

On Madness, Prophecy, and Outlaw Praxis: Thinking from Exile

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Persecution cannot prevent even public expression of the heterodox truth, for a man of independent thought can utter his views in public and remain unharmed, provided he moves with circumspection. He can even utter them in print without incurring any danger, provided he is capable of writing between the lines.

—Leo Strauss¹

Thanks, first, to Barbara for her invitation to respond to Linda. And thanks to Linda for bring Enrique Dussel into the conversation here at PES. Thanks also to Jazon and company (Ana Cecillia, Arianna, Dave) for creating the LAPES (Latin American Philosophy of Education Society) community; for creating *ex nihilo* (from nothing, the nothing, the not yet, the no-where, *ou topos*) and *ex exilio* (from exile, the periphery, from exteriority). The ongoing project that is LAPES is a direct response to questions raised by Dussel in his *Philosophy of Liberation*. There he writes:

Since about 1965 there have been some Latin American philosophers who have asked themselves whether it was possible to do philosophy in underdeveloped countries. A little later the question was put another way: is it possible to philosophize *authentically* in a *dependent* and *dominated culture*? [And this question leads] into the *central problem of philosophy of liberation*: Is a Latin American philosophy possible?²

I want to argue that LAPES is an affirmative response to these questions *precisely* because it is engaged in the project of liberation philosophy, or what Linda Alcoff has described as *constructing exteriority*. The flow of this Dusselian project - its rhythm, its temporality, and its ontological location - is the focus of my response. Please, then, allow me to begin by identifying the dialectic of this originary, liberatory project: insofar as it is a *constructive* project it is one of community-building, of solidarity. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is also a *provocative* project. What's more, it implies, as Dussel describes it, *the destruction of order*, which is the title of section 2.6.4 of his *Philosophy of Liberation*. In that section Dussel writes:

Every new [construction] begins as a corruption or destruction of an old order – no system... can make way for a superior order without dying in the process ... Something dies, true, but only as a condition for the possibility of the birth of something else. Every moment of passage is agonizing, and this liberation is also the agony of the old for the fruitful birth of the new, the just.³

As a way of providing context for the title of my response I need to bring us back to Alexander “Sasha” Sidorkin’s toast, given last year in Memphis at the PES Presidential Sunday evening party. Sasha raised his glass and said, “What is the difference between the madman and the prophet? [*dramatic pause*] Time!” With this context in mind, the title of my response is “On Madness, Prophecy, and Outlaw Praxis: Thinking From Exile.”

My response to Linda’s paper is organized around a fragment, a single sentence that appeared at the end of the draft of her paper that she shared with me a few

weeks before we gathered in Toronto. In the fragment she speaks of the “*need to think through the idea of re-impacting a community way of life ...*.” This fragment, which is an expression of an imperative, takes us to the heart and soul of Dussel’s project, and thus to a discursive location, a foundation in fact, that may or may not support what Linda describes as Dussel’s “naturalizing of philosophy of education.” Indeed, this foundation I am referring to may or may not support the reading of the liberatory project as an example of non-ideal theory. I take it that these hermeneutic categories may not fit so easily upon Dussel’s liberation project, especially when we recognize that his project is one part *philosophy* and the other part *theology*: in sum, a philosophy *and* theology of liberation; specifically, a project that is founded/grounded in what Dussel identifies as the universal truth of the Gospels.

In the fragment I am focusing on, which identifies the “need to think through the idea of re-impacting a community way of life,” I want to highlight *the need* – the desire, *el deseo* – to think the idea of re-impacting a community way of life. For Dussel, this *deseo* (desire) is an expression of those *in need* of community life, those for whom *being-with-others* is an *existential necessity* because it is a *spiritual necessity*, which is to say a *fundamental human need*.

For Dussel, the *needy* – technically everyone – are those who *require* human community. In this sense we are, all of us, “the poor in spirit.” Dussel calls our attention to the moment in the Gospel of Luke: “Blessed the poor, for there is the reign of Heaven” (Luke 6:70). Dussel comments: “The Beatitudes are the ethical code par excellence.” And to clarify the meaning of “the poor in spirit” he offers an exegetical reading of Matthew (3:5): “‘Blessed are the poor *to pneumatic*’ – which can be translated ‘in spirit’ [or] ‘spiritually’.” He adds, “*pneuma* [is] God’s own *Creative Might*, the power that launched the *prophets*. *Spirit* is the immanent essence of God (Isaiah 31:3).”⁷⁴ In sum, *the poor in spirit*, those who *need* human community, take (lead) us to the radical principle of liberation philosophy/theology.

These specific moments from the Gospels, which are the foundation of Dussel’s project, give rise to *the preferential option for the poor*: the non-negotiable principle of liberation philosophy/theology. Dussel writes: “The radical principle of Christian Ethics is the face-to-face of the person-to-person relationship in the concrete, real, satisfied, happy community.”⁷⁵ It is through this principle that we are gathered into community.

As Hannah Arendt indicates in her essay “What is Freedom?,” to *think* a principle is to *enact* it: a principle is real to the extent that it appears with human action (*praxis*). “Principles do not operate within the self,” Arendt writes, “but inspire, as it were, from without ... the inspiring principle becomes fully manifest only in the performing act itself ... it is inexhaustible ... the validity of a principle is universal ... However, the manifestation of principles comes about only through action, they are manifest in the world so long as the action exists, but no longer.”⁷⁶ Here, then, perhaps we can speak of the “non-ideal” as an inversion of the ahistorical – what Hegel calls an *abstrakt* idea, which is wholly subjective and speculative and thereby “pure, empty.”⁷⁷ In contrast, the deeply historical and concrete radical principle of the liberation project *calls* us into action; specifically, it *calls* us into making com-

munity with one another. Those who *respond* to this call experience what Dussel calls “the miracle of being-community.”⁸ The ideal becomes real, the infinite ruptures into the finite: “The friendship of many individuals ... once forming a ‘crowd’ but now established in the face-to-face of unity, is what we call ‘community’ (or in the Greek New Testament, *koinonia*). A ‘community’ is so called because it *holds all things in common (koiné)*.”⁹

The radical principle that calls and gathers *the poor in spirit* appears to have universal range, and because of this it is the foundation of what Dussel call *una etica universal* (a universal ethic). The call is universal, but the response, which is to say the enactment of the radical principle, happens *only* in the very local, base, and thus small community. Indeed, it is rooted in what Dussel calls the “person-to-person” encounter. Furthermore, and this qualification is crucial, the gathering of the base community happens at the periphery, away from the center, emerging from exteriority, in what Dussel calls “originative farness.”¹⁰

Here we have to pause and recognize that Dussel’s project, specifically his re-mapping of metaphysics and ontology “beyond” Being, is the expression of a specific *modality* of thinking. To understand this existential implication of the project, we are helped by the preliminary remarks Dussel made for his paper “La Etica,” which he delivered at El Congreso Del Educador Social in Barcelona in June 2001. In those remarks he situates his project as originating in the year 1973, when he was forced to leave his native Argentina: “Fui expulsado de la Universidad y de mi patria, y vivo en el exilio.”¹¹

Vivo en el exilio: I live in exile. I am from exile.

It appears possible [necessary] to philosophize in the periphery...only if the discourse of the philosophy of the center is not imitated, only if another discourse is discovered [made, formed]. To be different, this discourse must have another point of departure, must think other themes, must come to distinctive conclusions by a different method. This is the hypothesis.¹²

I want to turn, briefly, to this figure of the *exile thinker*, who is at one and the same time identified by Dussel as a prophet, hero, madman (*loco*), and outlaw.

The *exile thinker* – the liberation philosopher and theologian – *thinks* the call of the radical principle *with others* who move together *outside* the centers of power. This thinking is thus an enactment of the radical principle via the *making* of a counter-cultural community in the time and place of *exteriority*. This making is a movement, an *exodus*: movement away and movement from and movement along. It is a communal movement, *and* the movement of the community, “the movement of Jah people,” as Bob Marley sings.¹³

The exile thinker thinks in exile, but this thinking is always a collaborative *making* and *forming* of community. In this sense, the enactment of the radical principle is a *praxis*, and this *praxis* is *poietic*. Dussel writes: “When I speak of *praxis* (person-to-person relationship) I include also in this case *poiesis* (person-to-nature relationship). Because of this ... the praxis of liberation (a *practica poiesis* or a poietic praxis) is the act itself by which the horizon of the system is crossed over and one that really penetrates into the exteriority through which ... a new, more just social formation ... is constructed.”¹⁴

Exteriority is the time and place beyond Being, and is mapped by Dussel as unfolding in the shadow of Being.¹⁵ Exteriority is the clearing that opens in the beyond, in the nothing.. Hence *exile* thinking is occurring *ex nihilo*: from nothing. Exile thinking arises from the nothing that is properly mapped as “the nowhere,” the *ou topos* (utopia).

The *topos* (time/place) of exile, where thinking beyond Being occurs, is also the location where the intervention of prophecy unfolds. This is exile *qua* exteriority as *originative farness*, or the temporal situation of the prophet who speaks to the future from the past: the prophet speaks from the past to the future away from the center that is *in-between* past and future. The prophet lives in exile, but the old world from whence he was expelled still lays claim upon him. He is an *out-law*. As the voice of the community that is always in the process of moving, making, and forming, the prophet is also outside the law. As Dussel describes it, the ethical community, from whence arises the exile thinker – the prophet and outlaw – “refuses to comply with prevailing (moral) laws” that define the society. In turn, those who take up thinking in exile “will be *outlaws*.” And their work, he insists, is “the praxis of those delivered into the *wilderness* [which] is ‘*madness*’ for ‘*this world*.’”¹⁶ *This world, this society, the present*. Community is formed *ana-lectically* prior to *logos* (order, reason); it is antecedent to the law (*la ley*). The law here corresponds to any organized moral system that speaks *from outside the community*. The law is the logic of a static society (the present): “From exteriority, *ano -*, is produced the unfolding, *dia -*, of the comprehension of a new horizon, *logos*.”¹⁷

As Linda has shown, there are important applications to be made, via Dussel, not only to pedagogy (teaching/learning), but also, and more importantly, to *thinking* about pedagogy for philosophy of education. Again, we recognize here the application of the Dusselian agenda within the LAPES *proyecto* (project), which is happening *ex nihilo* and *ex exilio*, unfolding as a new community at the periphery, away from the center of philosophy of education as constituted by ‘established’ learned societies such as PES.

Towards the conclusion of *Philosophy of Liberation*, Dussel writes:

To think everything in the light of the provocative word of the people – the poor ... the child, the culturally dominated youth, the aged person discarded by consumer society – shouldering infinite responsibility and in the presence of the Infinite. This is the philosophy of liberation. Philosophy of liberation is a *pedagogical activity* that stems from a praxis that is rooted in the proximity of teacher-pupil, thinker-people (the organic intellectual, Gramsci would say, “the intellectual *in the people*.”) Although pedagogical, it is a *praxis*. Nevertheless, as pedagogical, its essence is *theoretical* or *speculative*. Theoretical action, the poetical intellectual illuminative activity of the philosopher, it sets out to discover and expose (and in the exposition, risks the life of the philosopher in the presence of an *entrenched system*). The project *exposes* all moments of negation and all exteriority lacking justice. For this reason it is an analectical pedagogy of liberation.¹⁸

In sum, the need, desire (*deseo*) to think through the idea of re-impacting a community way of life arises from the impoverishment of a thinking that, within the prevailing normative order, reduces the correspondence of philosophy and education to a pragmatic relation. This reduction, which dominates contemporary work in the field, is yet another example of the degeneration of *thought* in education, where

the means-end “outcomes” logic is the controlling system, and thus the standard against which so-called “philosophy of education” is measured and valued. Within such a system and the “learned” societies where it circulates, *poietic praxis* is pushed to the margins ... where it thrives! Indeed, what we hear when we listen attentively to Dussel’s project is the call to move away from *society* (perhaps the kind of learned “society” that we have constituted with PES?) and move into and along the periphery, to exteriority, the antecedent, where we take up a prophetic and outlaw philosophy of education. From that perspective of the prevailing social order – the present/society – prophetic and outlaw thinking will always appear *loco* (absurd, irrational, incomprehensible). Nevertheless, it is outlaw work because it refuses to comply with the prevailing norms (*la ley*), and, in contrast, *makes* a new way of being-together by responding to the fundamental need and desire for human community. Such *making* (*poietic praxis*) demands a return to the original location where the originary work unfolds.¹⁹ There, in that place of originary thinking, we can respond together (dia-logically) to the imperative that Dussel identifies when he writes: “We need neologisms”²⁰ And, finally, it is prophetic work because it is a leap ahead into a future that remains an open, fertile ground for free thinking: the path/way of human liberation.

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1. Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Social Research* 8, no. 4 (1941): 488-504, 490.
 2. Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 172.
 3. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 61.
 4. Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 50
 5. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, 16.
 6. Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?,” *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1958), 152.
 7. G.W.F. Hegel, “Introduction,” *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), § 26.
 8. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, 11.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 30.
 11. Enrique Dussel, “La Ética,” paper presented at the *Congreso Del Educador Social*, Barcelona, June 8, 2001, online at: <http://enriquedussel.com/works.html#>
 12. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 172-173.
 13. Bob Marley, “Exodus,” *Exodus* (New York: Island Records, 1977), track 5.
 14. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 63.
 15. Dussel writes: “Against the classic ontology of the center, from Hegel to Marcuse – to name the most brilliant from Europe and North America – a philosophy of liberation is rising from the periphery, from the oppressed, 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 no-sense. It is, then, a ‘barbarian’ philosophy.” Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 14.
 16. Dussel, *Ethics and Community*, 69.
 17. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 170.
 18. *Ibid.*, 178-179.
 19. Originary thinking is the “exile” project of philosophy of education that I have been working out for well over a decade. Cf. Eduardo Duarte *Being and Learning* (Sense: Rotterdam, 2012), and Eduardo

Duarte "Heidegger's Prognostic: Originary Thinking at the End of Philosophy of Education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 48, no. 8 (2016): 798-810.

20. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 167.