identity, hence the importance of taking race and ethnicity seriously. As we take into account Schutte’s perspectival and Gracia’s metaphysical approaches as non-essentialist takes on race and ethnicity, not only in Latin America but also in the U.S., we may as well move towards what would be a Pan-American conception of Hispanic or Latino identity, or a Latino pan-identity in the very quest of liberation. If a wide reflective equilibrium allows for such a pan-ethnic identity within different comprehensive views, say, of mixed-raced Native Americans, Amerindians, Afro-Latin, African-Americans, mulattoes, zambos, and others, we come full circle in our own attempt to establish the correlation among ontology, subjectivity, and language. Since race and ethnicity do not have fixed contours, as they change over time with the very dynamics of cultural, demographic, and social transformations, we may speak of diasporic, hybrid conceptions of race and ethnicity that not only overlap on many occasions but also influence each other, even as they point to their paradoxical indeterminacy (Benhabib 2002, 194; Garcia Canclini 1995, 14). It is not so much a semantic problem or a realist predicament of sorts—whether biological or social kinds—that could be made reducible to ontological or linguistic commitments (*ethnos*, *genos*, nations, tribes, and peoples), as it is fundamentally a social problem that entails intersubjective thinking, normativity, and a critique of power. As a classical example we might evoke here the so-called three-race account found in the Hebrew Biblical story of the Sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth), that was later appropriated by racist, ideological narratives such as Gobineau’s, along the lines of Foucault’s contention that the race war “is not a clash between two distinct races...[but] the splitting of a single race into a super-race and a sub-race” (*Il faut défendre la société*, in Foucault 1997, 61).

IV. Now, the phenomenological deficit of critical theory ultimately unveils communicative networks and lifeworldly practices that resist systemic domination, as we have learned from Foucault’s critique of power, especially in light of his recently published *Cours au Collège de France* on subjectivation and recasting Habermas’s and Honneth’s readings. Hence, this phenomenological deficit holds both for Honneth in the dynamics of recognition and for Habermas, in his recourse to communicative action. In order to settle ongoing struggles for liberation and recognition neither liberal nor socialist proposals for social peace (contractarian, procedural, communitarian, agonistic, and others) seem to sufficiently account for the phenomenological tensions between identity and difference, sameness and otherness, the abstract and the concrete, the familiar and the alien, parts and whole (Honneth 1991). This is precisely what we have characterized as concrete tensions between private and public interests, material and ideological relations, theoretical and practical intents, in a word, what Honneth has characterized as “social pathologies,” following Marx’s highly original approach to the existing contradictions, shortcomings, and inequalities in the capitalist societies of his own times (Honneth 1996). A phenomenology of liberation must thus carry out the radical hermeneutic, deconstructive thrust of its emancipatory project in the following programmatic terms:

1. Insofar as it realizes and fulfills itself *qua* static, genetic, and generative phenomenology, Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology may be regarded as a proto-hermeneutics, paving the way to Heidegger’s hermeneutic turn.

2. Only by means of a phenomenological hermeneutics can we rescue the fundamental sense of ontology, so as to avoid ontic and essentialist reductions, insofar as human modes of being (i.e., pertaining to *Dasein* as *In-der-Welt-sein*), actions and activities overall (*praxis*) cannot be reduced to a mere theoretical presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) or “poietical” readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*), like other beings in nature (stones and living beings) and fabricated (artifacts, artworks, and human-made things), so that our world-disclosing techniques and practices toward worldless and poor-in-world beings foster our own development and self-understanding, as we relate to ourselves and to our environment. Human environment is essentially social, historical, and cultural, hence a correlation of self-understanding and technique underlies the ongoing domination of nature and struggles for recognition as an interplay of the will to power.

3. Deconstruction is a radical hermeneutics: since there is no such a thing as a transcendental signified we are always already situated in relation to the very moments of signification in our social reproduction through social representations, symbolic, cultural, and theoretical concepts and philosophemes (in Derrida’s Nietzschean terms, metaphoricity, *différance*).

4. The main task of a Phenomenology of Liberation is to think the unthought-of in the very impossibility of justice (assuming that justice to come, *justice à venir*, is the quasi-Messianic motif of ongoing struggles for liberation) within the limits of the possible (power). The social utopian horizons of liberation cannot fulfill or exhaust democratic, egalitarian claims and struggles for mutual recognition, beyond self-deceptive mechanisms of social control and technologies of the self.

5. By effecting a rapprochement between the procedural conceptions of a reflective *equilibrium* (J. Rawls) and the *lifeworld* (J. Habermas) we aim at a hermeneutics of normativity correlated to the facticity of a democratic ethos inherent in a pluralist, political culture, capable of integrating semantic and pragmatic aspects of a diversity of practices and codifications (*modus vivendi*) that subscribe to possible,

actual, and imaginable overlapping *consensuses*, especially when dealing with universalizable questions of human rights and public policies.

6. We can thus seek to revisit the conception of a postnational, democratic ethos, including its different versions of *deliberative democracy* (Rawls, Cohen, Fishkin, Habermas) so as to recast the (Habermasian) problem of *juridification* (*Verrechtlichung*), beyond its original pejorative, negative sense, associated with the economic, financial, and administrative reductionisms that one might find, say, in a neoliberal, corporate globalization qua technical, systemic colonization of the lifeworld. A phenomenology of liberation rehabilitates in formal-pragmatic terms a positive juridification insofar as it articulates a social ontology with intersubjective struggles for recognition and a grammar of liberation, beyond the reification of labor and productive relations (Habermas, Honneth).

7. Following Foucault, Apel, and Habermas, the three paradigms of ontology, subjectivity, and language are said to be co-constitutive and interdependent, insofar as they account for the problem of the social reproduction of the modern, rationalized lifeworld through the differentiated models of a sociological descriptive phenomenology, of a hermeneutics of subjectivation, and of a formal-pragmatic discourse theory. Just as a Kantian-inspired “transcendental semantics” accounts for the articulation of meaning (“*Sinn und Bedeutung*,” in Kant’s own terms) in the sensification (*Versinnlichung*) of concepts and ideas as they either refer us back to intuitions in their givenness (*Gegebenheit*) of sense or are said to be “realizable” (*realisierbar*) as an objective reality (since ideas and ideals refer, of course, to no sensible intuition), a phenomenological-pragmatic perspectivism recasts, by analogy, the phenomenological, hermeneutical semantic correlation (*Bedeutungskorrelation*) between ontology, subjectivity, and language without presupposing any transcendental signified, ontological dualism (or *Zweiweltenthesen*), or binary relationship between subject and object, theory and praxis, oppressors and oppressed. And yet the very irreducibility of the hermeneutic circle, together with the incompleteness of its reductions inherent in such a systemic-lifeworldly correlation, seems to betray a quasi-transcendental, perspectival network of signifiers and language games. The modern phenomenon of juridification (*Verrechtlichung*) turns out to be a good example of this new version of the same problem of accounting for the normative grounds of a critical theory of society. Habermas’s wager is that his reconstructive communicative paradigm succeeds in overcoming the transcendental-empirical aporias through a “linguistically generated intersubjectivity” (Habermas 1987, 297).

V. My ongoing research in social phenomenology has sought to articulate the normative and empirical claims inherent in a Latin American philosophy of liberation that takes racial discourse into account. As I pointed out, the myths of racial democracy play a decisive role in the formation of ethnic identity in Latin America and remain paramount for the consolidation of a truly egalitarian democracy. Gilberto Freyre’s 1933 seminal book *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (ET: *The Masters and the Slaves*) has been hailed as the most representative work on Brazilian identity ever, opening up endless debates on collective self-esteem, self-understanding, and race relations in Brazil, especially racial mixture, the quasi-romantic idealization of the mulatto (*pardo, moreno*), and the so-called myth of “racial democracy”—even though there is no occurrence of the term in this book. Beyond its immediate context of the contemporaneous discussion on regionalism versus universalism following the Modern Art Week in 1922, Freyre’s analyses contributed to new, comparative

readings of slavery systems and racism in the Americas. One particular upshot of the racial democracy myth is the ideology of whitening and the concomitant practice of miscegenation or race mixture, described by many scholars as the primary pillar of white supremacy in Latin America, particularly in Brazil (Twine 1997, 87). According to Twine, the whitening ideology “was originally coined by the [Latin American] elite to reconcile theories of scientific racism with the reality of the predominantly nonwhite population of their country” (Twine 1997, 87f.) toward the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus Afro-Latin American children are systematically disempowered as they learn not to talk about racism, regarded as a taboo subject for discussion with their parents and peers (Twine 1997, 153). It was such a perverse circle that racial democracy has been fueling for decades throughout generations and it was only recently, especially after the end of military dictatorships in Latin America, that the middle-class and the average citizen began talking about these social pathologies. Most Latin American citizens have certainly been socialized into a racist, paternalist political culture, so full of contradictions and shortcomings when compared to the normative, regulative ideals of the democratic, egalitarian yardstick. And yet, this making of a political culture is only sustained to the extent that Latin Americans also produce and reproduce such a culture. The shift from a hypocritical racial democracy towards a truly pluralist democracy has in effect been the only way out of the elitist pseudoliberalism of both military and civilian calls to “modernize” Latin America. Just as the aestheticist regionalism and nationalism of the modernist movement of the 1920s gave way to a technocratic, nationalist modernization in the 1950s and 1960s only to highlight the oligarchic, hierarchical relations of power that made Brazil one of the most socially and economically unequal nations of the planet, a moral revolution from below alone can secure the rule of law for all and call for a public, democratic distribution of primary goods. If Brazil remains too far from a well ordered society and public participation in the bargain processes is still remote from vast, excluded segments of the population, the political thrust of social movements meets a fortiori the normative criteria of a concept of democracy that defies and transgresses any corrupted, systemic “power that be” for the sake of the people. The egalitarian premises in affirmative action procedures can do precisely that, whenever one has to be reminded that the outcast in Latin America discover their own identity as citizens, rights-bearers, or as end-in-themselves only when they become visible in the public sphere and get talked about in the media. Hence a radical critique of racial relations, state, and society is not necessarily opposed to the normative ideals of a philosophy of liberation.

In full agreement with Andrews, I believe that because race does matter in Latin America, “black activists, aided by black and white scholars and intellectuals, lobbied intensively for the addition of racial data to recent Brazilian, Costa Rican, and Uruguayan censuses and are currently lobbying for their addition to censuses in Colombia and Panama” (Andrews 2004, 207). National population censuses have been carried out in most Latin American countries every ten years, on a regular basis, since the 1980s and 1990s. In Brazil, the first census was taken in 1872 and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics has been performing national censuses every 10 years since the 1930s—the next one will be carried out this year. It is very interesting the way public discussions about race and color have contributed to deconstructing the myth of racial democracy in that country and consolidating its social, democratic institutions, especially insofar as they unmask racial inequalities and subtle forms of racism. Affirmative action has come to the fore of ongoing debates opposing different camps across the complex spectrum of positions that denounce

cultural browning, whitening ideologies, and Europeanization. These social pathologies, crystallized in racist and racialized conceptions, betray the relevance and the inescapability of race in public discussions about inequalities in Latin America. The empirical findings of censuses, polls, and surveys point to this inevitable social construct and its key role in shaping democracy. As Andrews put it, “If race truly did not matter—if it did not play a powerful role in determining how much education one receives, what kind of job one works at, how much salary one earns, even how long one lives—we would not need these data” (Andrews 2004, 206 f.)

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Endnotes

1. An original draft of this paper was read at the University of Oregon on January 19, 2010. I am grateful to Naomi Zack, José Mendoza, and Peter Warnek for their critical remarks and suggestions.
2. I am using the term “mestizaje” (Portuguese, *mestiçagem*; French, *métissage*) to allude to all possible mixed-racial

combinations so as to comprise not only European and Amerindians, but also Africans and mixed-raced groups.

3. Samuel Huntington, *Who are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 243, apud Alcoff, Linda Martín, "Comparative Race, Comparative Racisms," in *Black Ethnicity/Latino Race?* ed. Jorge Gracia (Cornell University Press, 2007).

BOOK REVIEW

El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano, del Caribe y "latino" [1300-2000]: Historia, Corrientes, Temas, Filósofos

Enrique Dussel, Eduardo Mendieta, Carmen Bohórquez (Eds). (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno, 2009.) 1111 pp.

Reviewed by Grant J. Silva

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How does one present an overview of seven centuries of Latin American philosophy when much of the subject matter has been ignored, marginalized, and/or eclipsed by European and Anglo-American philosophical interests? Enrique Dussel, Eduardo Mendieta, and Carmen Bohórquez tackle this daunting task in their edited work, *El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano, del Caribe y "latino" [1300-2000]*.¹ Authored by an international team of researchers, professional academics, and philosophers, this volume—a formidable one thousand one hundred and eleven pages long—presents the history of philosophical thought in pre-Columbian America, colonial Iberian America, and contemporary Latin America (including the Caribbean and even amongst Latino/as in the United States). In addition, it contains over two hundred biographical sketches of philosophers from all of these regions and eras (not to mention an eighty-two page single space bibliography). Perhaps anticipating the above question, Dussel introduces the volume by writing: "This work was designed as the beginning of a continental philosophical *movement*, rather than just a book."² As such, this volume stands as a collective philosophical resurgence of the Latin American masses.

El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano is an incredible resource for anyone researching Spanish-language or Latin American philosophy. With entries on analytic philosophy, phenomenology, logic, scholasticism, conservatism, liberalism, feminism, the philosophy of education, and aesthetics, this work explores general topics that *any* philosopher capable of reading Spanish can appreciate. In addition, the entries pertaining to colonialism, indigenous thought, the philosophy of liberation, positive/anti-positivist thought, the various independence movements of the region (including decolonization and recent indigenous politics), and current trends in Latin American political philosophy are sure to capture the interests of those working in Latin American or even "Hispanic" philosophy in the United States.

This volume consists of four parts: (I) historical epochs (broken into three subsections), (II) philosophical currents of the twentieth century, (III) general philosophical themes, and (IV) biographical sketches of various philosophers or *pensadores*. Dussel introduces each section, which, given his

wealth of knowledge and desire to construct a truly global or world philosophy, presents the history of Latin American thought from a foremost expert in the field. A thinker whose entire philosophical corpus can likewise be catalogued, Dussel provides his take on such issues as the origins of modernity and abstract philosophical ideas—his comments on the question of "indigenous philosophy" versus "ethno-philosophy" or "myth" serves as example (see pp. 17-20).

Part I begins with an overview of several indigenous responses to what Dussel labels "nuclear" or core philosophical problems, i.e., those questions that all humans bound to social groups and confined to the human psyche are forced to contend with (p. 15). Not only are such peoples as the Nahuatl (Aztec) and Maya present, but lesser-known indigenous peoples (from a U.S. standpoint) such as the Mapuche, Guarani, Tojolabal, and Quechua are also found in this subsection. Worth noting is Miguel Leon-Portilla's entry on the Nahuatl philosophical tradition, a summation of much of his research on Nahuatl culture (p. 21). Upon reviewing this section one can only imagine how much philosophical thought was lost during the conquest of America. As an example, take the entry on the Tojolabal—people of Mayan descent living in southeast Mexico. The Tojolabal meaning of *nosotros* (or "we") refers to the main agent of their social ontology, the "community," "people," or *pueblo*. This *nosotros*, which consists of a community without social hierarchy or political imbalances, not only sheds new light on the significance of contemporary indigenous *social* movements but also reveals alternative philosophical practices that do not begin with the individual (p. 33).

Next is the colonial, early modern epoch. The fact that early modern thought is mentioned at the same time as colonization and the colonial mentality reflects the Latin American philosophical commitment to what has been dubbed "the underside of modernity." Dussel's entry on "The First Philosophical Debate of Modernity" is helpful here: a synopsis of several books and recent essays, Dussel holds that the first philosophical debates of the modern era are found in the ethical justifications (or lack thereof) of the Iberian invasion of America and the subsequent colonization of indigenous people. For him, the debates and works of Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda not only exhibit the modern emphasis on "the public exercise of reason," but their subsequent philosophical-anthropological range of questions (i.e., "Are the indigenous humans?" "What right do we have to take over this region?" and "Can they be saved?") blossomed into the more distinctively *modern* problematic. While it remains possible to view the history of modern philosophy as a uniquely Eurocentric phenomenon—that is, without reference to the Americas or colonization in general—the modern fixation with progress and the further accumulation or maturation of knowledge began with the recognition of immature, child-like beings, the product of backward or primitive cultures. Thus, Dussel argues, at the base of all modern thought (from the fifteenth until the twenty-first century) is the anti-discursive tendency to obviate non-Western epistemologies and ontological frameworks in the name of progress, maturity, and salvation. Modern thought is inherently anti-dialogical because it undermines the possibility for critical engagement with philosophical worldviews that do not begin on equal footing, namely, "reason" as opposed to myth, tradition, or the simply the possibility of some other epistemic foundation (see pp. 55-66).

The last subsection of part I pertains to the Latin American philosophical climate of late modernity or the Enlightenment. This subsection demonstrates how romantic, liberal, conservative, and even Krausian ideals were incorporated to Latin America, often at the service of various independence

movements of the nascent Latin American republics. Given how some would consider the nineteenth-century nation-building movement as the historical precursor to a distinctively “Latin” America, Leonardo Tovar González’s entry on the foundations of Latin American philosophy proves worthwhile in this sense. The purpose of González’s entry is to provide a brief account of the various “foundations” of Latin American philosophy, from the indigenous to the Spanish, “Latin Americanist” to intercultural (pp. 255-261).

Part II explores the main philosophical currents that abound in Latin America in the twentieth century. I venture to say that this section (and the subsequent) will be of interest to most philosophers since the currents of thought that are presented range from such topics as existential and Christian philosophies to feminist philosophy and bioethics. The entry on Caribbean philosophy and the work of C.L.R. James and Sylvia Winter (by Carlos Rojas Osorio and Paget Henry, see pp. 479), in addition to those by Eduardo Mendieta (on Latino philosophy in the United States, see p. 518) and Ricardo Gómez (the philosophy of science, p. 335) provide great overviews of their respective topics.

Part III presents the history of general philosophical themes in Latin America. Such topics include ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, philosophy of history, philosophy of economics, multiculturalism, and even philosophy for youth. The entry on ethics provides an example of how general philosophical themes are made relevant in light of Latin American history. As Ricardo Maliandi shows, with the advent of positivism in Latin America, ethics became intertwined with social platforms aimed at improving the region. This had a drastic effect of education, politics, and value theory, such that ethical enterprises had a more normative or practical import in Latin America when compared to other regions (see pp. 526-541).

There is no doubt that many will be drawn to the entries entitled: “Indigeneity: From Integration to Autonomy” (by Héctor Diaz-Polaco), “From Aimé Césaire to the Zapatistas” (by Ramón Grosfoguel), “Decolonial Thought, Generosity and Openness” (by Walter Mignolo), and “The Philosophical Thought of the Decolonial Turn” (by Nelson Maldonado-Torres) (see pp. 647-683). These entries provide a veritable introduction to decolonization and de-coloniality. Decolonization is not just about nation-building, national autonomy, or the removal of colonial elite, but more importantly the identification and elimination of power dynamics entrenched in the colonial process, i.e., “coloniality.” Whereas it can be argued that “post-colonialism” is the first step towards ending imperial regimes, simply creating autonomous nations (as opposed to colonies) does nothing to target forms of oppression that replicate or maintain colonial atmospheres by incorporating grotesque gender and racial stratifications. I think this is a great lesson for political and social philosophers to learn from Latin American thinkers.

The last part of this volume consists of an assortment of biographies of Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino/a philosophers. As a researcher interested in Latin American philosophy for over 10 years, I am only familiar with a few of the names presented in this section. This can either speak towards my impoverished knowledge of Latin American philosophy or reveal the fact that there is an assortment of philosophers that have yet to be discovered by Latino philosophers in the United States (probably both). Seeing how Latino/as are also present in this section, the editors of this text intend on showing the inherent transnational aspects of Latin American thought. This transnationalism is perhaps engendered by the reality of colonization, something that all Latino/as in their respective regions are unable to avoid, at least in one way or another.

One area where this work could be improved is on the topic of race and racial thought, a subject of extreme importance throughout the history of Latin America and amongst Latino/as and Caribbean people today. Although race is discussed at various points throughout the text, especially in the context of multiculturalism and de-colonialism, there is no specific entry on this topic. Seeing the philosophical import that an idea like race can have, especially in terms of its practical significance and connection to socioeconomic class level, it might have been better explored as its own theme or current of thought. Nonetheless, this volume is rather successful in its attempt to present both *the history of philosophy in Latin America* and *the history of Latin American philosophy*. I highly recommend it to all in our field.

Endnotes

1. México: Siglo XXI: Centro de Cooperación Regional para la Educación de Adultos en América Latina y el Caribe, 2009.
2. The original reads: “Esta obra fue proyectada, más que como un libro, como el inicio de un *movimiento* filosófico continental” (p. 7).

SUBMISSIONS

Call for papers

The spring 2011 issue of the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* will be open to any topic on Hispanic/Latino philosophy. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Electronic submissions are preferred. All submissions should be limited to 5,000 words (twenty double-spaced pages) and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting.

Call for book reviews

Book reviews in any area of Hispanic/Latino philosophy, broadly construed, are welcome. Submissions should be accompanied by a short biographical summary of the author. Book reviews may be short (500 words) or long (1,500 words). Electronic submissions are preferred.

Deadlines

January 15, 2011

Please send all articles, book reviews, queries, comments, or suggestions to:

Guest Editor: Eduardo García-Ramírez
Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
México, D.F.
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Formatting Guidelines

The *APA Newsletters* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use *italics* instead of underlining. Use an “em dash” (—) instead of a double hyphen (--).

Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

- John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

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