

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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1. ENRIQUE DUSSEL'S WORK IN CONTEXT

The aim of this book series is to chart an agenda for contemporary critical theory. Although the intellectual orientation of the series is rooted in the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory, as reflected in the focus of our first two volumes, we also seek to engage the work of prominent critical theorists—in the catholic sense of this term—whose thinking expands this field of vision. Almost a century after the Frankfurt School was founded in 1923, the task of rethinking the project of critical theory from a global perspective, one that is responsive to the pernicious ongoing legacies of colonialism and imperialism, could not be more pressing. In this context, we are delighted to focus our attention in this volume on the work of Enrique Dussel. Dussel is not only a towering critical theorist in his own right; his ethics of liberation also engages critically and productively with Frankfurt School thinkers such as Karl-Otto Apel, Jürgen Habermas, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin. Although Dussel undoubtedly pursues his own distinctive critical-ethical vision, he does so in conversation with the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory, alongside other traditions, including hermeneutics, phenomenology, Marxism, world-systems theory, and

decolonial thought. By challenging the residual Eurocentrism, developmentalism, and formalism of Habermasian critical theory and by offering his own materialist and liberatory ethics, Dussel offers an ambitious and expansive agenda for critical theory for the twenty-first century.

Enrique Dussel is without question the most important Latin American philosopher of the last century. His work is extensive, massive, encyclopedic, interdisciplinary, and widely impactful, even if this impact is measured superficially by the translations and pirated editions of his works. A search of the philosophy, theology, and ethics dissertations written in English, German, French, and Spanish will reveal that he is the most studied Latin American philosopher of the last half century. He is now very well known for his elaboration of a philosophy, an ethics, and a politics of liberation. He has also produced major works on the history of the Latin American church, world history, Marxiology, history of Latin American philosophy, ethical theory, and political philosophy.¹ His work embodies the synthesis of several currents and traditions of thinking in Latin America as well as the creative reception of twentieth-century hermeneutics, phenomenology, existentialism, philosophical anthropology, and in the last two decades in particular, the work of the Frankfurt School.² His work was nourished by the 1960s and 1970s debates around whether “there existed a Latin American philosophy.” On the one hand, these debates brought together figures such as Leopoldo Zea (representing a very important tradition known as Latinamericanism), Augusto Salazar Bondy, Juan Carlos Scannone, and Arturo Andrés Roig, to name some of the most prominent figures, resulting in what then became known as the *philosophy of liberation*; on the other, we have the then contemporaneously emergent tradition of the *theology of liberation*, with figures such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Ernesto Cardenal, Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo, and José Míguez Bonino, among many others.³ Both of these movements emerged in conversation with the political-economic theory of *development of underdevelopment*. Among the articulators of this theory, we find the works of Andre Gunder Frank, Enzo Faletto, Celso Furtado, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The work of these political economists would influence and interlink with

the work of what then became known as world-systems analysis, as is today best represented in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein. World-systems analysis and the development of underdevelopment became very important for Dussel's own view of world history and Latin America's place within it. Two additional currents that nourished the work of Dussel were the *pedagogy of liberation*, best articulated by Paulo Freire but also advanced by thinkers such as Ernesto Cardenal, and the *sociology of liberation*, best articulated in the work of Orlando Fals Borda.⁴ All of these thinkers, currents, schools, and traditions were engaged in what we could call "disciplinary insubordination."⁵ That is to say, they all agreed that the "traditional" and inherited modes of producing knowledge about Latin American social reality were either inadequate to this reality, at best, or in fact misleading, obfuscating, and falsifying, at worst. The modes of producing knowledge thus had to be reclaimed, refashioned, and rebuilt so that the knowledge they generated could be useful for projects of social liberation. This project entailed developing new historiographies of Latin American thought, engaging with hitherto neglected social agents, critiquing the project of the nation-state, and challenging the notion of development that undergirds the neoimperial economic and political projects of the United States and Europe.

Here it must be emphasized that a key point of convergence for all these movements and thinkers of "disciplinary insubordination" was the critique of the dominant—read Eurocentric—idea of progress, or what was called *desarrollismo* (developmentalism). Developmentalism was the ruling capitalist, liberal, Eurocentric ideology that entailed setting Latin America on a distinct historical trajectory already traced and paved by Europe and the United States. Developmentalism was, and is, in fact an entire philosophy of history, with both its prophets and its theodicies. This is an important point to underscore because all of these acts of epistemic and disciplinary insubordination pointed to a crisis, an anomaly, of traditional ways of thinking: if entering the Parthenon of modernity meant trekking the road of development, why was it that Latin America not only seemed to always trail back but actually seemed to be going backward? Additionally, why were large sectors of Latin American society—especially the many Indigenous peoples spread out

through Latin America—not to be found on this allegedly well-traveled road to modernity? While African, Southeast Asian, and Indian nations were engaged in projects of decolonization and the subsequent pronouncement of their entry into a postcolonial chamber of history, Latin American thinkers recognized that such projects and pronouncements were not simply premature but also misleading and inaccurate. The development of underdevelopment, or what were called pejoratively the *dependistas*, recognized that Euro-American hegemony was predicated on a mythology: that history moved in stages, from archaic, to primitive, to premodern, to modern; that earlier stages would be left behind; and, additionally, that this trajectory could be discerned and calculated by economic algorithms, formulas, and indexes. What these unsubordinated thinkers recognized is that colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, and neoimperialism had configured a world-system of economic, political, social, and epistemic subordinations and dependencies.

Enrique Dussel's published "selected works" include thirty books, ranging from the history of Latin American philosophy, to the development of Marx's critique of capitalism, to the articulation of an ethics of liberation, to his three volumes of a politics of liberation.⁶ Volume 29 of these selected works is tellingly titled *Filosofías del Sur: Descolonización y Transmodernidad*.⁷ We also now have the anthology of his most recent essays, titled *Anti-Cartesian Meditations and Transmodernity: From the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation*.⁸ We refer to these recent titles in particular because they allow us to call attention to the fact that Dussel has, since his earliest works,⁹ embraced the project of thinking from the Global South, aiming to decolonize thinking by tracing a different version of history, one that dispenses with vanguards, winners and losers, and, of course, theodicies and that recognizes that there are multiple modernities or different ways of being "modern." Furthermore, by focusing on Dussel's encyclopedic and extensive work, we have sought to highlight how his version of the "decolonial turn" emerged from a major "disciplinary insubordination" that heralded a true epistemological revolution in Latin America and the Americas at large.¹⁰

2. FROM THE “DE-STRUCTION” TO THE “DECOLONIZATION” OF (THE HISTORY OF) ETHICS

Dussel’s epilogue at the end of the present volume offers an autobiographical trajectory of his thinking. Yet what remains implicit in his account is how consistently, doggedly, searchingly, and one may say obsessively and in an insomniac way (to use that most apropos Levinasian expression) Dussel has thought and written about ethics. Notwithstanding the breadth of his work, at the core of it is the “ethical question,” the “ethical demand and interpellation” of the victim, the poor, the orphan, the destitute, the refugee, the “Indian,” the gay person, the rape victim. While Levinas argued that ethics is *prima philosophia*, Dussel argues that *ethics* is the very source and elaboration of any critical thinking. Dussel has written five ethics, each one bearing the stigmata of a distinct method and orientation.¹¹ Yet these distinct approaches are united in the ethical imperative to attend to the victims of every ethos and social system. These five ethics, it can be argued, correspond to five stages of Dussel’s philosophical itinerary.

The first, which extends from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, could be called the *hermeneutical stage*. Dussel’s philosophical production begins with the analysis of two ethical worldviews and their corresponding “ethical-mythical nucleus” (an expression that he takes over from Paul Ricoeur): the Semitic and the Greek. His *Humanismo Helénico* (1963) and *Humanismo Semita* (1964) set out to elucidate the life-worlds from which two contrasting but encompassing cosmovisions (*Weltanschauungen*) gave rise to two different conceptions of the human, with their contrasting views on the relationships among the body, the soul, community, and God/gods. The operative idea in Dussel’s first two books was the Ricoeurian one of mythopoesis—that is, the idea that different cultures are rendered distinctly coherent by their unique myths, rituals, religions, allegories, and metaphors. It is against this background that Dussel set out to think about the uniqueness and distinctness of Latin America. Thus we could say that these two books exemplified a *hermeneutical ethics*.

A second stage, extending from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, could be called *ontological*.¹² During this stage, in particular as he takes up his teaching position in Argentina in 1969, he undertook what he will call a “de-struction” of the history of philosophical anthropology and of ethics in order to develop an ethics of liberation for Latin America. Thus volume 3 of his selected works is made up of his *Lecciones de antropología filosófica* (1969) and *Para una de-strucción de la historia de la ética* (1970). The former is a set of lectures in which he argued that philosophy properly thought is philosophical anthropology and that philosophical anthropology properly thought is in turn fundamental ontology. But the being of the human is a historical being; its being is historical. The human being is not in history but is history—that is to say, the being of the human is temporality. The noteworthy pivot of the lectures is that to understand properly the being of the human, we must undertake a *de-strucción* of the history of philosophical anthropology and thus of ontology. This project is taken up in the 1970 lectures, but now, the *de-strucción* of the history of philosophical anthropology and ontology becomes the *de-strucción* of the history of ethics. As Dussel makes clear when introducing the lectures on the history of ethics from 1970, *de-strucción* is not a destructive but a critical—that is, positive—task. He writes, “*Struo* in Latin speaks of joining, stacking, accumulating, piling. For this reason de-constructing means untying, unstacking, sifting through, but not simply to ruin.”¹³ The positive aim of this “de-struction,” however, is to elucidate what in 1970 he calls an “ontological ethics” or “*ethica perennis*.”¹⁴ We could then say that these two courses set out to elaborate an *ontological ethics*.

A third stage, which we can call *analectical*, begins with Dussel’s discovery of the work of Emmanuel Levinas in the early 1970s through the mid-1980s. As was noted, Dussel had been lecturing on the “de-struction” of the history of ethics, but with a positive aim: to develop an ethics for and of the Latin American life-world and history. What were originally lectures, however, became a three-volume work on ethics—namely, *Para una ética de la liberación Latinoamericana*.¹⁵ The first two volumes are framed by the thought of Ricoeur and Heidegger, expanding the work Dussel had done in his lectures from the 1960s.

However, in 1971, when Dussel is introduced to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, the project of the de-struction of the history of ethics becomes the project of developing an ethics of liberation framed by Levinas's concept of the absolute otherness of the other. In this stage, Dussel's method is no longer hermeneutical or ontological but "meta-physical." In order to think about the alterity of the other, we need not dialectics but analectics—that is to say, we need to think not from the difference that is tethered to the logic of the totality, of the same, but rather from the "distinctness" or irreducible nonassimilable otherness of the other. It should be noted that while it is tempting to think of the discovery of Levinas as catalyzing a break, a rift between ontology and metaphysics, a turn from Heidegger toward the thinker of infinity and the face of the other, this would be misleading. A close reading of the texts from the late 1960s reveals how Dussel was thinking with and against both Ricoeur and Heidegger. As we saw, the "de-struction" of philosophical anthropology at the service of a de-struction of ontology aimed to serve as a prolegomenon to a de-struction of the history of ethics with the very specific aim to develop an ethics for what would be more explicitly called "an ethics of Latin American liberation."

The work that is most emblematic of this stage is *Philosophy of Liberation*, written in the early 1980s in Mexico, as Dussel begins his exile.¹⁶ The operative ideas during this period are Levinasian notions of totality and exteriority. Here it is important to note that in volume 3 of the trilogy *Towards an Ethics of Latin American Liberation*, Hegel and Marx appear as thinkers of the totality. In the *Philosophy of Liberation*, Marx once again appears as a thinker of Being, of the totality, of the "same" and "one" (Hegel's *Geist* and Marx's *Das Kapital*) that closes itself off to the alterity of the other. In the writings from this period, in fact, dialectics is juxtaposed to analectics. Dialectics is the logic of the thinking that grounds itself out of itself and that assimilates everything to itself without leaving a remainder. Analectics is the thought that thinks from the distinctness of the other without assimilating the alterity of the other to mere difference. Analectical logic opens itself to the radical otherness of the other in such a way that it can never ground itself. This thinking thus is without ground. It is this analectical

logic that becomes the deconstructive method of Dussel's philosophy of liberation during the mid-1970s. Then we could argue that this ethics from the early 1970s is an *analectical ethics* or an *ethics of alterity*.

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A fourth, *Marxist* stage emerges in the mid-1980s, as Dussel began to read Marx differently, and lasts until the early 1990s. As was noted at the outset, during the 1970s, Dussel was engaged in debates within the then vibrant theology of liberation. A central point of contention in these debates concerned the role that Marx could or should play within the theology of liberation. Related to this was a debate over how to understand “el pueblo” and “the poor” both biblically and theologically—that is, were the poor the same as Marx's proletariat, those who only have their labor power to sell? Dussel's intervention in these debates culminates in his 1986 *Ética comunitaria*, which was translated into English in 1988 under the title of *Ethics and Community*.¹⁷ This *Ethics* must be read in conjunction with the works on Marx that Dussel undertook during the late 1970s and 1980s. Dussel's first work on Marx during this period is his 1977 book, *Filosofía de la producción*, which is made up of a translation of Marx's notebooks on technology and an extended analysis of the text.¹⁸ The book was expanded in 1984.¹⁹ This book was followed by three volumes on the genealogy of Marx's *Das Kapital* through a close reading of the different drafts that Marx wrote before he settled on the published version of volume 1 of *Das Kapital: La producción teórica de Marx: Un comentario a los “Grundrisse”* (Marx's theoretical production: A commentary on the *Grundrisse*, 1985); *Hacia un Marx desconocido: Un comentario de los manuscritos del 61–63* (Toward an unknown Marx: A commentary on the manuscript from 61–63, 1988); and *El último Marx (1863–1882) y la liberación Latinoamericana* (The last Marx [1863–1882] and Latin American liberation, 1990).²⁰ This trilogy on *Das Kapital* was complemented by *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx* (The theological metaphors of Marx, 1993).²¹ The 1980s and early 1990s were Dussel's decade and a half of an in-depth study of Marx.

At the center of Dussel's detailed reconstruction of the genesis of *Das Kapital* is the discovery of the centrality of the concept of *lebendige Arbeit* (living labor) for Marx's critique of capital. In Dussel's reading, Marx emerges not as a thinker of the totality and the dialectics of the

self-positing and self-grounding of being but as the thinker of the exteriority of capital: the exteriority of living labor to both the market and the expropriation and accumulation of surplus value. Instead of a dialectical and Hegelian Marx, what Dussel presents us with is an analogical (analectical) and Schellingian Marx. This rereading of Marx allows Dussel to give concreteness to the Levinasian other, which is no longer simply a metaphysical other but a concrete, material, embodied, historical other: the poor, the wretched of the world, of history, of global capitalism. While Dussel traces carefully the evolution of Marx's economic-political thinking, he also foregrounds the specifically *ethical* dimension of Marx's critique of capitalism. Centering the category of *lebendige Arbeit* reveals a Marx who is interested not simply in the "logic" of capital but also and perhaps most centrally in the unethical, immoral character of a system that expropriates the "life" of workers, turning them into fungible commodities. In Dussel's hands, then, Marx becomes one of the great ethical thinkers of the West. We are amply justified, then, in claiming that this fourth stage in Dussel's intellectual itinerary can be called Marxist, or, more generally, a historical materialist stage. If we are attentive to the third volume of Dussel's trilogy on the genesis of *Das Kapital*, with its focus on living labor and the ethical critique of capitalism, and read it in tandem with *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx*, we can think of these works as the elaboration of a Marxist ethics. Then we could argue that the ethics from the decade and a half of the 1980s and early 1990s is a *Marxist ethics*.

A fifth and final stage, which we can call *ethical critique*, at least for the moment, begins in 1989, when through the mediation of Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, Dussel enters into a decade-long dialogue and debate with Karl-Otto Apel, culminating with the publication of Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* in 1998. Dussel insists that this ethics is now a proper *ethics of liberation* because it brings together the material, intersubjective validity, and feasibility dimensions into a comprehensive ethical system. In other words, this "critical" liberatory ethics is both material and formal. To this extent, then, we suggest that this period be called ethical critique. Here we can only foreground two key moments in the debate with Apel that, arguably, show why Dussel left behind the Levinasian ethics of alterity and

the metaphysics of radical otherness. One moment has to do with the priority of the community of life to the community of communication (*Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*). There is no communication if subjects are not able to live—that is, a condition of possibility of discourse is that the other be alive. Apel, whose work aimed to advance Peirce’s agenda of linguistifying Kant, took the primacy of the communication community as the point of departure for his version of discourse ethics. Dussel, by contrast, taking the suffering corporeality of the ethical subjects and the expropriation of their lives through the labor market as his point of departure, argued for the primacy of the community of life as a material precondition for the communication community. In other words, there can be no community of communication if that community has not first secured its material survival and sustenance. The second moment has to do with the Apelian-Habermasian bifurcation of the *Begründung* and *Anwendung*—that is, the justification (or grounding) and application of ethics. Apel talked about levels A and B of ethics, where A refers to the justification of ethical norms and level B refers to the application of those norms. For Apel, the key function of ethical theory is precisely the adjudication and elucidation of the moral norms that enable humans to coexist in community. As an approach to moral theory, discourse ethics prioritizes intersubjective validity over substantive ethical values. For Dussel, however, moral validity is empty if it does not refer to the material moment of ethics. Ethics must address the material life of ethical subjects who must secure their dignity and integrity in concrete conditions of privation and injurability, to use Judith Butler’s most apropos term. Apel retorted that questions of survival and distribution are part of what he calls an ethics of responsibility, which is subordinate to the formal ethics of intersubjective validity, or the formal ethics of discourse. In fact, Apel claimed that Dussel’s ethics of liberation is but a version of an ethics of responsibility that aims to address the issues attendant to the application of moral norms and to this extent belong to what he called part B of ethics. Apel’s argument, then, was that Dussel’s ethics of liberation is concerned merely with questions of application, not justification.

From this decade-long but productive dialogue with Apel, Dussel acquires a new set of philosophical tools that enables him to

reformulate his ethics of liberation on a new philosophical basis.²² A quick overview of the structure of the 1998 *Ethics of Liberation* allows us to see how Dussel's ethics of liberation has moved beyond Levinasian phenomenology. This massive and impressive ethics has three major sections, though Dussel himself divided it into two major parts. The first part consists of a "World History of Ethical Systems"—in Spanish, *eticidades*. The second is called "Foundations of Ethics," and the third, "Critical Ethics, Antihegemonic Validity, and the Praxis of Liberation." The "Foundations of Ethics" part is itself divided into three parts: First, we have the material moment of ethics, or what he calls the moment of the practical truth of ethics. Ethics is grounded in the corporeality of living ethical beings, and it must address their lives. Then we have the moment of intersubjective validity, or what Dussel calls formal morality. Finally, we have the moment of ethical feasibility—that is, that a valid moral norm is one that can actually be enacted. In order for an ethics to be meaningful, it must be enforceable. For Dussel, these three moments are equally primordial. To focus on one at the exclusion of the others, or even to give one primacy over the others, is to fall into reductivism. The third part, the critical ethics, mirrors, but now critically or negatively, foundational ethics; thus we have ethical critique, antihegemonic validity, and the praxis of liberation—what Dussel calls the principle of liberation. Every system for the production and reproduction of life cannot but produce victims, specific victims—namely, the victims it generates by the very means through which that system seeks to perpetuate itself. These victims challenge the ruling system by articulating a counterhegemonic validity. Any ethics worthy of the name must articulate an ethical critique from the perspective of what Dussel calls the "negativity of the victims" of that system. The community of life, which is prior to the community of communication, turns into the community of victims that articulate the negation of the negation of the ruling system. Here it becomes clear why Dussel must begin with a "world history of ethical systems." The history of ethics is the history of the critique of ethical systems that produced their own victims and consequently the articulation of their own respective antihegemonic validity. For Dussel, there is no ethics without the history of ethics and thus without the history of the ethical critique of the

victims of history. Therefore, what Dussel had called earlier the “de-struction” of the history of ethics has turned into the history of ethics that is deconstructed from the standpoint of the victims of history.

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A major shift has taken place. The Levinasian other, which was transformed into the “poor” and the “pueblo” in the Marxist ethics of the fourth stage, has now become the victim and the community of victims of the ruling system. We need to underscore that this victim is no longer thought of in terms of Levinasian alterity, the *otredad del otro*, the otherness of the other. The victim is always a specific victim, the victim of a given mode of production and its correlative system of the circulation of commodities. We ascended from metaphysics to historical concreteness, from the indeterminate nature of the other to the historical indexicality of their destitution and precarity. Dussel thinks, furthermore, that the history of ethical systems narrated in terms of the emergence and coalescing of interregional systems (that for a long time remained delinked and nonsubordinate to each other or to one) underwent a major shift, beginning in 1492 with the discovery and/or invention of America. The “invention” of the Americas, the “discovery” of the New World, became the catalyzing event that led to the integration of the hitherto interregional system into a world-system, under the subordination of Spanish and Portuguese dominion (launching the hegemony of Europe). To summarize, Dussel’s post-1998 *Ethics of Liberation* and his *Politics of Liberation* have three elements that are antithetical or allergic to radical alterity: First, both foundational and critical ethics require intersubjective validity—that is, a justification of moral norms and ethical values that require, if not the consensus, at least the validation of all those affected by the application of those norms. Radical alterity cannot enter into this process of adjudication and justification. Second, what could be called the *long durée* of the ethics of liberation aims to recover and valorize the lessons learned from past victims of now anachronistic or defunct ethical systems, which have been rendered both immoral and illegitimate by the specific critiques of the victims they created and rendered invisible. Third, the community of victims refers to a corporeal vulnerability and injurability of ethical subjects that are explicitly historically indexed. In Dussel’s fifth ethics, *ethical agency is grounded in the corporeality of the ethical agent*—that

is, being-alive as a condition of the possibility of ethical agency. For this reason, we should think of ethical agency as ethical flesh, ethical corporeality. But this flesh is thoroughly historical. This means, then, that our *ethical flesh is riveted to history*. We all suffer our flesh, but in different forms in accordance with the affordance of material circumstances. Dussel's ethics of liberation is therefore at the same time an archeology of ethopoesis, the ethical creativity of those who challenge the ruling *ethos* expanding the horizon of those to whom we respond. To paraphrase Adorno, there is a direct lineage between the slingshot and the atom bomb but not one between barbarism and the response to the suffering of our victims. This is why ethics must always be prefaced by a global history of ethical systems—the memory of the vanquished and victims in and of history. It could be argued, then, that the ethics of 1998 forward is *an ethics of liberation of the community of life*.

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In the preface to his 1998 *Ethics of Liberation*, Dussel notes that this “new” ethics is a second “step” compared to the early 1970s *Para una ética de la liberación Latinoamericana*. Indeed, it is a major step. But the fundamental focus remains the same: the poor, the victim, the excluded ones, the other of and in history. Dussel offers four clarifications as to how this ethics differs from the prior “four” that he wrote, as we tried to argue in this introduction. First, Dussel notes, this ethics is no longer a prolegomena, a preparatory ethics; it is an ethics “sin más”—an ethics *simpliciter*, as such, without further qualification. Second, whereas the early ethics were framed in terms of Latin American “liberation,” now the horizon is planetary, global, world “liberation.” The poor and victims are not only in Latin America. Third, while the prior ethics is framed by an engagement with the works of Gadamer, Heidegger, Levinas, and Ricoeur, this latest ethics is marked by an engagement with a whole host of contemporary ethical thinkers: Apel, Habermas, Hinkelammert, Honneth, Rorty, Rawls, Taylor, Vattimo, Walzer, and so on. Fourth, Dussel is poignantly aware that he writes in the late 1990s, in the shadow of the collapse of the Soviet Union and, putatively, the triumph of Western liberal capitalism over socialism. He very consciously writes against the background of both cynicism and defeatism of those movements that were the voice of the poor and the victim. Nonetheless, it is precisely against this so-called end of history that Dussel affirms

the imperative to develop an ethics, now from the perspective of the immense part of humanity that is systematically excluded, exploited, and expropriated from the benefits of “globalization.”²³ The ethics of liberation, then, is simultaneously an *ethics of globalization from below*.

The question remains, In what sense can we understand the *Decolonizing Ethics*, which is the title of the present book as well as the thrust of Dussel’s work, as we have argued thus far? The overall trajectory and evolution of Dussel’s work have been from the de-struction of ontology to the de-struction of the history of ethics to now a positive project: decolonizing ethics by rethinking it from the standpoint of the ethics demanded by the poor and victims of globalization. While in the introduction to his 1998 *Ethics*, the project of a “decolonial” turn or a “decolonization of ethics” remained implicit, in the introduction to the *Politics of Liberation*, an expansion of the ethics of liberation into the field of politics, the turn becomes explicit. In that introduction, in fact, Dussel declares, “The ‘decolonizing turn’ is a global historical-philosophical challenge.”²⁴ This sentence comes after Dussel has identified *seven limits* that must be “deconstructed” in order to develop both an ethics and a politics of liberation. The first limit is *Hellenocentrism*, which claims that all modern Enlightenment culture comes from Greece and that the Europeans are the direct inheritors of this tradition, to the exclusion or neglect of the contributions of other ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptian, the Mesopotamian, the Phoenician, and the entire Semitic world, which are antecedent and sources of Greek culture. The second limit is the *Westernization* or *Europeanization* of modern ethical and political theory that pretends that the West and Europe are not internally heterogeneous or dependent on the contributions of the Eastern Roman Empire, Byzantium, and the incredibly important role that Constantinople plays in linking the ancients to medieval and Renaissance Europe. The third limit is *Eurocentrism*, which cripples our ability to understand the contributions of other cultures as well as the way in which “Europe” is an idea, an ideal that emerged from an intercultural dialogue, of religions, cultures, traditions, and institutional challenges. A fourth limit is the invidious and self-serving *periodization* of world history that temporalizes, or creates, a specific narrative, relegating some cultures to a

prehistoric past while placing the West at the forefront of history—that is, the latest moderns of the most modern. The fact is that world history looks very different when traced from the Middle East, India, China, or pre-Colombian Turtle Island (the Indigenous name for the so-called New World). A fifth limit is the *secularism* of philosophy and political theory, whereby Dussel understands “secularism” as an ideology that masks not only the “West’s” own “not yet secularized” status but also the ways in which other cultures are secular and also on the way to secularization. Secularism is an ideology, and secularization is an ongoing process that will continue so long as societies meet the challenges of organizing their interactions and making sense of the world on different conceptual frameworks. A sixth limit is what Dussel calls the theoretical and conceptual *colonialism* of philosophy tout court in developing countries and societies that ignore, neglect, demean, and subordinate their own philosophical traditions to those of the colonial metropolises (Europe and the United States). The seventh limit is that of the failure to understand or even acknowledge the entanglements of the so-called discovery of the “New World” and the “project” of modernity. The limit here signals the failure to understand the epochal character of the “invention of the Americas,” to use the title of Dussel’s 1992 Frankfurt lectures.²⁵ Modernity, argues Dussel, does not begin with the Reformation, or the French Revolution, or the French Enlightenment; rather, modernity begins with the question, Are these peoples of the New World human, and should they be evangelized, colonized, and enslaved? It is the “invention” of the Americas that will enable Europe to become the pivot of a now interlinked world-system that up through 1492 had been delinked regional systems.²⁶

To summarize, then, the task of decolonizing ethics means orienting ourselves by the recognition of these seven limits, which gravitate around three key imperatives: first, we must deconstruct the history of ethics; second, we need to develop an ethics with a global perspective in mind, an ethics for the large majority of humanity that is excluded from the gains of “modernity”; and third, the imperative to recognize the plurality of cultures—that is, of ethopoetic cores and semantic reservoirs that are not liabilities but resources for ethical perspectives and ways of being with one another in justice. There is a fourth imperative that

is not readily legible from the seven limits traced by Dussel but that can be read in his other works, in particular in his 1992 Frankfurt lecture alluded to earlier, and that is the imperative to decolonize the “ethical self.” We can and must read Dussel’s work as a *decolonial genealogy of the ethical subject and ethical agent* in two ways. First, his work relocates the “sources of the modern self” to the sixteenth century with the colonization of the “New World.” Modern subjectivity is informed by the European colonial project that is launched with the “discovery” of the New World, which in Dussel’s argument is its material condition of possibility.²⁷ Second, as Dussel insists, the trajectory of the modern ethical subject does not simply go from late antiquity through the medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment periods of European history; it also includes ancient China, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Semitic worlds. These traditions gave expression to different conceptions of the ethical subject that were more attentive to the corporeality, injurability, and vulnerability of the “living” subject. Decolonizing ethics thus also means attending to different sources of ethical agency.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

Our volume opens with a contribution from Enrique Dussel that lays out some of the major stakes of his ethics of liberation. In “Are Many Modernities Possible? A South-South Dialogue,” Dussel argues against notions of multiple and alternative modernities, insisting that modernity is a contingent, concrete, singular, and nonrepeatable event of world history that cannot be replicated in alternative contexts. Moreover, it is an event that is indelibly linked to colonial domination. Thus for non-European countries to attempt to follow the same path Europe took to modernity can only lead them to colonial misery. Dussel insists that we should think instead of overcoming modernity in the direction of transmodernity. Fulfilling this task begins with fostering a dialogue among the cultures of the south that includes not only a critique of modernity but also a willingness to incorporate the best of modernity. The end result of this process would not be a universal culture—because univocal universality is necessarily dominating—but

rather a cultural pluriversality that is open to the specificity and alterity of different traditions.

The next seven chapters in this volume explore various themes in Dussel's work. The first four of these chapters address aspects of Dussel's ethics, with a shared focus on his materialist principle. Linda Martín Alcoff's chapter, "The Hegel of Coyoacán," presents Dussel as a kind of renegade Hegelian: a thinker as attentive as Hegel was to the geography and historicity of philosophy and as committed to an immanent, dialectical style of argument who nonetheless breaks radically with Hegel's developmentalism and with his focus on an abstract idea of freedom as the driving force of history. For Alcoff, the materialist principle at the core of Dussel's ethics, a materialism that must be understood as pragmatist rather than reductive, leads him to focus less on abstract notions of freedom and more on the concrete struggles of victims for liberation from existing systems of oppression. Whereas Alcoff offers a largely sympathetic reconstruction of Dussel's ethics, Mario Sáenz Rovner's chapter, "Ideality and Intersubjectivity: Dialectics and Analectics in a Philosophy of Liberation," takes a more critical approach. While acknowledging the tremendous value of Dussel's decolonization of key Marxist concepts and his emphasis on the relationships among capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism, Sáenz Rovner is critical of Dussel's reading of Marx's concept of living labor, which he finds insufficiently immanent. Unlike Dussel, who turns to Levinasian analectics to rethink living labor, Sáenz Rovner argues that Hegelian dialectical logic can be rescued from its sexism, racism, and Eurocentrism. Like Alcoff, Don Deere focuses on the materialist principle of Dussel's ethics in his chapter, "The Upsurge of the Living: Critical Ethics and the Materiality of the Community of Life." Deere demonstrates in detail how Dussel's materialism moves beyond alternative materialist approaches to ethics such as utilitarianism and also beyond the ethical formalism of liberalism. Although Dussel's ethics combines materialist and formalist aspects, Deere insists that it is best understood as a materialist ethics that incorporates a formalist moment (not vice versa). For Deere, contrary to Sáenz Rovner, the analectical material moment in Dussel's thought that refers to the concrete suffering of excluded victims is

also the original critical moment. Continuing the thread of focusing on Dussel's ethics, Jorge Zúñiga M. focuses on the north-south debate between Dussel and Apel in his chapter, "Ethics of Liberation and Discourse Ethics: On Grounding the Material Principle of Life." Although he praises Dussel for his ability to subsume key aspects of Apel's discourse ethics within the ethics of liberation, he is also critical of Dussel's ethics inasmuch as it fails to grapple fully with the problem of how the materialist principle at its core is grounded. As such, Dussel's ethics has not yet fully risen to Apel's challenge. In the final section of his chapter, Zúñiga offers as a friendly amendment or supplement to Dussel's ethics two possible strategies for grounding the materialist principle, each of which aims to demonstrate the non-circumventability of life for ethics.

The next three chapters discuss broader issues in value theory, including aesthetics and philosophy of history, in relation to Dussel's work. In "On the Apophatic Urgency of Now: A Future for the Philosophy of Liberation," Oscar Guardiola-Rivera argues for an aesthetic turn in Dussel's work. Guardiola-Rivera seeks to excavate and build on this aesthetic turn, viewing this as the complement to Dussel's earlier project of de-struction of the history of ethics. Linking Dussel to Jewish thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, and Emmanuel Levinas, Guardiola-Rivera reads Dussel's work as an interrogation into one of the oldest questions in philosophy, the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, and interprets him as an aesthetic-critical interpreter of the philosophy of history. Alejandro Vallega's chapter, "An Introduction to Liberatory Decolonial Aesthetic Thought: A South-South Path, from Indigenous and Popular Thought in América and from the Sense of *Xu* in Chinese Painting," explores further the aesthetic dimension of Dussel's thought. He begins by arguing that Dussel's materialist ethical principle has an aesthetic basis, specifically an account of sensibility. He goes on to develop this insight into a sketch of a decolonial aesthetics of liberation through a "south-south" dialogue between Rodolfo Kusch and Chinese traditional painting. Amy Allen's chapter, "The Ethics and Politics of Progress: Dussel and the Frankfurt School," explores further the philosophy of history strand identified by Guardiola-Rivera. Allen

articulates the complex and ambivalent conception of progress that runs through Dussel's ethics and reveals some points of concordance between Dussel's work and the Frankfurt School, in particular the work of Theodor Adorno.

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Our volume ends with Enrique Dussel's "Epilogue," which offers a rich and fascinating intellectual autobiography in which the author situates his own work in its existential, geographical, cultural, and historical context and charts his own self-understanding of the various shifts his work has taken over the last fifty years.

NOTES

1. See the translator and editor's introduction to Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1996), xiii–xxxi. See also the introduction to Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 1–26; and the introduction to Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism and Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1–18. See also Frederick B. Mills, *Enrique Dussel's Ethics of Liberation: An Introduction* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–20.
2. For a more extensive treatment, see Eduardo Mendieta, "Critique of Decolonial Reason: On the Philosophy of the Calibans," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 41, no. 1 (forthcoming).
3. For an excellent overview of this constellation and debate, see Gustavo Leyva, *La filosofía en México en el siglo XX: Un ensayo de reconstrucción histórico-sistemática* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultural Económica y Secretaría de Cultura, 2018), chap. 6, 423–500. See also *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2016 ed., s.v. "Philosophy of Liberation," by Eduardo Mendieta, January 28, 2016, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/liberation/>.
4. We are fortunate that we now have in English a work by Dussel that brings together these two currents in an exemplary fashion. See Enrique Dussel, *Pedagogics of Liberation: A Latin American Philosophy of Education*, trans. David I. Backer and Cecilia Diego (Goleta, Calif.: Punctum Books, 2019).
5. Here we are drawing on some ideas developed in the introduction to Santiago Castro-Gómez and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Teorías sin disciplina: Latinoamericanismo, postcolonialidad y globalización en debate* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel de Porrua, 1998), 5–30.
6. They can be found here: https://www.enriquedussel.com/Libros_OSelectas.html.

7. Enrique Dussel, *Filosofías del Sur: Descolonización y Transmodernidad* (Mexico City: Akal, 2015).
8. Enrique Dussel, *Anti-Cartesian Meditations and Transmodernity: From the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation*, ed. Alejandro A. Vallega and Ramón Grosfoguel (The Hague: Amrit, 2018).
9. It needs to be noted that already in works from 1963 to 1964, Dussel had called for thinking from and out of the Latin American life world and history. In the early 1960s, Dussel was calling for a provincializing of Europe, on the one hand, and placing Latin American history in a world context, on the other.
10. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Enrique Dussel's Liberation Thought in the Decolonial Turn," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (2011), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5hg8t7cj>.
11. Arguably Dussel has written six, if we take his recent *14 tesis de ética: Hacia la esencia del pensamiento crítico* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2016). However, the basic ideas in this text were all elaborated in the 1998 *Ethics of Liberation*. This last text clarifies and expands on what is developed in this major ethics.
12. The "ontological" work that Dussel was developing during this time was also heavily *philosophical anthropological* along the lines of Max Scheler, Helmut Plessner, Arnold Gehlen, and the young Habermas, who inflected philosophical anthropology with epistemology.
13. Enrique Dussel, *Lecciones de antropología filosófica, Para una de-strucción de la historia de la Ética*, *Obras selectas* 3 (Buenos Aires: Docencia, 2012), 20.
14. *Ibid.*, 201.
15. Enrique Dussel, *Para una ética de la liberación Latinoamericana*, *Obras selectas* 8 (Buenos Aires: Docencia, 2012).
16. Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985).
17. Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988).
18. Incidentally, this text was produced in collaboration with his son, Enrique Dussel Peters, who has meanwhile become an important Mexican economist.
19. Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la producción* (Bogotá: Editorial Nueva América, 1984).
20. Enrique Dussel, *La producción teórica de Marx: Un comentario a los "Grundrisse"* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1985); Dussel, *Hacia un Marx desconocido: Un comentario de los manuscritos del 61-63* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1988), which was edited and translated as *Towards an Unknown Marx: A Commentary on the "Manuscripts of 1861-63"*, trans. Yolanda Angulo, ed. Fred Moseley (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Enrique Dussel, *El último Marx (1863-1882) y la liberación Latinoamericana* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1990).
21. Enrique Dussel, *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx* (Estella, Navarra: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1993).
22. A collection of the texts written for these encounters has been published; see Karl-Otto Apel and Enrique Dussel, *Ética del discurso y ética de la liberación* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005).

23. Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y la exclusión* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1998), 14–15.
24. Enrique Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical World History*, trans. Thia Cooper (2007; repr., London: SCM, 2011), xvii.
25. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995).
26. The essays are collected in Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy*, and further expand on each one of these limits.
27. See Dussel, *Underside of Modernity*, in particular the chapter on Charles Taylor; and Dussel, *Invention of the Americas*, in particular part 1, “From the European Ego: The Covering Over.”