

THE UNDERSIDE OF MODERNITY:
ADORNO, HEIDEGGER, AND DUSSEL

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Theories or ideas, no matter how lofty, are not immune from historical circumstance: the latter often discloses what otherwise is left unsaid. Far from being an assortment of random data, history from this angle remains a great taskmaster—by teaching us about the complex ambivalences and unintended consequences of rational designs. The ideas of “modernity” and “enlightenment” are a prominent case in point. No one can doubt the loftiness and even intrinsic nobility of these labels. Basically, modernity (as understood in the West) was meant to inaugurate a new age of human freedom and self-determination, as contrasted with previous eras marked by political, clerical, and intellectual tutelage. In turn, enlightenment—in Kant’s memorable phrase—was meant to awaken humankind from the “slumber of self-induced immaturity” and ignorance, thereby paving the way for the undiluted reign of scientific knowledge and moral self-legislation. As history teachers, these and related ideas did indeed generate some of the desired results—but often in unforeseen ways and straddled with dubious or less noble implications. Like a deep shadow, these implications accompanied from the beginning the modern spreading of “light.” At the very onset of the new age, Francis Bacon proclaimed the equation of knowledge with power—thereby vindicating the prospect of human mastery over nature (as well as over less knowledgeable people). In the domain of politics and ethics, the modern maxim of freedom exacerbated a formula which Aristotle already had used against non-Greeks: “meet it is that barbarous peoples should be governed by the Greeks.”¹

The merits and demerits of modernity have been widely discussed in recent decades from a variety of angles (anti-modern, modernist, postmodern)—but often in a purely academic vein. Here again, historical circumstance demands its due. It was during the past (twentieth) century that some of the most disturbing and hideous connotations of the modern project of unlimited mastery came out into the open, and it was in response to these implications—manifest in fascism and Stalinist communism—that some of the most penetrating analyses of this project were formulated. In view of the hundredth anniversary of Theodor Adorno’s birth (1903), it is fitting that close attention should be given again to his critical work—particularly to the magisterial *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (written in collaboration with Max Horkheimer) and the *magnum opus* of his later years, *Negative Dialectics*. Roughly in the same historical context, another leading German thinker—Martin Heidegger—launched an equally devastating attack on the totalizing machinations of modern technology and modern politics (in writings which only recently have become available). The following pages start out by reviewing the arguments of these two thinkers, with an emphasis on both their similarities and their differences. With the demise of fascism and Stalinist communism, these arguments seem to have lost their contextual force; this, however, is far from being the case. Under the aegis of globalization, the totalizing ambitions of Western modernity are revealed today on a planetary scale: in the opposition between the hegemonic “North” and the dominated “South.” Speaking no longer from the European “center” of modernity but from the non-Western periphery—and drawing freely on the insights of Adorno and Heidegger—the Latin America Enrique Dussel has formulated a new critique of the modern project, a critique which—without denying its liberating potential—takes aim at the prospect of global mastery as the “underside of modernity.”

Adorno and Modernity’s “Dialectic”

Adorno’s life reflects the entire drama of his period. A co-founder of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research during the Weimar years, he—like many of his colleagues—was forced into exile by the rise of fascism in Germany. Under the impact of fascist policies, and especially the unfolding specter of the Jewish holocaust, Adorno came to realize the darkly sinister undertone of Western modernity—an awareness prompting him to temper the confident progressivism of his earlier years (inspired by Left-Hegelian ideas). To be sure, past history had always been punctuated by grim episodes of persecution

and oppression; however, what rendered contemporary politics distinctive was the totalizing or “totalitarian” reach of political control—a reach indebted in no small measure to the triumphant sway of modern rationality wedded to the Baconian motto of knowledge/power. Some of the dangers lurking in this motto were clearly exposed by Max Horkheimer, Adorno’s friend, in a study written during the war years and entitled *Eclipse of Reason*. Without simply abandoning modernity or the promises of enlightenment, Horkheimer’s text severely castigated the ongoing shrinkage of critical reason and self-reflection into a mere instrument of calculation and managerial control. To a larger extent, this shrinkage in his view could be traced to the Baconian (and Cartesian) split between subject and object, between rational knowledge and external matter or nature. The end result of this division, he noted, was on the one hand an “abstract ego emptied of all substance” except its will for self-preservation, and on the other, “an empty nature degraded to mere material, mere stuff to be dominated, without any other purpose than that of this very domination.”²

Themes of this kind were further explored and deepened by Horkheimer and Adorno during the same war-time period—an exploration which culminated in their epochal work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Here, as in Horkheimer’s text, the animus was not directed against reason and enlightenment as such—provided these labels preserved the connotation of critical understanding and self-reflection. As it happened, however, the unfolding scenario of modernity led to a steady curtailment of the latter in favor of a progressive congealment or “reification” of both rational knowledge and the empirical target of knowledge (the two poles of the subject-object split). According to the authors, the advancement of modern scientific knowledge basically heralded an exit or exodus—a largely welcome exodus—from primitive myth or an unreflective and oppressive “naturalism” (utterly opaque to human understanding); yet, precisely by virtue of this exodus and the resulting subjugation of nature, modern reason is in danger of being “re-mythologized” by turning into an instrument of unreflective power. Although the program of rational inquiry always entails in some way “the disenchantment of the world, the dissolution of myths, and the substitution of knowledge for fancy,” the process begins to boomerang when reason loses its critical edge by blending into “positivist” formulas. At this point, enlightenment reveals its own dark undercurrent, and social progress its complicity with regress. Here is a passage which eloquently expresses the authors’ concerns:

We are wholly convinced—and therein lies our *petitio principii*—that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought. Nevertheless, we believe just as clearly to have recognized that this very way of thinking—no less than the actual historical forms (the social institutions) with which it is interwoven—already contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today. If enlightenment does not allow reflection on this regressive element, it seals its own fate.³

In terms of the study, the regressive counterpoint of enlightenment—its dialectical underside—derives from the streamlining of rational thought into a calculating, instrumental form of rationality, a process which underscores the growing division between human beings and nature, between cognitive power and its external targets. Ever since the time of Bacon, Horkheimer and Adorno assert, cognitive rationality has shown a “patriarchal” face: by conquering superstition, human reason is meant to “hold sway over the disenchanted nature.” In the course of modernity or modernization, this patriarchal legacy has led to a steady widening of the rift between *res cogitans* (thinking subject) and *res extensa* (extended matter)—which coincides with the gulf between inside and outside, between logical form and substantive content. On the internal or “subjective” side, the *cogito* in modernity tends to be stylized into a sovereign selfhood, a self-contained “identity” which ejects from itself all forms of otherness as modes of alienation and reification; in large measure, modern freedom or “emancipation” has this connotation of self-recovery or self-possession. It is only through this retreat into inwardness, the text states, that individuals gain “self-identity,” a selfhood that cannot be “dissipated through identification with others” but “takes possession of itself once and for all behind an impenetrable mask.” The upshot of this development is the radical subordination of matter to mind, of nature—both internal and external nature—to the dictates of a

rationally emancipated humankind. As the authors add intriguingly, in a foray into political theology: “Systematizing reason and the creator-God resemble each other as rulers of nature. Man’s likeness to God consists in the sovereignty over the world, in the countenance of mastery, and in the ability to command.”⁴

In the modern era, the streamlining effect of cognitive rationality was first evident in the sequence of grand philosophical “systems”—all intent on grasping the universe as a whole. Later, the same tendency surfaced in social-scientific systems, especially in functional-sociological models pretending to capture the totality of social life. In the authors’ words: “From the start, enlightenment recognizes as real occurrence only what can be apprehended in rational unity; its ideal is the ‘system’ from which all and everything follows.” The primary means for accomplishing this unity—a means extolled especially by positivism and the “unified science” movement—is number, that is, the reduction of all qualitative differences to quantitative measurement. “Number,” we read, “became the canon of enlightenment: the same equations govern bourgeois [abstract] justice and economic commodity exchange.” In expelling or cleansing itself of qualitative differences, cognitive rationality inevitably prepared the ground for the “systematization” or homogenization of social life and thus for the establishment of increasingly effective social controls and disciplines. At the same time, the priority of number or formal calculus promoted a distinctive kind of social and intellectual hierarchy (or patriarchy). By defining knowledge or “truth” as the primacy of universal form over particular content, of rational system over non-rational experience, modern rationality exacted a price: namely, the alienation of reason from the target of knowledge or, more precisely, the isolation of reason from possible learning experiences induced by its targets. Among these learning experiences are the lessons provided by human sensuality and affectivity (that is, the realm of “inner” nature). From the vantage of modern rationality, Horkheimer and Adorno state, sensuality and instinct are “as mythical as superstitions” (and hence subject to the same exorcism), while the idea of serving a God not constructed by the rational self is considered “as irrational as drunkenness.”⁵

As in Horkheimer’s text, exposing the “dialectic of enlightenment” was not meant as a plea for primitivism or nostalgic regression. Some help in avoiding the twin dangers of regression and rational triumphalism could be found in Hegelian dialectics, and particularly in his notion of “determinate negation.” With that notion, Horkheimer and Adorno affirm, Hegel “revealed an element that separates [genuine] enlightenment from the positivist decay with which he lumps it together.” Yet, this endorsement is qualified: by ultimately “absolutizing” the outcome of dialectics—namely, his own system of totalizing synthesis—Hegel himself “contravened the prohibition (of images) and lapsed into mythology.” As a result, the authors recommend a more subdued, post-Hegelian dialectics—but one clearly geared toward the healing or reconciliation of modern divisions. To be sure, hope could not be pinned on magical formulas or instant solutions. Only through critical reflection—one mindful of its tendential complicity with power—was reason able to break the spell of (ancient or modern) mythology and reification. Only in this manner was reason capable of regaining its liberating élan: an élan whereby enlightenment transcends domineering rationality by regaining access to a nature “which becomes perceptible in its otherness or alienation.” Thus, a healing of modern divisions is at least initiated (if not competed) through radical self-reflection pushing beyond instrumentalism—more boldly phrased: through a “recollection of nature in the rational subject,” a remembrance which holds the key to the “truth of all culture.” As the authors conclude, enlightenment fulfills and “sublates” itself when the means-ends nexus is suspended—at the point where the “nearest practical ends” reveal themselves as the “most distant goal” and where repressed nature is remembered as the “land of origin” as well as the portent of an “unmanageable” hope.⁶

Qualified endorsement of Hegelian dialectics is the hallmark also of Adorno’s later writings, particularly his sprawling *Negative Dialectics*. “Qualified” here means acceptance of healing mediations *minus* resort to the “absolute” or to any kind of comprehensive or totalizing synthesis. It is this *minus* feature which renders genuine dialectics “negative”: namely, by confining itself to the determinate negation of existing ills and divisions while radically refusing to portray and conceptually define a fully reconciled utopia. One of Adorno’s main complaints here is directed at Hegel’s relentless rationalism or

“conceptualism”: his effort to bring all experience under the domineering sway of concepts (culminating in the “absolute” concept or idea). Although recognizing experiential “otherness,” he remonstrates, Hegel’s system tended to “pre-think” and conceptually pre-arrange every concrete particularity, with the result that the diversity of phenomena was streamlined into a grand, holistic synthesis governed by reason. Proceeding in this manner, Hegelian dialectics ultimately reduced concrete phenomena to mere “exemplars of concepts” while confining reason to the rehearsal of its own categories. In Adorno’s view, the only way to rupture this self-enclosure is through thought’s attentiveness to non-thought or reason’s turn toward the (conceptually) “non-identical”—which precludes any premature synthesis. Only in this manner is reason able to regain (in Hegel’s own terms) its “freedom toward the object,” a freedom lost under the spell of the subject’s “meaning-constituting” or meaning-imposing autonomy. Basically, philosophy’s genuine concern in our times, he adds, is with those matters in which Hegel (following a long philosophical or metaphysical tradition) expressed little or no interest: namely, “non-conceptuality, singularity, and particularity”—things which ever since Plato have been dismissed as “transitory and insignificant,” as a “*qualité négligeable*.”⁷

According to Adorno’s text, the corrective to Hegel’s conceptual system is the rigorous insistence on non-totality, that is, on the inescapable “non-identity” between reason and its targets, between concepts and the world (or the stubborn excess of the latter over the former). “To change the direction of conceptuality, to turn it toward non-identity,” we read, “is the hinge or emblem of negative dialectics.” Tied to traditional metaphysics, idealist philosophy offered only a truncated dialectics which ultimately was unable to come to grips with modern social dilemmas and divisions. Basically, in its idealist version, dialectics was tied to the “sovereign subject” as the source of rational conceptualization—an outlook which now has become “historically obsolete,” given that none of the idealist formulas have stood the test of time. Under present circumstances, Adorno argues, only a negative dialectics holds out both intellectual and social promise: by being attentive to the “otherness” or underside of reason as well as to the social political underside of modernity, the legions of marginalized and oppressed peoples at its fringes. In his stark formulation, traditional idealism by privileging the *cogito* (or subjectivity) only “spiritualized” the Darwinian struggle for survival, thus reinstating or confirming a repressive naturalism. By proclaiming itself the Baconian master and even idealist “maker” of all things, the modern epistemological *cogito* inevitably entangled itself in the nexus of power/knowledge: “In exerting mastery it becomes part of what it believes to master, succumbing like the lord” (in the Hegelian master-slave relationship).⁸

In departing from the idealist legacy, negative dialectics counters not only speculative illusions but also the nexus of domination prevailing in modernity with regard to both nature and society. In relinquishing the primacy of the *cogito* (or subjectivity), such a dialectics is able to confront the power/knowledge nexus which, in modernity, pits against each other reason and experience, humanity and nature, privileged or dominant and oppressed populations. As Adorno writes, dialectical thinking “respects that which is to be thought—the object or target of knowledge—even where the latter exceeds or does not heed the rules of formal logic.” Differently phrased: such a thinking is able “to think against itself without self-cancellation or self-erasure.” Proceeding along these lines, negative dialectics extricates itself from the modified Darwinism of traditional idealist thought, by allowing things “to be” and by giving a hearing to voices otherwise excluded by modern reason. In Adorno’s words, attention to the underside of reason means a willingness to “heed a potential slumbering in things” and thereby “make amends” to them for its own incursions. This “potential slumbering in things” is the domain of otherness or difference—a domain captured in Josef Eichendorff’s phrase of “beautiful strangeness” (*schöne Fremde*). As he concludes:

The hoped-for state of reconciliation would not annex the alien through an act of philosophical imperialism. Instead, its happiness would consist in allowing it to remain distant and different even in proximate surroundings, beyond the pale of both heterogeneity and sameness or identity.⁹

Heidegger and Modern “Machinations”

The relation between Adorno and Heidegger is complex and hard to disentangle; probably for this very reason it is infrequently discussed in the literature.¹⁰ Some of the differences between the two thinkers are relatively easy to pinpoint, having to do mainly with their respective life stories and intellectual backgrounds. As indicated, Adorno’s life story was relatively turbulent, leading him from Weimar Germany into the New World (New York and California) and finally back to Frankfurt after the war. By comparison, Heidegger’s personal life was relatively sheltered, being spent for the most part in and around Freiburg and the Black Forest region. In terms of intellectual background, Adorno drew his inspiration chiefly from Left Hegelianism and aspects of humanist Marxism; by contrast, Heidegger’s intellectual pedigree is of *longue durée*, stretching from the Pre-Socratics via Aristotle to Husserlian phenomenology and hermeneutics. The most obvious difference, of course—and the one most widely debated—has to do with their respective response to 1933 and its aftermath. Yet, it is precisely in this regard that initial impressions and popular assessments may be thoroughly misleading and hence in need of revision. During recent years, several writings have become available which Heidegger wrote in the decade following 1933, that is, during the apogee of the Nazi regime. Far from showing a continued attachment to this regime, these writings on the contrary reveal Heidegger’s steady estrangement—or what one may call his “inner emigration”—from the hegemonic powers of his time. With growing intensity, his opposition is directed at the totalizing or totalitarian features of the regime, features which in no small part derive from modernity’s infatuation with “making” and domineering fabrication—what Heidegger calls “*Machenschaft*.”

The texts from the Nazi period which recently became available are mainly three: *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Contributions to Philosophy) of 1936; *Besinnung* (Meditative Thinking) of 1938-1939; and *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (The History of Being) of 1939-1940. Taken together, the texts give evidence of a profound intellectual drama that Heidegger underwent during this period—a drama that is customarily described as his “*Kehre*” or “turning” (labels which should not be taken as synonyms for a reversal or simple “turning away,” but rather as signposts of a deepening and more intensive “turning toward” primary philosophical concerns). Of the three texts, the first is the most voluminous and also the dramatically most ambitious, setting forth an entire, detailed trajectory of intellectual and existential transformation and reorientation. This trajectory basically leads from the condition of modernity anchored in knowledge/power and the domineering designs of the *cogito* in the direction of a freer and more generously open mode of co-being among humans and between humans and the world (guided by “letting-be”). The text is challenging and provocative not only philosophically, but also on a more mundane, political level. Taking direct aim at National Socialism and its motto of “total mobilization,” Heidegger comments that such a “total (or totalizing) worldview” must “close itself off against the probing of its own ground and the premises of its actions,” and it must do so because otherwise “total ideology would put itself into question.” It is in connection with this critique that the term “*Machenschaft*” surfaces prominently—and with starkly pejorative connotations. The rise of worldviews to predominance, Heidegger notes, is a result of modern metaphysics, and in that context “worldview basically means *Machenschaft*,” that is, a mode of contrived “machination” where creative praxis is replaced by organized “business” (*Betrieb*) and managerial control.¹¹

Elaborating on this point, the text links the term with the modern prevalence of “making” (*Machen, poiesis, techné*), a making seen not solely as a form of human conduct, but as a distinct type of ontological disclosure. In modernity, Heidegger points out, *Machenschaft* is promoted by the sway of science and technology that renders everything “makeable” (*machbar*). Under these auspices, the instrumental cause-effect nexus becomes all-dominant, though in varying guises: “Both the mechanistic and the biologicistic worldviews are only consequences of the underlying *machenschaftlich* interpretation of being.” Preceded by biblical accounts of creation (construed as fabrication), the modern rise of *Machenschaft* was decisively inaugurated by the Cartesian *cogito*, especially by Descartes’ equation of *ens creatum* with *ens certum* (fixed, determined being). Subsequently, this approach was further solidified by the advances of mathematical physics and technology (*Technik*), a process leading to the

progressive technical-calculating management of the world and its resources. Against this background, Heidegger asks “What is *Machenschaft*?” and responds: “It is the system of complete explanatory calculability whereby every being is streamlined and uniformly equated with every other being—and thereby alienated, and more than alienated, from itself” (or its own distinctive potential). As he further elaborates, calculability and anonymous sameness are curiously allied in *Machenschaft* with something seemingly very different: namely, subjective feeling or emotion (*Erlebnis*). But the contrast is only apparent because anonymity and subjectivism are only two sides of the same coin: the cognitive and the emotive sides of the ego. Both reveal the subject’s incapacity for self-transformation and its “oblivion of being.”¹²

Jointly with the critique of *Machenschaft*, *Beiträge* also offers intriguing reflections on the meaning of “power,” “violence,” and related terms. Departing from an earlier ambivalent usage, the text stipulates a series of definitions with clearly demarcated contours. Closely associated with *Machenschaft* are the two terms “power” (*Macht*) and “violence” (*Gewalt*). In Heidegger’s formulation, violence (*Gewalt*) signifies the willful but impotent attempt to change things or conditions without deeper insight or ontological attunement: “Wherever change is sought by ‘ontic’ means alone (*Seiendes durch Seiendes*), violence is needed.” Power (*Macht*) stands purely in the service of willful machination and signifies “the ability to secure the control of possibilities of violence.” In sharp contrast to these terms, *Beiträge* mentions “authoritative rule” (*Herrschaft*) as a mode of ontological potency or capability deriving its authority from its liberating openness to “being.” “Herrschaft,” Heidegger writes, “is the need of freedom for freedom” and happens only “in the realm of freedom”; its greatness consists in the fact “that it has no need of power or violence and yet is more potent (*wirksamer*) than they.” Such liberating and non-manipulative *Herrschaft* is impossible under the reign of modern worldviews, especially totalizing worldview-ideologies, which have no room for human freedom and level everything into the uniform system of *Machenschaft*. Under the auspices of this system, human beings individually and people at large are reduced to mere resources of power, and the only issue is the preservation and enhancement of their utility. The only way for *Dasein* and people to live genuinely and freely, *Beiträge* insists, is through an act of self-transcendence or self-transformation (ek-stasis) that is simultaneously an act of self-finding, highlighted by the term “*Ereignis*.” For *Ereignis* means basically the chiasm or entwinement between humans and the openness of “being” (or the divine), a differentiated and needful encounter which opens up the prospect of the arrival of “the godhead of the other God” (*die Gottheit des anderen Gottes*).¹³

The critique of totalizing and domineering *Machenschaft* was further sharpened in the book titled *Besinnung*. As in the case of *Beiträge*, the text can be read both on a recessed, philosophical and a more mundane, political level—although the two levels are closely interlaced. Philosophically, *Besinnung* urges a more reflective re-thinking of human being-in-the-world, a re-thinking opening human hearts and minds again to the “call of being” (which guides them into a more careful and caring mode of living). As before, Heidegger dwells on the meaning of *Machenschaft* and its relation to *Macht* and *Gewalt*. “*Machenschaft*,” he reiterates, “means the all-pervasive and totalizing ‘makeability’ of everything” and the general routine acceptance of this process in such a way that “the unconditional calculability of everything is assured.” In pursuing its leveling and domineering path, *Machenschaft* employs violence (*Gewalt*) and the latter is stabilized through the “secure possession of power (*Macht*)” aiming at universal or total subjugation. In modernity, the text continues, the aims of *Machenschaft* are promoted and abetted by technology (*Technik*) which reduces human beings to mere empirical resources whose value is assessed purely in terms of utility or productivity. It is in this context that Heidegger launches an attack on the *Führer* himself who, in address to the *Reichstag* in 1939 had made this statement: “There is no stance or attitude (*Haltung*) which would not receive its ultimate justification from its utility for the totality (of the nation).” Reacting angrily to this statement, Heidegger raises a number of acerbic questions, such as the following: What is the “totality” that is postulated here? What is the “utility” of an attitude or outlook, and by what standard is it to be judged? Does the entire statement not signify “the

denial of the basic questionability (*Fraglichkeit*) of human *Dasein* with regard to its hidden relation to being” (and its care)?¹⁴

Moving beyond the critique of *Machenschaft*, *Besinnung* offers glimpses of a radically “other” possibility: namely, the reflective recovery of the question of and care for being, a care completely immune to managerial manipulation. As before, Heidegger distinguishes between power and violence, on the one hand, and genuine “authority” (*Herrschaft*), on the other. “Apart from exuding intrinsic dignity or worth,” he writes, “*Herrschaft* means the free potency or capacity for an original respect for being” (rather than merely empirical things). To characterize this dignity, *Besinnung* introduces a new vocabulary, by presenting being (*Sein*) as a basically “power-free domain (*das Machtlose*) beyond power and non-power or impotence (*jenseits von Macht und Unmacht*).” As Heidegger emphasizes, “power-free” does not mean powerless or impotent, because the latter remains fixated on power, now experienced as a lack. From an everyday “realist” angle, being’s realm may appear powerless or impotent; but this is only a semblance or illusion resulting from its reticent inobtrusiveness. Due to its reticence, being’s realm can never be dragged into human machinations, into the struggles between the powerful and the powerless (as long as the latter merely seek power); but precisely in this manner it reveals its *Herrschaft*, a reign that “cannot be matched by any power or superpower because they necessarily ignore the nature of the *basically* power-free possibility.” To be sure, access to this reign is difficult and radically obstructed by the *Machenschaft* of our age. Yet, an important pathway through and beyond these obstructions is offered by meditative thinking (*Besinnung*) which opens a glimpse into the “time-space-play” (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*) of being as *Ereignis*, that is, into the interplay and differential entwining of being and beings, of humans, nature, and the divine.¹⁵

Themes and insights of this kind are carried forward in *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, a series of texts dating from the onset of World War II. Politically, the texts are still more nonconformist and rebellious than preceding writings—an aspect largely attributable to their grim context. Central to the volume is again the critique of *Machenschaft* defined as a made of being that “pushes everything into the mold of ‘makeability’.” As before, *Machenschaft* is intimately linked with the glorification of power (*Macht*), and the latter is anchored ultimately in “will” to power and in “unconditional subjectivity” (a chief trait of modern metaphysics). To effectuate its rule, power relies on violence (*Gewalt*) as its chief instrument. When violence or brutality becomes predominant, matters are starkly simplified: everything is geared toward the “unconditional annihilation (*Vernichtung*) of opposing forces by unconditional means.” The unleashing of brutal violence carries in its train the “devastation” (*Verwüstung*) of everything with the result that a “desert” (*Wüste*) spreads where nothing can grow any longer—especially not thoughtfulness and care for being. A particularly vivid and harrowing sign of this devastation is the hankering for warfare—a warfare that, due to the totalizing ambitions of *Machenschaft*, now turns into “total war” (*totaler Krieg*). Given the steadily widening range of modern technology and weaponry, Heidegger adds somberly, the relentless struggle for power and more power necessarily leads to “unbounded or limitless wars (*grenzenlose Kriege*) furthering the empowerment of power.” Unsurprisingly, such wars ultimately take the form of “world wars” in the service of a globally unleashed *Machenschaft*.¹⁶

As an antidote or counterpoise to these trends, the texts refer again to the possibility of “authoritative rule” (*Herrschaft*). However, in view of its lingering proximity to power, the term now appears sufficiently suspect to Heidegger that he is willing to drop it (in favor of an unmitigated “power-free” realm). The sharpened denunciation or distantiation from *Macht* is paralleled by an intensification of political polemics. *Die Geschichte des Seyns* openly ridicules fascist leaders for their self-glorification as “mighty rulers” (*Machthaber*) whose great achievement resides in their “seizure of power” (*Machtergreifung*). Leaders, Heidegger states, are never “possessors of power” (*Machthaber*) but rather puppets in the grip of *Macht* and *Machenschaft*; they cannot “seize” or “possess” power because they are “possessed by it” (in the manner of an obsession). The texts also critique National Socialism directly by debunking its chosen terminology. Drawing on his argument that modernity is marked by “unconditional subjectivity,” Heidegger comments that “the consequence of this subjectivity is the ‘nationalism’ of nations and the ‘socialism’ of the people (*Volk*).” Proceeding even more boldly, the texts raise the issue

of political and moral responsibility. Despite the fact that power cannot be “possessed” but operates obsessively, the book does not hesitate to link power and violence with “criminality” (*Verbrechen*). Given the unleashing of *Machenschaft* and unconditional global warfare, Heidegger asserts, our age also produces “the great criminals” (*die grossen Verbrecher*)—criminals whose misdeeds far exceed ordinary human guilt and who, in fact, can be described as “global master criminals” (*planetarische Hauptverbrecher*). As he adds: “There is no punishment which would be sufficiently great to punish these criminals.”¹⁷

Dussel and Transmodernity

Roughly half a century has passed since the time of Adorno’s and Heidegger’s major writings. In the meantime, the world has dramatically changed. With the destruction of the Nazi regime, fascism—at least in its overt totalitarian guise—has passed from the scene. With the demise of the Soviet Union, Soviet-style totalitarianism likewise has disappeared. However, appearances are deceiving. In new guises and under new labels *Macht* and *Machenschaft* continue to haunt the world. Under the aegis of globalization, totalizing ambitions are no longer limited to intra-societal domination but have acquired global or planetary dimensions. As a result, social and political divisions are no longer confined to domestic class conflicts but assume the character of a global divide: that between developed and developing societies, between North and South, between center and periphery. Given the enormous accumulation of technological, military, and economic power in the “developed” hemisphere, the divide readily translates into the hegemonic domination of the North over the South or—in Samuel Huntington’s phrase—of the “West” over the “Rest.” In this situation, the dialectic of enlightenment and modernity is bound to be most intensely experienced by its victims or “subaltern” targets: ordinary people and intellectuals living at the borders or margins of development. One of the most eloquent and trenchant contemporary intellectuals hailing from the South is the Argentinian-Mexican Enrique Dussel whose name is closely linked with the (so-called) “philosophy of liberation.” For present purposes, the discussion will be limited to two of his major texts: *The Invention of the Americas* (of 1992) and *The Underside of Modernity* (of 1996).

In terms of intellectual background, Dussel’s work has been strongly influenced by a number of European writers: ranging from Marx, Gramsci, and Adorno to Heidegger, Ricoeur, and Levinas. From Marx he derived insight into the dynamics of economic class conflicts and their progressive globalization under neo-liberal capitalist auspices—although he carefully steered clear of any type of determinism (an aspect linking him with Gramsci). From Adorno he learned about the “mythical” feature of Western modernity, and also about the need to avoid the totalizing ambitions of Hegel’s conceptual dialectics. Connections with Heidegger’s writings are particularly pronounced. With the latter he shares, among other things, the emphasis on concretely situated human existence, on finite *Dasein* as “being-in-the-world”—where “world” is not external to, but co-constitutive of human being (in contrast to the Cartesian legacy). Like Ricoeur and Gadamer, Dussel is committed to hermeneutics or hermeneutical interpretation, deriving from the conviction that seeing is always a “seeing as” and action an imagining or “shaping as” inspired by sedimented memories and pre-judgments. In pursuing his intellectual path, Dussel in recent years was also deeply drawn to the teachings of Emmanuel Levinas—although the latter never fully eclipsed his earlier philosophical moorings. What attracted him in Levinas’s work was especially the debunking of egocentrism, that is, the insistence on non-totality in the sense of an openness to the ethical demands of the “Other,” especially the marginalized and disadvantaged—a debunking which clearly resonates with Adorno’s stress on non-identity and Heidegger’s accent on self-transcendence. What emerged from this confluence of intellectual mentors is a “philosophy of liberation” particularly attentive to “third world” needs or (in a different formulation) an “ethical hermeneutics” taking its departure from the vantage of the oppressed (paralleling the “preferential option for the poor” favored by liberation theology).¹⁸

The full title of the first study mentioned above is *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the “Other” and the Myth of Modernity*. The title immediately announces the book’s central target: the rise of “Eurocentrism” manifest in the West’s totalizing hegemonic ambitions. For Dussel, the “birthdate of

modernity” was 1492, that is, the discovery and ensuing conquest of the Americas. While foreshadowed by some tendencies of the later Middle Ages, he writes, modernity “came to birth in Europe’s confrontation with the Other: by controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as discoverer, conquistador, and colonizer of an alterity that was likewise constitutive of modernity.” Using language borrowed in part from Horkheimer and Adorno, he adds: “Modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European.” Although insisting on the tensional relation between Europe and its “Other”—or between the “West” and the “Rest”—Dussel does not erect the conflict into an unbridgeable or incommensurable gulf. The relation for him remains dialectical—but not in the sense of Hegel’s dialectic where the “Other” is ultimately absorbed in a higher synthesis. One of Dussel’s distinctive contributions is the notion of an “analectical” mode of reasoning and interacting, a mode which preserves the linkage between dialectics and (a certain kind of) dialogue. As he writes at one point: Analectics designates a method “which begins from the Other as free, as one beyond the system of totality; which begins, then, from the Other’s word, from the revelation of the Other, and which, trusting in the Other’s word, labors, works, serves, and creates.” Although favoring dialogue, analectics does not end in a bland consensualism but respects the gap or difference (*dia*) between self and other, between oppressor and oppressed, shunning the temptation of a totalizing synthesis: “I want to develop a philosophy a dialogue as part of a philosophy of liberation of the oppressed, the excommunicated, the excluded, the Other.”¹⁹

For Dussel, liberation of the oppressed does not involve a brute struggle for power—which would only lead to the replacement of one type of oppression by another. In line with the idea of an “ethical hermeneutics,” his aim is not only to liberate the oppressed and excluded, but also to liberate the oppressor from their desire to oppress—thus ultimately appealing to a latent ethical potential. It is in this respect that Dussel invokes the example of Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish cleric who, at the time of the conquest of the Americas, denounced the violence of the conquistadors, but without endorsing simple counter-violence or the unleashing of totalizing carnage. As he writes in *The Invention of the Americas*, it was Las Casas who, in traveling in the New World, had a transformative experience: he “underwent tutelage at the hands of the oppressed and learned to admire the beauty, culture, and goodness of the indigenous, the new, the Other.” In a Levinasian sense, Las Casas discovered in the Americas an ethics which is not abstractly imposed but arises from the concrete encounter with the “face” of indigenous peoples; and “out of his love” for them he launched his critique of their oppression, while pleading for a different, “analectical” mode of interaction. Proceeding to a more general level, the text crisply pinpoints the preconditions of a non-imperialist dialogue applicable to our present time. The idea of such a dialogue, Dussel writes, should not lapse into “the facile optimism of a rationalist, abstract universalism” which merely imposes Eurocentric standards on the rest of the world. At the same, it must steer clear of the quagmire of “irrationality, incommunicability, or incommensurability” which is merely the flip-side of Eurocentrism. What is needed instead is the fostering of an alternative or analectical reason open to the traumas of exclusion and oppression, on outlook which should “deny the irrational sacrificial myth of modernity” while simultaneously affirming “the emancipative tendencies of the enlightenment and modernity within a new transmodernity.”²⁰

The second study cited above—*The Underside of Modernity*—radicalizes the critique of Eurocentric modernity by inserting this critique into the broader parameters of the ongoing process of globalization. Arguing against some recent Western thinkers (like Habermas and Charles Taylor), Dussel insists that the meaning of modernity cannot be solely found in the “discourse of modernity” or in the Western “sources of the self.” Despite certain triggering factors operating within the geographical confines of Europe, modernity also has broader connotations—which makes it possible to distinguish between its purely “Eurocentric” and its “global or planetary” significance. What the latter dimension reveals is the role of modernity “as *center* of a global process” where the center elevates itself with reference to the global “periphery” (which is variously called colonial, neo-colonial, under-developed, “third world,” and now South). Notwithstanding the influence of Reformation, European enlightenment, and revolution, the text asserts, modernity in its broader reach was born “when Europe begins its

expansion beyond its historical limits.” At this juncture, Europe “arrives in Africa, in India and Japan, thanks to Portugal; in Latin America and from there in the Philippines, thanks to the Spanish conquest.” While Europe thus establishes itself as “center” and vanguard, other societies and cultures are deprecated as “immature, barbarous, underdeveloped.” It is thus that the “second moment” of modernity—its other side or underside—is inaugurated: no longer as “an emancipatory rational nucleus” but as “an irrational sacrificial myth.” Although most empires in the past considered themselves as centers of a certain geographical context, the situation is changed in modernity because of the latter’s global reach: “Only *modern* European culture, from 1492 onwards, became the center of a world system, of a global or universal history that confronts (with various forms of subsumption and exteriority) *all the other cultures of the world*—cultures that now will be militarily dominated as its periphery.”²¹

According to Dussel, the (Habermasian) notion of a “discourse of modernity” is flawed not only because of its Eurocentric focus, but also because of its very restricted scope of possible “counter-discourses” (which cannot be limited to Nietzsche and postmodernism). In contrast to the stress on recent, intra-European skirmishes, the text insists that the idea of a “counter-discourse” to modernity is already five centuries old: it began on the Hispaniola Island “when Anton de Montesinos attacked the injustices that were being committed against the Indians” and from there extended to the classrooms of Salamanca, to the work of Bartolomé de las Casas and the lectures of Francisco de Vitoria. Here, the importance of the periphery comes into view. For, Bartolomé de las Casas “would not have been able to criticize Spain without having resided in the periphery, without having heard the cries and lamentations, and without having seen the tortures that the Indians suffered at the hands of the colonizing Europeans.” For Dussel, it is the “others” in the periphery that constitute the real source and impetus of modern counter-discourses (even in the European center). Hence, for philosophers and intellectuals, the study of Latin America, of Africa and Asia is not “an anecdotal task” or a residual pastime. Rather, it involves historical “truth and justice”; it is a matter of remembering a history that “*rescues* the non-hegemonic, dominated, silenced, and forgotten counter-discourse, namely, that of the constitutive alterity or underside of modernity itself.” Henceforth, the study of philosophy or the history of ideas can no longer be confined to a Western canon. What is demanded by our time—the age of globalization—is the development of “a new global vision of philosophy,” one which will reveal hitherto unsuspected dimensions once the “rich thematic of the *refraction* of the center in or by the periphery” is perceived as the untapped and perhaps inexhaustible heritage or patrimony of the entire world.²²

As formulated by Dussel, the “philosophy of liberation” is one of the prominent counter-discourses of our time. It stands in the tradition of “critical philosophy”—though it moves beyond Kant’s transcendental formalism in the direction of a greater awareness of its historical and social situatedness. It is a philosophy “born in the periphery” but with “global or planetary aspirations.” Such a philosophical outlook, Dussel asserts, must always ask first of all “who is situated in the exteriority of the [dominant] system” or “in the system as an alienated, oppressed segment.” In line with negative dialectics and its notion of non-identity, liberation philosophy rejects all forms of totalizing synthesis, in the realization that “all totalities can be fetishized”—regardless of whether one deals with political totalities (such as imperial regimes) or cultural totalities (such as “Judaean-Christian civilization” or the “American way of life”).²³ In support of this outlook, the text repeatedly invokes the teachings of Heidegger and Adorno, supplemented by some Levinasian insights. Basically, we read, the approach started from “Heideggerian phenomenology” and from “the Frankfurt School at the end of the sixties,” and then turned to Levinas because of his stress on “exteriority” and non-totality. More specifically, the point of departure was the “later Heidegger’s” concern with “*Lebenswelt*” (world of daily life) and the concrete situatedness of human existence (being-in-the-world). In the case of Adorno, the main sources of inspiration were the notions of “negative dialectics,” “myth of modernity,” and “dialectic of enlightenment” (all reinterpreted from the angle of periphery). Amplified by some further ideas, what all these precedents bring into view is a difficult course between affirmation and empty rejection. Taking up a central point of the earlier study, Dussel states:

Liberation philosophy criticizes the “sacrificial myth” of modernity as irrational, albeit presupposing and preserving its “rational emancipatory nucleus,” thereby also transcending modernity itself. Our project of liberation can be neither anti- nor pre- nor post-modern, but instead must be transmodern. This is . . . the condition of all possible philosophical dialogue between North and South, because we are situated in an asymmetrical relation.²⁴

What Dussel here calls asymmetry is otherwise often called hegemony—or else the onset of a new global imperialism (involving the rule of the “West” over the “Rest”). In such a situation, nothing can be more important and salutary than the cultivation of global critical awareness, of critical counter-discourses willing and able to call into question the presumptions of global imperial rule. The dangers of such totalizing domination are becoming more evident every day. With the growing technological sophistication of weaponry we are relentlessly instructed about the underside of modernity, about the fateful collusion of power and knowledge in the unfolding of modern enlightenment (as analyzed by Adorno and Horkheimer). Coupled with the globalizing momentum, military sophistication greatly enhances the prospect of global warfare—indeed of global “total” warfare (as envisaged by Heidegger in the 1930’s). Such warfare, moreover, is profiled against the backdrop of hegemonic asymmetry (as seen by Dussel): the vastly unequal possession of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. In this situation, the goal of global warfare is bound to be the “total” subjugation of less developed or subaltern societies—a subjugation accomplished through long-distance military offensives capable of inflicting maximum casualties on enemies while minimizing the attackers’ costs.²⁵ Given the intoxicating effects of global rule, must one not also anticipate corresponding levels of total depravity and corruption among the rulers? In fact, must one not fear the upsurge of a new breed of “global master criminals” (*planetarische Hauptverbrecher*) whose actions are likely to match those of their twentieth-century predecessors, and perhaps even surpass them (behind a new shield of immunity)? Armed with unparalleled nuclear devices and unheard-of strategic doctrines, global masters today cannot only control and subjugate populations, but in fact destroy and incinerate them (from high above). In the words of Arundhati Roy, addressed to the world’s imperial rulers:

To slow a beast, you break its limbs. To slow a nation, you break its people; you rob them of volition. You demonstrate your absolute command over their destiny. You make it clear that ultimately it falls to you to decide who lives, who dies, who prospers, who doesn’t. To exhibit your capability you show off all that you can do, and how easily you can do it—how easily you could press a button and annihilate the earth.²⁶

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b. (Aristotle ascribes the saying to “our poets.”) Regarding Kant see his “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” in Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant’s Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1970), pp. 54-60.

2. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (1947; New York: Seabury Press, 1974), p. 97. With regard to fascism, Horkheimer added this important further qualification (p. 121): “In modern fascism, rationality has reached a point at which it is no longer satisfied with simply repressing nature; rationality now exploits nature by incorporating into its own system the rebellious potentialities of nature. The Nazis manipulated the repressed desires of the German people.” With proper modification, something similar could be said about contemporary forms of “fundamentalism.”

3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (first published 1947; Frankfurt-Main: Fischer, 1969), pp. 3, 9; translated by John Cumming under the title *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), pp. xiii, 3. (In the above and subsequent citations I have slightly altered the translation for purposes of clarity.)

4. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 4, 8-10. “Enlightenment,” the text continues, “behaves toward things like a dictator toward men: he knows them only insofar as he can manipulate them.” Revealingly, the authors draw a parallel between “commanding” and the modern infatuation with “making” or instrumental fabrication—an infatuation which needs to be sharply distinguished from the realm of doing or “praxis,” especially political praxis.

5. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 7, 14, 29. The insight that modernity, while ostensibly promoting human freedom or emancipation, at the same time tightens the network of social disciplines was later developed in greater detail by Michel Foucault, especially in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books 1979).

6. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 24, 39-42. Compare also their comment on the sense of remembrance (p. xv): “The issue is not the conservation of the past but the redemption of the hopes of the past.” The idea of an “unmanageable” or incalculable future resonates with the title of one of Jean-Luc Nancy’s writings: his *La communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Bourgeois, 1986), translated by Peter Connor et al. as *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Compare in this context also my “An ‘Inoperative’ Global Community? Reflections on Nancy,” in *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 277-297.

7. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt-Main: Suhrkamp, 1966) pp. 17-18, 36; translated by E. B. Ashton as *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), pp. 8, 27-28. (In the above and subsequent citations I have slightly altered the translation for purposes of clarity.)

8. *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 6-7, 12, 19. As one should note, the above critique does not simply mean a substitution of multiplicity for unity and of particularity for universality. As Adorno adds soberly (p. 158): “Like Kant and the entire philosophical tradition including Plato, Hegel is a partisan of unity. Yet, an abstract denial of the latter would not befit thinking either. The illusion of grasping the manifold directly would mean mimetic regression and a lapse into myth, into the horrors of diffuseness—just as unitary thinking, imitating blind nature through its repression, ends in mythical dominion at the opposite pole. Self-reflection of enlightenment is not its revocation.”

9. *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 141, 179-180, 191.

10. Compare in this regard my “Adorno and Heidegger” in *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), pp. 44-71; also Herrmann Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger: Untersuchung einer philosophischen Kommunikationsverweigerung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981).

11. Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (*Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 65; Frankfurt-Main: Klostermann, 1989), pp. 38-40, 42. For an English translation (not followed here) see *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999). The critique of worldviews/ideologies was continued and deepened in “Die Zeit des Welbildes” (1938) where Heidegger denounced the increasingly virulent “contest of worldviews” (*Kampf der Weltanschauungen*). See *Holzwege* (Frankfurt-Main: Klostermann, 1950), pp. 69-104, especially p. 87; and for an English translation “The Age of the World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 115-154.

12. *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, pp. 126-132. As one should note, Heidegger always differentiates carefully between *Erlebnis* (emotive feeling) and *Erfahrung* (which *Dasein* has to shoulder or undergo).

13. *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, pp. 50-51, 140, 282. In Heidegger's words (p. 26): "Ereignis hands over (*übereignet*) God to humans while dedicating/consecrating (*zueignet*) humans to God."

14. Heidegger, *Besinnung*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (*Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 66; Frankfurt-Main, 1997), pp. 16-17, 122-123. As he adds (p. 123): "Are humans here not definitively fixated as oriented toward the control and mastery of beings (while abandoning and being abandoned by being, *Seinsverlassenheit*)."

15. *Besinnung*, pp. 16-17, 22, 187-188, 191. According to the text, our time finds itself at a crossroads or parting of ways: a parting that determines "whether *Machenschaft* finally overwhelms humans, unleashing them into limitless power-seekers, or whether being discloses its truth as a need—a need through which the encounter/counterpoint (*Entgegnung*) of God and humans intersects with the chiasm between earth and world" (p. 15). I am indebted to Krzysztof Ziarek for the felicitous rendering of *machtlos* as "power-free."

16. Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, ed. Peter Trawny (*Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 69; Frankfurt-Main: Klostermann, 1998), pp. 46-48, 50, 64, 69, 76-78.

17. *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, pp. 44, 63, 70, 77-78, 180, 209. For a critique of "leaders" (*Führer*) as supreme technicians compare also Heidegger, "Überwindung der Metaphysik" (1936-1946) in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, part I (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), pp. 71-99, especially pp. 85-88. For an English translation by Joan Stambaugh see *The End of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 103-109.

18. The phrase "ethical hermeneutic" is borrowed from Michael D. Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationalism in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998). As Barber elaborates (p. 69): "One who lives out the ethos of liberation locates herself in the 'hermeneutic position' of the oppressed and takes on their interests." Regarding the "preferential option for the poor" see especially Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sr. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

19. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the "Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 12; also his *Método para una filosofía de la liberación: Superación analectica de la dialéctica Hegeliana*, 3rd ed. (Guadalajara: Editorial Universidad de Guadalajara, 1991), pp. 185-186.

20. Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, p. 132. See also Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, pp. 64-65.

21. Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), pp. 51-52, 131-131 (translation slightly altered). Arguing specifically against Taylor, Dussel states (p. 131) that "this manner of interpreting modern identity is Eurocentric, that is to say, provincial, regional, and does not take into account modernity's global significance and, hence, the role of Europe's periphery as 'source', equally constitutive of the modern 'self' as such." The edge against Habermas is particularly evident in the comment (p. 3) that, in Latin America, "we cannot complete or 'realize' fully an incomplete modernity (as Habermas optimistically suggests), because as the 'slave' we have paid with our misery, our actual 'non-being' (first, since 1492, as colonized, and then, since 1810, as part of the neocolonial world)." Compare in this context Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

22. Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, pp. 135-137. The text at another point (p. 52) refers to the dispute between Las Casas and Ginés de Sepúlveda in Valladolid (1550) where the latter argued (in the manner of contemporary Western "hawks") that "European culture is the most highly developed"; that "other cultures exit from their barbaric condition only by means of the modern civilizing process"; and that, whenever underdeveloped cultures oppose this civilizing process, "it is just and necessary to use violence in order to squash such opposition."

23. *The Underside of Modernity*, pp. 8, 11, 137. In this context, Dussel also makes reference to the role of religion (from the angle of a "theology of liberation"). Although rejecting an oppressive or totalizing religious system, he notes (p. 11) that one might "affirm the Absolute in the case when it would ground, justify or give hope to the oppressed in their process of liberation. Symbolically, the Pharaoh-god justified domination; but the Yahweh of the slave of Egypt, led by Moses, gave motives of liberation. . . . If there is an Absolute, it cannot but be the Other of every system, as the breath of life of all that lives. In this case, religion becomes a fundamental moment in the praxis of liberation."

24. *The Underside of Modernity*, pp. 3, 20, 53. With regard to Adorno, Dussel carefully distinguishes "negative dialectics" from an empty negativity; to guard against the latter danger he occasionally (pp. 3, 81) invokes the metaphysical positivism of the "old Schelling." While appropriating insights from Levinas, he criticizes the

Levinasian approach to otherness as “absolutely abstract with respect to every possible world”; to add a dimension of social concreteness he turns to Marx’s emphasis on “living labor” (pp. 53-54).

25. This strategy was already in place at the time of the conquest of the Americas. In the word of Tomás de Torquemada, commenting on the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire: “Less than one hundred Castilians died, a few horses. . . . Of the Mexicans one hundred thousand died, without counting the ones who died of hunger and plague.” See his *Monarquía Indiana*, cited by Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, p. 52. Recent superpower wars against third-world countries reveal a similar scenario.

26. Arundhati Roy, *The Cost of Living* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), p. 79.