

1 Latin American Liberative Ethics

Alejandro Crosthwaite, OP

BISHOP HÉLDER CÂMARA LOOKS out his window and contemplates his diocese of Recife in northeastern Brazil, which consists of a vast countryside divided into large, rich estates and poor villages. Most of his poor parishioners live in shantytowns. Around midnight, he opens his diary to reflect on the day he spent visiting his people. He recalls a conversation (which he has reproduced in his book *Dom Hélder Câmara: Essential Writings*) with one peasant whom he met that day, who in many respects typifies the poor people of his region.

“His name,” says Dom Hélder, “is Severino of the Northeast, son of Severino, grandson of Severino.” Like his ancestors, Severino does not live; he vegetates. He passes his days not like a shady tree, its roots filled with the sap of life; but like the cactus that survives in arid soil. So far this unemployed farm worker has not rebelled. Raised by illiterate parents and instructed in the faith by the priest in a dusty chapel, Severino learned from them to suffer life under unjust persecutors. Severino’s belief supported his resignation to a world in which things could not be otherwise. “Some are born rich and others poor,” he says. “Such is the

will of God.” This conviction stifles any thoughts of liberation. Daily he paces the muddy streets of his *favela*, humbled by unemployment while his family goes hungry. For Severino, hope of a better life lies on the other side of the great divide. Until then, Jesus counsels patience and offers strength to endure.

BOX 1.1

Hélder Câmara

Hélder Câmara (February 7, 1909, Fortaleza, Ceará, northeastern Brazil–August 27, 1999, Recife) was Roman Catholic archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Brazil. He retired as archbishop in 1985, and lived to see many of his reforms rolled back by his successor, Jose Cardoso Sobrinho. He is famous for stating, “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist.”

Severino’s fatalism comes from many causes: from living in wretched social, economic, political, and cultural conditions; from accepting his lot as powerless before oppressive landowners and government forces; from internalizing “the white man’s” or upper-class, racist views and policies; from superstitious religious beliefs; and from the conviction that God wills his suffering and the suffering of those like him. Brazilian liberative pedagogue Paulo Freire, in his classic book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argues that the source of this kind of fatalism stems from centuries of domination. “An oppressed consciousness,” he observed, “lacks the capacity to distance itself from reality and thus be critical of it.” The poor peasants in Brazil could not objectify facts and problematic situations in their everyday lives to even begin questioning them.

History and Development of Latin American Liberative Ethics

Latin American liberative ethics is a critical reflection on the European/North American ethical tradition in light of the radically different ideals and social, political, cultural, and economic contexts of the oppressed cultures of Latin America. It serves as a tool to unmask ethical theories that justify marginalization and oppression while at

the same time guiding and empowering liberative and transformative social practices on the South American continent.

These long-standing ethical traditions that justified violations of human dignity and basic human rights in Central and South America led philosophers, theologians, and pastoral and socially minded agents in Latin America to project new philosophies, theologies, and praxes onto the application of an ethics radically different from traditional ones. According to Aristotle’s discussion of the dialectic, “If a conclusion is absurd, something must be wrong with its first principles.” In a similar way, liberative ethicists reason that if severe oppression, poverty, and pessimism characterizes so much of Latin American life, then something must be wrong with the infrastructure, as well as with the worldview and ethics that fail to challenge and even perpetuate said infrastructure.

Many consider the critique of the Spanish and Portuguese imperial conquest of the Americas (the beginning of a continent-wide history of domination), the search for a truly Iberian-American identity by the Spanish and mestizos born on the continent, and the philosophical justifications for the wars of independence from the Iberian Peninsula to be the first steps toward a liberative social ethics in the Western Hemisphere. However, Latin American liberative ethics is said to have its explicit origins in the emancipation struggles of the continent from “dependent capitalism” in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and the Second Vatican Council. These two historical events exposed several elements of the “theory of dependence” and promoted an anticapitalist understanding of life and of a society based on a communitarian spirit.

Many scholars divide the history of Latin American liberative ethics into four phases. The first phase (1510–1553) begins with the many critiques of the conquest of the Americas by the Iberian powers and the search for a distinct identity by the Iberians born on the continent. The most

BOX 1.2

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire (September 19, 1921, Recife, Brazil–May 2, 1997, São Paulo, Brazil) was a Brazilian educator and influential theorist of critical pedagogy. His most famous and influential work is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

KEY TERM 1.1

Dependency Theory. An explanation of the economic development of a state in terms of the external political, economic, and social influences on national development policies, dependency theory argues that history shapes economic structure, favoring some countries to the detriment of others and limiting their development possibilities. Dependency theory sees the world economy as comprising two sets of states, those that are dominant and those that are dependent. The dominant states are the advanced industrial nations in the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The dependent states are those states of Latin America, Asia, and Africa that have low per-capita gross national products (GNPs) and that rely heavily on the export of a single commodity.

renowned of the former was the sixteenth-century Spanish historian, social reformer, and Dominican friar who became the first resident bishop of Chiapas and the first officially appointed “Protector of the Indians,” Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, OP. His extensive writings, the most famous being *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* and *History of the West Indies*, chronicle the first decades of colonization of the West Indies. In an attempt to conscientize the Spaniards, he focuses particularly on the atrocities the Spanish colonizers committed against the indigenous peoples. Of the latter, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and Guamán Poma de Ayala in Peru built interesting bridges between the European worldview and that of some of the Amerindian civilizations.

The second phase (1750–1830) comprises the philosophical justifications for seeking

independence from Spain and Portugal, the first emancipation. The third phase took place during the liberation from dependent capitalism, the second emancipation. This third phase is often divided into three substages: the “constitutional stage” (1969–1973), the “maturation stage” (1973–1976), and the “stage of persecution, debates, and confrontations” (1976–1983). The fourth phase, from 1983 to the present, is that of growth and answers to new questions. For the purposes of this chapter, we will only focus on the third and fourth phases.

The Third Phase: The Constitutional Stage

The Cuban Revolution (1953–1959) and the profound reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) within Roman Catholicism generated new paradigms of thought in the numerous Latin American social thinkers during the so-called constitutional stage. This stage produced the way of reflection that has had the most international influence.

KEY TERM 1.2

Second Vatican Council. The twenty-first ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church. It opened under Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962, and closed under Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1965. At least four future pontiffs took part in the council’s opening session: Giovanni Battista Cardinal Montini, who succeeded Pope John XXIII as Paul VI; Bishop Albino Luciani, the future Pope John Paul I; Bishop Karol Wojtyła, who became Pope John Paul II; and Father Joseph Ratzinger, present as a theological consultant, who became Pope Benedict XVI. Its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*) has had a profound impact on liberative philosophy and theology.



Fig. 1.1. The start of the Second Vatican Council, 1962.

The Second Vatican Council, convoked by Pope John XXIII (1958–1963) and concluded by Pope Paul VI (1963–1978), provided the foundations for a philosophical social ethics based on the concept of “liberation of the oppressed”—that is, the struggle for the material and educational conditions that would allow for vast sectors of the world population to overcome economic misery.

However, the hostile US reaction to the social changes on the island of Cuba brought about by the revolution of the 1950s exposed several elements of the theory of dependence, whose foundations were established in the 1920s. The theory of dependence sought to break the cycle of “backwardness” in contrast with the industrial development of the first world, while at the same time avoiding the dependency on a single cash crop or

product for exportation that fundamentally benefited the economy of the industrialized nations and the local elites.

According to this theory, in order to break the cycle of dependence, it would be necessary for

KEY TERM 1.3

Cuban Revolution. An armed revolt that led to the overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista of Cuba on January 1, 1959, by the 26th of July Movement led by Fidel Castro. The term *Cuban Revolution* also refers to the ongoing implementation of social and economic programs by the new government.

each nation to promote financial self-sufficiency, eliminate the high levels of misery, and generate government systems that would not be easily manipulated by the financial interests of large multinational corporations. Also, the “preferential option for the poor,” renewed in the Roman Catholic Church, opened spaces for active participation in the struggles to organize and collaborate in movements of cultural, political, economic, and social vindication for marginalized sectors.

Several Roman Catholic theologians, among them the Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Brazilians Hélder Câmara and Leonardo Boff, grounded themselves in the initiatives of the Second Vatican Council in order to foster a commitment to social change in Latin America.

Their theoretical and practical work became world-renowned under the name of “liberation theology.” Its theoretical foundation is based on the message of the gospel, which gives preferential option to the *anawin* (the oppressed and excluded), denounces injustices, and seeks to create more just social structures. Inspired by the gospel’s social message, these thinkers promoted an anticapitalist understanding of life—a society based not on avarice and selfishness but on a communitarian spirit. Its practical application is expressed through basic ecclesial communities in the poorest urban and rural areas, in which

BOX 1.3

Leonardo Boff

Leonardo Boff was born December 14, 1938, in Concórdia, Santa Catarina state, Brazil. He is a theologian, philosopher, and writer known for his active support of the rights of the poor and excluded. He currently serves as professor emeritus of ethics, philosophy of religion, and ecology at the Rio de Janeiro State University.

BOX 1.4

Gustavo Gutiérrez

Gustavo Gutiérrez (born June 8, 1928, in Lima) is a Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest regarded as the founder of liberation theology. He holds the John Cardinal O’Hara Professorship of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Gutiérrez spent much of his life living and working among the poor of Lima. Gutiérrez is of Amerindian heritage, being of mixed Quechua descent, and he is probably the most influential Peruvian scholar of all time. Gutiérrez’s groundbreaking work, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (1971), explains his notion of Christian poverty as an act of loving solidarity with the poor as well as a liberative protest against poverty.

solidarity, dignity, liberty of expression, Bible study, and collective mobilization to reclaim the political rights of the marginalized are promoted, fostering the participants’ active involvement in the social processes of their own countries.

In the same spirit, but beyond the specifically Christian and theological context, the Brazilian Paulo Freire created a pedagogical theory and praxis of education designed to promote social action and the dynamism of people who have suffered socioeconomic repression for several generations. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) has had considerable influence in international efforts to develop educational models that generate desirable social changes for the majority of the population—such as democratic participation, critical thinking, active production of knowledge—or, in Freire’s words, learning practices that help “create a world in which it is easier to love.”

KEY TERM 1.4

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC). Began in Brazil in the mid-1960s and then spread throughout Latin America. BECs grew out of efforts of clergy and pastoral agents who helped the people relate their faith to concrete needs. Each community, consisting of fifteen to twenty families, gathered once or twice a week to hear the word of God, to share their common problems, and to work in solidarity toward a solution.

In his liberative pedagogical proposal, Freire considers the practice of liberty and dialogue to be the essence of education and avoids authoritarian models: “No one educates another, no one

educates themselves; men and women educate each other, in dialogue with the world.” His critical analyses of traditional educational “professor-student” models reproduce the opposition between oppressors and oppressed. In order to break this model, he proposes a dynamic and autonomous model that values the experience and knowledge of each student as well as their social participation, their creative production, and the exercise of an answerable and collective responsibility. In opposition to “banking education,” which seems to follow the capitalist model, forcing students to collect data frequently disassociated from their vital experience, Freire proposed a “liberative education” in which problems are presented to the students so that they may solve them in a collective manner under the coordination of their instructors, learning in a practical way the necessity of working as a team, participating and

CASE STUDY 1.1

Base communities arose as a pastoral response on behalf of the Catholic Church. The initial motivation that inspired priests, religious sisters, and pastoral agents was to fulfill their own mission, finding a more effective way for the church to minister to the poor of Latin America. Their objective was not political. Even today, many base communities are essentially pastoral and nonpolitical, at least not in a radical way. However, many base communities were instrumental in preparing the ground for the creation of popular organizations and revolutionary struggle, especially in the extreme difficult circumstances of Central America in the 1970s and 1980s. The social and political impact of base communities is not quantitative but qualitative (since in reality a very small portion of the Latin American Catholic population actively participates in base communities, even less so than Protestants and evangelicals). However, they are key in promoting an initial increase of conscientization, not only of the political, social, economic, and cultural problems facing the oppressed but also an encounter with the gospel that leads to a liberative life-vision and motivation for spiritual, social, and political engagement and liberation.

They also create a sense of community, of mutual support and aid. The participants learn to be subjects and not only objects of their destiny in the experience of popular democracy and direct action that has political and social consequences. The initial stages of conscientization, which people call their “awakening,” is the act of questioning the state of things. Base communities use a methodology founded on questions where the people themselves learn some basic categories of analysis. During a weekend meeting, after gathering

CASE STUDY 1.1 (continued)

their ideas about a particular subject like land ownership, the group facilitator may provide statistics to help the people understand their experience in the wider national context. The Scriptures provide an ideal. The people acquire a strong sense that as human beings they are called to be active change agents of their history. Several biblical texts provide images of what liberative human life should look like: a society of brothers and sisters, and life of sharing and equality. If it relates to society as a whole it then becomes a utopian vision. For rural Christians, this utopia provides an out-of-reach ideal or end, which can never be fully realized. However, Latin American Christians find this ideal more comprehensible and energizing than the Marxist phrase: “a classless society.”

What makes this ideal more effective is that people have seen its effects, although in a moderate way, in their local base community: the common experience they live in the base communities has destroyed the barriers of mistrust among its members. In many cases, old family or town quarrels have ended. Also, their common projects for the local community are another source of encouragement. Traditionally, the local community leaders have tended to copy oppressive governing models from the dominant society and become themselves little dictators or demagogic populists. In sharing their leadership in the base communities and acting based on community consensus, base communities have given many people a popular form of the democratic process. These experiences have, at the same time, made them more critical of power relations in their societies.

A Brazilian recounts, for example, cases in which the peasants that were members of a base community surrounded and captured the landowner of a large plantation that oppressed them. They took him by force to the military authorities and obtained an agreement from him to respect their human dignity, which they came to recognize through their weekly meetings. During the worst years of the dictatorship in Brazil, base communities provided a small space where the people could reaffirm their dignity and hope. As the military began to soften its iron grasp on Brazilian politics and began to prepare the country for more democratic forms of governance, it was the base communities that had prepared the people to take responsibility of their country’s destiny. Some Brazilians thought that the base communities would coerce the rural classes toward a particular political option, for example, voting for the Workers’ Party. However, the base communities had educational courses and materials that had as their purpose the development of its members’ critical conscience of the political processes and not a “party-centered” ideology. Base communities discussed the criteria to take into account during the elections for a more just- and solidarity-based society. After the elections, research showed that members of base communities voted for opposition parties, but did not vote unanimously for any one particular party. They had made their own free personal choice based on their reflection at the local base communities.

How do base ecclesial communities contribute to the liberation of the oppressed and marginalized? Why do you think these communities do not create in their participants monolithic thinking or only one way of responding to oppressive realities? Do you believe these groups could also transform those who hold power in society?

expressing themselves: “The oppressed only begin to believe in themselves when they discover the source of their domination and join themselves to the struggle organized for their liberation. This discovery cannot be only academic, but must include action; but it cannot limit itself to mere activism, but must include serious reflection.”

The Third Phase: The Maturation Stage

During its maturation stage (1973–1976), Latin American liberative ethics oriented itself toward this “serious reflection,” which includes praxis in order to overcome the history of domination and social inequality. Its most influential proponent has been the Argentinean Enrique Dussel.

Beginning with an analysis of the history of European invasion and conquest of the Americas, and how it created structures of domination, marginalization, and dependency, Dussel shows how these practices of domination based themselves on a “universalist ethics” of Western Europe. By attributing to itself authority over universal knowledge, European philosophies have defined “human nature” according to the paradigms, behavior patterns, and rationalist orientation of the West, condemning the invaded cultures to conditions of nonbeing, chaos, and irrationality. In this way, Western philosophies have historically legitimized the domination that oppresses the so-called third world, masking it under the appearance of “promoting civilization.”

To respond to these conditions, Dussel proposes an ethics based on dialogue with and listening to the excluded, the “radical Other”—that is to say, the subject that has been converted into an object by Western domination. This reflexive praxis would organize a “liberative analectic” as an alternative to the current “analectic of domination.” Dussel’s theoretical development is based on a detail criticism of the ontology of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and other German, French, and English philosophers. For Dussel, the voice of the oppressed has to pass through the paradox of

BOX 1.5

Enrique Dussel

Enrique Dussel was born on December 24, 1934, in La Paz, Mendoza, Argentina. In 1973, a bomb attack at his house by a paramilitary group forced him into exile in Mexico, where he has lived since 1975. Today he is a Mexican citizen. He is a professor in the Department of Philosophy in the Metropolitan Autonomous University (Spanish: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana) (UAM), Campus Iztapalapa in Mexico City and also teaches at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Spanish: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) (UNAM). He is the founder with others of the movement referred to as the philosophy of liberation, and his work is concentrated in the field of ethics and political philosophy. Through his critical thinking he proposed a new way (a critical way) to read history, criticizing Eurocentric discourse. Author of more than fifty books, his thought covers many themes, including theology, politics, philosophy, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and ontology. He has been a critic of postmodernity, preferring instead the term *transmodernity*.

speaking with the language of the oppressor in order to question it and overcome it: “In order to discover new categories that can open the possibility of us thinking of ourselves, we need to begin speaking like the Europeans and, from them, prove their limitations.”

In addition to his immense philosophical project of liberation, which includes ontology, analytics, pedagogy, and the erotic, Dussel also writes for the common person through conferences with

specific examples accessible to those untrained in philosophy. He uses the following liberative pedagogical schemas:

Dominating Dialectic	<i>versus</i>	Liberative Dialectic
conquering attitude	v.	collaborative attitude
divisive attitude	v.	converging attitude
demobilizing attitude	v.	mobilizing attitude
manipulative attitude	v.	organizing attitude
invading attitude	v.	creative attitude

The Third Phase: The Stage of Persecution, Debates, and Confrontation

Liberative philosophy, pedagogy, theology, and ethics constituted a clear initiative to create Latin American thought in search of interpretive social models that generate a more just and creative liberative social ethics. It also represented a radical criticism of Western thought from the margins of Latin America, especially from 1976–1983—the stage of persecution, debates, and confrontation. The foundations of this concept, although taken from other sources, coincide with recent developments of great influence in European and North American thought in the fields of the humanities and cultural studies; for example, in the postcolonial thought of authors such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, all professors at North American and British universities.

Unfortunately, due to the Marxist and/or Christian language of the Latin American liberative theories, and in part due to the limitations of the diffusion of a bibliography from the third world, postcolonial theorists have mostly ignored the contribution of Latin American thought in the same direction, which was developed before theirs.

KEY TERM 1.5

Postcolonial Theory. A specifically postmodern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism. Postcolonialism comprises a set of theories found in philosophy, film, political science, human geography, sociology, and literature.

The Fourth Phase

In dialogue with these theories, during the current fourth stage, of growth and answers to new questions, liberative social ethics is a way to vindicate concepts originally produced in Latin America. Several thinkers have shown the coincidences as well as the differences between Latin American liberative ethics and North American/European postcolonial thought—that is, proposing an alternative way of thinking about socio-cultural relations and a philosophical worldview in present-day contexts, namely, the globalization of capitalist markets. The main difference between “northern” and “southern” liberative discourse stems from the context of the reflection: from the periphery or from the center. The Colombians Jesús Martín Barbero and Santiago Castro Gómez, the Argentinians Néstor García Canclini and Walter Mignolo, and the Chilean Nelly Richard, among many others, have written works of philosophical reorganization. Walter Mignolo, for example, proposes the configuration of “post-Western” thought based on the experiences of Euro–North American domination and imperialism, which denounces the conditions of inequality and seeks methods to confront colonialism, which is not only an experience of the past.

Mignolo argues that the so-called modern/colonial world is the product of imperial global designs, be they Christian, imposed by Spain and Portugal, or the “civilizing mission” of both

LIBERATIVE ETHICS IN ACTION 1.1

Liberative Ethics in Action: The Liberative Philosopher—Critical Inquirer “into Things below the Earth and in the Sky.”

On October 3, 1975, Enrique Dussel was the target of a bomb attack in his house by an extreme-right corporate union of iron workers (“Comando Rucci”). The following morning, he gave a lecture on Socrates’s *Apologia* at the Faculty of Philosophy at the National University of Cuyo commenting on the attempt on his life and the critical-political role of the philosopher in society titled “The Practical-Political Function of Philosophy.” Dussel began by describing the note left behind by the terrorists, in which they accused him “of poisoning the minds of the youth”; the same accusation was leveled against Socrates by the Athenians. Meditating on his recent experience and that of Socrates, Dussel probes deeper into the reasons of the accusation. Like Socrates, who is found guilty of criminal meddling, the philosopher is accused of investigating the bottom of things, the foundations of the oppressive and unjust system, and what is worst, teaches others to do so! Referring specifically to the attempt on his life, Dussel states with Socrates that if the powers that be think they can put an end to the criticisms labeled against them by killing the prophetic voices in society, then they are gravely mistaken. The only way to put an end to them is to convert from their unjust and oppressive ways. From all this, Dussel deduces the function of a liberative philosophy: philosophy is to be political without being, essentially, politics in the proper sense of the word. For Dussel, inquiring “into things below the earth and in the sky” means inquiring into the very foundations of our so-called Western and Christian society, and reinterpreting them in a radical and critical way, different from the “official” interpretation, which supports the oppressive, death-dealing status quo that kills a people in the name of the same principles that serve as the foundation for their liberation.

This is the critical-political and liberative function of the philosopher and philosophy: to be the “stinging fly” in a society that “is inclined to be lazy and needs . . . stimulation.” The philosopher is appointed to lead the philosophical life, that is, to examine his or her life and that of others, especially that of the oppressed, in order to liberate it. Dussel states that the accusation of not accepting the status quo and the powers that sustain and perpetuate it is the eternal accusation against the philosopher. When asked by a student how to respond to Peronism in his native country of Argentina, Dussel answered: “as a philosopher!” The way of the philosopher is to keep a critical distance from the social reality in question in order to better see and point out its oppressive tendencies: “Philosophy adds critical thinking to the process, although it is not confused with it.”

England and France, or the development and modernization projects of the United States in the twentieth century. And it is the market that is now becoming the new global design of the powers that be. Hence, the globalization of culture, understood as the “material aspect in which the history of capitalism and of global designs evolved,” has

always been there; except that today’s modern technology allows it to spread faster and farther than before, but still in one direction, just as in the sixteenth century. For example, the force with which Inca and Aymara culture entered and modified Castilian culture was less significant than the reverse. That is, Castilian knowledge and attitude

CASE STUDY 1.2

The first steps of the Christians for Socialism movement were taken in Chile around the 1970s. However, the movement had its origins many decades before, when Christians and Marxists began to work together for a common cause: the liberation of the oppressed workers. A group of factory workers and Christian faithful discover that the fundamental linchpin of Latin American reality and history was the reality of class struggle. The suffering of the oppressed took on an identifiable face in the political struggle of the working class against a system that supported a wealthy and exploitive oligarchy. The workers found their liberation in socialism understood as the creation of cooperative social relations and self-management, equal power relations, and the reduction of hierarchy in the management of economic and political affairs. In this linchpin, radical politics and Christian radicalism eventually found their common ground.

On September 4, 1970, Salvador Allende obtained a relative majority in Chile. He won over against Jorge Alessandrini, who represented conservative Catholicism and was a ferocious anti-Communist and opposed any kind of social change. He was supported by a large majority of the Catholic hierarchy and by certain sectors of Opus Dei. Allende also won against Radomiro Tomic, who represented progressive Catholicism. The bishops, who generally identified themselves with Christian Democracy, feared Allende's victory, although they also feared a possible victory by the right-wing Alessandrini, ex-president of Chile. Confronted by the fact of Allende's victory, the Catholic bishops maintained a deep silence. To the Right, this silence was interpreted as the church's becoming an accomplice to the victory of Marxism. To the Left, this silence was completely unjustified. In April of 1971, a group of priests and lay faithful decided to break the church's silence and convened a "Conference on Christian Participation in the Construction of Socialism in Chile" to explore ways of collaborating with Allende for the creation of a more just Chilean society. From this meeting arose the so-called Document of the Eighty, from the number of priests who participated in the conference. The Chilean conference of bishops immediately made a public statement against the participants in the conference and published its three-theses proclamation regarding the role of the church in politics: the nonpolitical spiritual mission of the church, the political liberty of Christians, and the importance of church unity. In response, in September of 1971, the Presbyteral Secretariat for Christians for Socialism was created with the mission of establishing a Christian and political presence in popular movements and left-wing parties. Later the Educational Secretariat of Christians for Socialism was established to promote liberative education for all. They did this without creating a parallel group in the church or state. However, three years later, on September 11, 1973, a coup against Allende deposed him from the presidency and opened the way for the thirteen-year right-wing military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

Do you think Christianity and socialism are compatible with each other? Do you think Christians and socialists can work together for a more just society even if they do not agree on fundamental points or self-understanding?



Fig. 1.2. Marchers for Salvador Allende. A crowd of people marching to support the election of Salvador Allende for president in Santiago, Chile, September 5, 1964.

toward life did not change as much as Aymaran and Incan knowledge and attitude toward life.

According to Mignolo, the “modern/colonial world” arose from certain kinds of local histories: *imperial* local histories. Imperial Spain became an instrumental agent that made possible the implementation of Christian designs and then conversion to a global one. Imperial England in complicity with the French Enlightenment displaced (but not replaced) Christian global designs, making room for secular civilizing ones. The imperial United States displaced (but not replaced) the global design of the civilizing mission with a global design of development and modernization. And the market is now becoming the global design of a new form of colonialism, a global coloniality, which is being analyzed as “the network

society” (Castells), “globalcentrism” (Coronil), and “Empire” (Hardt and Negri). Thus the globalization of “culture” was always there, since culture (in whatever technology of the time was available) is the material aspect in which the history of capitalism and of global designs (Christianity, civilizing mission, development and modernization, marketization) evolved.

Technology today allows culture, and financial markets, to move faster. While a globalization of culture may not exist, planetary communication and the coloniality of power nevertheless move faster, and as in the sixteenth century, in one direction. For example, Bolivia’s music and restaurants in the United States or Europe are less relevant (aren’t they?) than European television and popular music in Bolivia. In La Paz, for example,

BOX 1.6**Walter Mignolo**

Walter Mignolo (1941–) is an Argentine semiotician (Écoles des Hautes Études) and professor at Duke University who has published extensively on semiotics and literary theory, coined over a dozen new words, and worked on different aspects of the modern and colonial world, exploring concepts such as global coloniality, the geopolitics of knowledge, transmodernity, border thinking, and pluriversity.

there is a “German Channel” that provides the state of the weather in Germany and in Europe for the Bolivian audience. I am not aware of a “Bolivian Channel” in Germany that does the same.

It is interesting, then, to conclude this section by observing how Latin American thought achieves its productivity and recognition within contemporary developments thanks to its efforts, not so much in following the precepts inherited from the European conquest and global-vision, but because it critically reflected on that inheritance and united itself with the radical difference of the ideals and production of oppressed cultures before such precepts. Hence, the stereotype that Latin American only produced folklore transforms itself into a valuable instrument to unmask theories of justification of marginalization and to give energy to the mobilizing thought of liberative social practices.

Need for Liberation

Historically, Latin American liberative ethics have their explicit origins in the emancipation struggles of the continent from “dependent capitalism” in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and the

Second Vatican Council. Dependency theory developed in the late 1950s under the guidance of the director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, Argentinean Raul Prebisch. Prebisch and his colleagues were troubled by the fact that economic growth in the advanced industrialized countries did not necessarily lead to growth in the poorer countries. Indeed, their studies suggested that economic activity in the richer countries often led to serious economic problems in the poorer countries. Neoclassical theory had not predicted such a possibility but had assumed that economic growth was beneficial to all, even if the benefits were not always equally shared.

Prebisch’s initial explanation for the phenomenon was very straightforward: poor countries exported primary commodities to the rich countries that then manufactured products out of those commodities and sold them back to the poorer countries. The “value added” by manufacturing a usable product always cost more than the primary products used to create those products. Therefore, poorer countries would never earn enough from their exports to pay for their imports. Prebisch’s solution was similarly straightforward: poorer countries should embark on programs of import substitution so that they need not purchase the manufactured products from the richer countries.

BOX 1.7**Raul Prebisch**

Raul Prebisch (April 17, 1901–April 29, 1986) was an Argentine economist known for his contribution to structuralist economics, in particular the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis, which formed the basis of economic dependency theory. He is sometimes considered to be a neo-Marxist, though this label is misleading.

TIMELINE

1492	Christopher Columbus arrives in the Americas
1510–1553	The first phase—critique of the Iberian enterprise and search for an Iberian-American identity
1514	Bartolome de Las Casas begins his struggle on behalf of the Amerindians
1515–1521	Conquest of the Aztec Empire by Hernán Cortés
1529–1533	Conquest of the Inca Empire by Francisco Pizarro
1535	Establishment of the viceroyalty of New Spain (capital, Mexico City)
1542	Establishment of the viceroyalty of Peru (capital, Lima)
1717	Establishment of the viceroyalty of New Granada (capital, Bogota)
1776	Establishment of the viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata (capital, Buenos Aires)
1804–1825	Wars of Independence (the first emancipation)
1825–1900	Consolidation and liberal-conservative conflicts
1898	Spanish-American War (end of the Spanish Empire and beginning of American Interventionism).
1910–1920	Mexican Revolution
1953–1959	Cuban Revolution
1962–1965	Second Vatican Council
1968	Medellin, Colombia, II Conference of the Latin American Catholic Episcopate
1969–1973	Second emancipation: “constitutional stage
1970–1990	Era of military regimes
1973–1976	Second emancipation: maturation stage
1976–1983	Second emancipation: stage of persecution, debates, and confrontations
1979	Puebla, Mexico, III Conference of the Latin American Catholic Episcopate
1980–2008	Washington Consensus (orientation toward neoliberal policies)
1983	Fourth phase begins
1992	Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, IV Conference of the Latin American Catholic Episcopate
1997	Synod of Catholic Bishops of the Americas
2000s	Turn toward the Left (e.g., Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia)
2007	Aparecida, Brazil, V Conference of the Latin American Catholic Episcopate

The poorer countries would still sell their primary products on the world market, but their foreign exchange reserves would not be used to purchase their manufactures from abroad.

Dependency theory was viewed as a possible way of explaining the persistent poverty of the

poorer countries. The traditional neoclassical approach said virtually nothing on this question except to assert that the poorer countries were late in coming to solid economic practices and that as soon as they learned the techniques of modern economics, then the poverty would begin

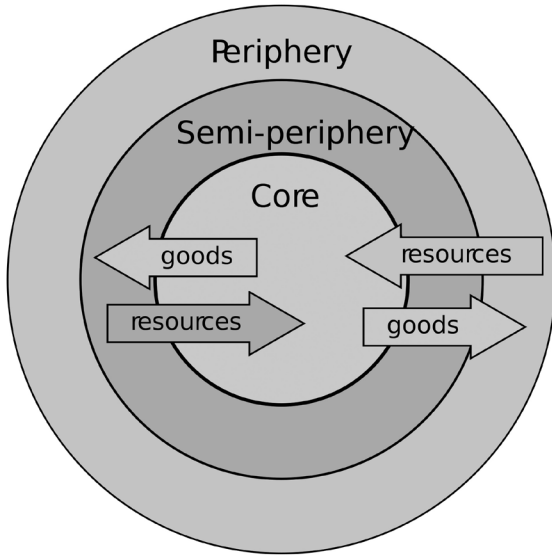


Fig. 1.3. The concept of dependency theory.

to subside. However, Marxists and liberative theorists viewed the persistent poverty as a consequence of capitalist exploitation. And a new body of thought, called the “world systems approach,” argued that the poverty was a direct consequence of the evolution of the international political economy into a fairly rigid division of labor that favored the rich and penalized the poor.

There are still points of serious disagreements among the various strains of dependency theorists, and it is a mistake to think that there is only one unified theory of dependency. Nonetheless, all dependency theorists attempted to explain the same underlying phenomenon. And most dependency theorists agree, moreover, that international capitalism was the motive force behind dependency relationships.

Although dependency theory proposed an alternative liberative model of economics and economic policy, three issues made this policy difficult to follow and continue to pose questions to Latin American liberative ethicists. The first was that the internal markets of the poorer countries were not large enough to support the economies

of scale used by the richer countries to keep their prices low. The second issue concerned the political will of the poorer countries as to whether a transition to producing primary products was possible or desirable. The final issue revolved around the extent to which the poorer countries actually had control of their primary products, particularly in the area of selling those products abroad. These obstacles to the import substitution policy led others to think a little more creatively and historically about the relationship between rich and poor countries but also, unfortunately, led many to believe that liberative ethics was a methodological and praxeological failure.

The response of liberative ethicists to dependency theory tended to rationalize the control of the state—high protectionist barriers, a closed economy, and a general snobbishness toward the role of the market; and from the end of the 1940s to the 1980s, the state enjoyed absolute control. At the same time, in agreement with the milieu, “national security” became a justification for governments to take over “strategic sectors” of the economy with the presumed objective of satisfying the needs of the country and not those of foreign investors. This led to the creation of government-owned oil companies in several countries, for example. Also, as the phenomenon of globalization was on the rise, some dependency theoreticians and some liberative theoreticians rejected participation in the world market.

Until the 1970s, this focus and praxis seemed to work. However, with the passing of years, the great weakness of the liberative response to dependency theory had to be recognized. The industrial enterprises—private as well as state-owned—that it had encouraged were inefficient due to protectionism, lack of competition, and isolation from innovative technology. In great part, it did not prioritize quality or quality of service. Agriculture suffered substantially. Budget deficits increased by leaps and bounds. With the generalized inflation that hit Latin America in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s,

family savings were wiped out. As a consequence, people could not retire. Inflation grew to incredible heights, pushed by deficits and lax monetary policy. National economies lost the benefits of international commerce and, logically, there was no improvement in social inequality.

Despite these setbacks, Latin American liberative ethics in response to the reality of dependence still has meaning and value in articulating itself in the great process of the second emancipation of Latin America. As a Brazilian liberative ethicist said: “If there was no philosophy of liberation, one would have to invent one” (Dussel, 1994). In the end, the great contribution of Latin American liberative ethics has been to speak to power with a voice born from the experience of misery, poverty, and exploitation, even if its practical solutions, especially in the realm of economics, have not borne the desired fruit.

Current Themes and Methodologies

According to some liberative social theorists, ethics is the practical order of a critical, difficult milieu, in the process of changing toward a new order of things: from the passage of an established moral system accepted by most to another, non-normative, liberative ethical order. Morality is the all-encompassing established praxis, triumphant, in power (reinforced by the laws of the state); whereas ethics means the practical structure born from oppression of the established order, from the morality in power, and travels the long, road of building a new practical totality that is more just, in the future horizon of an oppressed society, of liberation.

For Latin American liberative ethicists, ethics is the practical order of moving from an unjust morality to a more just future morality. It is the normative order during the dialectical passage

from one moral order to another. A liberative ethics meditates and explains the meaning of practical goodness at the time when a moral order is being destroyed for being unjust, a time when the liberating subject is exposed, one could say, to the harsh elements, without cover or protection in the moral order that is falling into pieces. It proposes a morality beyond the present morality. The liberator, or liberators, the heroes that rise against the established order guided by liberative ethics, does not destroy the old moral order only to build a new one on the life and courage of the warriors, the victorious, the revolutionaries but in service to the oppressed, the poor, the alienated people. That liberator, in the end, is the people themselves, the poor, the historical “we.” With their lives they build new moral orders. This is the greatest insight of liberative scholars and figures.

Possible Future Trends

As a consequence of the theory of dependence, Latin American liberative social ethics continues to deal with some urgent challenges to Central and South America; for example, the essence of capital, dependency, transnational economics, foreign debt, military buildup, struggle for peace, democracy and dictatorship, liberation of women and feminism, self-affirmation of the Latin American youth, the question of the Amerindian before the five centuries of the “intrusion,” overexploitation of work, the “cultural question,” and the “question of ‘the people.’”

Regarding the economy, several oppressive realities have developed since the 1950s, and thus liberative social ethicists have asked further ethical questions. First, human labor, which occupies the greatest part of human existence, has been objectified in its products: human life has been turned into a commodity. Second, there has been a misappropriation of human life due to the transfer

of the surplus to the central capital (neocolonizing metropolis). This is the greatest challenge of our time, the misappropriation of the being of entire peoples, an ethical problem par excellence, robbery and victimization of human life. As a corollary to both of these realities, the transnational capital appropriates unto itself the surplus, the human lives, not only of the capital of the periphery (with less development) but also of the rest of the central national capital (with higher salaries). It extracts extra work, due to competition within the periphery and in the center itself, from all the other capitals. These ethical problems, although sometimes not perceived by the majority of social ethicists, especially in the global north, define the Latin American milieu. And it is on the foundation of these realities (capital, dependency, and transnational capital) that a liberative social ethics discourse can continue to make a transforming contribution in the years to come.

These topics might not seem to belong to the field of ethics; however, if ethics is about real life, these realities weigh heavily on the shoulders of the people on the periphery, especially those in Latin America. In the same way, and related to the topics indicated above, the foreign debt of the poor countries was produced by the necessity of rich countries to loan money so that these countries might be able to buy their overproduction. The debt is the fruit of the crisis of the central capital that pays the capital of the periphery. Here one is dealing, once again, with an ethical issue by definition, a situation that allows central capital to cruelly take possession of the lives of the poor and underdeveloped. All these fall under the umbrella of ethics, if by ethics one means the thinking through of domination, both in general and concretely, which weighs heavily on those from which this ethics emerges.

Not only as a political problem but also existentially and concretely, the participation or lack thereof of the people in the decisions of their governments becomes a possibility for a liberative

social ethics. The problems of democracy and dictatorship, as the liberty of the people and possibility of participation, have become central issues in the recent history of Latin America. Although, since the mid-1980s, an extremely weak form of democracy has become a reality in most countries of South America, dictatorship continues to be the rule in many states of the Western Hemisphere.

Half of humanity suffers another type of domination that has become the object of ethics and liberation. Latin American women suffer oppression from the machista ideology and the praxis of domination of the male, in sexual, cultural, economic, and political realms. The “mujerista” movement has generated a liberative ethics of womankind. This ethics is an integral part of an ethics of liberation, whether or not that has been articulated in a concrete way by both movements.

A liberative ethics cannot forget the youth in the construction of a more developed and just future Latin America. By nature, the youth are the future social ethicists, the young men or women who with their idealism desire a better, more just, more participative future world. Life within the established system, the current crisis of capitalism with its crisis of unemployment in the center and misery in the periphery, teach the youth of Latin America a harsh reality. A liberative ethics is a message of hope for that youth that can be generous and courageous in the building of a free Latin America.

Latin American liberative ethics, already begun by José Carlos Mariátegui in his reflection on indigenous identity, must also develop an ethical discourse on the nature of the Amerindians, on their mythical-rational thought, and on their place in the history before the conquest.

Amerindians see the five-hundredth anniversary of the “discovery” of the so-called new world as five centuries of domination, genocide, and death. However, they have survived and are reclaiming their lands, their dignity, their liberty, their political and cultural autonomy.

BOX 1.8

José Carlos Mariátegui

José Carlos Mariátegui (June 14, 1894–April 16, 1930) was a Peruvian journalist, political philosopher, and activist. A prolific writer before his early death at age thirty-five, he is considered one of the most influential Latin American socialists of the twentieth century. Mariátegui's most famous work, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1928), is still widely read in South America. An avowed, self-taught Marxist, he insisted that a socialist revolution should evolve organically in Latin America on the basis of local conditions and practices, not the result of mechanically applying a European formula.

Together with the oppressed, the peasant farmer, the Amerindian, the woman and the youth, the salaried worker of the countries of the periphery, suffers an overexploitation of ferocious dimensions. The transfer of surplus from the periphery to the center is compensated by an overexploitation of the worker in the form of low salaries that contribute to miserable standards of living or subliving. A liberative social ethics has to think ontologically, from the being of capital and dependency, about the reality of Latin American workers. And ethically, it needs to elaborate a moral theory that explains and makes known the evilness of the overexploitation this social class suffers.

Together with all of these issues and questions, there is the “cultural question.” The developed nations exercise a cultural hegemony over Latin America, the dominant classes over the dominated ones, the established ideologies over

the youth, machismo over women, and so on. Culture, like the totality of those phenomena, shows us another important field for current, liberative ethical reflection. A liberative ethics thinks the reality of a national culture before that of the central nations (which is imposed through the means of television, radio, cinema, publications, satellite communications, etc.), the reality of popular culture before the “illuminated” culture of the hegemonic groups of dependent countries, and a culture of a consumerist society before a revolutionary popular national culture. In other words, the question of “popular culture” is a central and difficult topic that a liberative ethics must confront.

The word *popular* raises, in turn, the question of the meaning of “the people.” Since “the people,” the reality of this social organism and the category used by the populisms of Latin America (projects of the national elites in the countries of the periphery to unite the newly born working class), many have thought to discard the category of “people” from the agenda of social change. However, this term continues to be used by every revolutionary leader of the global south. In an established system, “the people” is the social bloc of the oppressed—classes, sectors, ethnicities, marginalized, and so on. In the dissolution of a given order, the poor are expelled from the oppressed classes. When a new order is constituted, the poor form part of the new classes; and the members of the new oppressed classes will become the people.

Joaquín Hernández Alvarado, writing in 1976, stated that liberative social ethics had reached its productive climax, and one could not expect any further developments or insights. However, it seems that this prophecy has not been fulfilled. Latin American liberative social ethics continues to deal with the threat of new oppressive challenges and ideologies by continuing to propose a liberative alternative for a more just future.

Study Questions

1. Before reading this chapter, could you have named a Latin American philosopher or thinker? Why do you think Latin Americans are associated with folklore but not with theoretical or scientific production?
2. What are the main tenants of a “liberative education” versus a “financial education”?
3. What is the difference between a “liberative analectic” and an “analectic of oppression” as presented by Enrique Dussel? Can you enumerate the elements of Dussel’s liberative pedagogical schema?
4. What is the theory of dependence? How does the question of culture and “the people” come into play?
5. What is “post-Westernism” and how does it relate to the philosophy of liberation, post-colonial theory, and postmodern thought?

Suggested Readings

- Barbero, Jesús Martín. *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations*. Newsbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993.
- Boff, Leonardo. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987.
- Cámara, Hélder. *Dom Helder Camara: Essential Writings*. Edited by Francis McDonagh. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009.

- Canclini, Nestor Garcia. *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*. Translated by Christopher L. Chiappari. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Castro Gómez, Santiago. *Critique of Latin American Reason*. Barcelona: Puvill, 1996.
- De La Torre, Miguel A. *Liberation Theology for Armchair Theologians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013.
- Dussel, Enrique. *Philosophy of Liberation*. Translated by Aquilina Martinez. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th anniversary ed. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. 15th anniversary ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988.
- Mariátegui, José Carlos. *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988.
- Mignolo, Walter. *The Idea of Latin America*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.
- . *Local Histories/Global Designs*. Illustrated ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Richard, Nelly. *The Insubordination of Signs: Political Change, Cultural Transformation, and Poetics of the Crisis*. Translated by Alice Nelson. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.