Agenda for a South-South Philosophical Dialogue*

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Abstract

The intercultural dialogue that has been developing since the beginning of the 21st century as a cultural and political priority should have an inter-philosophical global dialogue as its epistemological and ontological foundation. However, given the asymmetric relation between the Global North and the Global South, it is necessary that this global dialogue begin with an inter-philosophical dialogue among the world's post-colonial communities. This essay argues that it is imperative for philosophers of the South to come together to define and claim for themselves a philosophical practice—generating its topics and methods from its own historical, socio-economic-political realities and traditions—that is critical of and goes beyond the European "I" which, by virtue of its colonial history, has asserted itself as the universal standard of humanity and philosophy. In asserting the particularity of their own traditions and the creative possibilities of their own situations, dialogues among the philosophers of the South work towards the realization of a pluriverse, where each culture will be in dialogue with all others from the perspective of a common "similarity," enabling each to continuously recreate its own analogical "distinction," and to diffuse itself within a dialogical, reciprocally creative space.

Key terms *Global South, dialogue, coloniality, pluriverse, trans-modernity*

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The intercultural dialogue that has been developing since the beginning of the 21st century as a cultural and political priority should have an inter-philosophical global dialogue as its epistemological and ontological foundation. Nonetheless, given the disproportionate concentration of cultural, political, economic, and military power in the Global North and given the exercise of power characterized by inequalities of race and gender—among other factors—against the Global South (the former colonial world whose configurations emerged in the 16th century and have intensified since the Industrial Revolution in Latin America, Bantu Africa, the Arab and Islamic world, Southeast Asia and India, including China—which, although it was not directly colonized has borne the effects of Western power since the 19th century), it is necessary that this process begin with an inter-philosophical dialogue between the world's post-colonial communities.

This is also necessary because modern Western philosophy decreed the inexistence as philosophy, strictly speaking, of all of the philosophical exercises undertaken in those countries which have borne the effects of the colonialism imposed by the European metropolitan powers. It is thus imperative that the philosophers of the South meet in recognition of their existence as such—grounded in the traditions that they have cultivated in the regional philosophies from which they have emerged—in order to clarify our positions, develop working hypotheses, and then—upon this basis—initiate a fertile North-South inter-philosophical dialogue, with a well-defined agenda previously developed by the philosophies based in the so-called "underdeveloped" countries or nations of the global periphery, who have the material basis to affirm that they have been exploited by a colonialist capitalism, that today has become globalized and is in crisis.

My approach to these issues is set forth here in the form of simple theses that might contribute towards this dialogue, with the intention that they be tested in forthcoming debates as bases for possible consensus regarding central themes which must be ranked in the order of their importance with a view towards more focused, specific dialogues at later stages of this process. Those themes could then be explored in greater detail as part of agreed frameworks that could be taught in high schools,

universities, and other institutes of learning, and help spark new working hypotheses and innovative research projects, derived from the new philosophical paradigm presented here.

§ 1. The Significance of an Agenda of Philosophical Themes to be Discussed Within the Framework of a South-South Dialogue

In the first instance, I believe that a necessary precondition for a fertile overall dialogue in the future is the meeting of a group of critical philosophers from the Global South (not those who simply teach or comment on the philosophers of the North) in order to undertake deep discussions, with sufficient time, to determine which are the problems, themes, and hypotheses for reflection that they should focus on in the future. These meetings would provide the participants the opportunity to explore each of the most fundamental themes or hypotheses in order to assess their deeper significance within a community of dialogue, and arrive at the levels of consensus necessary in order to define minimum ranges of agreement, that in turn could lay the basis for a truly planetary philosophy (not just for the South, but for the Global North as well).

Such a consensus (and its respective priorities) could only be arrived at upon the basis of a determination of the most relevant themes. This in turn presupposes a degree of critical philosophical reflection necessary in order to initiate such a dialogue from a new point of departure. It would not be necessary to discuss a specific theme in this first encounter, but instead to undertake a reflection regarding the significance and implications of the current situation of contemporary postcolonial philosophy, the causes of its prostration, as well as of its supposed inexistence, lack of fertility, and invisibility in the eyes of our fellow philosophers in the so-called "periphery." How did this situation come about? How can this apparent inexistence of the regional philosophies be overcome? Which are the themes that should be explored, and in what order? In some regions of the South or postcolonial world, the histories of our regional philosophies, some of which have ancient roots dating back for centuries and even thousands of years, have begun to be written for the first time and to be

renovated with new criteria. It has been a long time since the history of *our* philosophies ceased to be a central aspect of the formation of *our* university students of philosophy. The prevailing tendency has long been to simply transplant the curriculums developed in European or U.S. universities (the latter, particularly, since the end of the so-called "Second World War"). All of this reflects a dismal state of affairs, which is one of the manifest fruits of a cultural colonialism that must be confronted.

The discussion regarding which have been the *factors that impeded the development of our regional philosophies in the South,* and the order in which they arose, ought to be the first item on the agenda which must be explored upon the basis of a full awareness of its importance.

§ 2. Metropolitan Modernity and the Colonial Worlds

My point of departure is that all philosophies (Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Arab, Amerindian, etc.) have inevitably been ethnocentric in character, since their origin lies in a certain ontological ingenuousness which considers their own world (their cultural totality assumed as a complete grasp of the meaning of human existence) as the center around which the rest of humanity revolved. This ethnocentrism, however, was empirically local and regional in character. Even the immense Chinese empire, which always assumed itself to be the "center" of the universe, never ceased to be centered around its particularity, with only the most incipient consciousness of its near and distant surroundings. It considered other peoples if not inferior then as causes of disquiet within its apparent imperturbability, because it suspected that its knowledge was inherently limited, and that an immense unknown exteriority lingered in the shadows of the unexplored and might erupt into visibility at any moment. The accounts of sporadic travelers, which told of adventures in unknown regions, were not given much credit but could in any case illuminate that consciousness which was never clear about the phantoms, monstrous beings, and bottomless depths that surrounded it, like those strewn throughout the Atlantic in the equivalent representations imagined

by the Europeans under siege by the Arab and Islamic world in what they referred to as the so-called "Middle Ages."[1]

But it was only in the European context that for the first time in the history of humanity, such traditional expressions of ethnocentrism reached the most distant confines of the planet itself, and began to be diffused around the Earth beginning in the 15th-century of the Common Era. As a result of rapid technological development, Chinese, Portuguese, and Spanish navigators for the first time achieved the circumnavigation of the globe, which made it possible for the European version of what was merely yet another *particularist*, localized ethnocentrism to be transformed into an ethnocentrism on a *global* scale. This included first the *modern* expansion of Mediterranean Europe, and later that of Northern Europe, which together marked the inception of what we describe today as globalization.

European modernity emerged simultaneously with this process, thanks to the mercantile centrality of the North Atlantic (which displaced that of the Mediterranean), to the emergence of capitalism as a historical phenomenon, and to Eurocentrism and the scientific and technological revolution which would result from the combination of all of these factors. All of these were also the origin of a *modern* philosophy, which would lay claim to the privilege of supposedly being the sole vehicle for the deployment of human reason capable of transcending the narratives of mythology, thus discrediting all of the religions of the South. This philosophy did not only have the pretension of being universal, planetary, and the expression of human reason as such, but also categorized all other regional philosophies of the South as "backward," naïve, and particular. Once the process of the Spanish conquest of the Americas began at the end of the 15th century in the Caribbean (with all of the cultural conflicts that were inherent in this process), all of its argumentation was focused on

[1] The name of a historical epoch that is only valid in the European context. The Islamic world experienced a stage of urbanized and mercantile splendor during the same period.

the demonstration of the superiority of European civilization, and thus gradually that of its philosophy. Europe's military conquests and the destruction of pre-existent commercial routes, would help impede the possibility that other cultures might subsequently match European levels of development, and would seek to prevent them from progressing upon the basis of a new perspective on world history distinct from that which had been inaugurated by the original *world-system*. The cultures which were colonized sought to defend themselves by reiterating the value of their past glories, but this was not a sufficient basis for them either to resist the new developments which ensued or to formulate arguments that were effective against the superiority assumed by their European adversaries. In the end, they were largely swept away by events and were not able to confront the new European philosophy for centuries.

This overall landscape should not be exaggerated, because in reality there were significant moments of specific creativity in all the regions of the South. But such moments were soon excluded from the regional histories of these philosophies in favor of the prevalence of the advances achieved by modern European philosophy beginning with Descartes, which would attain a hegemony that is still unsurpassed among the colonial élites.

A specific kind of historical judgment soon became diffused throughout the periphery. It was true that a certain kind of philosophical discourse was conducted with locally important figures, but how could this be compared with the thought of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, or Carnap? This question was poorly formulated and, as a result, the responses it inspired were incomplete and complicit, serving only to blur and bury the historical truths at issue. In Latin America, until recently, it was said, "There is no Latin American philosophy!"—if by philosophy one understands the practice of the same kind of theoretical discourse which had been developed in the context of modern European philosophy. But certainly in the Latin American context, there have been numerous philosophers and philosophical currents which have helped lay the basis for cultural, political, economic, or technological processes, and which interpreted the meaning of life within the cultural contexts of our region.

But these efforts obtained regional, not global, recognition, as might be expected within the framework of a peripheral culture.

One must therefore meditate in detail on the causes which produced the eclipse of the philosophies of the South in order to be able to clearly comprehend the negative factors which must be overcome to undertake the process of developing the philosophies of the postcolonial, peripheral, or dominated regions of the world, subjected to the colonialism of the European metropolises, whose domination has not only been military, economic, or political, but also ideological, cultural, and at its roots *philosophical.*

§ 3. The Colonial Dimensions of Economic and Technological Expansion

At the end of the 15th century, Europe was completely limited, surrounded by the walls of the Ottoman Empire. The Muslims laid siege to Vienna well into the 17th century, and did not cease to occupy Granada (the last region representative of the splendor of the ancient Califate of Cordoba) until January 1492. The Latino-Germanic region of Europe (not that of the Byzantine or oriental Empire), was peripheral, under-developed, and cornered by the Islamic world, and thus unable to connect itself with the "Old World" envisioned by Adam Smith. Its only path in that direction was through the ports of the Italian cities, which dominated the traffic of the Eastern Mediterranean, and from there to Fatimid Egypt or Syrian Antioch, which led eventually to Baghdad, or to the caravans which reached China through the deserts of the north, or India via Kabul. The other way was north of the Black Sea all the way to Constantinople, or across the Red Sea or Persian Gulf towards Hindustan and the China Sea. This Europe, which was dark (during the so-called "Middle Ages"), could only break through its isolation from the Northeast through the Principality of Moscow (which would reach into Siberia and arrive at the Pacific at the beginning of the 17th century), or via the West, through Portugal and Spain. The discovery of the caravel in 1441, and the slow dominion of the Oceans—thanks to the Chinese maps of the Atlantic and Pacific, the compass, and other instruments of navigation equally of

Chinese origin (China had an advantage of more than 400 years with respect to the technology, science, and astronomy characteristic of Medieval Europe)—enabled it to discover and *manage* the Atlantic Ocean, which would become the geopolitical center of European modernity. The development of naval and military technology would enable Portugal to take control of the maritime commercial routes of Africa, the Indian Ocean, India, the Moluccas, and the coasts of China and Japan. And it would be Spain which established the *first European continental colonialism* in Latin America and imposed it upon the continent's original inhabitants (Meso-Americans, Incas, Tupi-Guaraní, etc.) for three hundred years (from the end of the 15th century until the beginning of the 19th century, approximately).

This expansion, due to the greater levels of development of military strategy and technology in comparison with the cultures of native Latin America, would establish, in the first phase of Early Modernity,[2] an economic system of mercantile and monetary capitalism based upon the extraction of silver, gold, and colonial goods, founded upon the inhuman domination of the continent's indigenous peoples and the Atlantic *slave trade*, which would incorporate West Africa into a triangle of death structured around the relationship between Africa, Latin America, and Europe: Europe would transport arms to Africa; from there slaves would be transported to the Americas (and later to the English colonies in North America); the sale of these slaves would permit silver and gold (money) and tropical products (sugar, cacao, tobacco, etc.) to be sold in Europe or accumulated in its banks. This was the period of capitalist "primitive accumulation." Later, the Dutch, English, French, and Danes would land in India and the rest of Asia, and capitalist commerce with its center in Europe would achieve global dimensions.

[2] The second phase of *Early Modernity* would be characterized by the hegemony of Holland (from 1630), and its third phase by that of England (from 1688), which in turn laid the basis for *Mature Modernity*, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, which began in China's Yellow River Valley and flowered definitively in the United Kingdom at the end of the 18th century.

The tragic component inherent in the process which produced the configuration of a capitalist economic *world-system* is that the colonial world would be interpreted as one which is inhabited by human beings who are exploitable and are treated as if they belonged to a secondary class of human beings in anthropological, ontological, and ethical-political terms, as we shall see. The original inhabitants of the colonized regions of the Global South were thus assumed to be sub-humans whose domination by Europeans supposedly endows them at the same time with a limited dosage of enhanced humanity. Coloniality was interpreted from the European perspective as a kind of gift, the endowment of humanity. This ideological core which underlies all the other modern ideologies has prevailed up until the present.

§ 4. The Political and Military Dimensions of Colonial Expansion

Political and military forms of aggression always precede economic expansion, as expressed within the context of the capitalist mercantile system in Latin America in the form of big landed estates (*haciendas*) and systems of forced miner community labor (the *mita*), the African slave trade and slavery, and through unequal forms of commerce such as the Opium Wars in the Far East. It was a Eurocentric "will to power" which organized armies of occupation, whose strategic and technological advantages were able to overcome the resistance of the political structures of power (sometimes regional and sometimes local or ethnic in character) they encountered in their path, first in Latin America (beginning at the end of the 15th century) and then in Africa or Asia (on a continental stage from the end of the 18th century). The emerging modern states (in Spain, Portugal, the United Provinces of Holland, England, France, Denmark, etc.) from their origins combined the following characteristics, which developed together in an intertwined manner: a) royal domination of state churches (*Christendoms*[3]), b) *coloniality*, c) mercantilist versions of *capitalism,* and d) *Eurocentrism.*

[3] See the concept of *Christendom* (*Christlichkeit* in German), that is not Christianity, in the fifth chapter of the second part of Karl Loewith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964); and also in the fourth chapter of my *Politics of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

The *coloniality of power* (a concept clarified by the sociologist of Peru, Aníbal Quijano) of the European colonial metropolises was expressed in diverse forms of domination imposed upon their dependent colonies. The European king at the head of each of the metropolitan powers exercised an unquestioned monopoly of power over their colonial subjects. The coloniality of the members of the colonial communities impeded their participation as proper citizens; they were the subject neither of political rights nor human rights equivalent to those of the European metropolitan subjects. None of this was contradictory from the European colonialist perspective, given the premises of the European conception of law (which Carl Schmitt describes accurately, although he is incapable of perceiving its Eurocentrism). This explains how it was possible, within the constraints of this framework, for the French Revolution to issue the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in August 1789 (the first list of its kind of ostensibly universal human rights),[4] and at the same time to apply its *Code Noir* (*Black Code*), which was the governing law in the French colony, to define the duties and restrict the rights of the slaves it possessed in the Caribbean, (in Haiti, whose slave rebellion in 1791 finally led to the independence in 1804). These slaves evidently were not considered to be *human* or to be the subject of the new *universal human* rights proclaimed by a bourgeois, colonialist revolution in metropolitan France (which considered the citizens of the metropolis to be *equal, fraternal,* and *free*, but considered the *non-humans* of the South to be *slaves* who were inherently *unequal* and thus the legitimate objects of *domination*).[5]

[4] Which means that the "universality" of these rights excluded colonial subjects; it was in fact a particularity imposed with universalist pretensions, or an ideological universality which was actually particular and exclusionary regarding the colonial sectors of humanity, which is a theme within the political philosophy of the South that was not addressed by Hobbes, Locke, or Hume, etc.

[5] The *non-humanity* of the human beings of the South or post-colonial regions of the world continues today. The deaths of the civilian populations which have been the victims of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan count much *less* than those of the soldiers (*boys*) who lose their life waging these wars.

The European metropolitan countries had political institutions in charge of administering matters related with their overseas territories, beginning with the Spanish *Council of the Indies* established at the beginning of the 16th century. These institutions combined political and military dimensions in charge of *vigilance* and *punishment,* when necessary (as suggested by Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish*), related to the extraction of wealth from the colonial regions, without any concern whatever for their reciprocal duties to colonial workers (including indigenous peoples who worked for them for free, African slaves, and exploited *mestizos*). The idea was never that of a symmetrical commercial exchange (involving the payment of the value equivalent to that of the commodity transported from the periphery to the center); instead, the essence of the matter was a theft of the exchange value which had been expropriated thanks to the presence of a military power that impeded the colonial world from demanding a just payment for the extraction of wealth from the South. Violent military coercion guaranteed economic theft, which was not considered to obligate the metropolitan center in terms of a debt owed to the colonies (and which would involve a just payment of interest). Rather what was at issue was the direct appropriation of goods belonging to someone else pursuant to a purported right of conquest, which always in fact implied an imposition grounded in superior military force. Jürgen Habermas has correctly emphasized that any consensus must be achieved as the result of the symmetrical rational participation of all those affected; but the political dimension of colonialism implied instead the asymmetrical imposition by force, not of a rational consensus, but of an irrational *will to power* exercised by the center against the periphery. Nonetheless, the philosophers of the center speak today of rights, symmetry, and democracy (and do not criticize the wars conducted today to "establish democracy" in the "backward" countries of the South), without ever having acknowledged the last 500 years of irrational, colonialist, and anti-democratic political and military violence, in which they are implicated, and its negative effects.

The political philosophy of the South today must rethink all of the philosophical tradition from Hobbes or Locke up until the Frankfurt

School, C. Schmitt, A. Badiou or G. Agamben, to name just a few, who have not yet succeeded in overcoming the Eurocentrism which has always accompanied the political expansion of Europe, and now that of the United States as well.

§ 5. The Ontological-Philosophical Justification of Colonialism

Colonial praxis has from the beginning relied upon a philosophical justification as its foundation, and this is the point of departure for modern European philosophy with its universality claim, which unfortunately is accepted by most of the members of the philosophical academies of the South. This justification also had an anthropological character (expressed in the assumption of the superiority of European human beings over those of the South, as reflected in the interpretation of that superiority by Gines de Sepúlveda in his re-reading of Aristotle in the 16th century, or by Kant in the 18th century, based upon his conception of the origins of such inequalities in the climates of the Earth and its regions)—one aspect of which was historical (where Europe was, for example, the "center and end of universal history" for Hegel) and another which was ethical (in terms of the inclusion within European culture of the peoples of the Americas, Africa, or Asia, upon whom was imposed its vision of an ethics which is non-conventional, individualist, founded upon rational argumentation, universal, and not merely particular such as those characteristic of the cultures of the South, etc.)—which served to demonstrate the legitimacy of colonialism.

But the ultimate foundation of colonial praxis was ontological in character. The European "I" which had enunciated to the South for over a century and a half, beginning in 1492, its formulation, "*I* conquer the New World," now assumed itself as a universal ontological foundation as "I." This central *Ego* (*Ichheit* in German), around which everything revolved, was inadvertently European: a European "I" with the pretension of discovering itself to be universal and ultimate, which knows itself, and which can reconstruct *all of the world* (including all of the worlds contained within the South). It is within this context that René Descartes, during the second phase of Early Modernity, in Amsterdam (a Spanish province until

shortly before his emergence), a student of the Jesuits (a Spanish religious order) enunciates his *ego cogito*. This *ego*, this metropolitan *European* "I"[6] is the ontological-philosophical foundation of what Martin Heidegger will denominate as the "world"(*Welt*) in *Being and Time* (1927).[7] In 1637, Descartes's *Discourse on Method* serves as the manifesto of modern European philosophy, which assumes its role as the supposed universal philosophy throughout the next 400 years.[8] The need to overcome this Eurocentric vision must precisely be the primary objective of a dialogue among the philosophers of the South, among those of us from the post-colonial regions, who continue to be treated as if we were still colonial subjects in epistemological and philosophical terms, in the vast majority of our spaces for philosophical and academic reflection within the universities of the South. In large part, the function we fulfill and have assumed is as mere *commentators* at the periphery of modern European philosophy, and not as thinkers with reflections regarding our reality, which has been negated and which has not been the object of thinking by that philosophy which claims universality for itself.

Philosophical coloniality has dual aspects: a) in the center, Spain of the 16th century, due to the universality claim of its European metropolitan regional philosophy since the 16th century, which at the same time has negated and marginalized the contributions of the pre-Cartesian ethical and political philosophy, which flourished during the period of the First Early Modernity and has disappeared from the histories of modern philosophy; and b) in the periphery, the South, because of the prevailing, unquestioning acceptance of the supposed evidence that the said European philosophy is in fact the universal philosophy, which has imposed itself throughout the last few centuries. This latter aspect presupposes for its part: i) an

[6] I repeat: *inadvertently*. "European," and also male, white, adult, metropolitan, etc.

[7] Of course Heidegger seeks to demonstrate that this "I" is founded upon a "being-in-the-world" which is always presupposed.

[8] See my article: "The Anti-Cartesian Meditations," *Poligrafi* 41–42 (2006): 5–60, http://www.enriquedussel.com, (under "work" and "philosophical articles").

ignorance of the regional philosophies of the periphery from their origins (prior to and together with that of European modernity); ii) the negative evaluation of the significance of its own philosophies throughout the last 500 years; and iii) the definition of philosophy (in the colonial philosophy of the South) as commentary regarding the European modern philosophy (that has a universal claim) that denies even the very existence of the South's own philosophies. In addition, there is a marked tendency in these colonial philosophies of the South towards argumentation in favor of their impossibility and as to their uselessness or superfluity.

The colonial philosophy of the South then, in a negative sense, is that which is practiced in the periphery by those who act based on the premises of Eurocentrism and deny their own regional and local philosophy. From the perspective of the center, it is modern philosophy which negates all other philosophies (from the South), and which categorizes them as being equivalent to mythological, folkloric, conventional, backward, particularist, and/or pseudo-philosophical thinking.

§ 6. The Economic and Political Liberation of the South

The concrete historical processes of national or regional liberation in the face of European colonialism—which began in the South with Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari between 1780–1781, and then in Haiti between 1791 and 1804 against France, in 1810 with Latin America against Spain and Portugal, and in Africa and Asia following the Second World War—laid the foundation for the emergence of a philosophy of liberation from colonialism. These events determine a creative moment which should be taken into account.

These political, economic, and cultural moments of liberation must also be considered to be culminations of a philosophical process, as well as the birth of a philosophy which is intertwined with praxis and which lays the foundation for a justification of this age of emancipation from colonialism. It will be necessary, therefore, to be especially *attentive* to the historical reconstruction of the philosophy of the South (in singular or plural, for it is also necessary to highlight the "philosophies" of the South). It is simply impossible to conceive of an autonomous, creative, truly free philosophy in

the South within the tortuous, suffocating limits of the political, economic, and cultural horizons of a community which has been colonized, subjugated, exploited, and oppressed. As Augusto Salazar Bondy wrote in 1969 in neocolonial Perú, it is very difficult to construct an authentic philosophy in a colonial and dependent context.[9]

The post-colonial situation (which is not exempt from neoliberal or other new economic, political, geopolitical, or epistemological variants of colonialism) is the contemporary framework of conditions which make liberation from colonial philosophy possible within the context of a new stage of creativity. In my view, this is the current responsibility of philosophers who have the pretension of being thinkers regarding the reality that surrounds them, as European philosophers did in the context of their reality, in their metropolitan and colonial context. This goes much beyond merely being the *commentators* of philosophical works, from which a great deal can be learned, but which must be understood as the expression of thinking grounded in *another reality*. To confuse European or U.S. reality with our own simply constitutes a *fallacy of dislocation* (the fallacy of taking the space or world of another culture as one's own, and thereby rendering invisible the distinct originality inherent in the other reality and its very differences with one's own).[10]

§ 7. The Affirmation of the Ancestral Cultures of the South

Philosophy does not imply an isolated process of theoretical production, but instead one that involves a commitment to the world

[9] Augusto Salazar Bondy, *¿Existeuna Filosofía en Nuestra América?* (México: Siglo XXI Editores, 1969).

[10] This *fallacy* encompasses many additional errors: not to recognize that the other's reality is different from one's own; therefore, not to know that it is impossible to assume reality as a given as it is lived in Europe or the U.S., because one is not existentially, originally part of that other-world (which one might fictitiously live as if it were one's own, as a colonial person with a metropolitan soul, a ghost or phantom); to negate the knowledge of the evolving historical identity of one's own reality and not differentiate it from that of others; to thus think of that which is alien falsely as one's own, and therefore to define as philosophy what is in essence commentary, and not to aspire to create something different; and in, ethical terms, to be responsible for rendering invisible, for hiding, for making disappear, or for failing to perceive what is one's own, etc.

surrounding us. The pretension of such absolute autonomy is what characterizes the efforts of a certain school of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, which nonetheless supposes all of the history of philosophy from the Vienna Circle to the philosophy of language in the British Isles, to be itself the history of philosophy as such, when in fact all of this must be situated in specific cultural worlds, located in the universities of certain countries in certain specific historical moments with concrete characteristics that explain their emergence, development, and current crisis. The Frankfurt School, French existentialism, phenomenology, etc., all argued that a philosophy without historical commitment (that is, one that is isolated from specific philosophical, cultural, economic, and political moments within their historical contexts) is impossible. Thomas Kuhn demonstrated that scientific revolutions (and thus those of a philosophical character as well) depend not only on intra-scientific events, but also on extra-scientific factors which help determine their emergence.

For their part, Eurocentric philosophies in the South, in post-colonial countries, equally seek to practice a universal philosophy of the modern European type within their own cultural horizon, that of the South in Latin America, Africa, or Asia.[11] This compels them to accept certain apparent forms of evidence that constitute unquestionable dogmas within modern European philosophy, such as the idea that philosophy itself is of Greek origin marked by the transition from *mythos* to *logos*. Both of these formulations—that is, philosophy's Greek origin and the overcoming of *mythos* by *logos*—are unacceptable. Today it is widely recognized that long before Greece, there was philosophy in the Mesopotamian kingdoms dating back to the 4th century BCE, and in Egypt. Thales of Miletus, the first recognized Greek philosopher, came from a family of Phoenician

[11] I should be more specific here: the *South* which I have been referring to includes at minimum: a) Latin America (and its indigenous peoples); b) the Islamic world (from Morocco to Mindanao in the Philippines); c) Sub-Saharan Bantu Africa and its diaspora; d) India; e) Southeast Asia (in part Hindustani, such as Burma, Nepal, etc., and also countries linked to China, such as Korea, Vietnam, etc.); and (f) China.

origin.[12] And as to the relationship between mythology and philosophy, Aristotle considered the latter to be a form of *mythopoiesis*, and Greek philosophy as a whole (beginning with the post-Socratics such as Plato or Plotinus) were completely immersed in a world permeated by myth: What, for example, is the *psyche* (soul) in Plato but a myth of Hindustani origin, which cannot be demonstrated by means of empirical evidence (a myth which is handed down all the way to Kant)? What are the *Enneads* of Plotinus but an expression of the metaphysical cosmic mathematics characteristic of Egyptian culture?

It is upon the basis of the allegedly irrational and anti-philosophical character (according to the modern European definition of philosophy) of myths and religious narratives (which, according to Paul Ricoeur, one of my professors at the Sorbonne in Paris, are *rational* philosophical narratives based on symbols), that modernity denied any validity to the philosophical narratives (which contained myths) of the cultures of the South, including those of China and India which go back for millennia, as well as those of the Iranian-Aristotelian tradition of scientific and empirical inquiry in the Arab world.

In order to reconstruct the philosophies of the South, it is necessary, as part of a pendulum swing in the inverse direction from that imposed by the pretensions of modern European secularism (which necessarily implied the negation of the ancestral cultures of the South), to restore the validity and significance of the traditions of these regions of the world, including those of a mythical character, and to subject them to an adequate hermeneutical interpretation. It is the methodology of interpretation (hermeneutics) which is philosophical; although the text or narrative subjected to this process can be mythical, poetic, or non-philosophical, the result of this interpretation would thus be hermeneutically a work of philosophy.

[12] See the third section of the first chapter of my book, *Politics of Liberation*.

It is thus necessary to recover the symbolic narratives of our ancestral cultures in the South, regardless of whether they are philosophical, mythical, or religious in character or not (even those texts categorized as theophanic or revelatory), in order to subject them to a *philosophical labor* within the overall framework of reconstructing our traditions. The local *reality* of the South which I have alluded to is enveloped in myth, as is that of modern philosophy,[13] and must be considered a humanist, rational, and symbolic point of departure for a history and philosophy of the South.

§ 8. The Philosophy of the South as a Critique of Coloniality

The *philosophy of the South,* as a *front* or philosophical consensus consisting of many philosophies of the post-colonial, underdeveloped, or exploited world (in some cases, only recently free of direct colonial domination)[14]—with some sectors in the process of achieving greater autonomy than others[15]—should in the first place take into consideration the themes described above. The point of departure must be an understanding of the epistemologically colonial character of its methods, themes, use of sources, and manners of discourse; the reality in which it is

[13] See Franz Hinkelammert, *Crítica de la Razón Mítica* (San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 2009). The "myth of progress," for example, is at the foundation of all of modern science, and cannot be proven empirically; it is in fact a transcendental postulate and supposition (which is also dangerously false, as Walter Benjamin argued).

[14] And I say "only recently" advisedly, because since the beginning of the 21st century, the failure of the U.S. to impose its military domination throughout the world (as the result of its defeats in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan) and the emergence as new global powers—namely, China (with 1.3 billion inhabitants and an average growth rate in its production of 9% over the last few years), India, Russia (in an intensified process of reorganization), and Brazil (gauging from a distance its implications as a nation of 200 million inhabitants)—the geopolitics of the world has moved away from a unipolarity of the North (centered around the U.S., Europe, and Japan, today in crisis). The philosophy of the South, therefore, includes these new powers in the South (China and Russia were never colonies, but were definitely underdeveloped and exploited for a long time), which in turn define the need for a new nomenclature, since there are new powers emerging that no longer fit into the category of the North as it was developed in the 20th century, and the South itself is no longer what it was in that same century.

[15] The situation of South America (as differentiated from that of "Latin" America as a whole) in particular, and that of the "Arab Spring" or "Jasmine Revolution" are key indicators of deep processes of political renewal, that also demand correspondingly new levels of philosophical production.

immersed and the community to which it is directed—whether it be the philosophical community of the South, the intellectual community, or peoples of the post-colonial world which is in process of liberation—are unavoidable themes integral to the philosophy of the South.

I also believe that there is a specific aspect which should be prioritized; it is a question which we have analyzed in certain dialogues between Arab and Latin American intellectuals, namely: *What were the causes which led to the virtual "disappearance" or loss of overall creativity of the philosophies of the South since the emergence of modern European philosophy?* Here I am alluding, for example, to the disconnection of the Islamic world (as I have suggested, from Morocco to the Philippines, passing through Tunisia and Egypt, through Iraq and its center in Baghdad, Afghanistan, the Mogul empire in India, the commercial sultanates of Indochina, and the Moluccas or Spice Islands) due in part to its disruption by Portuguese colonialism and to the indifference of mercantilism and of Arab culture with regard to the use of oceanic navigation (initiated in the context of modernity by China, which discovered the Americas, Africa, and Australia beginning in the early 14th century). All of these factors together produced the absence of a joint reaction and effort to resist European expansion. The Ottoman Empire itself, defeated at Lepanto in 1571 (due in part to the flow of Latin American silver towards Spain), lost the capacity to control its territory because of economic crises (which included the devaluation of that same silver in the Islamic system due to the influx of cheap silver from Latin America). The Arab world was impoverished without losing money because of the devaluation of its currency. This is how it ceased to be the necessary "center" capable of connecting all of the cultures of Asia, Africa, and the Mediterranean; thus began its long slide into peripheral coloniality.

Although global commerce was centered around relations between China and Hindustan up until around 1800, the impact of the crisis in its own first industrial revolution would lead China to retreat into itself and thus lose the possibility of developing the potential of its own technological inventions which it had achieved between the 7th and 18th

centuries,[16] which in turn helped spark the Italian Renaissance and the English Industrial Revolution.

Once this question has been fully explored (here I have only begun to sketch an initial approach), a philosophical critique focused on the destructive tendency of philosophical colonialism with regard to the impact of European modern philosophy must be developed. In the absence of the kind of critique of the coloniality of each of the national and regional or continental philosophies of the cultural entities of the South, it will not be possible to undertake the subsequent stage of unleashing a moment of philosophical creativity and symmetry throughout the South. When I refer to "symmetry" in this context, what I am suggesting is the need to develop a psychological attitude and approach representative of a certain normality that would make it possible for those of us in the South to consider and treat academic colleagues in Europe and the U.S as "equals." We should free ourselves of false respect for a knowledge with universalist pretensions. This false respect could be overcome by philosophers in the South once they possess the historical, cultural, and philosophical tools of the same quality as their colleagues in the metropolitan centers, which at minimum would enable our peers in the South to uncover the signs within us of an inadvertent Eurocentrism which has been ignored. A well-founded accusation of Eurocentrism (expressed either as an ignorance of the South or as an ignorance of one´s own Eurocentrism) places the colleague from the center or North in an uncomfortable and unaccustomed situation (which destabilizes their previously assured centrality and universality and ultimate superiority) before the philosophers of the South. When a philosopher of the South falls into the trap of formulating a Eurocentric judgment (for example due to their ignorance regarding the history of philosophy in the South), they could exclaim: "What you are reflecting is the expression of a Eurocentric philosophy that

[16] Regarding science and technology in China, see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956–2012).

judges what is in fact unknown to you." It is likely that the confident, secure professor or academic from the center will lose their serenity or get angry, which would only make things worse (intensifying the arguments deployed against his or her positioning), or might begin to reflect and accept the criticisms proffered. It is only at this stage that a slow dialogue between the philosophy of the North and that of the South can truly begin, which is both so necessary and virtually inexistent, within an ethical framework of symmetry, respect, and openness to the truth.

§ 9. The Unfolding of a Philosophy of the South

A key priority which should be included in the initial stages of development of a network of philosophies of the South is to begin with the study, debate, exposition, and publication of *histories of philosophy* in each of our countries, continents, and regions. It is notable that the first histories of the national philosophies of the South are beginning to appear.[17] At the same time we must also prioritize the publication (electronic and by other means) of the classical works of the philosophies of the South, at least since the end of the 15th century. It would be even better if all of the classic works since the origins of these regional histories were included.

These publications should be the result of debates regarding the corresponding periods of philosophical history in each context, their significance and contents, and the works which should be taken into account. It should be evident that this process of critical reconstruction must be open to varying contents with wide-ranging interpretations,

[17] The most recent World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul, Korea organized by FISP included the presentation of the first history of the philosophy of Korea. In Latin America we have published, as I noted above, a large-format initial overview of Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino philosophy from an integral perspective; see Enrique Dussel, Eduardo Mendieta, and Carmen Bohórquez, eds., *El Pensamiento Filosófico Latinoamericano, del Caribe y "Latino" (1300–2000): Historia, Corrientes, Temas y Filósofos* (México: CREFAL/Siglo XXI Editores, 2009). There is not a single sentence dedicated to Latin America in the brilliant book by Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1998), although it does include a good description of the philosophies of China, India, the Islamic world, and Bantu Africa.

including those which are philosophical in content but not simply imitative of foreign philosophies, and which engage themes emerging from the historical process of the peoples themselves. These historical processes are the points of reference for the most important philosophers who accompanied these processes, and sometimes, these philosophers influenced such processes to a greater or lesser extent. Undoubtedly Confucius or Lao Tse were key constituent factors in the configuration of Chinese culture, Budhha or Sankara in Hindustan, Al-Farabi or Ibn Sina (often referred to by his Latinized name as Avicenna) in the Arab and Iranian context, or Bartolomé de Las Casas in the Latin American context of the 16th century.

But together with this dissemination of histories and reflection by philosophers of the South—researchers, students, professors, and intellectuals in general—upon the most valuable aspects of their own philosophical traditions, it is also necessary to develop a creative discourse which is properly philosophical in character, and which thus goes beyond mere commentaries on either one's ancestral tradition or that of Europe. This implies contributions that take the reality and history of the treatment of key specific themes in the corresponding regional or local philosophy of the South. Philosophical reflection should enrich these realities critically with one's own tools, and in dialogue with the best expressions of modern European philosophy (which the philosophers of the South must know how to select and incorporate into their own projects of distinct, autonomous thought). All of this should be deployed with an emphasis on producing clear thinking which is well-founded, coherent, and understandable by those responsible for the concrete political, economic, aesthetic, technological, and scientific realities of the countries of the South. In sum, what is aimed at is a proper philosophy, which is both an expression of the South and a useful contribution to its community of reference.

In order to achieve these objectives it is also crucial to avoid a kind of fundamentalism that would lead to the exclusion of other philosophical currents (beyond those of the South, including those rooted in European modernity), and mere commentaries on European contributions. The

exclusionary approach is disdainful of dialogue and fails to have due regard for the best of European modernity. It has to be noted, however, that the latter conceives of itself as modern but does not serve the interests of the South as a community of reference; at the same time, it is disdained by the philosophical community of the European center for its lack of originality, and at best is perceived as simply "registering" the latest intellectual productions from Europe or the U.S., with commentaries which come too late and lack any real importance either in the South (because of their culturally distant character) or in the center (because they lack creativity and a vanguard quality).

Those of us who are able to effectively combine proficiency in our own regional tradition within the South (which is usually less well known than that of our local traditions) with the necessary familiarity with the latest achievements of European or U.S. philosophy, together with a commitment to shed light on contemporary aspects of the regional or local reality in the South, will be best positioned to contribute creatively to the new philosophical reflections which are so necessary. Contributions along these lines which address and describe relevant, previously unknown themes, have the potential to spearhead philosophical thinking that is both innovative and well-founded. The philosophers of the South are uniquely situated to reflect critically regarding the ethical, political, anthropological, ontological, and epistemological dimensions of our realities in the context of examples such as China (amid its hyper-industrial revolution), India (with its developments in electronics), Latin America (given the contributions of its political experiences of transformation Bolivia, Venezuela, or Brazil), and the Islamic world (in the wake of the "Arab Spring" or "Jasmine Revolution"). All of these reflect relevant themes which the philosophers of the South are ideally positioned to engage as actors in such settings.

Precision, seriousness, well-founded argumentation, relevance to one's own reality, beauty in the process of exposition, pedagogical and explanatory quality, and a sense of conviction as to the positioning one has elected, are all characteristics which should be reflected in the contemporary philosophies of the South. In this manner the community of

philosophers of the center will learn about new themes, with new methods, within the framework of a dialogue enriched by new participants. Meanwhile, the philosophy of the South will revive the creativity annihilated at the end of the 15th century, with the inception of the coloniality of knowledge that extinguished the philosophies of the South.

§ 10. Premonitions as to the Dawning of a Pluriversal Trans-Modern Age[18]

The *decentering* of the world-system which is taking place before our eyes towards countries with increased political, economic, and military autonomy, including the emergence of BRICS,[19] among others; the intensification of economic crises in Europe and Japan, and the limits confronting U.S. militarism, have laid the foundation for the following questions: a) What is modernity? b) Was there, is there, and will there be one or several different modernities? c) Is it possible for a *new age* to arise in the future, within the framework of a different kind of culture that lies beyond modernity and thus might be described as *trans-modern* in character?[20] d) And if this *new world age* emerges, as Schelling might have imagined, will it be organized according to the framework of a *univocal universality*—which assumes the viability of one culture for humanity as a whole, reflected in one language and one tradition, with the disappearance of cultures which have been vanquished, including the negation of the diversity of other cultures which have existed for millennia—or will it instead be an *analogical pluriverse* of cultures flourish through a process of

[18] Both the concept of "trans-modernity" and that of "pluriversality" are explained in the last section of this essay.

[19] Brasil, India, Rusia, China, and South Africa.

[20] In my essay "Transmodernity and Interculturality," (unpublished paper, 2004, http://www.enriquedussel.com) I explain the difference between this position and that of those who embrace the notion of "post-modernity." The prefix "post" refers to the final critical stage of European modernity, and thus implies a Eurocentric hypothesis rooted in the Global North. It is a particularism with an unfounded pretense of universality; the South is not and will never be "post-modern."'"Trans" by contrast has as its referent a point lying beyond modernity, a different world Age, which is no longer Eurocentric, and which emerges from the Global South and includes the Global North and is thus truly planetary in character.

intercultural dialogue for centuries between different cultures engaged in a permanent process of creative cross-fertilization?

Let me respond briefly in the form of short theses intended to spark future discussions:

In the first place, modernity is not the Enlightenment, and Kant's explanation of its character ("liberation from a state of immaturity and self-imposed guilt"[21]) is not sufficient. Modernity is an age of history inaugurated by Europe thanks to the discovery and dominion of the Atlantic Ocean (as a new geopolitical center) which enabled it to expand by sea and constitute commercial, military, and cultural empires, with Europe as their core. The European "I" (or *ego*) constituted other cultures as its colonies, subjected to its Will to Power, which encompassed nature as an exploitable set of objects that could serve as a form of mediation in order to obtain greater quantities of exchange value. This is an age characterized by huge technological advances, which reflected the demands of securing advantages among competing sources of capital and by scientific discoveries and the political organization of states in systems of representative democracy. It was imposed on other cultures up until the limits that we are seeing unfold today, which involve a civilizational crisis revealing the negative effects of its vast scale: the possibility that life on Earth might be extinguished.

Secondly, in the fullest sense, although there are historical antecedents—namely, the separation of science from religious faith in the philosophy of Córdoba reflected in thinkers such as Ibn Rush (often known by his Latinized name as Averroes); great technological, agricultural, and industrial discoveries in China; the invention of modern mathematics and heliocentric astronomy in Baghdad; etc.—modernity thus is European, unique, and is being imitated in part in the process of globalization, which is underway in other regions of the world. There are

[21] Immanuel Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" (*Berlinische Monatsschrift* [December 1784]), in *Werke*, vol. 9 (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges., 1968), 53–61.

not several different modernities, although the extent and ways in which it is implanted may vary in diverse cultural contexts. If it was Calvinism which helped shape the initial development of capitalism (as Max Weber argued), at present it is neo-Confucianism which inspires the *suigeneris* versions of capitalism which have arisen in Southeast Asia and in China itself. This is the same modernity described above which has been imitated and expanded in certain respects.

Thirdly, we stand at the threshold of a *new* age of history given the exhaustion of the premises upon which modernity is founded. Ours is not a postmodern situation, but instead a moment characterized by radical transformations in the very cultural foundations of the modern *ethos*. It is upon the basis of these assertions that I therefore propose that *trans-modernity*, in the absence of another equivalent term, is the adequate description for the horizon that is opening up before our eyes. What is emerging is not a new stage of modernity but rather a *new* world age that lies beyond the assumptions of modernity, capitalism, Eurocentrism, and colonialism. A *new* age where the conditions necessary to sustain human life on Earth demand a transformation in our ontological attitudes regarding nature, work, property, and other cultures.

Fourth, in the context of trans-modernity, humanity will not be trapped in a *univocal universality* limited to a single culture, which would in turn be imposed to all of the rest in order to extinguish them, thereby producing a universality which is the fruit of an exclusionary process of identity. It will instead be a *pluriverse* where each culture will be in dialogue with all others from the perspective of a common "similarity," enabling each to continuously recreate its own analogical "distinction," and to diffuse itself within a dialogical, reciprocally creative space. It will be, as I have suggested here, an age which, as the result of new economic relations, will have succeeded in overcoming capitalism, given the imperative character of the demands of the environment and of the conditions necessary to make life possible for the majority of the Earth's population, which will have embraced a participatory form of democracy beyond the limits of liberalism, and which will no longer consent to the perpetuation of a system based upon the exploitation of those most vulnerable to the impact

of increases in the rate of profit and to the commensurate increases in the poverty and inequality of citizens throughout the world.

All of this is a reasonable prognosis which can be argued upon an empirical basis, and which traces the outline of a future horizon which will at least attempt to overcome the substantial dominations which can be detected throughout our historical moment, because without this attempt, it is impossible to imagine today how we are going to overcome the inevitable dominations of the future, which will surely emerge because of the nature of our human condition.

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