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# Enrique Dussel's "Otherness" and the Problem of the Euro-centric Totalized Epistemological System in Academic Theology

DANIEL JARA J. •

djara@semisud.edu.ec

Universidad Teológica del Caribe – Puerto Rico

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## ABSTRACT

The article deeps into the thought of Dr. Enrique Dussel (La Paz, Mendoza, Argentina, 1934) in order to demonstrate that modern academic thought in the global north (theological thought included, naturally) is highly euro-centric, cognitive-centric and naive about its self-placed position of authority and superiority regarding theological knowledge from the global south, which constitutes its *Other*. It explores Dussel's thought about Modernity and refers to the totalization of the *Euro-central* model. In order to deal with what Dussel calls «the conquering vocation of the system», inspiration is found on the Levinasian philosophy of *the Other* and on an approach to the «asymmetrical problem» that stresses the need for a post-colonial turn against the empire of Euro-centric reason, while recognizing *the Other* as a revelatory epiphany.

**Keywords:** Enrique Dussel; Otherness; Modernity; Levinas; Asymmetrical Problem; Post-colonial Turn

**La “alteridad” en Enrique Dussel y el problema del sistema totalizador de la epistemología eurocéntrica en la teología académica**

\* El autor es ecuatoriano, profesor de Teología Intercultural en el Seminario Sudamericano SEMISUD – dependiente de la Universidad Teológica del Caribe UTC. Editor-in-Chief de *MOZAIK: The Ecumenical Journal of the World Students Christian Federation WSCF-Europe*. Master en Teología (Cross-Cultural Theology) en el Protestant Theological University (The Netherlands). Master en Extended Ecumenical Studies por la University of Bonn (Germany). Especialista en epistemologías del Sur por el Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra (Portugal). Dr. Theol. (cand.) at Ruhr-University Bochum (Germany).

RESUMEN

El artículo profundiza en el pensamiento del Dr. Enrique Dussel (La Paz, 1934) para demostrar que el pensamiento académico moderno en el norte global (incluido el pensamiento teológico, naturalmente) es altamente eurocéntrico, cognitivo y ingenuo sobre su autoimpuesta posición de autoridad y superioridad con respecto al conocimiento teológico del sur global, que constituye su *Otro*. Explora el pensamiento de Dussel sobre la Modernidad y se refiere a la totalización del modelo eurocéntrico. Para abordar lo que Dussel llama «la vocación conquistadora del sistema», se inspira en la filosofía levinasiana del *Otro* y en un enfoque del «problema asimétrico» que enfatiza la necesidad de un giro post-colonial contra el imperio de la razón eurocéntrica, reconociendo a dicho *Otro* como epifanía reveladora.

*Palabras clave:* Enrique Dussel; Alteridad; Modernidad; Levinás; Problema asimétrico; Giro post-colonial.

«We were told that the *being is*, “the *not-being is not*” (Parmenides) “So innocent!” or “so abstract!” you could say. No! So colonizer! The *not-beings* are the barbarians. They *are-not*. And because the *not-being is not*, just the *being is*. What happens then? The Other is placed in the world, and the only world “which *is*” is the one that has the domain of everything».<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Modernity and its euro-centric totality

Modern academical thought in the global north (theological thought included, naturally) is highly euro-centric, cognitive-centric and naive about its self-placed position of authority and superiority regarding the knowledge from the global south, which constitutes its *Other*. The reasons behind this asymmetrical epistemological relation can be traced to the very foundations of Modernity or back to the Latin-Germanic Christendom, or even before, to the Greek philosophical conceptions of *being* and *to be* which condemned foreign peoples and tribes to ‘barbarity’.

According to Dussel, the birth of Modernity took place in 1492. Even when its embryonic phase occurred in the free cities of

<sup>1</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación* (Bogotá: Editorial Nueva América, 1995), 125.

late-medieval Europe, it was not in the Renaissance's arts nor on its sciences where it came to birth, but on its confrontation with the *Other*.<sup>2</sup> Two main historical events characterized this confrontation. At the beginning of the year, on January the 6<sup>th</sup>, the united forces of the kingdoms of Castilla and Aragon defeated the army of Sultan Boabdil and conquered Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Europe. Because of this and to the following expulsion of Jews and Arabs from the peninsula, the pope Alexander IV recognized Queen Isabel and King Fernando with the titles of 'Catholic Kings' four years later. The same year, on August, the Genoese Christopher Columbus set sail from Puerto de Palos under the blessing of the Spanish Catholic rulers with the idea of arriving India by traveling westward.<sup>3</sup> On October the 12<sup>th</sup>, he faced the first Amerindian native, this encounter in the beaches of Guanahani, in the current Bahamas, was the beginning of the clash between old Europe and the New World and it meant the conquer, subjugation and annihilation of the *Other* and his world.

Opposite to what is commonly claimed, this encounter cannot be interpreted as the result of European inherent superiority but as a consequence of its geopolitical weakness. Europe was surrounded on the East by Islam since the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans, Greece, and Turkey and the fall of the capital of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 (Vienna was still besieged by Ottoman troops until 1688). On the South, Al-Andalus was under Muslim control since the eighth century. This situation of isolation obliged Europe to explore new commercial routes to far Asia by traveling westward. Nevertheless, according to Dussel, the events of 1492 were nothing but a proof of a paradigm that had been forming for centuries<sup>4</sup>: «Europe posses-

2 Cf. Enrique Dussel, *The invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the Other and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 12.

3 Cf. Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 27.

4 It is relevant to point here Dussel's reflection: «Modernity (...) is not contemporary to Europe's hegemony, playing the role of "center" of the system in relation to other cultures. "Centrality" of the world-system and Modernity are not synchronic phenomena. Modern Europe becomes "center" after becoming "modern"». Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la Cultura y la Liberación* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, 2006), 46.

sed, according to this paradigm, exceptional internal characteristics which permitted it to surpass all other cultures in rationality».<sup>5</sup>

Dussel affirms that modernity has two ambiguous meanings: the first one refers to human emancipation from “pre-scientific” thought by the power of human reason (which is European reason of course), I call this one the “reason-centric” paradigm. But on a second “mythic” level it also bears a connotation that justifies violence against any *Other* that defies it, even just by existing. Because modern Europe sees itself as much more developed and superior than other cultures, it is a moral must to bring this development to barbarous people. Modern Europe is not able to see any other developmental direction than his, and since savages refuse to follow its way voluntarily, it is obliged to practice «fair colonial wars»<sup>6</sup>. Those who refuse these efforts are guilty of their own oppression for opposing the civilizing process and are treated as necessary «holocausts» for a greater good, as the «inevitable costs of modernization»<sup>7</sup>.

Through modernity, European reason, the System, works actively to totalize itself. By posing itself in the center, the System works like a black hole which guarantees its existence on the base of devouring any exteriority. This applies to foreign nations in medieval times as well as to current globalization (that should be better called “westernization”) impulsed by Europe and its overseas projects (i.e. the United States, Australia, South-Africa, etc.).

Any exteriority to this project is nothing but pre-modern. Thus, Europe and its reason-centric epistemology becomes the end and destiny of humanity as a whole. In 1784, Kant writes in *Answering the question: What is Enlightenment?*: «Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) is the exit of humanity by itself from a state of culpable immaturity (*selbstverschuldete Unmündigkeit*). [...] Laziness and cowardliness are

5 Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 10.

6 *Ibid.*, 137.

7 *Ibid.*



the causes which bind the great part of humanity in this frivolous state of immaturity».<sup>8</sup>

Half a century later, Hegel interprets world's history in theological terms, as the movement of the *Spirit* with its own direction: «Universal history goes from East to West. Europe is absolutely the end of universal history. Asia is the beginning».<sup>9</sup> This is God's self-realization, a theodicy expressed on reason and freedom. Thus, Europe's reason totalized itself even on a religious level, theological discourses and narratives outside this epistemological matrix had to be ignored, silenced, subjugated or destroyed.

But if human development comes from East to West, from Asia -the dawn of reason- to Europe -its glorious fulfillment- what is the place of Africa, the South East Asia or Latin America (the global South according to De Sousa Santos)?<sup>10</sup> Well, they do not participate in human development because they are not even humans! Hegel is extremely explicit about the sub-human condition of Africans, regarding Latin Americans, he doesn't even mention them, they do not participate in the *Spirit*:

«Africa is, in general, a closed land, and it maintains this fundamental character. It is characteristic of the blacks that their consciousness has not yet even arrived at the intuition of any objectivity, for example, of God or the law, in which humanity relates to the world and intuits its essence [...]. He [the black person] is a human being in the rough. [...] What we understand properly of Africa is something isolated and lacking in history, submerged completely in the natural spirit, and mentionable only as the threshold of universal history».<sup>11</sup>

8 Emmanuel Kant, *Was heisst Aufklärung?* (Königsberg, 1784), 481.

9 Manuel Boatca, *Global inequalities beyond occidentalism* (Farnham: Union Road, 2015), 96.

10 In order to differentiate between theological methods and backgrounds, the categories of global South and global North are especially useful. On this regard, I have chosen to follow De Sousa Santos' logic: «The South is used here as a metaphor of the human suffering which is systematically caused by the colonialism and capitalism. It is a South that exists as well in the geographic global North, the so-called interior third world of the hegemonic countries. At the same time, the global south contains in itself [...] the local practices of complicity with them». Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Una Epistemología del Sur: La reinención del conocimiento y la emancipación social* (México: Siglo XXI: CLACSO, 2009), 12.

11 G. W. F. Hegel, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Appendix C (Hamburg: Meiner, 1995), 171.

What can be said about those texts? Are they examples of a disastrous but overcome past? Certainly many of their implication and assumptions factually remain in many European theological faculties. Otherwise, why do they still differentiate between *Theology* (referring mainly to its western systematic study) and *Contextual Theologies* (Latin Americans, Africans, Asians)? Why their libraries and curricular meshes are still divided into areas (i.e. Soteriology, Eschatology) while the area of Contextual Theology is a chaotic potpourri of topics, from Liberation Theology to religious ethnographic studies; from African Christology to Chin Pneumatology? Would it not be a better option to assume that Chin Pneumatology has all the right to be part of the Pneumatology class instead of the one about Contextual Theology? The same is valid for many other theological topics, at least the ones whose characteristics allow similar categorizations as those in Western academia, which because of its radical novelty or otherness, is not always the case.

While in the Southern part of Europe the *Spirit* was active in the past, it is the north of Europe -its western part mainly- the area on which, by the hand of its reason and freedom, history found its plenitude. According to Hegel, Germany, France, Denmark, and the Scandinavian countries are the heart of Europe (*das Herz Europas*). Hegel adds:

«The Germanic Spirit (*germanische Geist*) is the Spirit of the New World (*neuen Welt*), whose end is the realization of the absolute truth, as the infinite self-determination of freedom that has for its content its proper absolute form. The principle of the German Empire ought to accommodate the Christian religion. The destiny of the Germanic peoples is that of serving as the bearer of the Christian principle».<sup>12</sup>

Christian faith and Church, as the 'highest' religious belief and religious institution respectively, are absolutely adjoined to the destiny of Europe. Hegel stresses the role of European colonization as a *missionary effort* in the world: Missionaries of civilization in the

12 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Colonial Press, 1900), 341.

entire world (*Missionare der Zivilisation in der ganzen Welt*).<sup>13</sup> Here, the inseparable bond that the system assumed for the gospel and European culture is more than evident. Since then, European theologians, priests, and missionaries would have nothing to learn from the non-European *Other*, because their faith is assumed as the full realization of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to observe how this colonial way of thinking was implanted in the minds of millions of believers in the global south. Believers that are convinced that *the Spirit* has completely moved to the south, and now they are those who have nothing to learn from the aging and "*Spirit-less*" churches from the global North.

The Euro-centrical model works as a totalization that assumes the progressive advance of humanity until assuming that historical European particularities constitute events of human universality in general.<sup>15</sup> This universality encompasses culture, philosophy, theology, epistemology and subjectivity in general. Postcolonial and decolonial studies that have been performed during the last 100 years have shown that this colonial matrix is so deeply rooted at a scientific and empirical level that nowadays we are just grasping the surface of the problem.

In this sense, we are like the man that was born with an elephant in his room, it was so big that he learned to move around him but he never identified its existence. How do we know this? Because the *Other* reveals aspects of the self that otherwise would be hidden to us. For example, how could the system be aware of its euro-centric and cognitive-centric matrix if it was not because of the post-colonial production which made this evident? How could European Theology and Philosophy be aware of their limitations if it was not because of their Asian, African or Latin America counterparts? As the liberation pedagogue Paulo Freire experienced first hand:

13 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 455.

14 *Ibid.*, 342.

15 Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (Durkham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 43.

«I always say “men and women” because I learned many years ago that saying only “men” is highly immoral [...] I had already written *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. You can read the Spanish versions of this work and you are going to confirm that it is written in sexist language. The women from the United States made me understand that I had been deformed by the “macho” ideology».<sup>16</sup>

The doctrine of European superior thought and history and its role as the zenith of human development was firmly established in the sciences, the arts, the politics and every human affair worthy of being taken into account. In this direction, Dussel states: “Scientism, the current ideology of the center, is a subtle ideology, which [...] fabricates the instruments necessary for the power of the center to be exercised over the periphery”.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. The conquering vocation of the system

«During this journey [conquest of current Mexico], Cortés carried a banner of black taffeta with a colored cross, and blue and white flames scattered throughout. He inscribed on the border of the banner: “We follow the cross and in this sign we shall conquer!”<sup>18</sup>

If according to Dussel, all western ontology can be summarized by the formula *the being is*, the same can be said about western rationalism and the Cartesian formula *cogito ergo sum*, it is its cornerstone, its summary. Nevertheless, according to the Argentinian philosopher, the *ego cogito* cannot and should not be understood without its proto-formulation: the *ego conquiro*.<sup>19</sup> This colonizer doctrine was put into practice in one way or another in the five continents,

16 Paulo Freire, *El Grito Manso* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Siglo XXI, 2003), 32.

17 Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 33.

18 Fray Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía Indiana* (Mexico DF: UNAM 4, 1975), 39.

19 Cf. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the Other and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 43.



nevertheless, it was Amerindia one of those which had to pay the highest prices. The Spanish colonizer Fernandez de Oviedo acted as a truly European philosopher when asking himself rhetorically: «Are the Indians human beings?» (ontology), to which he answers: «no, these are not rational beings» (epistemology).<sup>20</sup>

This example shows clearly a point I would like to state: there was (and is) a dialectic movement by which the supposed superiority of European Ontology, Philosophy, Theology, and its official History feed and reinforce each other. For Hegel this is natural, because «the state that bears the Spirit [epistemological superiority] is the dominator of the world [colonial superiority] before which all other states are devoid of rights (*rechtlos*) [ontological inferiority]». For this reason Europe appointed itself «the missionary [religious superiority] of civilization [cultural superiority] to the world».<sup>21</sup> The conquest of America became both, the result and proof, of European universal superiority; while numerous European philosophies became its rational discourse, several theologies worked as its divine justification.<sup>22</sup>

This encounter between *modern* Europe and the *barbaric* New World has been called euphemistically as the «encounter of two worlds», assuming a kind of symmetrical participation of two actors in the action of encounter. It could not be farther from the truth! The «encounter» theory seems to ignore the asymmetrical exclusion that the *savage Other*, his world, his reason, and religious beliefs experienced from modern Europe.<sup>23</sup> Christian faith, as other missionary religions in world's History, immediately assumed violence as

20 Cf. Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, *Historia General* in Kathleen Ann Myers, *Fernandez de Oviedo's Chronicle of America: A new history for a new world* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 116.

21 Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 5.

22 Regarding America Hegel affirms that it is the «Land of the future». Because there are no European in America, there is no History nor Philosophy to reflect about. Hence the 'missionary' action of Europe was so important. See: Michael Schultz, «La presencia de G.W.F. Hegel en representantes de la filosofía latinoamericana (L. Zea, A. Roig, E. Dussel, I. Ellacuría)», *Contrastes* 19 (2014): 285-309.

23 Cf. Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 55.

a mission instrument to settle its position of superiority over indigenous beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Amerindia established its first encounter with the absolute stranger through a relationship marked by dispossession and violence. For this reason, the philosopher of liberation concludes: «It is totally euphemistic and vacuous to speak of the “meeting of two worlds”, since the essential structure of one of them was destroyed».<sup>25</sup> The indigenous genocide was only the prelude of what De Sousa Santos calls the American «epistemicide». Thus, it makes more sense to speak of a covering up (*encubrimiento*) of Amerindia and its otherness, instead of a discovery (*descubrimiento*) of a new world.<sup>26</sup>

A significant number of European philosophers and theologians were totally functional to the conquering efforts, providing the rational and religious basis and justification for the destruction of Amerindia's otherness.<sup>27</sup> Instead of recognizing indigenous otherness or exploring ways to preserve it against Spanish and Portuguese slavery, they supported the totalization of the system, which transformed any utopia of a different or better world into «demoniac, illegitimate, the atheist».<sup>28</sup> At this stage, the project of the Kingdom of God as it is presented in the gospels is replaced by the *System* and its project. It becomes a fetish. The Amerindian (and the global south) *Other* was stripped of his dignity and became an instrument of the project of the *System*. Once an instrument, he had no rights, he could

24 Authors like Bartolomé de Las Casas distinguished among the legitimate missionary impulse of Christian faith and illegitimate means to accomplish it (as physical violence): «Unique, single and identical for all the world and for all time was the norm established by Divine Providence to teach men the true religion, namely: persuasive of reasoned understanding and gently attractive and exhortative of the will. And it must be common to all the men of the world, without any discrimination of cults, errors or depraved customs». Bartolomé De Las Casas, *De Unico Vocationis Modo – Obras Completas* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, II, 1990) at Cap. V, 1, 17.

25 Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 42.

26 Cf. *Ibid.*, 57.

27 History keeps the memory of those who refused to be functional to this system. We can mention Bartolomé De Las Casas, José de Acosta, Francisco de Vitoria, and many others.

28 Enrique Dussel, «La cristiandad moderna ante el otro: del indio rudo al bon sauvage», *Concilium* 150 (1979): 498-506. 500.

be used, enslaved or killed. This theology of domination set the «borders» (so my salvation reach the *border* of the earth, Is 49:6) and declares the other «beyond» salvation, value, and dignity.<sup>29</sup>

According to Dussel, the conquest was understood on religious terms on both sides of the battlefield. For example, Cortez was convinced that God was the ultimate guarantor for Amerindian subjugation:

«We understand the task upon which we embark, and through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ we have to prepare ourselves fittingly for the battles to come and we will triumph on them. For should we be defeated (which I hope God will not allow), we will never escape, given our small numbers. Since we have no ships to Cuba, the only recourse left to our fighting, strong hearts, is to turn to God».<sup>30</sup>

On the opposite side of the battlefield, because of the almost absolute strangeness of these newcomers from the sea of the East, indigenous Amerindians treated them and their actions as extensions of the absolute otherness, the otherness from the realm of the gods. For example, the defeat of the earthly armies of the Aztec resistance was interpreted by them as the heavenly defeat of their gods against the foreign ones, so they had to incorporate these Gods (The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit, Virgin Mary, etc.) into their religious practice. Because the invaders considered indigenous religiosity as «negative, pagan, satanic, and intrinsically perverse»,<sup>31</sup> it was justified to eliminate indigenous religious practices, world-views, spirituality, and theological conceptions.

The strong ties between Christian faith and the conquering vocation of the *System* reached its peak in the work of Ginés de Sepúlveda and his condemnation of Amerindia's 'barbarous' non-in-

29 Dussel, «La cristiandad moderna ante el otro: del indio rudo al bon sauvage», 501.

30 Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Verdadera Historia de Los Sucesos de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1947), 51.

31 Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 51.

dividualistic approach to things and persons, and his further theological justification of the massacre: «the Indians know nothing about private possession [...], personal inheritance contracts and [...] modern's supreme characteristic: subjective freedom».<sup>32</sup> Thus, to conquer was an act of Christian mercy because of its liberating role from the «pre-modern barbarity», those who resisted were “culpable for their own violent conquest and their own victimization».<sup>33</sup> This shows how Christian faith and Modernity (with its epistemological superiority) lie in the core of the *System* and worked together in order to justify colonial violence<sup>34</sup>. In a world with no notions about the separation between religion and state, Christian Western Theology fused itself with Modernity confusing its culture (the *locus* of the *System*) with the gospel itself.

In this scenario, the Spanish Dominican, Frey Bartolomé De Las Casas, denounced this atrocious argument and pointed to the core of the Modern myth when charging the fault on those who practiced violence in order to guarantee the project of the *System*, he affirms: «The quoted texts prove that those who give the orders are principally responsible for the grave and bloody crimes perpetrated upon the infidels. Those who give orders sin more seriously than the rest».<sup>35</sup> This is an outstanding moment in the history of Europe and its relation to the *Other*. It is one of the first (registered) times when one of the sons of the *System* opened himself to the possibility of recognizing in the Amerindian an independent *Other*. Nevertheless, De Las Casas is an example of how difficult it is to leave behind the mentality of the *System* in order to recognize the *Other* on its own

32 *Ibid.*, 65.

33 *Ibid.*, 66.

34 Despite this cannot be applied to every theologian and philosopher from European background (there where dozens of European free thinkers that rejected this logic), Prof. James O'Connell has identified three formative elements shaping modern Europe: Judeo-Christian monotheism, Greek rationalist (manifested as Modern rationalism) and Roman organization (with its juridical and proto-capitalist economic system). See: James O'Connell. *The Making of Modern Europe: Strengths, Constraints and Resolutions – Research Report no. 26* (Bradford: University of Bradford, 1991).

35 Bartolomé de las Casas, *De único Modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión* (1536) 6:3 (México: FCE, 1975), 446.



otherness. He will describe Amerindians as «infinite and universal people [To whom] God certainly raised as the more simples, with no evil or insincerity. [...] The most humble, the most patient, the most peaceful, [...] with no quarrels [...] of all around the world»<sup>36</sup>.

De Las Casas was similar to the newborn who is just opening his eyes and learning to relate to the world with totally new eyes. Dussel affirms that these new eyes are the eyes of the *Other*, «of the other *ego*»<sup>37</sup>. To reconstruct his history will pose Europe in front of his *Other*. This *Other*, before becoming a «*cogitatum*, [...] was a dis-tinct (*dis-tinta*) subjectivity». <sup>38</sup> To relate to this *Other*, Dussel will need a new philosophical approach far away from the logic of the system, paradoxically, he found it on its own geographical heart, in the classrooms of Paris.

### 3. Levinas' philosophy and its influence in Dussel's otherness

It is not possible to understand Dussel's otherness without referring to his teacher in Paris: the philosopher of Lithuanian Jewish origin Emmanuel Levinas (Kaunas 1906 – Paris 1995). Educated in French Strasbourg and German Freiburg, his experience in the concentration camps of the Nazi regime molded his philosophic and ethic thought. Levinas dedicated his life to the study of Phenomenology, Ethics, Existentialism, Ontology, Jewish Religious Tradition, among others, and despite his European education and life, he made evident that Europe's philosophical thought cannot be identified exclusively with a Cartesian approach. It is his work about the *Other*, which caught Dussel's attention and became the base for his own reflection. The Argentinian summarizes Levinas' thought about the Other as follows:

36 Bartolomé De Las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias V* (Madrid: BAE), 136.

37 Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 74.

38 *Ibid.*

«The Other who is metaphysically desired is not equivalent to the other which is a bread to be eaten [...] Metaphysical desire [*désir métaphysique*] is characterized by an overwhelming tendency toward *something else*, toward something *absolute* in its otherness».<sup>39</sup>

Dussel recognizes that what is revolutionary on Levinas is his approach to the «asymmetrical problem». According to the French, the face of *Other* comes from *beyond* my own world. Because of this, he *commands me* upon the basis of its transcendence, posing an unavoidable obligation in front of me.<sup>40</sup> The asymmetrical transcendental position of the *Other* comes precisely from its role as victim and the responsibility it entails. It is not possible to reject this burden, it exceeds any free consent, agreement or logic. For Levinas, this is «prophetic»<sup>41</sup>.

Rejecting the logic of the *System*, Levinas argues for an ethical «sensitivity» because of the responsibility that the «face to face» experience with the *Other* involves. According to him, The *Other* is imposed upon me, precisely calling to me from its «misery and nakedness»<sup>42</sup>. The Other's manifestation acquires a new potential when it becomes true *revelation* and in order to apprehend him, rational comprehension falls short, a real experience of hospitality is required. This presupposes an epistemological shift beyond rationalism, right at the core of Levinasian philosophy. Nevertheless, this does not suppose a rejection to reason (Levinas clearly stresses the importance of rationality) but he recognizes its limits in order to relate to the foreign *Other*. Where rationality falls short, sensible proximity that does not seek to reduce the other to images or thematic categorizations should have place. Because of this, Dussel interprets Levinas' subjectivity as «irreducible to consciousness».<sup>43</sup>

39 Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*, 269.

40 Cf. Cemzade Kader, «The Self and the Other in the Philosophy of Levinas», *Mediterranean Journal of Humanities* 7/2 (2017): 243-250. 243.

41 See: Cemzade Kader, «The Self and the Other in the Philosophy of Levinas», *Mediterranean Journal of Humanities* 7/2 (2017): 243-250

42 See: Alfred Fred, «Levinas and Political Theory», *Political Theory* 32/2 (2004): 146-171.

43 Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*, 277.

Dussel will work on the base of Levinas' philosophy and will identify in the global South (especially Latin America) an *Other* on which the system can find salvation. The conquering Europe was not able to identify the otherness of the New World, so they invented<sup>44</sup> it by rejecting its novelty, by distinguishing it as the "inferior other" located in Asia (the *indio*).<sup>45</sup> From this «created identity» as the starting point, mission consisted of transforming Nueva España (and its religion, culture, and knowledge) in the likeness of *the same* (Europe). Embedded in the conquering oppression, there was an ontological one, Dussel explains this alienating process:

«the «othernation» (to make it «other», different from himself) is, meta-physically, to make it «the same»: a functional part of the system [...] The «other» (free) becomes other, different than himself, a thing. [...] [it is] the Other who is stripped of his exteriority, his dignity, his rights, his freedom and transformed into an *instrument* for the purposes of the dominator».<sup>46</sup>

This is how Ontology becomes ideology<sup>47</sup>, by rejecting the world of the Other and universalizing his own reality (in the same way, one theology became *the* Theology). The system centers itself and conquers any alterity until it becomes "the same". Dussel concludes: «At the end, "the same" remains "the self-same"; "Being is" summarizes all ontology».<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, inspired on the work of his teacher, Dussel allows himself to offer a new logic, different from the logic of the *System* and which could become its salvation. Dussel calls it the «Alterity logic».<sup>49</sup> This logic starts with a face-to-face movement in order to recognize the *Other*, which leads to his acceptance.<sup>50</sup> Dussel invites to «experience» the *Other* so it can not be seen as a thing any-

44 Cf. Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 31.

45 *Ibid.*, 32.

46 Enrique Dussel, «Ética de la Liberación: Hipótesis Fundamentales», *Concilium* 192 (1984): 249-262; 256-257.

47 Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 126.

48 Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 49.

49 Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 128.

50 Cf. *Ibid.*

more. When one asks to the *Other*: *Who are you?* then it is possible to go down (*abismarse*) into the mystery of the *Other*.<sup>51</sup> The face of the *Other* -Dussel affirms- «is just the area when the action ends and the mystery begins».<sup>52</sup> What is visible to our eyes is nothing more than what the *Other* seems to be but not what it is «as a free possibility, and as *his* project».<sup>53</sup>

The philosopher of the liberation affirms that the face of the *Other* appears not as a manifestation. From a phenomenological perspective, the beings manifest themselves because they are *phenomena*, this is «what appears». But the *Other* does not only «appear» but he is an *epiphany* because just by its presence there is an ontological break (a manifestation, a revelation) in front of the self, and this presupposes an expression of his freedom «through his provocative and revelatory word».<sup>54</sup> That it is why to dialogue among theological systems, practices, and traditions is so important, because the answer to the question «Who are you?» is not just a *manifestation* of the *Other* but a *real revelation*: a revelation of the body of Christ.

Freedom is the inherent condition of this encounter, it is because of its freedom that the *Other* can become the «exteriority of all totality».<sup>55</sup> This freedom subverts the logic of the system when replacing the will of the self (with his subjectivity and categories) to totalize himself in every system, so the *Other* can remain exterior to totality. As long as the *Other is not*, it is basically non-existent, empty, a *non-being*. Nevertheless, when it becomes a *being*, different and radically new (in a metaphysical sense)<sup>56</sup> systems are recognized.

This ontological movement allows to recognize the history, culture, and exteriority of the *Other* and it prevents from violating his nature in order to transform him into the *self*, which is *alienation*.

51 *Ibid.*, 116.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 116.

54 *Ibid.*

55 Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 44.

56 *Ibid.*, 45.



Alienation is also to totalize exteriority or fall into the temptation to systematize alterity<sup>57</sup> according to the categories of the *self* (For this reason many of the theological reflections from the global south cannot be classified according to the categories of western systematic theology). As Dussel affirms: «Alienation covers the face of the *Other* with a mask fashioned by the system to hide the *Other's* entreaty. The mask defines the *Other* by the function that it fulfills within the system».<sup>58</sup> In my opinion, this was for a long time the role of the «inculturation paradigm» on both Missiology and Contextual Theology: to ignore the radical novelty of local theogonies and their reflections, by instrumentalizing local beliefs in order to totalize European theologies and doctrines under «local masks».

When the self faces the *Other* and recognizes him as exterior to the system, recognizes at the same moment that his *locus*, the *System*, is finite; and the self himself is non-unique.<sup>59</sup> This is a necessary condition to advance to the *Other* on its otherness. Levinas called *désir* to this, what is according to Dussel a «love-of-justice»<sup>60</sup>, love to the *Other* as other (opposed to the Platonic *eros*, which is for Dussel a love of the «same» for the «same»<sup>61</sup>). This love goes beyond the same and his *System*, it is the *ágape*.<sup>62</sup>

This *ágape* is a love that leads to demands, which provokes justice against an unfair system, as Dussel asserts: «For the unjust system, "the other is hell" (if by hell is understood the end of the system, chaos)»<sup>63</sup>. It is a love that results in liberation, into the reconstitution of the *Other* as *Other*<sup>64</sup> and which directs the same to

57 *Ibid.*, 53.

58 *Ibid.*, 62.

59 Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 122.

60 William Paul Simmons, 'The Third: Levinas' Theoretical move from anarchical ethics to the realm of justice and politics' *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 25/6 (1999) 83-104, p. 85.

61 Emmanuel Levinas, *Philosophy, Justice, and Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) p. 113.

62 Levinas, *Philosophy, Justice, and Love*, 113.

63 Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 43.

64 Enrique Dussel and Daniel Guillot, *Liberación Latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial BONUM, 1975), 44.

adopt an *ethical* conscience (the capacity to listen to the *Other's* voice, the transontological word that breaks in from beyond the present system).<sup>65</sup>

Who is the *Other* of the system? The *Other* of the Euro-centric thought that seems to be lost on its self-reference and the desire to multiply itself by covering others? Dussel will affirm that this *Other* is Latin America. It is the face of Europe's *Other*, the essential alterity of Modernity.<sup>66</sup> If it is true that because of its novelty Latin America constituted itself in the radical *Other* of the system, I would affirm that Dussel falls short, and nowadays, the other of the logic of the system, its paradigms, methods, and dogmas is not just Latin America, but the "global South" as understood by De Sousa Santos. And from this non-being, the *Other*, the exteriority, the «mystery of the senseless»<sup>67</sup> a new reflection can take place.

#### 4. Dussel's post-colonial turn against the empire of Euro-centric reason

As part of the group «modernidad/colonialidad» (modernity/coloniality), Dussel will develop a new philosophical thought with implications on almost all the areas of social and human sciences (Ontology, Epistemology, History, etc.) and its starting point will be the denounce on the «spirit of pure imitation or repetition in the periphery of the philosophy prevailing in the imperialist center»<sup>68</sup> (which was naturally replicated on Theology as well). By this strategy, the knowledge, practices, and reflections of the global south were validated as long as they work as sounding boards of the European academy. Anything outside of it was demonized, ignored, ridiculed, silenced and finally eliminated.

65 Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 59.

66 Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 173.

67 Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 39.

68 Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 10.

To do so, it will be necessary to talk about a decolonizer epistemological turn (*giro descolonizador epistemológico*), which consists of:

«Becoming critically aware, from the postcolonial world, of Eurocentrism as place of expression of the speech (*locus enuntiationis*) [which is a] generalized *habitus* of the thinker, the scientific, the philosopher, and that penetrates so deeply into the subjectivity of the theoretic and in the objectivity of the theories (and social and human sciences) that it is practically impossible to get rid of their widely accepted limitations, and is accepted unanimously by scientific communities, by the theories, by the research projects, and prevents for overcoming its narrow deforming limits».<sup>69</sup>

Dussel claims for the capacity for looking to the world from other perspectives, this is from outside the limits of the system, the periphery. He identifies that this turn started since the late 1960s and the rise of the Latin American «critic social studies»<sup>70</sup>, which produced a historic rupture on philosophy when differentiating among the «center» and the «periphery».

The first moment on this exercise will be characterized by the study of the thought (traditions and philosophy) of the global south, not as an accessory element of *the* Philosophy (on the rationalist sense of the word) but it points to remember and to recover the history that is composed of non-hegemonic elements and has been forgotten or silenced, and «constitutes the alterity of Modernity»<sup>71</sup> To this exercise, Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls the «Sociology of the emergencies». This is a new paradigm that overcomes the Hegelian understanding by which *being* and reason are inseparable: «the *totality* of the world [is] the *being*; the being is “the same” as reason»<sup>72</sup>. As a consequence, anything that is not reasonable *is not*. How much richness has Theology lost during centuries because of this!

69 Enrique Dussel, «*Descolonización Epistemológica de la Teología*», *Concilium*, 350/2 (2013) 23-34. 30-31.

70 Dussel, *Filosofía de la Cultura y de la Liberación*, 28.

71 Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, 46.

72 Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 110.

For a long time, the western world has believed that beyond speculative and contemplative reason there is nothing except irrationality or barbarity. Nevertheless, the exteriority of the *Other* seems to resist to be totally comprehended or apprehended by any system or world.<sup>73</sup> It is only when the *Other* decides to speak, this is to *reveal* his exteriority, that his alterity stands in front of the *self*. For this reason, Dussel affirms that the other cannot be interpreted, understood, or studied from within the *System*<sup>74</sup>.

What epistemological option do we have in order to know the *Other*? Dussel offers a fascinating answer: «What reason can never embrace -the mystery of the other as other- only *faith* can penetrate. In proximity, face to face, someone can hear the voice of the *Other* and welcome it with holy respect».<sup>75</sup> Due to this, the position of Theology for dealing with the mystery of the *Other* in a true attitude of faith is privileged, especially when this *Other* is the brotherly different, a voice that when talking about himself reveals a new dimension of the body of Christ. This approach to the *Other* cannot be developed under the rational mentality of the *System* -the main goal is not to elucidate if what the *Other* says is true or not- but under the logic of *acceptance*, because when the *Other* speaks we can reach its metaphysical openness.<sup>76</sup>

Like his teacher, Dussel does not pose a critique against reason *per se*, but he rejects it when it exerts violence and becomes dominating.<sup>77</sup> Against this reason, a liberation praxis becomes urgent. This praxis is 'metaphysic and trans-ontological'.<sup>78</sup> His doubts about the absoluteness of the *System* become evident when it explores alternative ontological and epistemological realities. *Praxis* precedes any speculative and contemplative effort of reason, science,

73 Cf. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 46.

74 Cf. *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*, 47.

77 Dussel, *The invention of the Americas*, 26.

78 Dussel, *Introducción a la Filosofía de la Liberación*, 43.



and theories, which are "second *attitudes*" because they constitute a reflection (*re-flexión*) «that is to say, one flexes (*flexiona*), turns on every day, and every day is always practical». <sup>79</sup> The Argentinian denounces the conscious or unconscious tendency of western human sciences to prioritize a theoretical attitude and reflection over an existential one (following the Cartesian method). He rejects to assume theoretical reason as the fundamental human attitude because in his opinion 'the «I think» is a second attitude because I think what has already been done in my world, which I understood existentially and manipulated every day. <sup>80</sup>

Since the appearance (or translation to a western academic matrix in order to make visible all those reflections of creative resistance that existed for centuries) of liberation theologies (I prefer to use the plural in order to differentiate the Latin American theological movement from several theologies of resistance and liberation from the global south) different contra-hegemonic theological methodologies arose, challenging the monopoly of European academy. Far from what is commonly affirmed, I state that in western Universities we know very little about them and we are just starting to grasp their complexity or radical novelty. It would seem that for a long time these reflections and methodologies have resisted being fully understood by us. In my opinion, this is because they have been approached by thinking on them as new alternatives instead of recognizing that they are indeed alternative ways of thinking. The difference seems to be subtle but it is gigantic: it refers to the tension between domestication and instrumentalization of the *Other* on the one hand, and radical novelty on the other.

Due to this, Dussel turns his attention (as the gospel did two thousand years ago) to the simple people. He affirms: «It is to the people of the oppressed that we must listen with disciple's respect. If Philosophy (and Theology of course) does not listen to the oppressed

79 *Ibid.*

80 *Ibid.*, 107.

people, it is necessarily covering sophistry».<sup>81</sup> The *Other* of the academic, cult and educated northern academy is clearly the “powerless, uneducated and simple” South. This South is not strictly a geographic one, but a non-reason-centered South that mainly overlaps with the geographic one. Paradoxically, because most of the «simple people» in the South did not have access to education (as western formal intellectual formation) their alienation is only partial<sup>82</sup> in comparison to most of the «educated» academicians of the South.

Because the uncultured were kept outside of western theological system, they had the opportunity to develop a truly *Other* Theology that can become the salvation for the European one through the «re-discover» or «emergency» of their myths, symbols, prayers and practices. This constitutes a big step forward from the Modern conception of the *Other* as an individual subject. When considering another as the *Other* but not only as a person or social class but as people (*pueblo*) as a «peripheral culture»,<sup>83</sup> it becomes a communitarian *Other* that has the potential to transform itself into an epiphany of the *radically Other*. This epiphany, as a revelation, is not looked or desired by the system, but like in the path to Damascus, it bursts the reality of the system and claims: «You, with your *ego cogito*, have totalized us as things within your world, when you respect us as others, then, only then, you yourselves can be free».<sup>84</sup>

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