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Item Type	Article
Authors	Dussel, Enrique
Publisher	Duke University
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-11-09 22:30:23
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/190901

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Ethics Is the Original Philosophy; or, The Barbarian Words Coming from the Third World: An Interview with Enrique Dussel

Fernando Gomez

Translated by Fernando Gomez

Some Materials for an Intellectual Biography

FG: How would you describe the historical process of your thinking?

ED: It is a paradoxical process that takes me by surprise. It appears that being of a certain generation in Mendoza, Argentina, would entail specific demands as to where and how to behave and think. Also, ever since I was eight or ten years old, I already felt very close to groups that were extremely engaged in social activities. I see a great coherence in my life and my work in this regard. My first work in sociology in the Department of Philosophy at Mendoza, and this happened already in my second semester, was about the marginal neighborhoods in my county. I would go around the city limits on my bicycle and try to find the neighborhoods of Bolivian immigrants who were arriving in Mendoza to make a living. How could it be that I was so early interested in marginal life, which is the central theme of alterity that I am still thinking about today? That is, between the Dussel in his early teens

This interview took place at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, in April 1998.

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and the Dussel of today, I see an impressive continuity. And it is exactly the same with my studies in ethics. I was already studying ethics by the time I was nineteen. I studied ethics for four years. I had a very good foundation very early on thanks to a great professor who, despite his conservative views, was very learned. My doctoral thesis, which I completed in Madrid, is about the notion of the common good, which is ethics and the philosophy of rights, and there I was paradoxically going against Charles de König from the position of Jacques Maritain. So, against my teachers, I was already creating my own space, defending democracy in the final years of Perón and the beginning of democracy in Argentina, and also in the middle of the Franco regime, which was then very much against the grain.

FG: Do you wish to differentiate among history, philosophy, and ethics?

ED: Professionally, my philosophical field was, from the very beginning, ethics. My specialization was in ethics. What occurred was that I reached a point at which, thanks to the philosophy of liberation, and also thanks to Emmanuel Levinas, I realized that ethics was the original philosophy. On this point I agree with Charles Peirce and with Karl-Otto Apel. So I have always been a specialist in ethics, and I have been studying ethics for many years in the middle of a generalized lack of interest. Now, all of a sudden, ethics returns with a surprising centrality. It is even fashionable! In the meantime, I have been working on ethical issues for thirty, forty years, and this is what makes my final work a very careful reading on classic authors, which is not the common practice among people who devote themselves entirely to ethics.

FG: In what sense is ethics the original philosophy?

ED: This is so, especially since Levinas, but it is obvious that it is also the case before him, since the origins of Semitic thought. My first book, *Pensamiento Semita* [Semitic thought], published in 1961, insinuates that in order to deconstruct philosophy, but also to construct it later, it is necessary to start from the practical considerations [informing such an enterprise]. That is to say, where do I situate this author, this thought, this text? Where do I put him in relation to his surrounding practical structures? Aristotle's slave ethics is not the same as the Sophists' first critical ethics of slavery. And it is by taking this [contextualization] into account that I am then able to situate the textual circumstance inside its ethico-practical structures. I remember in the seventies, during a congress of philosophy, a Thomist intellectual in a bad mood rose up to his feet and said, "How could this be if

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ethics depends upon anthropology and not metaphysics, on all its suppositions?" But the truth of the matter is that such anthropology and such metaphysics are making explicit a thinking practice that is built upon its practical considerations. And this is precisely what my latest work demonstrates more convincingly than ever.

FG: At the recent conference in your honor, "Reconstructing Time and Borders: Latina/o Religious/Cultural Change and Identities" [Duke University, 27–28 March 1998], you spoke eloquently about a series of first discoveries in your first month-long sea trip out of Argentina, with the final destination being Barcelona. How do you insert your vital experience into the trajectory of your thinking? I imagine that the discoveries are still taking place.

ED: Yes. It had already occurred to me that I wanted to [insert my biography] in one book of mine, which was going to be published by the Universidad de Puebla, Mexico. I began this book with a certain biographical description, and the editors thought that this kind of biographical information was out of place. They suggested getting rid of it, and I followed their suggestion. But the truth is, I really believe that the biography, among people like us coming from a postcolonial world, is constitutive of intellectual discourse. This is so for the simple reason that we are making discoveries by placing the body in a place where discovery is really possible. One will not find in textbooks the experiences that one has undergone. This is so true—I would never have discovered what it means to be a Latin American solely from textbooks. Quite the contrary: It was sitting in European classrooms that made me feel like a barbarian from the Third World. And it is precisely when I put myself in the middle of the Palestinians and Arabs in Israel that I came to realize that the Middle East is very different from any place I had previously read about in any textbook. I needed the life experiences of all those coming from the peripheral or colonial worlds, or the so-called Third World. Life and work cannot be separated. That is, we are constantly in an inventive living situation insofar as we have to think about many things for the first time. And this will be found not in the textbooks of our libraries but in the daily and historical experiences of our lives. The author's biography is constitutive of his text. It is not pure context. It is, rather, the very meaning of its text.

FG: *Critique* is one of your favorite words. It seems to me as though you want to insinuate a certain intellectual attitude that must necessarily find inspiration in extreme intellectual positions situated in a historical precedent, for example Bartolomé de Las Casas.

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ED: Philosophical critique is always articulated when the negative effects of a system become intolerable for the victims, although it is also true that the degree of tolerability among the victims may well be almost infinite. But it seems to me that it is true that when these effects become genuinely intolerable for any consciousness, and this consciousness is successful at mounting a resistence, this is already enough to put the whole system in crisis. Critical thinking seeks to explain the whys and wherefores of a given situation, and critical thinking must allow for the organization and the reproduction of these critical groups. It gives new critical rearticulation to the already critical condition of certain groups under intolerable living conditions. Critical theory cannot anticipate what will happen because, when the situation is not intolerable, critical thinking has no possible ground or condition of possibility. But when these critical movements emerge, critical thinking must immediately transform itself and try to delineate a possible diagnosis, analyze the whys and wherefores of a given situation, and also allow for new horizons to open and possible alternatives to channel the process, which I would call liberation.

Following the Indigenous Footsteps in the Construction of the Philosophical Work

FG: I feel there is a certain tendency, or temptation, or perhaps necessity, in your discourse toward an implicit or explicit indigenous interpellation. And this might perhaps be more acute in the professional environment of the American academy. What would you say to this?

ED: Indigenous activism [*indigenismo*] is an exceedingly ambiguous phrase, and it has been used historically to integrate indigenous populations into the mestizo world or into the official world of national entities. So my interpellation is not so much indigenous as it signals the constant reference to the Amerindian cultures already here before the European invasion that survived it and that now, almost the end of the twentieth century [1998], are again making themselves present in the political arena in Latin America. It is true that in the United States, there is a certain thinking, a clear, critical, even guilty consciousness, that wishes to see among the Zapatistas, for example, the emergence of squeaky-clean, pristine, and honest movements that are, also at the same time, quite consequential with a cause of incredible depth. And they give it a great importance. Sympathetic to this sensibility and this problem, I am also trying to learn from this experience.

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My most recent book is dedicated to the Zapatistas, and this [gesture] is following no North American demagogy. At the beginning of this book, we may read, "To the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional), who reminds us in their ethical path the lost house in the mountains and whose footsteps we have been following in the construction of this philosophical work." Then, on the second page, there is a great text by the Frente Zapatista, "working men, peasants, students, etc." But it is in chapter four, when seeking the critical moment, what I call the fourth critico-formal principle, that I really engage seriously with a long text by the Zapatistas. In other words, it is not for the demagogy existing in this country that I need to make references to indigenous groups [in Latin America]. Moreover, in my doctoral thesis, which I completed in 1967 at the Sorbonne in Paris, I studied the bishops, the colonial institution of the defenders of the indigenous population. My central theme was already the indigene. In studying the sixteenth century, I was mostly interested not in the triumphant process but instead in the victims of this colonizing process. That's the main reason I studied what happened with the indigenous communities among the thirty-seven dioceses founded from the beginning until 1620.

FG: How do you relate this indigenous interpellation to those critical positions we call "Latin American"?

ED: The truth is, Latin America must include its indigenous dimension or else it is not Latin America. I am saying this coming from a country that has been insistently refusing to acknowledge the indigene. In Argentina, the indigenous dimension did not exist. Argentina pretended to be white, forgetting that the mestizaje there is simply tremendous. Most Argentinians deliberately forget about this. I was recently in Buenos Aires, and as I was walking along the Station General San Martín, and through a little street called Carlos Mújica, which honors a priest who was assassinated in 1974—and this homage makes me very happy—I noticed that all the faces I saw around me were mestizo. And while walking, I was thinking, this is exactly like Mexico; everyone is mestizo, 100 percent. There were no whites in the area. This is clear evidence that Argentinians sometimes say things that are not true. For example, beyond the General Paz Avenue, there are all *cabecitas negras*, that is to say, they are all mestizo. This leaves no doubt as to the generalized attitude, which would not like to acknowledge that Argentina is not so white after all. So, coming from a country with this obsession for whiteness, how did I discover the indigenous problem? Well, I discovered it when I was forced to put the history of Latin America inside the frame

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of global or universal history. That is to say, Latin America is not the sole product of a parachute jump from a European base. The Spaniards, due to the great demographic concentration—high Neolithic and urban cultures in Mexico and below, in the mountains—could not simply forget about the Indians, which is a quite different phenomenon when compared with the historical situation in the United States. The Spaniards could not simply kill them off in the same way nomad populations [here in the United States] would have to cede their territory. The Spaniards had to integrate themselves into this majoritarian population. It is thus undeniable that the indigenous element is a constitutive part of the colonial world. This is also true today: The indigenous element is an essential component of the peasant mentality in Latin America. It is easy to see in the countryside that there are still many pre-Hispanic myths, and this attests to the vigor and vitality of the indigenous component. Now, in some countries, such as Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico, the indigene is not simply a remembrance of things past or some parallel social figure; he or she in some cases will constitute the majority of the population.

FG: I would like you to delineate your own intellectual project in relation to several contemporary figures. Do you find fair the recent qualification by Fredric Jameson that your project represents "the astonishing proposal for the construction of a new non-Eurocentric world historiography" [see the preface to Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998)]? And, if so, how would this construction take place?

ED: Well, this adjective *astonishing* may also be taken to mean novel and surprising, even stimulating. At the risk of being called Hegelian in order to try to prove a fundamental error of interpretation in Hegel, my project is not anti-Hegelian, although I am trying to invert Hegel. Instead, my vision, which is completely different, is undoubtedly close to that sentence by Leopoldo Zea [1912–], in his book *América como Conciencia* [The American manner of consciousness (1953)], which says that "Latin America is outside [universal] history." This is exactly how I felt when I arrived in Europe. It was between 1958 and 1960, on the way back from Israel, that I had to explain to myself where my place was in universal history. It is, then, a reconstruction. Or, better yet, it is a construction of universal history, which, building upon the scientific data of any of the great universal propositions, would allow me to understand myself. To fulfill this objective, I had to reconstruct a certain vision of universal history, which of course could no longer be con-

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tained within Eurocentric parameters. This vision could not be Eurocentric, because first of all it had been born outside of Europe. This vision was formed by its Latin American experiences. For example, while living among Arabs in Israel, I witnessed how they called the Catholics and the Byzantines "Rumi," or Romans. Then, looking from the Byzantine world, the Orient of the official Catholic world, the Latin world is a secondary, pro-reform, and more superficial Roman world. That is how I started to see Europe from the outside. I lived this knowledge for two years in a world that situated itself before the Latin world insofar as the experience of Christianity. That is how it dawned on me that I had built a certain vision of history that was completely artificial or, if you wish, was certainly nonscientific. I have come quite recently to realize something as clear and simple as the following: In 1492, Europe exits the Islamic world and begins to unfold the world-system. This is with no doubt a deep fracture with respect to its internal structures. [By resituating them,] I am thus understanding certain phenomena better than ever before. Florence, for example, where the political thinking of a Guicciardini or a Machiavelli is emerging, will also be immersed in this 1492 crisis. And although it is a bit tangential, it is very interesting to see that Machiavelli's political thinking coincides, there in 1513, almost perfectly with the discovery of America. In other words, the complete transformation and crisis of Italy is interconnected with the opening of Spain to the Atlantic. For exactly the same reason, there is a redefinition of some phenomena during the Renaissance. Modernity begins, but with the installation of the world-system, and not because of internal phenomena exclusive to Europe. The progressive insertion of these phenomena into the [inevitable] frame of universal history breaks down little by little [European] provincialism. It is quite atrocious to see the standard way in which great intellectuals situate all [human] phenomena exclusively within the parameters of European history. This is true even among those who claim to be rigorously historical in their approach and pride themselves in a good self-awareness of their methods. For example, Charles Taylor [1931–], who is on his way to making a critique of the linguistic-formalistic thinking with no content, is willing to construct a history of the constitution of the self, the "I think," but little does he realize that his vision is completely Eurocentric. It is through these critiques of those who say they wish to break away from the empty formalism of linguistic thinking but still cannot transcend Eurocentric models that I realize that my project must cut deeper and becomes more complex than I ever thought at the beginning. There is still a lot of work to do.

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FG: Doesn't this desire for fracture force you, Enrique, to assume a necessarily universalist position, from which you are then able to relativize most, if not all, of these aforementioned critical positions?

ED: I would not call it universal or universalist. I would call it planetary. The adjective *universal* I would leave for abstract principles. But in history, what is important is the planetary, and the planetary is not universal; it is instead the coexistence of systems that include differences, with variable degrees of complexity. The truth is, there is no one universal culture; there are instead cultures competing and clashing with each other, and there is oftentimes the expansion of some phenomena sometimes to a planetary dimension. This is how I have come to understand the notion of globalization. But this is not at all to fall into relativism. I recently said at a Frankfurt seminar that one must live his or her culture with the pretension of universality, which is not coterminous with the planetary dimension. For example, one must live the culture of any African tribe with the honest claim to universality, which is not coterminous with the planetary dimension. That means that what I may think, feel, et cetera, must always make the claim that it could also potentially and ideally be lived by every human being. If I do not believe in this, well, then, I am a relativist, and I cannot live my own culture. One's own culture must be lived with this universal conviction.

Another thing is that in the interplay of cultures, one may well impose itself upon another. That is totalitarianism, which will take place only if I happen to have the necessary force to make it happen. And in this [sorry] situation, those who don't have this power, may well, in some cases, progressively devaluate their own practices and assume inauthentically the imposed practices, a situation that often results in a hybrid situation of total destruction. No, the claim [*pretensión*] to universality ideally made by every single culture, which I would call necessary or positive ethnocentrism, cannot and must not be confused with the effective validation of its [desired] universality. I could say this the other way around—I must put myself, in facing another culture, in a situation in which my values potentially may come to be accepted by another, but if such translation fails to take place, I must always be ready to admit, if only theoretically, the values of the other. I wish to insist that this receptivity for potential change does not at all make me a relativist. I am potentially able, in all honesty, to promote the universality of my own culture, while I try, at the same time, to change some or most of the ingredients of that culture if they proved no longer useful. In this double operation, I remain in the honest and permanent position of its claim to universality, against the relativist who would say that what I am proposing is valid only

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for me and for nobody else. This latter position is inauthentic. To be authentic is to say, "This is valid for me," and I claim, in all honesty, that it is also valid for everybody insofar as they are willing to accept that the other has another world. For this reason, I must force myself and try to see the whys and wherefores of others having other worlds, and what their values might be, and how these may get articulated. This is the only road to progress: if we are willing to assume in all honesty the legitimacy of the value systems of others.

FG: What would happen in historical situations of cultures in conflict?

ED: That's the point. When there are open conflicts, there is no time to assume, let alone to adjust, to the possible values of others. There is, quite simply, the imposition by force of the strongest [culture]. Consequently, there is a [formal] imposition of the strongest values on others and the destruction of the weaker values, which does not mean anything but the destructive simplification of history. There are a lot of experiences that will vanish from oppressed cultures. But this vanishing must not necessarily translate into the greater value of the strongest culture. It simply means that the victorious culture has more efficacious means—above all, military means—for the destruction of the most fragile cultures. This in no way means that the destroyed culture had no values that, in the long run, might have been more beneficial for the largest portion of mankind. Yet it is due to their destruction that these are rarely recuperated. In other words, the globalization of one culture does not, in the long run, demonstrate the intrinsic superiority of that culture, and we see this today with the ecological problem. Those so-called old or premodern cultures are teaching us now to have quite a different kind of relationship with nature, about which we previously had no idea and which was quite simply meaningless. It is high time we realize and try to incorporate the grain of wisdom passed along by these cultures.

FG: How would you differentiate your intellectual project from Gustavo Gutiérrez, Franz Josef Hinkelammert, and Walter Mignolo? I have heard you talking with admiration about Hinkelammert, whom you have called not a philosopher but an economist.

ED: I should situate these three names. I have known Gustavo Gutiérrez since 1962. I met him in Paris when I was a student. Gustavo and I belong to the same generation; he is a bit older than me, the eldest in my generation, we could say. We have gone through the whole process of slow

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realization, initially within conservative and Catholic groups, of slowly opening up to their historical time and revolution, their historical processes and demands. Gustavo is fundamentally a theologian, but he is extremely engaged. He has managed to give a structure to student groups, and also to political groups, which is something I have done myself. By contrast, due to my professional training and vocation, I am predominantly a philosopher. I have been developing a philosophical thinking that, I want to think, fulfills the academic expectations for a philosophical discourse. I have always taken some pains to distinguish theology from philosophy. Methodologically, these are two diverse fields of knowledge. This is not to say that Gustavo and I have not learned many things from each other. It is true that historically, the theology of liberation precedes the philosophy of liberation, yet both emerge from the same sociological problem of dependency. I became aware of this problem at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo in Argentina, while I was writing an ontological ethics of a strictly philosophical nature. A question came to me then: Instead of the ontological ethics I was already writing, why not write a diverse ethics, an ethics of liberation? I must remark that there was already a sociology of liberation emerging from the theory of dependency. So the philosophy of liberation is a movement that historically follows in the footsteps of the theology of liberation, runs parallel to it. Both emerge from identical experience, yet I always wish to emphasize that the former is of a strictly philosophical nature.

My contact with Franz Hinkelammert began in 1970, or perhaps a bit later. In Santiago de Chile, I wrote a little piece entitled “The Atheism of the Prophets of Israel and Marx” [1970], in which I was trying to demonstrate how the anti-idolatrous atheism of the prophets was identical to Marx’s. This early work came out of a discussion with Hinkelammert. Ever since, our dialogue has been growing. I honestly think that he is the most creative of the thinkers of Latin American liberation. I say that he is an economist, because that is his profession. I have found at Duke University a work of his published in German in 1963 about the Soviet economy. He got his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Berlin in 1974. He is an economist with a tremendous background, having studied courses in philosophy while completing his regular courses in economics. And why? Because he had a keen interest in the methodological problems of the economy. This interest in fundamental economic constructions took him away from the economy, and even away from mathematics, since these were categories that the standard economist cannot ever explain satisfactorily. This is how he came into contact with philosophy, and, in Latin America, with theology. And in this

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moment, Hinkelammert, already beyond sixty years of age, is still thought-provoking and still writing incredible pieces, such as his latest *El mapa del emperador: Determinismo, caos, sujeto* [The emperor's map: Determinism, chaos, and subject], which constitutes an important critique of Lyotard. He has very important texts on the deviations of the French Left, mostly on the redefinition of determinism, which I will be using in my dialogue with Ernesto Laclau. To summarize, the creativity of some of his theses has a truly global impact. My latest work, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* [Liberation ethics in the age of globalization and exclusion], takes what I call the "life principle" from Hinkelammert, although I realize now that the theme of life goes way back in Latin American thinking, but Hinkelammert is, well before anyone else, the one who put forth the theme of the God of life.

My direct contact with Walter Mignolo began much more recently. Approximately three years ago, when he was teaching a course in Puebla, México, and he invited me to join him. [That was my first contact with him,] although I had heard about him earlier. I have just begun to discover Walter's proposals in the United States in the area of "postcolonial studies." I think no one is better equipped than he to articulate this and put it next to the projects we have already done in Latin America. To me, the importance of Walter resides, aside from the originality of his own thinking, in that he is able to construct incredible bridges from this country. He is thus connecting the water of the Latin American creek with stronger waters elsewhere, so that we may get the mill of history moving for us, too. And for this we are very much grateful to him. He allows discussions in English of some of the issues that we have been covering in Latin America in the recent past but that have remained largely forgotten or even ignored; and he is forcing us to get a good hearing of the most salient North American and English discussions, in the English world, which are extremely complex, even byzantine, but which carry, no doubt, a tremendous impact. This two-way communication is forcing us to go back to the books to do the homework if we want to come to terms with the discourse produced by the two parts of our continent. So Walter is indeed a very crucial person.

FG: Which other contemporary figures do you know? I have heard you talk about Santiago Castro-Gómez and Eduardo Mendieta. I understand you also know them personally.

ED: Yes. Eduardo is a former student of mine and, today, a dear colleague. Santiago is a young Latin Americanist philosopher who, already in his

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first semester at the University of the USTA [Universidad Santo Tomás de Aquino] in Bogota, was nourished by the discussions about the theology of liberation and the philosophy of liberation. He belongs to the generation that listened carefully to those debates, and he himself soon took a critical position, one contrary to ours, I must say. This university had a great presence of Latin American thinking. I believe that with Augusto Salazar Bondy and other friends of that generation we are dealing with a generation that is critical of our critiques, which pleases me immensely. And I am very happy, although I belong to another generation, to join their critiques. It makes me feel young.

FG: I do not know what you will think about this, but I have always thought the postcolonial project in the North American context to be the secular arm of the theology of liberation. This would also put it close to the philosophy of liberation. But you strongly resist all my attempts to tie together philosophy and theology in the same knot of liberation.

ED: Yes, I want to be very clear about this issue. There is only one book, I must be honest, in which I use both discourses, but I use them in two different chapters. This juxtaposition takes place in my *Las metáforas teólogicas de Marx* [The theological metaphors of Marx]. Here, and again due to editorial reasons, there is a theological chapter, which is chapter 5, and this chapter also appeared in a theological publication. Nonetheless, all the remaining chapters in all of my remaining texts, when they are philosophical, they are philosophical, and when these are said to come explicitly from someone who considers himself a man of faith, they are, properly speaking, theological. But, again, to me, these two are absolutely different. It is also a common occurrence that the unguarded reader may be acquainted with both discourses and say to himself, "This man mistakes methodologically both discourses." But if you read them carefully, you would see how one is published in a publishing house for believers, so if you wish to go down this path, you are already assuming at least some of these parameters; whereas my other books are published by secular publishing houses, that is, for a largely secular reading public. My students in the Department of Philosophy at the university would never imagine that I could be a man of faith, or that I might unfold a theological discourse, for the main reasons that I never make any references to theology and that my discourses remain instead faithful to the philosophical tradition. Why do I do it like this? Because the philosophy of liberation, which has a lot less grip on the popular imagination than theological discourse, due to its [necessary] abstraction, is, however, theo-

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retically accessible to anyone who is willing to use his or her reason. My understanding of philosophy does not demand from the beginning the assumption of a subjective empathy toward the religious dimension. This general assertion does not at all mean that I am denying that this association [between religion and philosophy] cannot take place. Quite the contrary. I am not even denying that this association may well take place in my own self. And I would say that I am fully entitled to this. If anyone may think that this is not possible, or that this is contradictory or incompatible with a serious philosophical discourse, well, I would say that this is *not* so in my case. But I want to distinguish them very clearly, because otherwise the coexistence most often disallows the philosophy of liberation in the philosophical world, and this, to me, would be disastrous. On the other hand, no one can see clearly the reasons for the secularization of the theology of liberation. The philosophy of liberation is not the secularization of the theology of liberation but a philosophical practice that springs from identical Latin American situations, yet the discursive construction is entirely different. This is so to the degree that—and I must dwell on this autobiographically—my book *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, which originated from dialogues at the University of Frankfurt, represented a big problem for me in the sense that I was invited to participate in the context of a dialogue among different religions; but my main concern was to have a debate with Apel. My undertaking was strictly philosophical, and for this reason I asked the organizers [if they] would be scandalized if my thinking was strictly philosophical, and they said to me, "Of course not, go ahead!" Now, if you read this text, there is no doubt that it is a philosophical text, and despite being published in German in a theological series, it nonetheless remains strictly within historiographic-interpretive parameters. This separation is possible for a Marxist, for an unbeliever, and anyone else, because my discourse remains at the philosophical level. To me, this is a crucial point. A little vignette: Four years ago, a discussion took place at the symposium organized by the great Peruvian philosopher Francisco Miró Quesada Rada, president of the International Federation of Philosophy. The panel was called "Theology of Liberation and Philosophy of Liberation," and Gustavo Gutiérrez was there with me, among others, and that was a very nice experience. I situated myself strictly as a philosopher, and Gustavo was there as a theologian, and we spoke of the differences and the initial similarities in approaches. It ended up being a very fruitful experience, which does not mean that I cannot be theological at certain times.

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FG: You still want to rescue the name of philosophy. You would not like it to be neglected and forgotten.

ED: Yes. First, I believe philosophy has a great history. It has so great a history that the majority of practically all other human sciences spring from it. If we go back to the Greeks—although I am not at all Greek-centered, but let's just do it for this time—well, then, among the Greeks, there is perceptible an exceedingly rich fecundity in regard to rational distinctions. It was obvious that history and literature existed, and philosophy existed, but yet there was no political science, no sociology, no psychology, no economics. All these [disciplines] came out of philosophy. So philosophy has a—how can I say this?—a prestigious history, and I believe today philosophy still has a tremendous vitality and is truly fulfilling a very important function, as it did in its better times. It may sound paradoxical, but I do not really see philosophy today as being in crisis. Rather, I see it immersed, intensely participating in fundamental debates, and I would go so far as to say that it has some strong social presence, if only at the academic level.

An Ethics Bent on Universality: The Ethical Imperative to Reproduce the Victims of the System

FG: So it is within philosophy that you would see the articulation of its fundamental principles in ethics. You have spoken to me of your latest project as being a rationalist project. You have also remarked that this is an ethics with no God. I would like you to say a few words about these two general statements.

ED: I would not quite call it rationalist, and I would not quite say it is without God. Rather, I would say this is an ethics that is constructed rationally—but this does not mean that it is rationalist—and that this is also an ethics that makes the claim that it is possible to be built without God—but this does not mean that it is without God. The theme of God is very serious and, paradoxically, I haven't really dealt with it often. But I have spoken about it sometimes, and I think that it is perfectly possible to deal with it. Yet I think that there are so many misunderstandings, that if I dealt with the theme of God, I would get pulled toward the theological field, and everything I would say later might lose all credibility in the eyes of some. Against this, I would say that my most recent ethics will not deal directly with the theme of God. Again, I want to be very clear: This does not mean that it is without God but, quite simply, that [this theme] will not be dealt with directly. I still think that

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it is not necessary to give ground to ethics, which does not mean that God, perhaps convincingly argued, a task which is extremely difficult, could not give a bigger and better ground to any ethical project. But I think that my foundations are still satisfactory. In regard to rationalism, [my ethics] is not rationalist in the formalist sense. It is an ethics with contents, in the sense that it deals with corporality, through which I am retrieving the intricate world of partially conscious drives [*pulsiones*], the world of desire, the affects, and this is done, I think, quite convincingly. Inconceivable to me is an ethics without the foundational constituents of drives, so masterly discovered by Nietzsche and Freud. I do my best to retrieve their original intuition, although I am here correcting both, or at least showing their limits. I would not accept that my ethics be called simply rationalist; I would not accept that. But this does not mean that it is not rational. It is abundantly rational precisely for the reason [of this incorporation]. And it is not claiming an abstract universalism. Rather, it is making claims toward a universality, but this claim is always to be placed in the vicinity of the victims.

The other day, I was reading a text by Foucault published in 1975 or 1976. It took me by surprise how convincingly Foucault spoke about life, about how today's society keeps life under control, and about how our society allows for and neglects death [*controla la vida y deja morir*], as opposed to traditional societies, which allow for or care for life and keep death quite under [some form of ritualistic] control. In this succinct formulation, there is the whole problem of life, which will be very fitting to my next work on the critique of political reason. I knew Foucault, and I quote him in my most recent ethics. Yet this Foucault who was deeply interested in the issue of life interests me very much. This profound preoccupation with the issue of life must necessarily be a rationality with claims for universality. I would dare say this stronger, in a normative fashion: We have no option but to defend the society of life [*la sociedad de la vida*]. And it is crucial, at this point, to establish that this is not a life-centered approach coming from the Right [*vitalismo de derecha*], as it is in Nazism, nor is it an ambiguous position, as it is in Nietzsche. What would be the crucial difference between Right and Left in this regard? If we are to speak about the reproduction of the life of my group, if we remain inside the parameters solely provided by Darwinism or natural selection, what we are really saying is that we must kill our enemy. This is what I would call right-wing vitalism [*vitalismo de derecha*]. On the other hand, what I would call critical life-centeredness would mean the ethical imperative built upon the reproduction of the life of the victims of all historical systems. That is, the ethical imperative translates the reproduction

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of the given system into the reproduction of the victims of that system. This and only this would be the reliable sign of a true respect for life. This is not found in Hitler, or in Darwinism, or in Nietzsche, among others. This is the fundamental difference I have recently come to realize. Right-wing vitalism justifies the life of a national community, of a race, but it is firmly established in the fight to the death of an enemy, who will get killed or "disappeared." These actions will always find some kind of justification from someone. By contrast, a critical philosophy of life [*filosofía crítica de la vida*] will be saying exactly the opposite: The acceptable reproduction of the life of a community, of a nation, and even of a race—although I do not really think that we must use this last term—must instead be articulated upon the life of the victims of that group, that nation, that race. It is in this sense that I am saying that this ethics will be articulating a claim to universality [*pretensión de universalidad*]. It is in this precise sense that I would only say that my philosophy of life is a rational thinking, that is, it is also taking into scrupulous account the unconscious force field of drives [*pulsiones*], while making the necessary claims toward a universality. It is upon this latter point that I would say that my thinking enters into a postfoundationalist, but also antifoundationalist, terrain. That is to say, if antifoundationalism has been so far mostly critiquing the dogmatism from the Left, which was built upon the laws of necessity, et cetera, once this dogmatism has disappeared, deconstruction has already lost one enemy, but it still needs to apply this mechanism to the dogmatism from the Right, which is today, no doubt, the triumphant neoliberal thinking. For this task I would say we need to use tools that are different from Derrida's. We must use, for example, economic tools, and this is precisely what Franz Hinkelammert has done in the last twenty years. Hinkelammert is the only true deconstructionist of liberal thinking I am aware of. He would say something like this: "To the task of deconstructing right-wing thinking, or the affirmation of life that tries to justify the death of an enemy, and make him or her into a victim, we must seek to construct a vision from and for the oppressed." It is "from the victims" that we must build this positive thinking that will be necessarily deconstructive and constructive at the same time, and that will make claims for universality, because the victim needs to put the person who made him or her into a victim within the same shared horizon of domination and destruction. If someone like Richard Rorty says, "We are Americans and you are from Guatemala, and you deserve your poverty and should feel guilty about it," then Rigoberta Menchú cannot say to Rorty, "We from Guatemala, et cetera"; she must instead say, "We humans." It is from here that the notion of humanity is not a dogmatic universalist propo-

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sition but the most convincing response to the affirmation of the life of the oppressed, where the oppressor and the oppressed are within the same horizon of domination and destruction. This and nothing else is the philosophy for the life of the victims. This is always the best impulse in the critical thinking of Marx, which is also present in Freud, Menchú, and all others who speak about life but who make very clear that they are speaking about the life of the victims.

FG: There is a recent anthology of Rorty's essays, *Truth and Progress*. I have in mind chapter 9, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" [pp. 167–85], in which he is saying something like, there is no more use of this talk of Right and Left, and we all should instead talk about the values of the human being. It is as though Rorty is once again trying to depoliticize the philosophical debate.

ED: If he is speaking of the human being in that way, then he is clearly lost, because he has fallen into a metaphysical universality. What happens in my case is that my ethics is not a dogmatic metaphysics. Speaking about the human being is not necessarily always a metaphysics. In my case, it is an ethics that is postmetaphysical, or, as Levinas would say, a postmetaphysical metaphysics. That is to say, I am not advocating a naïve realism in which I am affirming the universality of my particularity. I am instead advocating something that is very different: the universality where the particularity of the oppressor and the oppressed is constantly pushed and pulled by ethical obligations. It is in relation to this latter point that I see my learning here at Duke University. I have learned how to situate things inside North American and mostly Anglo-Saxon discourse. If I talked today like I used to four months ago, some would say to me, "Oh, my dear friend, you happen to be a universalist-rationalist and also a dogmatic foundationalist!" No, I am not any of these things, rationalist, dogmatic, or universalist. It is for ethical demands coming from the victims that I must construct my discourse in a new way, and in this sense it is "transmodern." That is, my ethics constitutes a process through the notion of modernity; but it is also contrary to it or "anti-foundationalist." About this I intend to write a long chapter in my next book, in which I will have a dialogue with [specialists in] subaltern studies, cultural studies, and postcolonial studies. I have in mind, in particular, Ernesto Laclau, whom I see deconstructing class-based dogmatism, with whom I have agreed since Day One. How could it be otherwise, when I have received everyone's support in my discussion with Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg? Cerutti accused me of being a populist from a position I would call Althus-

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serian class-based reductionism [*clasismo reductivista althusseriano*]. He even wrote a book against me. It seems that no one in Latin America has realized his mistake quite yet. Well, now, in relation to the whole contemporary debate around these schools, they will have to agree with me completely. What I proposed already in the seventies was the category of "the people" [*pueblo*], which is not opposed to the notion of "class," which is contained by the former category. Class cannot completely take into account people. This is what Laclau is saying, and this is what I am also saying. Cerutti, from his dogmatic reductivism, critiqued me on this point. Now poor Cerutti remains clearly situated in this position, which he has already left behind, but not completely, although he has never admitted his error.

An Ostrichlike Ethics

FG: I would like now to move into what I perceive to be a necessary eclecticism in your work. Let me explain myself. I see Enrique Dussel sometimes using the communicational or dialogic model—say, in your dialogues with Karl Apel, Paul Ricoeur, Richard Rorty, and Charles Taylor, mostly—in *The Underside of Modernity*. Other times, however, I see you insinuating the explanatory model of economics—for example, in your monumental narrative of the mobile world-system shifting the center, against Hegel, from West to East—and I remember, in this regard, your example of the Jewish family of Otto Maduro [1945–], in their historical perambulation since their expulsion from the Iberian peninsula, passing through the low countries, Amsterdam, before reaching their final destination in New York. To me, this model reminds me more than a bit of the models provided by Immanuel Wallerstein or Giovanni Arrighi, for example. But, as we have already seen, you remain determined in the disciplinary divisions—that is to say, your latest ethics is rationalist in this new and ambitious sense, or profoundly philosophical, in no need of a theology. How do you like the qualification of eclecticism in relation to your work? Do you find it a praise, an affront, or neither, and why?

ED: This is a crucial issue, which I have much clarity about because it is at the root of my thinking. Eclecticism in the standard sense would mean constantly drawing from different theoretical models and juxtaposing them. I find it difficult to believe that there exist eclectics in this sense out there, because what really happens is that [things] get taken from different frames and inserted into one's own [frame or vision]. This process of integration may easily take some hasty readers by surprise. Yet let's imagine that there

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are eclectics. I am not one of them. Why? For the following reason, and I want to be very clear about this: I have a certain position from which my discourse gets produced. This position may get called "Latin America," or better, "the victims in Latin America." And it is from this position that I am building my discourse, making use of any possible theoretical framework. "Making use" [*echar mano de*], but what one needs to see is the point of that use, and the potential achievement of those objectives. For example, I may use the theoretical framework afforded to me by psychoanalysis to show how there are the oppressed and there are victims, and how a process of liberation of some instinctual repression [*represión pulsional*] must necessarily be produced eventually. Or I may well use the Marxist framework to show how an economic victim, the wage laborer, is produced, and how this victim may also find a way out of capitalist logic. Or I may turn to pedagogic oppression and look for Paolo Freire, et cetera, but in all these "making-use" strategies [*estas tácticas "de echar mano de"*], I never lose sight of the beginning of the project and the original proposition. And I never lose sight of the concrete path I am following, which is none other than the liberation of victims. This is not being eclectic. Moreover, I am aware of some categories that allow me to circulate from one theoretical framework to another and that allow me to try to understand the totality as consciousness in Freud, or totality as capital in Marx, or totality as the pedagogic system in Freire, and then totality becomes the metacategory that allows me to learn from the particularized categories I might be using in one particular science. This process, to circulate from one horizon to another, may sometimes easily catch an unprepared reader unawares, but, for example, if we read carefully *Dialectic of Enlightment* by Horkheimer and Adorno, we see how these authors talk about the capitalist economy, psychoanalytic repression, the legacy of Spinoza's philosophy, the Nietzschean proposals for value change, a certain pessimism coming from Schopenhauer, et cetera. This is how seven or eight theoretical frameworks are bundled together in a tight reflection that may well have no more than three lines. I am used to this procedure. And this is not eclecticism.

In my debate with Apel, for example, I could not see clearly at the beginning how I could do a convincing critique of his work. I now see this much better, and this clarification process is what constitutes my latest ethics. Thanks to this debate with Apel, I am able to reconstruct the totality of contemporary thinking, or at least a substantial part of it, and the origin of this comes from my engagement with Apel. In other words, I could not quite see at the beginning how I could understand Apel's thinking and at the same

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time articulate a convincing critique of his work. In the beginning, and despite learning an awful lot, I did not feel very comfortable with Apel's thinking, and in *The Underside of Modernity* I say this quite explicitly. I conceded for the time being what he was saying, I put myself within his horizon, a strategy that initially made Apel think I was going to transform myself into some kind of transcendental pragmatic. He failed to see that this was an always initial methodological learning strategy. So I said to him, "I concede to the main tenets in your discourse, and I am now placing from your own discourse my objections: What do you do with the excluded? I concede to your communicational community: What do you do with Marx? What do we then do with the community of economic producers?" This was not the main theme, or better said, this was precisely the main theme, because the economy was by analogy situated within the horizon of the communicational community. Yet the theme was bigger than this. It was the material reproduction of life, the theme I haven't yet discovered. And again, this may sound eclectic to some, but it is not eclectic at all. It is quite simply a methodological strategy to learn the discourse of another, which is an attitude that may seem quite indistinguishable from the true eclecticism [of mere juxtaposition]: Almost all philosophical discourses almost always have some aspects worth considering, because there is no doubt that we are dealing here with intelligent philosophers and classical authors. For this reason, I must learn these in order to integrate them, if at all possible, in a discourse hopefully more encompassing and complex. Someone could ask me, "Isn't this just being plain eclectic?" No, because the [true] eclectic would mainly juxtapose. This would be a bit like kitsch in architecture—I put a little colonial here, a little classical style there, and a little modern style in the margins. It is very clear that quite a bit of postmodernism is precisely this [juxtaposition]. But my project might be closer to a unitary fragmentariness [*fragmentarización unitaria*], although this may sound contradictory to some. The true "postmodern" [enterprise] cannot fall into kitsch but rather seeks the fundamental meaningfulness of this [historical] fragmentariness. And this is a whole other ballgame.

But still this is not fully my position. Mine is a much more organic approach. I may seem eclectic to your eyes because you yourself are looking only at my eyes, and the logic of my vision, or the hand and the logic of the touch, and the stomach and the digestive logic . . . and how on earth, I would ask, are you going to subsume the logic of touch, the logic of vision, and the digestive logic? Aren't all these functions necessary? Isn't any one of them impoverished in its isolation? Every one of these functions is necessary, and

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not one of them is satisfactory by itself. The unity of all of these biological functions will give us bodily totality. This unity is the ethics of liberation, and this is what I am practicing. It is not at all a mere juxtaposition. It is, rather, an organic incorporation [*asunción orgánica*] at the starting point with a clear objective and goals. And always faithful to these, there is a discourse clarifying its own internal coherence while learning and incorporating other discourses. My ethics is similar to, just to provide an Argentinian metaphor, an ostrich. They say in Argentina that an ostrich eats everything. You give him anything, even this watch, and he will swallow it without much fuss. Indigenous peoples and the gauchos have always noticed this, how easily and fast the ostrich ate anything they left behind. Even big iron nails! If he cannot digest something, he just throws it away. But he is never afraid of anything. I must say, I have learned this from Habermas, because Habermas, I think, also has this kind of ostrichlike stomach. He is the kind of man who will try to swallow anything. He will quarrel with the hardest and most unpleasant things, and his stomach is like the first one of the four stomachs discussed by Nietzsche. Nietzsche said that the philosopher needs to be like a ruminant, that he must chew his cud in the first, second, third, and fourth stomachs. Some people use only their first stomach. But there must be at least three more to be able to digest at deeper levels [of meaning]. Habermas may assume the material world, but he has already lost the critical world. By contrast, I think I have other stomachs, and at the end of the digestive process, I am still able to incorporate all these authors into my own discourse. This is not being eclectic. Quite the contrary. I make the claim, perhaps with too many excessive gestures, that this [ethics] is an architectural enterprise seeking coherence and rationality at other, certainly deeper levels.

FG: In relation to this postmodern logic of mere juxtaposition, I was thinking about Gianni Vatimo's proposals for a weak thinking [*pensiero debole*].

ED: I do not quite see eclecticism in this "weak thinking." What I see here is the attenuation of the energy of some of those dogmatic discourses and the simultaneous welcoming of a plurality of discourses. But it does not assume them; it simply accepts their existence. It cannot assume them, because if it did so, it would then fall into an almost complete contradiction. No, I think that this is a thinking clearly against all universals [*la universalidad*]. That is, the weak thinking affirms and accepts the possibility of many fragmentary thinkings. It does not deny them, but it cannot assume them, either. Then it is not eclectic, and it is not relativistic either, because this would imply accepting the partial truth of each and every one of them, and,

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in a certain sense, this weak thinking does not accept the notion of truth. Due to this nonacceptance, it does not and cannot say that these are not true. That is to say, it does not say that they are not true because it does not accept the truth-claim. But one could then attack, from Apel's position, their internal self-contradiction. To which the Vatimo school might say, "Very well, thank you, we contradict ourselves according to your logical reason and your theory of truth, but according to my logic, I am not contradicting myself, and what you are really saying to me is in my language and my logic a collection of nonsensical things." By so doing, this guy will remain, so he thinks, a very happy man with no problems. In other words, if you say I have a contradiction, I accept it, and then I contradict myself. But since the contradiction is always in relation to a notion of truth, which I do not accept, then I do not really contradict myself. This is a serious question at this point, because one then may ask this happy guy, "Very well, my friend, what could you say to the oppressed?" Here he will have to say, "Well, nothing." To which I would say, "Well, then, thank you very much, see you tomorrow." This is precisely what Rorty said to me personally. I asked him, "What would be more 'interesting' for the oppressed victims in Latin America: your thinking, which is destroying big, or alternative, narratives, or someone like Marx, who is trying to show why he or she is poor and how they may come out of poverty fighting for his liberation?" And Rorty said to me with great honesty, "Marx!" to which I added, "Well, thank you, I agree!" In other words, Marx is much more interesting than Rorty for the oppressed from a strictly pragmatist viewpoint. Here I am not coming near to touching on the possibility of any truth-claim! Rorty is trying to destroy the great discourse from the Left, not the discourse from the Right. This latter one he eats up raw and then forgets all about it! This is what I have written in my text on him. But it is only recently that I have come to see the importance of what I have already said. What I said to Rorty personally was said very intuitively. Now, by contrast, I feel I am better equipped with more and better arguments.

The Weapon of Reason: The Life Criterion for Every Single Thing among Skeptics and Cynics

FG: I would like to return to the communicational model, and particularly to the figures of the hypocrite and the cynic, about which you have beautifully written in *The Underside of Modernity* [pp. 64–73]. And I would very much like to take into account the degradation of the contemporary standard American idiom in regard to these notions by comparison to Span-

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ish, for example. Don't these figures make the communicational-rationalist model sink?

ED: Yes, they would. We should also include the skeptic, which is neither. That is, the skeptic may become a kind of hypocrite, although I would have this type distinguished from the cynic. The key thing is whether he enters the discussion. If [the skeptic] enters the discussion, then the rationalist will be saying to him that he is automatically in a self-contradictory position. What may often happen, though, is that the skeptic will not enter into the discussion. Although in this case, the rationalist [type] is relatively safe in his position, and he might say something like, "Don't you see how you cannot have a dialogue?" The skeptic will become automatically self-contradictory in either case. It is a catch-22 situation. That is to say, the rationalist a priori has always gone beyond the skeptic. And I would say he is entitled to this superiority. But the true problem resides, as Levinas would say—and this is also true for me—in the variety of skepticisms. There is the skeptic who denies the possibility of the truth, and there is the skeptic who denies the possibility of any kind of critique, which is entirely different. The skeptic who denies the truth also denies the truth of all critique; that is, he is taking all possible weapons away from the hands of the oppressed. This is a serious matter! Which may be summarized by saying that the denial of the truth in the abstract is as reactionary as the possibility of discussing issues in the shoes of the oppressed [thus in the abstract]. This is precisely the problem for me. To be skeptical in relation to dogmatic thinking is necessary, and this is the moment of truth for the postmodern skeptic. When Rorty stands up against the "Linguistic Turn" and develops its contradictions, what he is really demonstrating are the contradictions in a series of poorly constructed arguments made by the "linguistic turn." I very much agree with Rorty on this. But there would be another theory of truth that would allow such arguments to remain thus standing in their feet—for example, life becoming the criterion—and this is the supreme pragmatism with which Rorty would at least in principle find it difficult to disagree. Apel does not make this distinction. He thinks all skeptics are identical. To me, the skeptic who fights against dogmatism is very necessary. Even more, I would go so far as to say that all critical thinking is skeptical thinking in this sense. The skeptic who denies, however—and we could say this about Xavier Zubiri—the real truth [*la verdad real*] is in a self-contradictory position, and the skeptic who denies the possibility of any kind of critique is extremely dangerous. So we have three kinds of skeptics: the necessary skeptic, who critiques dogmatism; the skeptic who critiques the real truth, who contradicts himself; and

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the skeptic who critiques the critique from some kind of theory of truth, who is a reactionary.

FG: I see all these positions so far enunciated as social positions of privilege and force, particularly this last one, no?

ED: This is exactly the case. This is precisely the objective of the last one, the skeptic who holds [political] power, because the one who does not have the power is not interested in skepticism. The one in power may say to himself, "Why should I critique the critique?" That is, isn't it true that North American linguistic thinking—due to its formalism and lack of a strong theory of truth, intradiscursive truth—disallowed critical thinking in the name of logic, and precisely for this reason became complicit with military dictatorships? Now I see this very clearly. It was not so clear to me some time ago. It is now equally clear that there is already a critical thinking that is not yet fully articulated. We must then give it a hand and get it better articulated. And we must not forget that all those people who knew so much about linguistic logic never went against any kind of dogmatism! Now, I find appropriate the measured use of deconstruction precisely in these critiques of dogmatism—Laclau, for example, but also Derrida. Which should remind us that we must be careful, because there are three levels of negation. To me, the most interesting type is the skeptic against dogmatism. This is the good guy—a very important aspect not to forget—this is the one who facilitates the use of reason. I agree with Apel on this point. He said to me, "You must justify your own discourse from itself, because if you don't, well, then you remain without justifications for anything else." I believe that one must go strongly against the skeptic who simply denies the use of reason, for the simple reason that the oppressed need the use of reason. I am not interested in reason per se. My arguments in this regard are diverse from Apel's, although I see the main thrust of Apel's argument. He would say that we accepted Nazism without good enough reasons. And the theme of Nazism, like the theme of nationalism, is Apel's obsession. Which is extremely telling, because that makes him an anti-Nazi rationalist. He is not simply a rationalist nationalist, and he would be opposed to the repetition of rationalism and nationalism in the figure of another führer. This is a very honest position on his part. So it is not strange that Apel sees Rorty's antirationalism as something that is extremely dangerous. So when Rorty invokes the catchphrase, "I am American, and to me that's enough," then Apel may well respond to him, "And I am German, and that is enough, so if I am a Nazi, you just shut up and don't come to my doorstep to critique that I am a Nazi." To

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Apel's ears, the simple declaration of nationality rings like [the declaration of] Nazism. [This whole hypothetical debate] may summarize Rorty's proposal. And Apel is right, against Rorty's ignorance, which bespeaks democracy but with many internal contradictions.

Now the second type we have almost forgotten is the cynic. I situate this type as the one who is holding on to power and the one who de facto justifies death. It is not a problem of truth anymore. It has already become [with the cynic] an issue of life or death. The cynic justifies death, and he gets along just fine with his friend the skeptic, who takes the [critical] weapons against critical thinking. The cynic may also be friends with the dogmatist, who will no doubt justify the [use] of death—like Friedrich A. von Hayek [1899–]—or social Darwinism, or Nazism. The cynic wishes to be above the discussion. He does not enter the discussion. But if for whatever reason he does so, he will enter the discussion with his business associates, the dogmatic group, which justifies the use of death, and the skeptics, who will be critiquing all possibilities of critique. Then the philosophical force field is much more complicated than Apel ever imagined.

FG: In other words, Enrique, what do we do with the hypocrites and the cynics in power?

ED: Well, with those there isn't much point in having a discussion, because they are not willing from the get-go to have one. So the people must get organized to try to form an oppositional front and force them to negotiate. The philosopher of liberation in front of the cynic says, "Ah, so you have the power. Very well, then, I will try to speak for those who do not have it yet but who have a reason that is truly rational [*razón racional*]. And if they are weak now, who knows what may happen at a certain conjuncture in the near future? We may give it back to you, and then you will be forced to sit down and negotiate, because those you tried to eliminate will then be as strong as you are now!" The philosopher of liberation postpones the discussion for the moment. Discussion will then take place at another level.

In other words, the philosophy of liberation, or ethics, makes itself available for the fight for recognition among these oppressed groups. That fight will force them, but only a few times, to sit down and negotiate. Then the cynic at least will have no arguments whatsoever to make. Along the way, he will have lost his heart while losing all the ground during the fighting. For example, when Henry Kissinger says, "Look, there is no point in talking about morality, or values, or any of these abstract notions—we are here defending American interests," this is cynicism. Kissinger is the cynical

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figure. This very [sincere] proclamation removes the ethical component of his thinking and also part of its legitimacy. Honest people cannot accept this kind of discourse, although they may do so at the beginning, unconsciously. But it must be said once more that he [Kissinger] is a cynic who admits to his lack of interest in any serious discussion. They are not defending universal values, only their vested [national] interests. We need to stress that the majority of the population may well be complicit with this cynical state of affairs, and they may be thinking something like this, "Look, if there are values out there, I don't know, but in the meantime, I want to be left alone, to make a good living and keep the [good] standard of living I already have." With this mind-set, the general population may well be moving toward the Right to protect those standards of living. Cynical attitudes, more than cynical principles, may then easily spread out and become universal. The crucial point is that these [cynics] no longer [wish] to enter into the discussion [which may lead to change]. There is acceptance of the present state of imposition [*estado de fuerza*]. There can be no doubt that Rorty's [philosophical] position is complicit with this sorry status quo, since, as I have already said, he is focusing exclusively on debilitating the big narratives from the Left. And perhaps without fully realizing what he is doing, when he is speaking about democracy, freedom, and the sound bite of the "we, Americans," which is a powerful discourse, he is getting close to the Right, and all in the name of democracy. This is extremely dangerous.

FG: Rorty's philosophical discourse does not chip away Kissinger's?

ED: Not at all. Quite the contrary. Rorty's and Kissinger's thinking perfectly coincide. Kissinger does not believe in [the] truth [of things]. He knows only the truth of interest. And what Rorty is saying is, "I am Kissinger." Why? Because if Kissinger and I are Americans, then blacks will be defended because they are Americans, not because they are human. With this thinking, how on earth could you defend a black person from Guatemala? Rorty would say, "Come on, let's talk!" But without any serious intention of getting things changed. This would be an open-ended discussion, with no conclusions—pure entertainment, without really giving any ground for sympathy. To this attitude, the Guatemalan black should say, "Get lost!"

FG: The conversation is over as soon as this black foreigner gets on your nerves, then—bye, bye, leave me alone, get out of here, go home . . .

ED: Exactly. At this point, I go back to my good home, and you return to your poor little shantytown in the suburbs of Guatemala.

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FG: It is as though you believe, Enrique, that the quality of the argumentation of the social conflict would break it open, no?

ED: No, not at all. Habermas said the same thing to me: "You believe too much in the normativity of ethics." This was his response to the enthusiasm I spoke with in relation to my ethics in Saint Louis in 1996. To which I said, "No, maestro, I do not believe in the normativity of ethics, but I do believe that this ethics may give a hand in the fight for recognition, first and foremost in the destruction of the arguments of the opponents." That is, Rigoberta Menchú is right and Rorty is wrong. This general situation, when articulated in the academic world, puts me in opposition to Rorty. So my task is first the destruction of these arguments à la Rorty. And second, I must also respond to what Rigoberta is trying to articulate. I must try to show convincingly how serious and problematic this dilemma is, and how it is perfectly possible to articulate philosophical arguments from this [position], and at least to try to articulate for some groups in Latin America with increasing understanding of the importance of Rigoberta's arguments. I do not believe [these two interrelated tasks] constitute the beginning or the fundamental moment of the more general process. Yet I honestly believe this is a collaboration, in the strong sense of the word *collaboration*, or "to work with," without giving oneself any airs, with enthusiasm and clarity of vision. In other words, the point is to try to give good arguments to strengthen a certain [social] project. That's how I personally imagine all philosophers, seizing the historical day and the timeliness of their critical moment. That's why, for example, someone like Locke will be so important and most liberals still see their own reflection in this thinking. Yet this thinking was, in its historical moment, quite revolutionary. It was against landowners, against feudalism, against a certain traditional thinking. For example, in chapter 17 in the second treatise about government, Locke writes that the revolution will not be completed with shields alone, that these are not enough, that they also need weaponry for the completion of the revolution. Mr. Locke sounds very much like Che Guevara! He was a revolutionary who came from the early bourgeoisie and thought about his living reality. He gave reasons for the bourgeois revolution in England, and then the bourgeoisie in power made him a hero. There is nothing anomalous about this. That's how history works, otherwise nothing would take place. Another classic example: What is the connection between Rousseau and the French Revolution? Did things begin with him? One wouldn't go this far, but it is undeniable that there is some connection. The people could not tolerate the system anymore and revolted, and at this

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point Rousseau became the historical possibility to give a critical philosophy to his historical time. I think, quite honestly, that this and no other is the proper role of philosophy.

FG: In relation to your book *The Theological Metaphors of Marx*, I must confess I do not quite grasp your use of the phrase "living metaphor," which you take from Ricoeur. I am confused by your use of the notion of metaphor. I mean, why is it not symbol or allegory? How does it relate to the design of this book?

ED: I take *metaphor* to mean an expression, which could be as short as a word, a sentence, or even a whole text, yet it is always interrelated [with other words, sentences, texts] at various levels. For example, I may have a strictly economic discourse, and metaphor is then, at least for me, anything that may potentially signify something at least potentially eccentric and quite potentially disconcerting. I will give you the concrete example of commodity fetishism. This is a chapter [in Marx's *Capital*] that suddenly continues the discourse at a level quite other than the initially economic level. Although I would think one could also call it symbolic, in the sense that [Marx] is aiming at double meanings with it. And also perhaps allegory! At any rate, metaphor is for me what signals the possibility of the opening or a widening at various levels of the implicit or explicit horizon of discursivity. Marx is almost always delivering metaphors that aim at the relativity of the strictly economic discourse of reality. In relation to my book, metaphors, in this strict sense, open up the horizon for theological interrogation, and this is not simply in religious terms but perhaps, let us say, a bit more profoundly or in theological terms. I must say that in relation to *Capital*, this is a book of and about economic science. It is a book of economic science, which is not constructivist in relation to *Capital*. So, when Marx speaks about original tendency in capital toward capital accumulation, a Marxist category, he includes something like the following: "This theme is somewhat related to what theologians refer to when they speak of original sin." In other words, Marx is quite explicit about the possibility of a translation among discourses: What economic discourse says about "capital accumulation" could be at least potentially related to what others in the theological field refer to when they speak of "original sin." Among some buttoned-up, self-respecting economists, "original sin" is a metaphor. Why? Because it opens up a truly disconcerting horizon [of expectations], most likely with not many possibilities for decoding [if they remain entirely faithful to the economic discourse]. This was the case with this Marxian formulation—it was

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never, in my mind, convincingly highlighted! Marxists always saw this as a joke: "How funny, how critical this good old Marx is! Look at how he is poking fun at theologians! Look at how he is telling them that they do not know anything about anything, since original sin is ultimately the economy!" I believe this reading is incorrect. I believe Marx said, quite seriously, that this reality [of capital accumulation] is not entirely divorced from that which theologians refer to when using the perhaps cryptic sign of "original sin." So, I take seriously the sixteen texts by Marx on the subject of original sin, and I already have a theory of original sin. He says that theologies have shamefully dehistoricized original sin. What does this mean? It means that we need to think historically the notion of original sin. I then show up, with *The Theological Metaphors of Marx*, and I follow Marx's suggestion. I am then in a solid initial position to situate theological discourse. I may then ask Saint Augustine, or the Council of Trent, or contemporary theologians, "Are you really allowed to dehistoricize original sin?" And they should honestly say, "Well, not really." To which I would then convey that original sin was a historical fact, which would be false, or that we are simultaneously dealing with a mythical fact. In response to which, I would imagine, the theologian could also ask himself or herself the following question: "Would it be at all possible to historicize the notion of original sin?" I would encourage them to do that. I would say, "Go ahead, Mr. Jürgen Moltmann in Tübingen, try to think the dear notion of original sin historically!" What we would have in our hands would then be the "hot potato," or the dilemma, of the historical structures of sin determining the social nature of all individuals, specifically in that historical period unambiguously quite distinct, and yet related, to all other preceding and following periods. Is that acceptable or meaningful for any serious theologian out there? I would say so! Capital is thus the structure of original sin in the capitalist period. What would Mr. Theologian say to this? If I were in his shoes, I would say, "Good thinking! This is a better observation point than I could ever climb to!" To which I would have to reply that Marx is theologically brilliant, and by this I would mean "theologically brilliant" in a profound, strict sense of the term *theological*. If Gustavo Gutiérrez or Moltmann took this to heart, they would have a new theory of original sin, which would be, I still think, perfectly orthodox in relation to Catholic thinking, Lutheran thinking, Calvinist thinking, and even with the Baptist and the Adventist thinkings. It is up to each of them, then, to deal with this general frame according to their differences. That's how Marx displays an enormous amount of intuitions, which demonstrates that he had a not superficial knowledge of theological discourse in his lifetime. How surprising could this be when we

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remember that he tried unsuccessfully to become an assistant to the great theologian Bruno Bauer? If Bauer had not gotten kicked out of Bonn, Marx would have become a first-class or a second-class theologian, but never an economist! And perhaps luckily for him, or for us, without Bauer [in Bonn], Marx remained shoeless temporarily, only to transform himself later into a brilliant economist. That's the main point of *The Theological Metaphors of Marx*. Now, the book has been seriously misinterpreted in Spain. Why? Because there is no serious preparation to handle these issues, and the Spaniards are now saying that we are now living in post-Marxist times. They will not hesitate to say that no one is interested in Marxism nowadays. So it is not strange that, with this background, a text like this, dealing with capital accumulation is no easy thing to understand for a Catholic theologian, a Protestant theologian, a Muslim theologian, or what have you, because they deliberately circumvent Marx! The reverse is also true. Self-appointed Marxists have few possibilities to try to understand theological discourse. Finally, if *metaphor* means anything, it must mean "overlapping," that is, the interpenetration of two levels of discourse, in this case, theological and economic. And Marx is the genius of this operation! I recall talking to someone in Berlin once about the Jewish question, using [Marx's] text in the original German, and the good man could not believe his eyes! Marx says explicitly that the true critic has the right to put the Christian [in himself and others] in contradiction with his sacred text, the Bible. That's the oppositional meaning I see in the use of the Marxian metaphor. Grasping this point, therefore, I am entitled, not so much as [systemic] critic but as [partial] interpreter initially, to try to link one by one all the metaphors I see him using in his discourse. By doing so, I am thus building a more ambitious and convincing discourse. The truth of the matter is that the title of the book, *Theological Metaphors*, is a bit pretentious [if not misguided]. It is, however, a stronger meaning I am after: the metaphorical theology in Marx. Marx contains a completely solid and coherent theology.

FG: Hearing you speak, it is as though the notion of contradiction was the unacceptable limit for everyone around. I mean, it is as though the notion of overlapping, or perhaps interference, created a friction—healthy or not, I don't know—but a friction insufferable to the point that we must all get out of here.

ED: Yet for Marx there is no contradiction. He is dealing with the parallel universes of theological and economic discourses. That is to say, if I wish to become a critic at the economic level, I might as well also be a critic at the

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theological level. This latter awareness, the critical awareness of theology, is precisely what the theology of liberation is all about. A bit clearer, perhaps: Marx became, but in a metaphorical sense, a practitioner of the theology of liberation *avant la lettre*. I am using this term in the sense of his deconstruction of the economy in his lifetime. At the same time, he continued to suggest different venues, or metaphors, if you will, for the deconstruction of the theology of his lifetime. This is what prophets do.

The Place of the Victims

FG: Still following up on your previous comment, would there be any connecting or intersecting points among parallel discourses?

ED: Of course. For example, against the political economy of the bourgeoisie, which is dogmatic and fetishistic, for the main reason that this is, for them, the sole horizon that tries to explain reality—and reality is here the same as capital, and capital is the same as nature—I could instead try to see things from the viewpoint of the victim. From this angle, I am able to deconstruct the entire edifice of political economy, in the sense that the above explanation, purportedly totalizing, is exclusively the truth of capital and in the sense that the human dimension [*lo humano*] is and must necessarily be another, different thing. If this is so, it must also be the same with theology. Say, if a contemporary theological disposition builds itself only by taking into account medieval Christianity, the only thing that is happening is the [anachronistic] insertion of the medieval world into contemporary Christianity, buttressing, in this regard, for example, a conceptual edifice against the Muslim world. So within this wrong attitude, we would fall prey to a dogmatic theology. This is the exact parallel to the dogmatic economy that is capitalism. How, then, do I deconstruct the dogmatic theological discourse? By putting myself, at least imaginatively, in the place of the victims—in the above example of the medieval church, by putting myself in the shoes of the poor serfs. And from there I build the theology. Who did something like this? For example, Thomas Münster and almost all the medieval heretics, who would call, quite rightly, the Pope's simony idolatry. And simony is idolatry, all right! So with this example, I may now turn to political economy. I will say that I will be doing theology of liberation, and this is not necessarily outside theology, as soon as I am in the business of deconstructing the formal edifice [of theology] with a critique. In imitation of Marx, who theorized a positive economy, positive in the sense of alternative to the status quo, which he did

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not see realized in his lifetime. The lesson also applies here: Reconstructing the theological edifice by practicing a theology of liberation is a return to a theology that cannot, therefore, be, at least in the long run, dogmatic. Thus, there are at least two schools of thought, the dogmatic and the critical, that pertain to the theology and the economy, and surely to other sciences. Both surely function differently, yet this functionality [*funcionalidad*] surely betrays a key difference as well: [the dogmatic school of the status quo simply functions, whereas] critical thinking is needed when the functional criteria of the dogmatic school will not allow life to be lived.

The Repudiation of the (Merely) Formal Aspects and the Irrepressible Desire for Contents

FG: Would it be correct to say, Enrique, that victimization is the result of some form of mediation?

ED: The victim is the criterion for the beginning of critical activity. When victimization reaches unbearable limits, the critical operation is needed.

FG: So would the victim be the intersecting, conflictive point of all these parallel worlds of discursivity in conflict?

ED: Pain situated in the corporality of the victim vividly displays the contradiction of the purported felicity of the dogmatic discourse against the brutality exemplified by the impossibility of the reproduction of life. Pain is there to see for those who know how to see, and therefore the critic must have different eyes, just in case, as Marx says. But it is not simply discourses, because the second [life] discourse does not quite exist yet. It is, however, the initial discourse of the victim articulating the clear contradiction of and to the system. This discourse says, "I am hungry." This is the contradiction. Why? For the straightforward reason that you happen to be eating properly while I am not. So this demand is one that is asking why on earth I am hungry. If your reasons are convincing, then you may go ahead and destroy my discourse. This is precisely what I said to Apel: "I am, of course, interested in the communicational community, only insofar as there is the 'material discourse' [*discurso material*], which is articulating things such as 'I am hungry.' " How do I get this job done inside your model of the communicational community? He wants nothing to do with this. Why? Because Apel is still stuck in the validity of the argumentation, the learning process, and the assumption. But I am really bored with this framework! Marx says quite explic-

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itly that Hegel falls for the desire to want contents from the boredom of the merely formal arrangement. That is, one gets miserably bored if one faithfully remains in the formal cage. So wanting contents comes almost naturally to a sensibility uneasily adjusted to the formalist disposition. The content will essentially open up a whole historical dimension by asking, How is it that the victim cannot live? Because this is the problem of the popular culture, if we wish to use this language, and this is the problem of the novelty of creation. This is the creativity of the action. Liberatory action is and must be a creative part of praxis. What interests me is the moment when praxis turns into creativity, precisely in this sense of novelty [as touching upon the reproduction of the victim]. The beginning of [true] creativity would then be the moment when the victim begins to build a new system, or a new act, or a new institution, because the generation of liberation must take place at various levels, not simply at the level of the totality or revolution but also, meaningfully, in every single little transformation, yet always originating with the victim.

FG: Does this series of creative acts need to incorporate a dimension of exteriority—say, the theology in your previous comments—to thus be able to interrogate and critique better the nuts and bolts of the hegemonic operating system—say, capitalism? Are you trying, Enrique, to insert something, which we may tentatively call discursive or conceptual, into the economic machinery of capitalism so that there may be a short circuit in its operative self-referentiality, so that it becomes inoperative, or what exactly?

ED: This interesting question entails the fundamental ambiguity. For Vatimo, Levinas entails theological problems. With this comment, he betrays that he does not understand Levinas at all, or that he does not understand what the critique is all about. The transcendental dimension [*lo transcendental*], in the sense of exteriority, has nothing at all to do with the theological dimension [*lo teológico*]. Any one theology may or may not affirm transcendentality understood to be exteriority. It is exactly dogmatic theology—the one that will say "God is with us," or "Gott ist mit uns," and this was the Nazis' motto. It is true: festishism occurs when [the sign] God justifies the totality with no exteriority [imaginable of any kind]. Another word for this might be *idolatry*. It is clear that [nondogmatic] theology also demands [some kind of] exteriority. This exteriority is concrete: It is the poor, the widow, the orphan. These are the prophets. But this has nothing to do with this theme. Transcendentalism understood to be exteriority in [the discipline of] philosophy is not theology. This is Vatimo's error—to fail to see that it is instead the ex-

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teriority of the poor, who have no shelter against the night dust of the road. I said in my latest ethics that I am tired of exteriority always being deemed theological. At the end of the prologue, I add, "I wish to state very clearly that when I refer in this work to 'the Other,' I will always put myself at the anthropological level; it is all too simplistic to try to refute the ethics of liberation by misinterpreting the theme of the other as a mere philosophical or theological problem. The other will be the other, another woman, man, fellow human being, an ethical subject, the [recognizable] face through which the epiphany of living corporality [occurs]. [The other] will thus be for me a theme of absolutely rational-philosophical-anthropological signification. An absolutely foreign other in this ethics would be, to me, something like an Amazon tribe still with no contact with civilization, and today, virtually nonexisting" [*Liberation Ethics*, 10]. In other words, I do not wish to do what Barthes does, to take God under the sign of the other. No, my ethics will not speak of Him. I will build it entirely with no mention of Him. So exteriority is outside the given system, for example, the marginalized [social sectors] in the megacity, popular culture in regard to hegemonic culture, the outside of the national culture, the migrants who come from Mexico to the United States, et cetera. This is the exteriority of those beyond the border. The borderland nothing. The enemies. These are the exteriority. This is Levinas's great theme, the other or otherness, the exteriority to an "ipse" of a self. And this is the ethical problem, which is also, of course, an anthropological and philosophical problem.

FG: And this dimension, which you are calling anthropological, would be ineluctably intersubjective?

ED: Absolutely. But there is something more to this intersubjectivity, because when I say this word, *intersubjective*, I, of course, have in mind a subjective we, since the other is not even intersubjective. This other would be the countenance of the other, which appears in the face-to-face experience, *even before* the formation of [that which I may wish to call] subjectivity. Now, this is, I think, a convincing reason why Levinas is one of the most acutely critical of thinkers, and perhaps one of the reasons why he is being rediscovered among philosophers of deconstruction in the United States and Europe, yet with the [tragic disappearance] of the economy and the corporality of the poor. This is how intellectuals in Latin America turned to Levinas in 1969. It is quite telling that none of the studies of Levinas I have come across makes any passing reference to the critical-economic reception of Levinas in Latin America. This acquaintance was profoundly direct

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and quite intimate. I was there. I happened to talk to Levinas directly about these issues. He has been quite close to us. But nobody ever talks about these exchanges. Why is that, we might ask? Well, for the simple reason that Latin America is semanticized as an unyielding exteriority with respect to the still hegemonic philosophy of the center.

The Mysterious Reason(s) of Life

FG: I can't help but notice an apocalyptic tendency in your enunciation. I have in mind your presentations at Duke University, and also some of your writings, particularly *The Invention of the Americas*. I mean "apocalyptic" in the sense of a warning, that is, either we build now an architecture of non-falsifiable tenets, and we stick to them, or we all sink together, eventually, and sooner rather than later.

ED: What happens is that if I speak of these issues at the level of pure contingency, from the horizon of [lack of or desire for] political hegemony and with the utopian goal of an all-inclusive democracy, I could always get the questions, "And hegemony—what for? What is the point of democracy?" These questions have no convincing answers if I look only at sheer contingency. It is hegemony for hegemony's sake, and democracy for democracy's sake. Why one or the other? What's the [reason of the] choice? Because one is better than the other? How is that so? Hegemony and democracy must exist so that they allow me to live better. That is what I mean by the mystery of life. And I mean *mystery* in a deeper sense, as in the 1861 manuscripts, where Marx says that "capital becomes mysterious." The reason for this mystery is that reason is a dimension of life and not vice versa, life is a dimension of reason. I must say that the world of partly conscious drives [*mundo pulsional*] and the world of rationality (however rationality is conceptualized) are only two dimensions of life, in the sense that the latter is not enough for and cannot exhaust life [*la razón no podrá dar razón de la vida en su sentido profundo*] because it is part of it. In the race of life, life always runs ahead of reason, and reason will always look at the back of life. And not vice versa. Which means that life will never be transparent to the use of reason. Reason is for life, and reason is the cunning of life. Of course, the rational use of the brain—one could develop this argument almost in the manner of the biological sciences—is a process of the evolution of mankind. So reason will appear in a living being, which will be called homo [*sic*]. Yet reason will always face boundaries it will not be able to trespass. There will

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always be a dimension of [human] reality that reason alone will never know. This [totality] is [for lack of a better word] life. To go back to your question of the apocalyptic tendencies, the criterion is precisely the reproduction of life, with the participation of all those living under these life circumstances. I believe we find ourselves in a historic moment, in which life is in mortal danger.

So, you are telling me that I turn apocalyptic. Well, then, I am sorry, but I have been apocalyptic since Day One. I remember a friend of mine who was assassinated by the Peronism of López Rega. This could be related to the text *Apocalíptics e integrados* [The apocalyptics and the integrated], by Umberto Eco. We have two types: those who are integrated into the system and live, and those who are not and take risks and may perish before their time. The apocalyptic [types] are those who take some risks to try to help the victims [of the system]. Yes, I have always been of the apocalyptic persuasion, if we understand this notion in this sense. I will never be anything else. And I keep good company: Marx, Freud, Freire, et cetera. All the great critics have been apocalyptic. Either this or they integrate. There is no way out. Yet this apocalypse is not for the sake or the love of it.

FG: I did not wish to imply that there was anything wrong with the apocalyptic disposition, or that this was an accusation—quite far from it. Yet it seems to me that it is the figure of death, and perhaps the figure of death alone, the last or the necessary instance, that helps all of us carve out some resilient certainties.

ED: I would say, if you let me, that it is the opposite. It is life that lets me delineate certainties and uncertainties. Death is the limit, or boundary. Life always strives to continually linger and grow. And inside life, reason is one of its privileged mediations. Although it is quite clear that reason can also create irrational systems, or, as Marcuse would put it, systems that reproduce death. So in this sense, death is the limit that signals the extinction of life. Better yet, death cannot be taken to be a criterion for anything that pertains to life. In the approximate words of Wittgenstein, if there is anything we cannot by any means accept, it is suicide. The idea being, if suicide is acceptable, then anything is acceptable. And this would be complete chaos. If suicide were a possible criterion, this would mean that death would be our criterion. Logically, this would mean the end of all criteria. No, the criterion is not, and cannot possibly be, death, but its limit, life.

FG: Would this mean, if I'm at all following your logic, that death is irrational?

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ED: No, death is not irrational. What is irrational is the affirmation of death as death. Death is not irrational, it is beyond that [sphere of rationality]. Take a look at the beauty of this text by Marx! If I do not say it is Marx, no one would ever believe me! I will read it to you: "No living being believes that the defects of existence dwell in the principles of life." He uses here the word *Prinzip*, that is, the essence of life. Marx is essentialist! And the quote continues: "But these dwell in the external appurtenances to it. Suicide is contrary to nature." This is what my last ethics is all about.

FG: So the frontispiece of your ethics includes a text by the Zapatistas, Marx . . . and I see someone else . . .

ED: [F.] Eboussie Boulaga. I quote him in the original French, precisely against the reductionist rationalist fallacy: "Je pense, donce je suis." Descartes is the cause of the crime, "Je danse, donce je vie."

FG: The affirmation or the dance of life . . .

ED: Exactly. The dance of culture, the enthusiasm, the banquet, the community . . . because by dancing, I am telling everyone that I live, but differently from a stone in the road, which miserably exists. I do not exist, I live, and I live in this [ideal] manner of a [dancing] culture.

The (Un)Predictable Game of a Fully Rational Pragmatism

FG: I see you taking the road of [normative] formulations, such as "give bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, shelter to the pilgrim or foreigner."

ED: It is the defense of life that moves me to give bread to the hungry. This is a rational demand. My rational being wants this from me. That is to say, rationality is for me not the beginning but the effect or the consequence. Perhaps easier, the little primate who came down from the trees in western Africa had to fight to protect himself, as a living being, because otherwise lions would eat him raw and alive. Everyone would take advantage of that pitiless living being with a rather small cerebral cavity. It was with a gradual little push of intelligence that [the monkey] managed to get by. He succeeded at defending himself and his group, to build a habitation, et cetera. The house was the first survival act, as Edgar Marin said. This house was the praxis of a profoundly inexperienced animal with a specialization in nothing in particular, since he did not run fast enough, did not have big teeth, nothing at all. That little monkey was a pretty useless thing [by comparison

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to other animals]! Yet somehow, with the mediation of his intelligence, he managed to control, little by little, the surroundings of his [living] situation. This is reason, and reason is always practical. Theoretical reflection thus depends on the quite unpredictable game [of possibilities] circumscribed always by an inexcusable pragmatism.

The Crucible of Life (*La Vida a Flor de Piel*)

FG: Could you make this latter formulation for the eminently pragmatic character of human intelligence a little more concrete, if at all possible?

ED: I could say that this comes into being most exclusively and quite graphically in the ongoing massive destruction of humanity in [what we may wish to call] the Third World. I mean [had I not been personally acquainted with this reality], there is no way in the world I would have imagined any of this. Quite simply [without this acquaintance], I would not have been interested in any of this. I would not have had a serious interest in life. However, my theme since the beginning of time is the poor. It is so unavoidable, the existence of the poor, who trudge their way toward death in India, Africa, Latin America, et cetera, that I am forced to face the ethical question, When whole countries are expendable, how, where, do I find good enough arguments for an ethics that will dare say that this is unacceptable and unjust? Because, if I follow Rorty, I cannot say anything like this. I cannot, if I join Apel. Apel would say something like this: We must bring the African out of the asymmetrical position and remove him from the brink of death, mainly or only so that he may then join the [polite] tables of discursive participation. And Apel stops there, allowing the African to join the argument. Whereas I wish to push this further. To give a ridiculous example [of this symmetrical fallacy], it is as though to justify the equality between man and woman, so that we may envisage an egalitarian act of sexual love, the woman must be thoroughly equal to the man so that she may begin to tease out arguments in favor of equality. The ridiculousness of this position lies in that this ethical symmetry does not step outside argumentation or discursivity. How on earth do I include the totality of humanity at the tables of discussion? What's the point of this discussion? It does not make sense. To follow up on the sexual example, sexual love is justified according to human corporality, which is part of life, which makes me love another human being. To achieve this, argumentation may potentially be an important or fundamental mediation, but only insofar as it is the possibility for the reproduction of life. At this point,

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Habermas has a good comment. He would say that the biological conception [of human life], which places on the philosophical tables the reproduction of life with no [clear] reference to argumentation, is reductive [and unconvincing]. To which I would say with no hesitation, "Of course, I agree!" This [kind of reductivism] does not bother me a bit. And I would add the following: "Your argumentation about argumentation, when it disregards the fact that argumentation is a mediation of life, is also a reductivism, but of a worse kind!" So I am thus holding the conceptual fish by its head and tail: Human life is human thanks to argumentation, and to this they would say, "Oh, wonderful!" and, let us not forget that argumentation is an institution created by life and not vice versa. Now, how do I come to this conclusion? Quite simply, because of the fact that I live in Mexico and lots of people there are dying, have no decent work, and steal and kill other people to go on with their lives. It is quite unexceptional that one could get killed in the streets. Now, who is to blame for this situation? The bad people? No, it is the system that does not feed the people, and the system is called capitalism. People are dying of hunger. Life finds itself caught in this crucible (*la vida está ahora a flor de piel*). And this is the theme: how on earth most people find themselves in an almost unbearable uncertainty about their lives with all the demands of tomorrow. Now, this is the unavoidable [ethical] thing for me. Is there anybody around willing to negate this reality? Nobody. Apel himself admitted to this when he was speculating about the general question of whether the coexistence of ethics in the epoch of science was possible. My question would be, rather: Is ethics at all possible with the ecological destruction and the tremendous injustice in the world today? But science is an academic problem. A better formulation of this problem would be thus: Is ethics possible with the ongoing ecological destruction and the destruction of humanity? This is my theme! If I ran into someone who would effectively smash to smithereens with good argumentation this big theme—that humanity is at risk—then I would let this big issue sit pretty and neglected like sand castles on the beach. But since I haven't yet, I must then reconstruct [the history of] ethics, taking into account this central theme. And this is precisely what I have done, and what I will be doing shortly. But I need to be a bit emphatic about this: I am not rationalist out of some rational fancy. Nor do I defend life out of some infatuation with life. What I do defend is human life. Why should I care if they call me anthropocentric? This is a silly charge. I make mine Hinkelammert's beautiful line, which would go like this: The issue today is that we live in a "capitalocentric" society; man is not the center. The center [of life] has been usurped by capital, and everything

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revolves around capital. The human being is the most splendid and developed expression of life. Should we wish to develop the theme of anthropocentrism, we would turn into full-time ecologists with a keenness toward the realization that the death of one species would mean the premature death of our own. This would affirm the universal dignity of all human beings, and that all living beings also have dignity, since we find ourselves in the identical swing of the vital cycle, with an unmistakable emphasis on the strongest accent of human life inside the vital cycle. This is not a belief. This is the way I see life to be. So by saving human life, we save the earth; and if we save the earth without the human being, then we lose the most important part of life. In this view, and we may well follow Marx, the universe becomes the inorganic part of ourselves, or life becomes our organic body, so that to save the life of the species is to anticipate the possibility of the salvation of human life, which, very much like ecology, is pushed around by economic forces. Human life is caught between ecology and the economy. This is my ethics! Now, against the view that asserts that ecological ethics goes this way and bioethical medicine, for example, goes the other way in proposing venues for life, I say that we should put life as the sole, exclusive universal criterion for everything under the sun—linguistics, mathematics, politics . . . you name it! Ecology and bioethical medicine are instead, quite simply, internal chapters [of the overall plan of life].

The Six Principles of an Ethical Architecture

FG: Could you give us a panoramic view of your latest *Liberation Ethics*? What are you trying to do here, and where do you see yourself going in the near future?

ED: This ethics took me by surprise. I thought that after my first ethics, the five volumes of the first *Ethics of Liberation*, I had nothing else to say. This first ethics, I must say, was never taken into account in most philosophical debates for the main reason that it never got translated and the Spanish version remains largely unnoticed. I wish to emphasize this, that this major project never entered the discussions in France, Germany, or the United States because there was no translation. This is also true in Spain—no one paid any attention because of the pervasive slight regard for Latin America. When I reread this first project today, I find that some of those issues are still important. I was already ahead of the game by some thirty years! I was already thinking about the theme of exteriority, the theme of the other at

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the plane of globalization. I think it is incredible. How could I write those things back then? So I thought that after this first massive work, I had nothing else to say because I had already written about every possible theme. Well, twenty-five years have passed, and in between, my [intensive] work on Marx and the experience of my debate with Apel. I wrote something like ten articles discussing Apel and Habermas. Little by little, I incorporated Vatimo, Taylor, Ricoeur, Rorty, and many others, many of whom were very close to me on a personal level. I realized that I could not continue writing articles, for the main reason that each article was already articulating a theme, which was, by itself, a fragmentary piece. Then I sat down in 1993 to see if I could write a new ethics. This second ethics is in perfect coherence with the first one. That is, I do not see any contradiction between the two, but this one is completely new. And what is the foundation of this novelty? The fact that I am taking many thinkers, mostly North American thinkers, and mostly pragmatists and utilitarians, much more seriously. I have a section on the linguistic turn. I would say that the difference between the two ethics is the following: My first ethics was a mixture of Levinas and Heidegger, that is to say, ontological and transontological, an ethics devoid of contents. There were no principles, no truth-claims, there was nothing Kantian. In this new ethics, by contrast, I think I convincingly articulate the combinations of the formal aspect and contents. In other words, there is a synthesis between Aristotle and Kant, but after Habermas. This is due to the fact that my new ethics was designed and written in the nineties, and therefore includes the thinking of the seventies and eighties in the United States and Europe. It is, then, a dialogue with many people, and it was a lot of work. I truly believe that this is not simply another book. [I would not hesitate to say] that this is my first great book, or if you wish, a book in which all previous ones have found a new, better reformulation. This is my crucial piece. And yes, I will write other pieces, and I will tell you in a minute how, but I still think that this is a very creative synthesis of everything I have been doing so far. It contains many new things, and it was written with the enthusiasm of all new discoveries.

How was this done? What happened was that what I called "totality" and equated with "understanding of Being"—Heidegger's world—was really what Ricoeur would call the "short cut" [*vía corta*]. That is, I affirmed the totality to be the understanding of Being, and although I took several turns—the hermeneutic turn, the pedagogic turn, erotics, politics—the path was not that long. Whereas in this second ethics, I would make the claim that I have really constructed the totality. In the first half of the book, I am developing the principles with which to construct reality; in the second half, I am return-

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ing to a rethinking of the issue of exteriority and how it may be articulated. The first part is the most demanding and the most novel for me. Building upon Kant and Apel, and without shying away from foundationalisms, which I will get to in a minute, what I am doing is precisely the foundation of [necessary] principles and those principles with a claim to universality [*principios con pretensión de universalidad*]. What happens is that almost all ethics get articulated around some principle. This is an amazing thing for me, and this is one of the first conclusions: All ethics spring from one principle, out of which all other principles are deducted. By contrast, I am going to propose at least six principles, and these will articulate a very coherent architecture. This coherence was articulated as I wrote the book. There was no a priori. It was truly like the delivery of a three-year-old baby! It did not take nine months. It took three years! What got constructed took me by surprise. I would have never imagined this final product at the beginning of the whole enterprise! The crucial novelty, if it is there at all, is that I have managed to give analytic depth to Hinkelammert's fundamental intuition, that life is the [sole] criterion for truth. This criterion for truth, which almost sounds like a sound bite and which Hinkelammert repeats constantly in relation to economic thinking, becomes in my work a monumental, incredible theoretical problem, which I haven't quite yet finished with.

So when I am able to extract this principle—the first principle, that is, to reproduce human life in community—I have a tremendous point of departure, and I take it to all-important philosophical moments. That is, no author has not dealt with this first principle in one way or another, if only intuitively or contradictorily. Quite simply, this [principle] cannot be left to gather dust in a corner. Now I must go deeper. So it happens that I have the theoretical principle that no one can ignore. All human acts address this principle in one way or another. All human acts. That is, no human act cannot *not* affirm life. No exceptions. And then, the transition is that I am able to see how this is not the problem of the good [*el bien*], and how all material ethics must pass through the problem of the good. I could reformulate this in negative terms: I would go so far as to say that the life criterion has nothing to do with the criterion of the good. This is a tremendous discovery, which will most likely develop into a detailed polemics: that the first formulation says that life is the criterion for truth and not the criterion for the good [*criterio de verdad y no de bien*]. That the truth is practical, and that this is the content problem of all ethics.

Now, the second principle shows that the validity of truth [*la validez de la verdad*] follows—and I am not contradicting myself here—another

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logic and is situated in another dimension. That is, I must enforce the participation of all those affected symmetrically in the discussion as to how we are all going to guarantee the reproduction of life. This [interest in the conditions of production] or concern is not the same as the reproduction of life. Then Kant's second principle, the categorical imperative, is quite unlike any truth-claim or any claim to the good [*no de verdad y no de bien*], a methodological claim [*principio de validez*]. This is precisely what Apel and Habermas also articulate. So I put myself here beside them, but I take them out of their reductive formalism and I use them as the methodological moment of validation [*momento de la validez*]. The whole thing must continue from here. Once I have this second principle, which is a true mediation or a true and acceptable act [*acto verdadero y válido*], this act must initially remain at the level of the truth-claim [*pretensión de verdad*]. But I still have to deal with the problem of feasibility [*factibilidad*], which is Hinkelammert's great theme. That is, feasibility is the empirical, technical, economic, and political possibility of getting something done, a thought or a proposition, et cetera. I have, then, so far, three principles: (1) the material principle of truth; (2) the formal principle of method or validity; and (3) the principle of mediation or feasibility. This latter principle branches out into three kinds of rationality: (a) practico-material rationality; (b) discursive rationality; and (c) instrumental rationality. We assume the following axiom: This latter instrumental rationality is necessary but is not in and of itself enough for encountering life. We are left, after all this, with only one possible theoretical resolution: the one act, or institution, which claims to be truthful, feasible, and likely, will also be making claims to be good [*sólo un acto o una institución que tenga la pretensión de ser verdadero, válido y posible, fáctico tiene la pretensión de bondad*]. In this new ethics, I still feel I haven't yet developed convincingly this latter claim to good [*pretensión de bondad*]. A year after its publication, I have continued working on this issue. I realize now that the great theme of this ethics is not the ethics of the good [*tema del bien*], but rather the claim to the good [*la pretensión de bondad*], which is an entirely different thing.

I could say that no human being will make convincingly the claim that his or her acts are all absolutely good, because this would imply that we would all have infinite intelligence, infinite speed, gratuitous and measured impulses, and this is clearly impossible. We would have to be something quite like God. So, if we cannot have these absolutely perfect acts, what is left for us to try? The answer is, acts that claim to be good. And when such acts claim to be good, I may then make the claim that I myself claim to be good in my act. Why? Because I have fulfilled the truth-claim, the validity

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claim, and the feasibility claim. In this situation, there is nothing other than claim [*pretensión*]. Of course! I am making the honest claim that . . . If, say, you think otherwise, well, you are very welcome to try to prove your case against my claims, and I will be standing in the honest position to accept your objections, and if these objections are convincing, we will then be constructing together. On this point, this new ethics has an unexpected consistency that I haven't seen in any other. This ethics does not quite speak about the good. This ethics speaks instead about the [honest] claims to the good. This ethics speaks of the general claims to goodness. This is the first part of this new ethics.

The second part incorporates these three principles in the negative form. Insofar as no act, institution, system, ethical construction, et cetera, may be entirely good, then it is only partially good, partially imperfect, and is also, finally, partially responsible for the production of negative effects. What happens is that I do not speak of negative effects, thus, I speak of the [negativity of the] victims. This will take place later in the book. Yet it seems to me that it is inevitable that any act will be creating some negative effects. That is, someone is going to suffer—there is no way around this. This is universal, apodictic—that is to say, it cannot not happen. So the logical development is thus—this is not taking place in the sphere of the likelihood, I can say this apodictically—all human acts will deliver, in the short or long run, inevitably and due to its finite condition, negative effects, that is, victims. This is the starting point for the ethics of liberation. If I put myself in the "place of the victims," I then understand beautifully what Marx is doing, but also what Benjamin, Marcuse, the first Frankfurt school—not the second—Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud, Levinas, and many others are doing. In other words, where are all these authors located? They are among the victims. So the three previous positive principles transform themselves into their negative counterparts. I must reproduce the life of all human beings, now I must reproduce the life of all the victims. But in order to do so convincingly, I must critique the system that produces the death of the victim. So the critique of the system is inevitable. This is the fourth principle, which is negative and material.

The fifth principle is negative and formal. I must allow for the possibility that the excluded victim will participate symmetrically in a discussion claiming truth. We have here a community with critical methodology [*validación crítica*], with respect to the hegemonic community. At this point, we must realize that we have [at least] two truth-claims [*dos valideces*], and I

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say this emphasizing the plural form, truth-*claims*—deliberately too close for comfort with respect to Habermas. So it is obvious that we have a new problem, which is the existence of the hegemonic truth-claim, which will be the one creating the most victims. On top of this, both Habermas and Apel admit to the empirical impossibility of [absolute] symmetry. So if absolute symmetry is convincingly beyond reach, no act will be making any kind of truth-claim absolutely. If there is no absolute truth-claim, all truth-claims are therefore relative. And if all truth-claims are relative, then they are partly valid. This partial validity on the part of the hegemonic truth-claim is due to the exclusion of other truth-claims. So at this theoretical juncture, I may situate myself among the victims, and I may try to achieve symmetry—for example, among women, among African Americans—and [I always] try to produce the symmetry of the victims with a critical validity. They haven't been able to do this because critical validity is necessarily a negative validity, that is, a [counterhegemonic] validity generated by the victims. Against Habermas and Apel, who speak of validation, I speak of critical validation. It is only then, in deepening this differentiation, that the communicational community of the victims may potentially become the critical machine for the overall evaluation of the system, and it is only then that some positive alternative may potentially be formulated. This is akin to Bloch's "Principle of Hope."

The fifth principle is, then, the second principle but in the negative form, and the sixth principle is the third but in the negative form. This last one is the principle of liberation, the real feasibility of a transformative possibility [*la factibilidad real de una posibilidad transformativa*]. This is the praxis of liberation. That is, I must transform that which has been producing victims, and I must allow for the victim to live. We are thus left with six theoretical principles. But I leave the door open. There might be more than six, I don't know. So I find myself suddenly with a new ethics articulated around principles that make universal claims. I read postcolonial theory, I read the work of subaltern studies, I read Laclau, and everyone is talking the talk of antifoundationalism and postmodern antiuniversalism. I ask myself, "Well, what's going on with you, Enrique?" What's wrong with me? What is really happening is that what I am talking about is "post" all this. Mine is an antidogmatic universalism. It is a claim to universality that cannot be the "old" Eurocentric universalism. That is, my next book will have to explain all this carefully to the North American reader, to the Anglo-Saxon or postmodern reader. But I am not going to repeat my new ethics. I am going to write the critique of political reason, and I am going to do so by putting myself in

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the most important of the various fronts of liberation, the politico-economic-ecological front [*lo político-económico-ecológico*]. It is in this way that I will discover how all orders of the real [*todo orden real*], be it the United States of America, the United States of Mexico, feminism, sexuality, gender, et cetera, are all present orders breaking away from a preceding order.

That is to say, all orders of the real represent a process of liberation from an old order left somehow behind. This is what one might wish to call the seventh moment following this new ethics. With this vision, I am then able to subvert the naturalist fallacy and propose that the being [*el ser*] of any social system truly represents the ideal being, the "ought" [*el deber ser*] of those who were busy already laboring in it. In other words, the point is not that one could move more or less gracefully from being to its ideal being, but rather that this latter ideal being is the foundational moment of the social system to come in the future, the ideal being of Hidalgo or Washington is the foundation for Mexico or the United States [and of other systems that will come]. So my beginning is this being that is also an ideal being, my beginning is a present system that must have been the outcome of a liberation process. I am thus able to rethink at the political level not only political but also economic and ecological contingency. And I am now able to come back to the previous question of disbelief: How are these ethical principles articulated after postmodern antifoundationalism? How on earth do I dare give ground after an antifoundationalism? Why do we need these gestures anymore? And, since dogmatic truth got appropriately undermined, why is it at all necessary to give ground to this life criterion for the victims? My next book will deal with these questions, but at the level of political construction.

There will be still another book, the reconstruction of my erotics, which will take me to issues of gender. This will be a response to the abundant critiques my erotics has received, but we must not forget that it is the first erotics in Latin America. Some people had written small pieces, whereas I wrote a complete erotics. The critique of this work has been fierce. Yet I think the careful assimilation of some of this critique would still salvage 90 percent of the things I said in my first book on ethics. It has strong claims that I will have to improve on, for example, the distinction between erotics and the issue of gender. This rewriting, instead of speaking within the horizon of feminine liberation [*liberación femenina*], will instead speak directly in the name of masculinity and also of femininity. But I will be speaking in the first person and not in the name of others, and this was impossible twenty-five years ago because nothing had been written.

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The Philosophical Task of Dismantling the Arguments of the Opposing Schools of Thought

FG: Would you make concrete your interpellation to satisfy the hunger you mentioned earlier, socially and politically? I am not so much after proper names, yet where do you see these liberatory moments taking place today?

ED: If my ethics lacks something, it is the kind of messianism that absorbs all those obsessed with the immediate fruition of concrete practice. Why does it not have it [in any kind of explicit formulation]? Because my ethics already comes from the reflection or the social practice. I mean, this [ethics] is a reflection that is inspired by the praxis that is currently taking place. I do feel responsible, however, for the promotion of a certain philosophical community that will assume a much needed historical responsibility of a certain kind. Yet I begin with the existing poverty, and it is quite clear that I do not make this up. I also begin with contemporary movements. And neither am I the beginning of these movements. What I would like, as a philosopher, and I wish to say this with conviction yet with the necessary humility, is to be able to collaborate with them. This is to be understood without any kind of messianic colors and banners. I am not at all assuming leadership. Quite the contrary. I am taking these movements into consideration, operating inside the academic front. I am developing the themes that will allow me to dismantle the arguments of the opposing schools of thought. As I mentioned earlier, this is obviously a negative enterprise, but I believe it is not an ethics that will liberate all of us. So in this regard I am not at all disappointed. If this ethics works, very well. And if it doesn't, well, it doesn't. I do believe, however, that my ethics may help toward some of the goals enunciated before, so I do not feel anguished. Yet, of course, I feel responsible for this work, which has gone as far as its possibilities allowed for. I am certain that any intellectual labor will linger [in the memory and desire of people] as long as it is still responding to the demands of the period. If it does not do this, it is clear it will go away.

The Genetic Mutation of Politics in Latin America

FG: Which movements inspire your philosophical production?

ED: My Brazilian friend Luiz Alberto Gómez de Sousa says that deep transformations are currently taking place in Latin America. It is as though a mutation was taking place, something like the beginning of a new species.

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It is not an exaggeration to speak, metaphorically, of a genetic mutation. This means that the excluded masses are passing the initial courses in real politics. These masses were excluded precisely for the main reason that they did not know the concrete mechanisms of politics. They are growing [in strength], politically, and they are passing the first exams in the democratic political system. And this is happening through elections, which are not 100 percent democratic but are at least partly democratic. I do not think it would be impossible to see, after Menem in Argentina, a more democratic regime. It would not be impossible to see in Brazil a stronger Lula with the collaboration of new alliances and new populisms. It is not impossible to see the election of Cárdenas in Mexico. If this happened, at least 75 percent of Latin America would at least change the way it looks, which does not mean an awful lot against the global economies, but it would be at least something. I honestly believe that there is a movement taking place, and I wish to join it. I wish to be there. I wish to stay articulate [with arguments]. I could mention ecological groups, feminist groups, the irruption of indigenista movements, the Zapatismo in Mexico, particularly. In Ecuador, for example, it is clear that the indigenous groups have succeeded in a series of national strikes. I have been able to establish a direct link with them, more as a learning exercise than anything else. My ethics tries to express all this [learning experience]. That is to say, my ethics is the philosophical expression of all this. I believe they need philosophical arguments like mine so that coherence and justification get reinforced in these movements.

FG: It is in answering questions like these that you seem to need, for some reason, to radicalize your (philosophical) discourse, at least from time to time. And you appear to do so by painting politics with indigenous colors [*agudizar socialmente esa apelación, . . . indigenizar*].

ED: No, I do not see it quite like that. My thinking, almost since the beginning of my philosophical journey, comes from Latin America. I believe the challenge is to try to demonstrate a more analytic mind, fundamentally rational, so that one can then respond to the demands of logic and the severity of tradition about the most important intuitions of [human] reality. This means that we need [in Latin America] a more serious, a stronger, more convincing philosophical construction against other positions such as analytic philosophy, the philosophy of right-wing movements, phenomenology, et cetera. What is needed—I said it earlier—is, more than anything else, [a philosophical] construction. Now, my enthusiasm sometimes betrays me in a perhaps too intricate elaboration of this ethical construction. There is a chapter in

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my last ethics, which includes almost five hundred footnotes. But this is not simply academic stuff. It is the kind of enthusiasm that comes from the reality of the people and that gives me the patience to deal with cumbersome abstractions. [It is no secret that] I spend quite a bit of my time dealing with the analysis of argumentation, and all this [labor] might end up transforming itself into aesthetic constructions, if you will. Yet I will say that this intellectual labor has still been encouraged by a strong sense of responsibility.

About the (Mis)Encounters between Philosophy and Spanish, Philosophy, and Latin America

FG: Enrique, please allow me to present to you a hypothetical situation. You've been teaching at Duke University this semester, and one of your students asks you a question at the end of class. We imagine that he or she is a nice liberal, with good intentions and a somewhat deficient knowledge of the Spanish language, and the question would be, How could he or she improve the knowledge regarding philosophy in Spanish or philosophy and Spanish. What would you say to this curious student?

ED: I think he could read Ortega y Gasset, Zubiri, Mugüerza. There is a lot of philosophy . . .

FG: Yes, but what would be the importance of this Spanish philosophy?

ED: I would say that there is a philosophical practice in Latin America that originates from the Latin American horizon. It is, of course, the philosophy of liberation. I like repeating the following anecdote about William James visiting Edinburgh around 1907, lecturing the English about the philosophy of religion. We may imagine him planning ahead in the following manner: "I [James] will do this in the manner which is proper to what we call pragmatism." I [Dussel] wish I had seen the faces of the English sitting down on the schoolroom benches getting the "inappropriate" lesson coming to them from barbarous (North) America, quite barbarous, of course, from the cultural and philosophical viewpoint of these imaginary turn-of-the-century English scholars and students. Surely they might have refrained from displaying, quite politely, a sarcastic smile [during James's classes]. Surely they thought he had big claims to the invention of the philosophical bicycle after all these centuries! I doubt very much that James was successful in the eyes of those [imaginary] English students. But in a sense, he did become

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successful, only much later. Today, everyone talks about pragmatism as a given. I think this anecdote applies also to Latin American philosophy. Some may think this is just a summer bird, as does Peirce, for example. But I must continue practicing this philosophy, which may well be that it is not philosophy [as we usually tend to understand the term]—although I am convinced that it is—and that it may well be washed away by the tide of time, which is likely. But at least it has originated from Latin America. The philosophy of liberation is [without doubt] a Latin American philosophy. And, to the question, Is there a true philosophy in Latin America that claims to respond to its own horizon?—I would say that the philosophy of liberation is at least one of them, and a stronger contender, in my opinion, among all others that may still exist out there.

FG: My question was aiming at the possible encounters and misencounters between philosophical practice, whatever this might be, and the connection with the Spanish language.

ED: This we touched on in a congress of philosophy in Peru some five years ago. Mine is certainly a philosophy thought in Spanish! Of course, someone who wishes to have a good grasp of it must know the language well. Those who master the language in the first place will be no doubt better equipped for a better, deeper, more proper understanding of the meaning of my text. But it is also true that my work makes a lot of references. I think it is true that my new ethics of liberation, which I now will not call Latin American in the sense that it is constantly making claims at universality [(*ésta*) *viene con una pretensión de universalidad*], but it is "contaminated" with a lot of German terminology. There is also English, also French, Italian, Greek, Hebrew, et cetera. It so happens that quite a few times I must use parentheses to make the point clearer to my translator or even to my reader. I think it is now truly multilingual. Don't you think so? At any rate, it is coming from Latin America. I will give you an example: the concept of *concientización*, which has a unique Hispanic connotation. Or I should better include the concept of "liberation," which, since Fanon, reaches our movements of liberation. Isn't it the Zapatista movement of liberation? Don't we have the Sandinista movement of liberation? And what about the Farabundista movement of liberation? In Latin America, the notion of liberation, which is certainly related to Africa, gathers a new, different vigor in the sense that the African liberation gathers momentum because it is only quite recently postcolonial, whereas postcoloniality in Latin America was quite established a long time ago. Liberation means a popular movement that must now address [the

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new challenges of the] global capitalist society. [Going back to the language issue], I believe my philosophy is expressed in a kind of distinct Spanish, the Spanish from Latin America, which is ultimately not the Spanish in its [inspirational] semantics. I will give you another example: When we talk of the people [*pueblo*], this had to do with the *antepetl*, the *nahuatl* concept. We could include the parallel meanings in Maya, Inca, et cetera. This notion of people is not people [*pueblo*] as we articulate it in Spanish. Today, after the naming of the conquistadors, we call them peoples [*pueblos*], yet if we still wish to use this notion, we must give it the kind of resonance that it still has in Latin America lest we forget the colonial and Amerindian contexts. Yes [, after having said all this], I believe this is a philosophy in Spanish.

FG: Philosophy in Spanish, with all these explanations, yet *in partibus infidelium*?

ED: Yes. Or I would say *in partibus periferica* [*sic*].

FG: And what do we do with the notion of *latino*? Would this fit? Is this the way to go?

ED: Well, this is the way people here in the United States talk about Hispanics. That's another question. I am not thrilled by the notion of *Latino*, which is a French notion. No, I speak about Latin America for the simple reason that the notion managed to gain an undeniable resilience. Since it is out there, we must use it. I have come not to bother with it too much against the notion of Spanish or Iberian America [*Iberoamérica*], which always smacks to me of the Franco regime. But there are, of course, some problems. For example, the Caribbean islands. The truth is, these are also Latin America, and the Spanish side is clearly closer to Latin America, but there are also French, Dutch, and English sides to them. The English side I find the most problematic in the association with Latin America, although I am slowly coming to terms with this issue, and it is not so much a question of *latino*. If we needed to use the ambiguous notion of *latino*, I would still need to fill it with some special content.

An Extremely Materialistic Ethics with No Apologies

FG: What would be the genealogy you will invoke to gather some strength in these uneasy, homeless times?

ED: In what sense do you mean "genealogy"?

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FG: I do not intend any intricate or abstruse sense by it. I mean it in a general sense. That is, I see you, Enrique, engaged in a series of exchanges and dialogues with predominantly metropolitan figures such as Apel, Rorty, most recently with Laclau, and many others. It is perhaps the case that you may not have too many choices. So who would you like to join ranks with in some kind of popular philosophical front against the possible enemies you might see before you?

ED: Please allow me to say the following [which will tie things up with the beginning of the interview]. I would say that my attitude is, and perhaps must remain, at least a little bit paradoxical. I use this adjective in the sense that I come from traditional and not necessarily traditionalist groups. My mother was a liberal, and my father was a doctor who declared himself positivist and agnostic. So my family background must be understood inside traditional—but not too traditional—groups that were fairly open-minded. Yet this background is meaningful inside a conservative understanding of tradition. I think I am just like that. I am not traditionalist, but I am traditional. That is, I like demonstrating the radically new or critical dimension to something, but at the same time, I must elaborate on the antiquity of the process I am describing. I have no problems with history [in this sense], and I do not feel the need to break free from my father, for example. In general, I like delineating the most radically critical positions in relation to long-term projects. That's how I see my last ethics. My ethics is extremely materialistic. I negate quite unambiguously the existence of the soul. I find this to be an unthinkable kind of myth. Nonetheless I am willing to assume all possible dimensions.

Ever since my first work, or even earlier, since childhood, I have seen the undeniable fact of poverty. Consequently, I was forced to assume the existence of the victim. I say this in the monograph published by the Spanish magazine *Anthropos*, that among the earliest memories in my life is the poverty of the *gaucho*, or the quasi-Indian inhabitant in the little village where I was born. My father was a doctor in those lands with an enormous amount of respect for those people and was completely devoted to them. It was not at all uncommon to get out of the house at four in the morning, get in the car, and drive until the end of the road, get on a horse, and continue until reaching some faraway ranch where a mother needed his assistance to deliver her baby. Oftentimes, the woman would have no money to pay my father. He always told them to pay him at their earliest convenience. My mother, in the meantime, had to sleep with a loaded gun, since she was left by herself in those dangerous parts. This is what I saw when I was a kid:

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extreme poverty and a man assuming his responsibilities in the middle of it. I see no contradiction in the sense that one must assume their own responsibilities under their own circumstances. I do not get obsessed about this. This comes natural to me. The pathos of this kind of existence is part of what I am. Of course there are later, different periods, but I do not yet see many ruptures [with this beginning].

A Spanish friend of mine, Mariano Moreno, said to me about my very first book, *Humanismo Semita* [Semitic humanism], that it already quite distinctly prefigures Levinas. He goes on to say in relation to the theme of the other, and perhaps with some exaggeration, that Marx is already anticipated. To him I said, "Not quite," that I was at that time with Buber and other people, and that Levinas was at that time doing other things. But Moreno held to his opinion. So I went back to the text and [found that] he was right! I could see what I was not aware of, community building and the dialogic making of the other are already there in my first book, which came out when I was returning from Israel! And why on earth did Enrique Dussel go to Israel in the first place? It is always for the same reason! I went to Israel so I could work not with the Israeli Ministry of Construction but with Palestinian laborers! So I would say that in a sense there is a strong disposition in me, which I suppose you could also call almost obsessive.

About the Problematics of Gender and the Rethinking of Erotics

FG: You have mentioned to me that your next project may perhaps address the problematics of gender in relation to a redrawing of lines regarding your previous work on erotics. Could you say something about this, now that we are at the end of the interview?

ED: I feel I must expand the horizon of my work on erotics. I spoke about women when I should have spoken about gender. This latter notion presupposes, quite strongly, the historico-cultural comprehension of the whole array and problematics of eroticism. I was bold then in talking about the liberation of women in the sense that I put them together with the great theme of victims' rights? Women in my province were, back then, criticizing the North American kind of feminism that was reaching them. So in a sense, this early work is speaking against [this kind of] feminism. But this was 1970, and feminism was largely perceived to be a North American issue. So I go ahead in these early days, and I attempt a critical thinking but still inside the

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framework of [what you might call] the frames of understanding of a provincial conservatism. Among other things, I critique homosexuality. My experience was, back then, limited in the sense that I hadn't been involved with any movement that was not quite openly heterosexual. I found reasons at that time to do this critique, but this is not the heart of the matter of this early work, which I still find almost 100 percent convincing. There is, for example, the beautiful discovery of the phallocentric totality, for which exteriority is nothing. Because of this, women cannot be mothers and lovers at the same time. They must still accomplish both roles contradictorily. The son must have access to this exterior nothing not only through his mother but also through the future wife. So in a sense, it is accurate to speak of an incestuous relation. But the still interesting solution to this [erotic] argument is ontological, which is still most often misperceived and misinterpreted. Now, it is true that some feminists saw limits to some of the possibilities of the critique I was capable of at that time. Well, I must now go beyond these limitations and direct them toward some of the current debates. But I will not be assuming the position of the woman as I did earlier by placing her in the place of the victim. Now I do not feel the need to do this, for the main reason that women have already assumed the production of discourse. The bibliography is overwhelming! Women are now subjects, but this was not the case in Latin America in 1970. I could not then find many articles, let alone books, dealing with the subject matter [of eroticism]. I was among the first to do such a daring thing. The day when someone wishes to write down the history of Latin American erotics, that someone will have to include my name in it. But now, I say the situation is quite different, and I see more clearly that the redefinition of the historical function of women puts into question masculinity. So it is also the case that one [possible task] will be to reconstruct masculinity. But I do believe it is the case of the liberation of masculinity, because this [is a concept that] refers mostly to the victims, and the male position is still the dominant position. Yet there is a reconfiguration of this one, too. So I must analyze how the possibility of a fully liberated woman will put into question completely the generic notion of masculinity. I find this to be a theoretically interesting and creative issue. By so doing, I will then be able to say "we" men, or the male gender, inside the general category of gender. This might be a nice way to say a few things on the subject. This will take place in the second volume [of my next project], which I will call the liberation front against formulations such as Michael Walzer's "spheres of justice." I cannot use this metaphor of the little spheres, which implies a kind of noncritical communitarianism. I use instead the [stronger language] of fronts,

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in the sense that we are all dealing with force fields, where recognition is not necessarily foreclosed. Given that the notion of justice would mean an excessive claim, I use the inevitable notion of liberation. The first front will be the political; the second, the economic; the third, the ecological. It will surely take me three or four years. I don't know. Inside this design, I must, of course, come to terms with the problematics of gender. It is quite possible to rethink this problematic together with the pedagogic-cultural problem. I will have to see. In any case, this would mean a second volume on these liberation fronts, which are more concrete and differentiated universes.

FG: Someone may accuse you, Enrique, of not having many serious dialogues with women . . .

ED: With women philosophers? Well, yes, it is true. They could accuse me of something like that. But I would say that it is out of respect that I haven't yet touched this issue [of gender] monographically. The bibliography is immense! The day I make up my mind to address this issue, I will have to purchase two hundred books, and I will need three years to get this done. Only then will I be able to address all [feminist] approaches, psychoanalytic, Lacanian, et cetera, as they justly deserve. Just a few days ago, a dear friend of mine, Otto Maduro, asked me precisely the same question, "How come you are not dealing with this?" I know I must address it, it is a big theme, and in order to do so properly, it will take time. After my early work on erotics, which took me a few years, women told me to keep quiet, so I did. I accepted this truly with benevolence. I think it is good for the male to keep quiet from time to time. This male talked back then perhaps too much about women. It occurred to me that I would never have to address this issue again, that what I had done was enough. I was, in a sense, reacting against some violent critiques. Now with the theme of masculinity, I say to myself that I must be allowed to expound on this again. It is true, I haven't yet done it. But I will have to do it again.

FG: Any loose ends? Anything you might wish to add?

ED: No, I think it is quite good as it is.

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