

A BRIEF NOTE ON PEDAGOGICS

Enrique Dussel

Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)

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Pedagogics of Latin American Liberation

Editors' note: With the permission of Enrique Dussel, the editorial team has produced an abbreviated version of Dussel's original talk. The transcription and translation were done by David I. Backer and Christopher Casuccio. Rafael Vizcaino edited the piece to center the topic of pedagogics and annotated it to help the reader navigate through the larger context of Dussel's oeuvre. Jason T. Wozniak and Fernando Villalovs offered editorial support.

After much thought on how to present, I said, "I will give a testimony." A type of special way of talking. It's not a "lecture", but a "talk."¹⁰⁵ I am part of a generation that needed to take many steps. And I would like to tell you how the path was taken, a path that is also a pedagogy. I wrote *La pedagógica latinoamericana* in 1972.¹⁰⁶ But I am not going to talk about that book. Instead I am going to situate it. What I want to talk about is how the path of liberation philosophy was born, and how *pedagogics* – which isn't the same as *pedagogy* – is part of liberation philosophy.¹⁰⁷ Pedagogics is a moment of a comprehension.¹⁰⁸

I was born in 1934, in a little village of 5,000 people in the middle of the Argentine desert. And why does pedagogics originate here, you may ask? In Argentina, we have a major pedagogical paradigm, the most influential in Argentina, which is represented by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Sarmiento's major work was called *Facundo*.¹⁰⁹ Sarmiento had a *pedagogical ideal*: to transform Argentina into a

¹⁰⁵ English in the original.

¹⁰⁶ Enrique Dussel, *La Pedagógica Latinoamericana* (Bogotá: Editorial Nueva América, 1980).

¹⁰⁷ See "An Argentine Political Decade (1966-76) and the Origin of Liberation Philosophy" in Enrique Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical World History*, trans. Thia Cooper (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ In the Translator's Preface to Dussel's *The Pedagogics of Liberation: A Latin American Philosophy of Education* (Punctum Books, forthcoming 2018), David I. Backer and Cecilia Diego write "'Pedagogics' should be considered as a type of philosophical inquiry alongside ethics, economics, and politics. Each of these words takes as its root a Greek term (like *ethos*), makes it an English compound adjective-noun ('ethic'), and then denotes a type of inquiry by turning the adjective-noun into a plural ('ethics'). The same goes for the Greek *paidegogos* in Dussel's lexicon, or *pedagógica*. Rendering this in English, we get a compound adjective-noun (pedagogic) and then a plural version of that term (pedagogics) to denote the corresponding philosophical field of inquiry. Reading 'pedagogics' should be like reading the word 'ethics,' or the other fields of inquiry just mentioned. Though this usage of 'pedagogics' is something of a neologism, it makes good sense given the scope of Dussel's inquiry and potentially provokes a new way of thinking about philosophy of education. As he says in the third sentence of 'Preliminary Words' in [his *Pedagogics of Liberation*]: 'pedagogics is different than pedagogy.' Pedagogy refers to the science of teaching and learning, while pedagogics 'is that part of philosophy which considers the face-to-face [encounter]'".

¹⁰⁹ Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Facundo: Or, Civilization and Barbarism*, trans. Mary Mann (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998).

modern, technological country modeled after the United States. For Sarmiento, it was necessary to develop Argentina. The worst thing Argentina had, was its colonial era, its Indigenous population, and the *gauchos*, which he even proposed to kill.¹¹⁰

There was an Argentine intellectual called Eduardo Mallea, who wrote a book titled *Historia de una pasión argentina*, who thought quite the opposite of Sarmiento.¹¹¹ He said the *gauchos* properly belong to Argentina, as do the *gaúchos* to Brazil and the *llaneros* to Colombia. Historically, however, they all came from Extremadura, the Maghreb, and the Arabian Desert. They were the *conquistadores* of the continent! Therefore, I said: to get to know my father (the patriarchal conquistador) I will need to travel to the Arabian Desert, and to get to know my mother (the Indigenous, *La Malinche*), I will need to go to Asia – the origin of our peoples is the far orient of the far orient!¹¹² In other words, I realized that to understand Latin America I needed to rewrite world history in its entirety.

So, in 1957 I had to start thinking about everything in a different manner. Leopoldo Zea argued that Latin America is outside of history.¹¹³ Zea and other intellectuals like Darcy Ribeiro and Francisco Romero problematized the idea of Latin America in a way that allowed me to begin to understand something about decolonization. Decolonization is above all epistemic. And if there is something we must start to reformulate, it is world history. Because the history that we teach is Eurocentric. This is already a fundamental pedagogical problem, a problem faced even by those who are talking about decolonization. The idea we have of history starts with Greece and Rome, and then moves to the Middle Ages

¹¹⁰ The *gauchos*, skilled horsemen of a racially mixed background, are one of the national symbols of Argentina. After Argentina consolidated itself independent from Imperial Spain, it continued the process of colonization by conquering the native inhabitants of South America that by then had been pushed to the desert regions. Thus, the fact that Dussel claims the origins of his pedagogics reside in the Argentine dessert is not merely anecdotal.

¹¹¹ Eduardo Mallea, *Historia de una pasión argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001).

¹¹² Enrique Dussel, *El humanismo semita: Estructuras intencionales radicales del pueblo de Israel y otros semitas* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1969); Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995).

¹¹³ Leopoldo Zea. *The Role of the Americas in History*, ed. Amy A. Oliver, trans. Sonja Karsen (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991).

and Modernity. This is true in the history of philosophy, philosophy of education, and pedagogy.

The German Romantics invented this ideology. They thought China was the origin of world history (though infantile), while India, Persia, Hellenism, and Rome were antiquity. Where are our *pueblos originarios*¹¹⁴ of America? Outside of history! They did not exist! The Incan Empire, the Aztec world, the Mayans – they are all absent in Hegel's vision.¹¹⁵ And who ends up ensuring that our *pueblos originarios* are present in history? Columbus? Please, do not insult me! I have been in Madurai (India), Nigeria, Berlin, New York, and everywhere in Latin America, and this is the history that is taught in all the schools: primary, secondary and university. An invention which places the Europeans at the center. So, we can talk about decolonization. But if we do not start to break the sciences and colonial epistemes apart, then we will keep believing the subject of history as it is currently taught.

For me the first era of world history was the Neolithic, which starts in Mesopotamia, which is to say: Iraq. Now, the barbarians of the twenty first century have destroyed a sacred city, Baghdad, which was the center of the world-system for at least five hundred years, from 756-1250 A.D. From Mesopotamia we know the Hammurabi Code which is critical thinking *par excellence*. When it says: "I have done justice with the widow," this is the problem of gender, the erotic. When it says: "I have done justice with the orphan," there is pedagogics! "I have done justice with the poor," is the economic. And "I have done justice with the foreigner," is geopolitics. This is critical thought three millennia before the Greeks. History starts much earlier than Athens, as so does philosophy. According to the university, philosophy – say Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle – started in Greece. Not true, it started in Egypt.

Starting to rewrite world history, I realized that there is a Latin American history that is not Eurocentric, where Latin America is part of world history – worldly, not "universal;" and we would call it "pluriversal"

¹¹⁴ This term refers to the indigenous communities of the Americas. While analogous, its connotations are different to those of "First Nations" or "Indigenous peoples," hence why the term is untranslated.

¹¹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

later on.¹¹⁶This was the thesis of the first class I taught as a professor. It was in a small Argentine university called Resistencia, where once a cow stuck its head into the classroom! Columbus came to America and so we study our pueblos originarios in the context of the Conquest. But we do not understand that these great Neolithic cultures had significant developments: mathematics, astronomy—they were extraordinary. Mayan astronomy was more advanced than European, than the Spanish astronomy of its era. We must reconsider this history.

These questions brought us to Augusto Salazar Bondy's question: Is it possible to do philosophy in an underdeveloped country?¹¹⁷ Salazar Bondy answers "no," because we do not have self-consciousness of our own history. But a group of us, about ten professors, said: "Yes! It is possible to do philosophy!" But doing philosophy would mean to study one's own negativity. To be dominated would be the point of departure. Our own philosophy would be one that would fight for liberation from domination. Liberation philosophy was thus born in 1970 in Argentina. In 1975, we began to publish under this project.

A new metaphysics of liberation emerges. Parmenides says: "Being is. Nonbeing is not." Heraclitus says: "Logos (reason) reaches the city walls;" the barbarians are outside the city walls. Hence, being is to be Greek; and to nonbeing is to be Asian, the barbarians in Macedonia. This Hellenocentrism is the forefather of Eurocentrism.¹¹⁸ This realization was for us the beginning of a new philosophy. Reading this in 1970 we said: "All of us, the colonized, Latin America, we are the nonbeing."

But this did not happen very quickly. The encounter with Levinas's philosophy was critical for us early on. Levinas was a Jew, and Jews were the persecuted Europeans within Europe. The Jew was a victim, the Other of Europe in Europe. Levinas says that the world Heidegger writes about is "my world" in a very particular sense. But Levinas

¹¹⁶ See Dussel's forthcoming *Siete nuevos ensayos de filosofía de la liberación*. The concept of "pluriversal" has also been theorized, in collaboration with Dussel, by Walter Mignolo, Linda Alcoff, and Ramón Grosfoguel, among others.

¹¹⁷ Augusto Salazar Bondy, *¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1969).

¹¹⁸ Enrique Dussel, *El humanismo helénico* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1976). See also Chapter one of Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquila Martínez and Christine Morkovsky (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

proposes a new category. If things manifest in my world (a chair, a microphone, etc), when someone else appears, this is not a thing like the others – it is *someone*. I can know [*conocer*] the other's race, weight, or height, but I do not know [*sé*] who they are: I do not know their story, or their project. I have to ask: What is your name? Where were you born? What do you think about doing? And the Other goes on to reveal *the exteriority of their being*. Nonbeing is real, the barbarian is human. This is the topic of *alterity*.

Now, some ideas on pedagogics. I think of pedagogics also as a world, a world of culture, a world of teaching, that closes in on itself. The pretension of every system is to encompass everything. The problem is when I think my interpretation of reality, in my world, is the only interpretation. And if I expect my particularity to be universal, I wipe out all the other particularities. (I am thinking of the critique of my *compañera* [Julieta Paredes] when she said that the word "totality" does not exist in Quechua or Aymara. I do think that the concept of *pacha* means totality. *Pacha*, as the universe is totality.) Such systems are pedagogical systems. And every system has a modern constitutive ego. *Ego cogito*, says Descartes. But before this *ego cogito*, Hernan Cortés utters *ego conquiro*. I conquer! It is a practical ego that situates the Other like a mediation, dominated and oppressed.¹¹⁹ In any system in the world, there is a constitutive I and a dominated I. It could be the system of gender or erotic love. For example, Freud says that sexuality is by nature masculine and women are its sexual objects. This is the problem of machismo.

What about pedagogics? The subject concerns generations, old and new. Humanity has always required that the preceding generation communicate its tradition and knowledge to the incoming generation. We must teach those who come, but we must teach them in a way related to what has been said above. Pedagogics works with the same categories outlined above. There is an ideological-pedagogical system of domination. That is what Paulo Freire calls banking education.¹²⁰ Why banking? Because it is like the bank, where I deposit my money

¹¹⁹ Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 34.

¹²⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1993).

and it later gives me interest. I put into the student's head the prior generation's knowledge and the student just repeats it to conserve the same. It is the return of the same as domination.¹²¹

Against such pedagogy of domination, what would a pedagogics of liberation be like? The Other, which could be the people, the child or the youth, or popular culture, interpellates the system. The Other must then be given a space to speak. A Semitic text says, "may I wake every morning with the ear of a disciple."¹²² Who prays for this? The teacher. The teacher must be the disciple of the disciple.¹²³ Why? Because the teacher does not know how the new generation is inhabiting the world that is no longer his. The teacher must learn the content of the youth's new projects. I will add to that a critical thought. Thus, a community where the teacher knows exactly how to teach the student to be critical about what the student already is must be cultivated.

The teacher should not say to an Indian student: "You do not know how to speak. Learn how to speak Spanish [*castellano*]." The student in this instance goes home and lets her parents know the teacher is telling her she must learn to speak, because she does not know how to. Her mother says: "But we speak our language." "Yes," the student replies, "but my teacher says that does not count." That is domination! But if the teacher tells the student: "You speak Quechua, Aymara, Maya, Otomí! I do not speak that language. You are bilingual, you are wiser than I am," then the student goes back home to let her mother know the teacher thought she was wise.

Thus, we must give strength to the new generation, the teacher must be a disciple of the disciple, therefore putting the system of domination

¹²¹ Here the influence of Levinas on Dussel's pedagogics is evident. For Levinas, the ontological totality reduces the other into the same, and the otherness of the other (exteriority) guarantees that the system as a totality can never be truly closed. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1969).

¹²² Isaiah 50:4.

¹²³ For Dussel, the affirmation of the Other's exteriority "requires a pedagogical transformation, *knowing how to listen* to the 'revealing' word of this Other beyond the system, a lived face-to-face praxis that cannot be expressed through the language of the existing system." See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Rafael Vizcaino, Jasmine Wallace, and Jeong Eun Annabel We, "Decolonizing Philosophy," forthcoming in *Decolonising the University: Context and Practice*, edited by Gurinder K. Bhambra, Kerem Nisancioglu, and Dalia Gebrial (forthcoming, 2018); see also Enrique Dussel, *Método para una filosofía de la liberación: Superación analéctica de la dialéctica hegeliana* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1974).

in question so that a new system can be organized. The object of critique in liberation philosophy is a fetishized system that the oppressed questions with their interpellation, rupturing such system so as to pass to a new one.¹²⁴ That diachrony is missing in almost all social sciences. Politics, for instance, is a system that eventually transforms into oppression, which then the people erupt, as Walter Benjamin would say, messianically.¹²⁵ This is because the messiah, in Hebrew משיח, is the one who confronts the system and breaks it, the one who provides the rupture. Thus, when Evo Morales says: "I exercise an obedient power," this is a new politics where the representative listens to the people [*pueblo*]. The politician in this case is not dominating. He is a servant [*siervo*].¹²⁶ (But we still must rethink twenty-first century socialism!)

We need to develop new categories, at all levels. Our grand task now is intercultural dialogue: with the Muslim world, with the Afro world, with the Hindu world, Southeast Asia, China. We need to start to discuss the problems of the Global South. For that reason, my latest book is about the philosophies of the South, decolonization, and transmodernity.¹²⁷ We are against very interesting circumstances and we will no longer ask the U.S. or Europe for permission to speak. We are beyond what they think. Those in the North often think only about 15% of the world. We in the South think about 100% of it. In this sense, I am very optimistic about the critical capacity of a thought that emerges from the *pueblos originarios*.

The horizon of my generation was to liberate ourselves from within Eurocentric thought. But now, there are new generations emerging that are doing their dissertations and theses on Mayan or Aztec

¹²⁴ The concept of the fetishization of power is clearly developed in Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. George Ciccarriello-Maher (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Throughout his entire work, however, Dussel has developed what he calls the method of anti-fetishism. See his *Philosophy of Liberation* and Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996).

¹²⁵ Walter Benjamin. "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

¹²⁶ See Enrique Dussel, *Política de la liberación. Vol II Arquitectónica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2009); and Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, 25.

¹²⁷ Enrique Dussel, *Filosofías del sur: Descolonización y Transmodernidad* (Mexico City: Akal, 2015).

thought, and I'm learning from these young people. I am learning. There are so many interesting myths within indigenous thought that can help us. These myths we must incorporate into the mestizo world, the white *criollo* world, and the urban world – we cannot isolate them in the countryside. For instance, we can learn from the Aymara community in the Bolivian countryside, or with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. The question is how to foster and nurture communities in cities that are plagued with crime, drugs, poverty, and corruption? This is a big problem that we cannot leave aside. We need to ask how pedagogy functions there. This is a struggle, but I believe we have a light that illuminates the path before us. ■