

Decoloniality and Philosophy, from a Latin American Perspective

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Introduction

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

alternative way to understand philosophy today beyond the double bind between Western coloniality and its “other.” My discussion closes with some of the implications such relocation of philosophical thought may have for the development of distinct world philosophies, a development I believe can only enrich philosophy and bring it to fecund living grounds in new configurations.

The Uncovering of Coloniality

The last sixty years in Latin American thought are marked by rigorous self-criticism and transformation, a movement towards not only a sense of Latin American philosophy but to its powerful and creative role in the development of world philosophies beyond the Western hegemonic control of the idea of what philosophy has been and may mean today. In 1942, in light of the great crisis in European culture, Leopoldo Zea makes his famous call for a Latin American philosophy out of the cultural history of Latin America.² In 1968 the Peruvian Augusto Salazar Bondi responds to this project with a fiercely clear critique of the very possibility of having a Latin American philosophy.³ According to Salazar Bondi Latin American philosophy and its history are mostly the derivative and imitative of Western ideas; this results from Western social, political, military, economical, and cultural colonial domination over other nations.⁴ For Salazar Bondi Western cultural imperialism and its robust control over Latin America make any Latin American philosophy impossible. What is required then is a decolonizing of the Latin American mind. Salazar Bondi’s critique stands at the beginning of what he and Enrique Dussel among others will call the Philosophy of Liberation.⁵ In his development of the Philosophy of Liberation the Mexican-Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel not

only recognized the structures of dependency that seem to make a Latin American philosophy impossible, but he goes further and uncovers a new source for thinking modernity and philosophy, namely the underside of modernity. The lives of the oppressed and excluded, of the faceless and nameless peoples outside the Western center of power put into question modern philosophy and its claims to justice, equality, and human freedom. And it is from them, out of their peripheral existences, out of their total exteriority, that new ways of thinking would arise.⁶ But however radical this move may seem, as Santiago Castro-Gómez shows in *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* (*Critique of Latin American Reason*), Dussel's relocation of philosophy at the margins may be seen not as an overcoming of Western supremacy but as a "contra narrative to modernity," one that still remained incapable of exposing and critically overcoming the very power relations that had constituted and that continued to sustain the relation between center and periphery Dussel and philosophy of liberation had so clearly recognized.⁷ The criticism from Santiago Castro-Gómez serves us to introduce another principal figure in the development of Latin American thought, Anibal Quijano, who develops a theory of "coloniality" (to be differentiated from colonialism). In a manner similar to Foucault's genealogy of Western modernity, but in his case beyond Foucault's Eurocentric concerns and orientation, Quijano traces power relations that develop during the colonization of the Americas.⁸ As he shows, European modernity is created during the colonization of the Americas through the development of certain racial-economic-epistemic structures of power, structures that will allow for the placement of the European ego cogito at the center of world order and that will be imported to the rest of the peripheral worlds during the development of European colonialism in the 18th and

19th century. As Quijano indicates in coining the term “coloniality,” this system of powers does not end with the end of colonialism, and it is not overcome by theories of post-coloniality, since the relationships and structures (racial, economic, and epistemic) remain operative and sustain the advent of liberalism and contemporary globalization. Quijano’s exposure of this coloniality of power serves as the ground for further developments towards the decolonizing of the Latin American mind. In his book *La hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)* (*The Hybris of Zero Point: Science, Race, and Enlightenment in New Granada (1750-1816)*) the Colombian thinker Santiago Castro-Gómez takes this work a step further. Castro-Gómez takes these insights and moves towards a decolonizing turn and the deconstruction of power structures by exposing the very way colonial cities were created precisely as the sites for the placement of subjects under such structures of power, and how subject and casts were developed that followed the objective scientific claim of an objective knowledge accessible to certain specific racial subjects.⁹ Two other developments worth mentioning take the thought of Quijano in powerful and significant direction for philosophy. Walter Mignolo develops the issue of the coloniality of power in terms of its epistemic sense as the coloniality of knowledge (only the modern Western white male thinks, or is capable of objective universal knowledge).¹⁰ Nelson Maldonado-Torres moves further and in resonance with Franz Fanon identifies a coloniality of being a coloniality in the very lives and compartments of Latin American-Caribbean peoples and other peoples outside the West who do not exist for themselves under the gaze of Western modern rationalist knowledge.¹¹

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

world philosophies born in dialogues across all the Souths and underbellies of the “developed” world. But in light of the development of the various senses of coloniality one must first clearly recognize the elements in modern Western philosophy that repeat and perpetuate what I would call a coloniality of thought.

The Coloniality of Thought: Modern Philosophy as Pernicious Knowledge

In light of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being that distinguishes the space of philosophy in Latin America appears a difficult question: what are the specific forms coloniality takes in modern philosophy?¹² This is a necessary question because the relationship between coloniality - its sets of relations and modalities of knowledge - and Modern Western philosophy must be made explicit if one aims for an accurate critique. While it is not a given that philosophical knowledge is determined by economic and political interests as those of colonialism, it is the case that the project of a modern rational subjectivism and the deployment of its transcendental knowledge seem to go hand in hand with colonialism, liberalism, neo-liberalism, and globalism. Even if one were to grant that unlike these movements philosophical thought does not seek by definition economic or political power as its primary aim, it is not of lesser importance to recognize philosophical knowledge is never beyond issues of power. Conceptual knowledge in its articulations of senses of beings is always a source of power, and the configuration of practices and institutions that will sustain specific ideas are clearly instruments of power. At the same time, even this type of framing of the issue does not tell us how we may understand Western North American and European Modern philosophy in relation to coloniality.

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

1. The ontological attitude—all responds to one Being or totality.
2. The onto-historical attitude—all philosophical determinations of beings respond to the single history of Western philosophy, which begins with the ancient Greeks and finds its apogee in modernity and its post-modern critics. This historical model also has serious implications for the understanding of temporality (fundamental to Modern Western philosophy at least from Heidegger on). The idea that all other histories and civilizations are behind the spearheading development of the West is sustained by the development of a new sense of time under the unfolding of coloniality in the Americas. As Anibal Quijano explains, the future is no longer seen as the extension of the past. Rather, the future becomes the figure of a new time, a time of progress, which, given the racial stratification of knowledge, becomes the burden and task of Western thought as the single movement of human development (barbarism-civilization) and of the destiny of humanity.¹³
3. The subjective rationalist attitude—the meaning of all ways of being is given to the Western rational subject (*ego cogito*), that is, to a particular transcendental consciousness, to a way of knowing characterized by a universal objective rational knowledge that affects and comprehends all

senses of beings while remaining untouched by that which it defines and names.

4. The traditional phenomenological attitude—only that which I see I may know; and that which I see may be taken as given to the “I” or a transcendental consciousness, for its understanding, calculation, and manipulation.¹⁴ And, as a corollary to this one may add the insistence on seeking something authentic and objectively knowable, such as, for example, the search for what is “Latin American” in the case of a thought from the southern cone.

5. The appropriative attitude—the idea that all that is beyond the Western tradition is “its other” and as such is available for reason as its negativity, which means, available for it to determine its meaning, and ultimately its value. “The other” living being, the other culture, and their sense are held in question by Western modern reason. The contemporary tendency has been to replace the direct appropriative attitude with a more complex strategy, in which “the other” is required to undergo the loss of her identity for the sake of entering into the post-modern philosophical discourse.

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

In order to avoid misunderstandings I must indicate that these observations do not call for the abandonment of the history of Ancient and Modern Western philosophy, nor reason, nor science, but aim to make explicit certain attitudes or dispositions that trap and limit

philosophical thought under the project of modern Western philosophical rationalism and subjectivism.¹⁵ At the same time, as I have indicated before, the issue is not that of the reception and dialogue between North-South, center-periphery, but that of the arising of philosophies that in their distinctness unfold and develop dialogues and encounters well beyond and outside these colonial paradigms.

The Question of Philosophy Beyond Pernicious Knowledge

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

But how may one put into question a tradition that seems to have total control and over-determine every possible path for philosophy? As Santiago Castro-Gómez, echoing Foucault, clearly shows in his *Critique of Latin American Reason*, one is always in danger of repeating the modern gestures I have identified above. Indeed, as Castro-Gómez shows, even the attempt to rethink the ethical out of the periphery that grounds the philosophy of Liberation may be read as a repetition of the way the modern

philosopher finds him or herself in a transcendental position from which the sense of being may be conceptually determined. However, I believe that one may radicalize Dussel's insight concerning the possibility of beginning to think out of a total exterior to the Western tradition and its relations of power. Such radicalization will lead us to think the sense of philosophical thought beyond the Western tradition and the coloniality of power.

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

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

It is this idea of thinking out of total exteriority that I find helpful in order to move beyond the bind of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. For Dussel exteriority is that life of the oppressed and excluded that calls for thought - that phenomena that thrust thought out of thoughts already operative and comfortable self-determination. This occurs as pulsating life releases thought beyond its conceptual frameworks and determinations. In this sense thinking occurs as exposure. At this point though, in light of Castro-Gómez criticism of Dussel's move to elaborate another ethics that repeats the objective rational position over the phenomena I will remain with Dussel's insight and

further explore what exteriority might mean to thought, staying a bit longer with the questioning the sense of philosophy.¹⁷

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

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

A space for thinking for understanding the senses of philosophy with and beyond the Western tradition opens with the violation of the genitive “of.” This violation does not situate thought within the modern Western philosophical tradition. Rather, it recognizes

that thought occurs out of experiences beyond the delimitations and dispositions of what the tradition may call philosophy.

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

What I have said about philosophy in this section may be understood in terms of movements of thought. Philosophy does not begin from its principles as a return to those very origins. Nor is it a matter of a traditional hermeneutic move, where “the other” comes to be translated into the Western tradition or vice versa. Rather, in the way I have characterized it, ultimately philosophical thought arises in the exposure of the already operative conceptual structures *from what is outside them to what does not belong to them*. Thought then figures a movement from total exteriority towards determinations of

senses of being; in the sense of the *diarhesis* that happens in language. Furthermore, such conceptual distinctions and determinations will mark new spaces of encroachment and unsettling of them through further movement from exteriority. Ultimately then, philosophical thought would escape and liberate, in its constant movement from exteriority towards exteriority. One may see some primary implications of this thinking in exteriority if one considers such diverse thinkers as Gilles Deleuze and Walter Mignolo. In terms of Deleuze, one implication of such way of thinking is that not only it acknowledges the fundamental alterity of thought, but in situating philosophical thought beyond philosophy proper and yet as inseparable from the senses of philosophy, it crosses the borders between literature, social-political, and economic issues. This crossing is not an erasure but it occurs as the igniting encounter between specific configurations of knowledge, which in their difference give rise to thinking each field anew. Thus, the reading of the thought from Latin America as political, social, or literary par excellence becomes a matter of a decision among many, and as such, a decision always in question. Considering Walter Mignolo's development of Quijano's coloniality of power in terms of the irreducible spaces of the *colonial difference* in language may further develop this explosive implication. As Mignolo sees it, language becomes the space for the unfolding of a thought form an irreducible colonial difference. But this colonial difference ultimately points to a total exteriority. Here language is not between discourses but it is the locus in which distinct experiences of knowledge beyond correspondence arise. Thus, language itself must be contested and uncovered, created anew. It is a matter of having to learn to speak/think again out of sheer distinctness. This unfolding of a thought from total

exteriority is the point at the heart of Mignolo's colonial difference. In Mignolo's words in *Local Histories Global Designs*:

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

Here the ultimate perspective remains the concrete situation of a speaking that articulates, bespeaks an “irreducible difference,” that is, a being in total exteriority out of which new ways of knowing beyond the modern Western paradigm may begin to unfold.

In light of such vital exposures one must ask: limits, differentiations, and the senses of living and praxis in which these arise and come to pass, are these issues that

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

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

Thinking in total exteriority figures an exposure to the concrete distinctness of thought's situations, in a manner that does not remain descriptive nor objective (thus repeating the transcendental positioning of a rational Cartesian subject over the phenomena). As is shown by what follows, the very phenomena that may seem merely historical, economic, sociological fact, takes a radical philosophical force when considered out of total exteriority: a significance by virtue of transformative and originary encroachments on the already operative structures of thought, relations of power, and conceptual determinations of the very spaces and configurations of senses of lives out of which thought occurs. In closing I will remark on two moments in this way of thinking, distinctly out of Latin American experiences: two moments that transform and diversify how one may think of philosophy today.

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

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

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

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

In general the issue for us is the unsettling suffered by Western history and onto-theological thought as this thinking makes its claim to what it does not understand and cannot subsume. At this point, *Yucatán* becomes part of Western historical writing and

understanding, and with this the conceptual structure of values and the modality of the very configuration of identity that has oriented the West in its developing the modern *ego cogitans* and its privileged epistemic place is from the outset is undone. *Yucatán*, not understanding, belongs now to unfolding of Western history and its metaphysics of identity. Much like the plague that came to Europe by way of a ship that never seemed to touch European ports, the deconstruction of Western history and metaphysics already begins when *Yucatán* is taken over as part of what belongs to the identifying instrument that is the history of the West.²³

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

is traditionally considered past may very well be a parallel temporal-spatial existence or an outright encroachment and interruption of the present and its futurity. In other words, time cannot be a single horizon for thought, since modern philosophy is no longer the future of all other past/future civilizations.

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

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

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

its full engagement with such fundamental elements of modernity as African, Caribbean, Sephardic, and Arab cultures and thought.²⁸ Such broadening of the history of philosophy does not mean the reduction of reason to the irrational or some exotic other; nor is it the case translating these distinct thoughts back into the modern Western way of understanding philosophy. The historical broadening simply points to experiences and thinking that even today too often remain buried, ways of thinking that will be transformative by virtue of their very assertive distinctness.

Conclusion

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

Notes

¹ I use the term *distinct* in order to indicate a contrast between it and *different*. In our lineages, more often than not, difference means different from what is self-same. I use *distinct* to indicate that which occurs in its concrete events and determinations without depending on the idea of a self-same other that will situate, determine, and judge its senses of beings (God, Being, or the modern Western rational transcendental subject).

² “To be a Latin American was until very recently a great misfortune, because this did not allow us to be European. Today it is just the opposite: the inability to become European, in spite of our great efforts, allows us to have a personality; it allows us to learn, in this moment of crisis in European culture, that there is something of our own [*algo que nos es propio*] that can give us support. What this something is should be one of the issues that a Latin American philosophy must investigate.”(Leopoldo Zea, “En torno a la filosofía americana,” *Cuadernos Americanos* 3 (1942) 63-78; *En torno a una filosofía americana*. (México: El Colegio de México, 1945); *Filosofía de lo americano*. (México: Nueva Imagen, 1984), 34-49. Translated as “The Actual Function of Philosophy in Latin America,” *Latin American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (N.Y.: Prometheus, 1986), p. 223.

³ Augusto Salazar Bondi, “The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Philosophic Thought,” *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century*, Ed. Jorge E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004). I refer to the essay as M & P.

⁴ M & P, 395-396.

⁵ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, Tr. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1985). Available on line from Servicio CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 1996/2002.

⁶ “...from the shadow that the light of being has not been able to illumine. Our thought sets out from non-being, nothingness, otherness, exteriority, the mystery of non-sense. It is then a ‘barbarian’ philosophy.” Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, Tr. Aquilina Martines and Christine Morkovsky (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 14. Also published in Jorge E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004), 428.

⁷ Castro-Gómez, Santiago *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* (Barcelona: Puvil Libros, S.A., 1996), 158-170.

⁸ Anibal Quijano “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification,” *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* Ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 181-224.

⁹ Castro-Gómez, Santiago *La hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2005).

¹⁰ Mignolo, Walter. *The Idea of Latin America* (London, Blackwell, 2005); *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), and *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).

¹¹ “The Cartesian formulation privileges epistemology, which simultaneously hides both what could be regarded as the coloniality of knowledge (others do not think) and the

coloniality of Being (others are not).” Maldonado-Torres, Nelson “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* Vol. 21, Nos. 2 and 3 March/May 2007, pp. 252. *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (London: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹² One may also rephrase the question in a simpler way: What is the direct relationship between colonialism and Modern philosophy?

¹³ Anibal Quijano “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification,” *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* Ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 195.

¹⁴ Here we find an indication of the interior relationship between the *ego conquiro* and the *ego cogito*. Vide ft. 14.

¹⁵ “Before the *ego cogito* there is an *ego conquiro*.” (Dussel, Enrique *Philosophy of Liberation* Tr. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1985), p.3. Thus, Enrique Dussel points to these dispositions when he points out the relationship between the *ego conquiro* that takes full force in the colonization of the Americas and the Modern Cartesian identification of the human as *ego cogito*. Nelson Maldona-Torres in his work on the coloniality of being and in his book *Against War* develops the sense of being that results from these dispositions, particularly with regards to the warring attitude that sustains the conceptuality of the Western Modern tradition. (Maldonado-Torres, Nelson *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, Tr. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1985), 3-4.

¹⁷ “To think culture with the aim of uncovering some “fundamental instance,” such as is Dussel’s intention, involves continuing to produce a first degree observation, in which the very action of the observer as much as what is observed are projected as the other of history. In this way the illusion of being able to observe “from outside” is created...” (My translation). Castro-Gómez, Santiago *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* (Barcelona: Puvil Libros, S.A., 1996), 168. This issue brings forth a crucial point for the rest this essay: to speak of total exteriority does not mean to speak from outside, but rather to begin to engage the alterity at play in the very configuration of thought and conceptual determinations. This means that one must take the phenomena and interpret it not within the system but out of that which calls for questioning the system. As Nelly Richard points out, when we look at the situation today in a neo-liberal globalized world, culturally speaking we do not have a center and periphery, hence we cannot speak of total exteriority in the sense of being outside the system of coloniality. (Richard, Nelly. *The Insubordination of Signs* Tr. Alice A. Nelson and Silvia R. Tandeciarz ((London: Duke University Press, 2004), p.98.) But, I would argue that transgressions and transformations, as small as they may seem, may only occur in light of a thought from and towards an exteriority that occurs otherwise than in terms of the teleology already operative in coloniality. In part the point is that philosophical thought is not the same as cultural studies.

¹⁸ Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.87.

¹⁹ Hernán Cortés, *Cartas de Relación*, “Preámbulo” (Mexico: Porrúoa, 1993), 3.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Enrique Dussel points to the distinctness of Latin American thought as it engages its experience and situation: "...from the shadow that the light of being has not been able to illumine. Our thought sets out from non-being, nothingness, otherness, exteriority, the mystery of non-sense. It is then a "barbarian" philosophy." Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, Tr. Aquilina Martines and Christine Morkovsky (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 14. Also published in Jorge E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century* (N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004), 428.

²² Of course, this is the point Frantz Fanon makes when he writes "Le noir n'a pas de résistance ontologique aux yeux du Blanc." Fanon, Frantz *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), p.89. "The black man has no ontological resistance on the eyes of the white man." Fanon, Frantz *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Fact of Blackness," Tr. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p.110.

²³ Antonin Artaud, "Le théâtre et la peste," *Le théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

²⁴ A single document that may serve as a case for discussion is the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* from circa 1550. A document much like *Yucatán*, the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* does not have a place; and as a result, its lacking of place, its displacement, indicates so much. (*Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995). Vide José Rabasa's "Elsewheres: Radical Relativism and the Limits of Empire," *Qui Parle*16:1(2006): 71-96. "Franciscans and Dominicans Under the Gaze of a Tlaculio: Plural-World Dwelling in an Indian Pictorial Codex" (Morrison Inaugural Lecture Series, University of California at Berkeley, 1998). In its pages one finds Aztec pictographic language, Latin, and Castilian alphabetic

writing side by side in a manner that challenges the very idea of a single historical consciousness bounded to alphabetical writing as the rarefied form of knowledge and reason. We find in that insurmountable difference between pictographic language and alphabetic writing a site of interruption—the interruption of the appropriation of existences that Walter Mignolo has clearly shown takes place in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* through the rise to supremacy of alphabetical writing and that specific way of understanding all senses of beings (Mignolo, Walter, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).) At the same time, we can also find in this moment, as well as in the other examples mentioned in this section, a possible *crisis*, that is, a possible moment of decision incommensurable to the limits of Western onto-theological history. By virtue of their asymmetric encounters with the Western tradition’s historical conceptual structures, these are sites, places, moments, and opportunities for a beginning to unfold. Such a beginning, I would suggest, may be an articulate thought in its diversifying identities, a thought fecund in its situated exteriority. Such a situated exteriority does not keep one out of the center, but shows us to be at that fluid margin that is human existence today with its evanescent borders, perpetual migrations, and immediate proximities in radical exteriority.

²⁵ This is the central point articulated by Quijano in his genealogy of coloniality of power, as well as by Mignolo when he speaks of “the colonial difference.” “By colonial differences I mean... (and I should perhaps say ‘the colonial difference’) the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, and energy and a machinery to transform differences into values.” This translates into the

value system in which the white Westerner has more epistemic and existential value than its others. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.13.

²⁶ Such an account is compelling in part because it explains the violence of Europeans towards the indigenous in the form of the Spaniard, Portuguese, and so forth by their desires for self-edification. At the same time, this account also explains the imaginative fascination Europeans had with the new world.

²⁷ 1542-1551- Bartolomé de las Casas (Dominican missionary), *Destruction of the Indies*, written in 1542 and edited in 1551: chronicle of the violent destruction of indigenous culture and life in the Americas on the hands of the conquistadors. The Valladolid debate (1550 – 1551)- concerned the treatment of natives of the New World. Dominican Bishop of Chiapas Bartolomé de las Casas argued that the Amerindians were free men in the natural order and deserved the same treatment as others; Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, insisted the Indians were natural slaves, and therefore reducing them to slavery or serfdom was in accordance with Catholic theology and natural law.

²⁸ One crucial example is Ibn Rushd, or Averröes as he is more commonly known, (1126-1198, Cordoba, Al-Andalus (711-1492)), who is considered the father of secular philosophy, and in this sense leaves the deepest imprints in the inheritance Al-Andalus leaves for the development of modern Western thought. Among Ibn Rushd's positions four seem immediately apparent: 1. Theology is separated from science; 2. All humans partake of the same intellect; 3. Existence precedes essence; 4. Averröes rejected the eccentric deferents introduced by Ptolemy. He rejected the Ptolemaic model and instead argued for a strictly concentric model of the universe. He writes on the Ptolemaic model

of planetary motion: “To assert the existence of an eccentric sphere or an epicyclical sphere is contrary to nature. [...] The astronomy of our time offers no truth, but only agrees with the calculations and not with what exists.” (Owen Gingerich (April 1986). “Islamic astronomy,” *Scientific American* 254 (10), p.74.). One might also keep in mind the intellectual and cultural life of Al-Andalus, the major center for the translation of the ideas that underlie Western modernity, with its 70 libraries, some of them with up to 600,000 books.