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# *Archaeosystem, Urban Revolution and Rationalized Unification of the Political*

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## Archaeosystem, Urban Revolution and Rationalized Unification of the Political

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*At any given time, the living see themselves in the midday of history. They are obliged to prepare a banquet for the past. The historian is the herald who invites the dead to the table.*

-Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

### Introduction

*Política de la liberación: Historia mundial y crítica* (2007) is the first volume of a soon to be completed trilogy in the complex theoretical production of Enrique Dussel. The second volume corresponds to *architectonics* (2009), and the last—put together in a collaborative manner and not yet published—to critique and the creation of the new. History, architectonics, and critique are the three constitutive moments of the political philosophy of liberation. The philosophy of liberation seeks to comprehend the historical drama of humanity from an *antimodern grand narrative*, to construct the theoretical base that founds political power upon *life*, and to comprehend the entropic and transformative dimension of political power from an ineluctable ethical commitment.

This first historical volume is the culmination of decades long work in the construction of a method and the elaboration of new philosophical categories that enable Dusselian liberation philosophy to establish new bases for another paradigm<sup>1</sup> of universal history. This is a history of humanity narrated from the not-said. A counter-narrative that, on the one hand, unties the knots<sup>2</sup> of modern political history, and on the other, is able to compose, to formulate, to again knot together a historical meaning.

This effort to knot together historical meaning is like a shout in the desert. In an age in which grand historical narratives were declared to have ended (Fukuyama, 2006), to write a world history is to produce theoretically what cannot be subsumed by neoliberal ideology. Market fundamentalism has taken the place of the macro-narratives that postmodern thinkers had written off, strategically utilizing amnesia—which uproots—and the fetishization of history—which naturalizes domination—as ideological tools that are not easy to dismantle. Unlike the attempt to recover the great story of Modernity as an unfinished task in an attempt to respond critically to our time, Dusselian philosophy of liberation, situated in a critique of colonialism, is given the arduous task of laying the foundations for a critical world history that, while dismantling the great story of Modernity, does not stop at the void of historical meaning proper to postmodern or market driven ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of his historical works in which it is possible to encounter the initial methodological underpinnings and the character of the ethical-political commitment that constitute them are: *Hipótesis para el estudio de Latinoamérica en la historia universal* (1966—although it will not be published until 2003), *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina* (1967), *Para una destrucción de la historia de la ética* (1972), *Historia de la filosofía y filosofía de la liberación* (1994).

<sup>2</sup> In *Para una de-structión de la ética* Dussel maintains: “If one wants to make a lasso with a chord to tie something, it is necessary to have previously undone the knots that the chord might have. In the same way, when reflective thought confronts something, the proper attitude of *logos* (which comes from *legein* and essentially means: to collect, to reunite), must first know to un-walk the path in order to return to the origin” (1972, p. 5-6, my translation)

Writing a counter-story, building an anti-traditional tradition, seeking and showing the not-said, will come up against the following limits of the modern history of politics: a) Hellenocentrism, b) Occidentalism, c) Eurocentrism, d) hegemonic classical periodification, e) secularism, f) theoretical-mental colonialism and, lastly, g) the non-inclusion of Latin America in Modernity. And in order to circumvent these limits, the critical world history of politics of liberation carries out four simultaneous tasks:

- 1) It traces, narrates what has been hidden by the modern myth of progress and the civilization of the world that begins from the Occident and to which we are supposed to feel grateful.
- 2) It unmasks cultural appropriation, imitation: philosophy and its classic political concepts are not born in Greece, the first important city is not Athens; civilizing contributions such as writing, the alphabet, geometry, astronomy, develop thousands of years before the formation of the western world.
- 3) It dismantles the chronology of 18th century German romanticism that linked ancient Greece and Rome with contemporary Europe in a successive line of historical stages through which the civilizational unfolding of Europe is understood as universal history. At the same time, it reconstructs a chronology that goes back to the Paleolithic as the origin of the political, causing Greece and Rome to no longer seem, to our time, so ancient or so foundational, to say the least.
- 4) It rearranges, relocates, the origins of politics and attempts to weave a historical narrative that departs from the experience of oppressed peoples as political actors and from the political philosophies that have inspired them.

Now, these tasks, as the Dussel himself warns, are put forth as as an outline and suggests an (unfinished) path forward—remaining as a legacy for the generations that will follow. Dussel's *Para una de-structura de la historia de la ética* (1972) begins with an epigraph of Heidegger's that seems significant to me when approaching this monumental effort to write an Other universal history: "The greater the work of a thinker...the richer is what is unthought in this work..." (Heidegger, 1996, p. 71). This does not imply a sort of carelessness, but rather, a recognition that breaking the limits used by thought—in this case historical—opens unsuspected fields for research and formulates new questions.

The critical hypothesis for politics of liberation that I would like to raise before providing a cramped synthesis of the significant elements of this history, is that what must be further developed in order to continue this work initiated by Dussel consists in deepening the recognition, the listening, the tracking, of those voices that are not yet fully understood. While it is true that there are technical difficulties in terms of tracing these stories, it is also true that the unfinished character of this work may imply other problems that Dussel does not address.

I find at least two problems: On the one hand, it seems to me that in the important effort to show cultural, scientific, political greatness outside and before Europe, the West, or Greece, the historian's gaze opens and puts other experiences under observation, dismantles and decenters, but we still need to give an account of how these other experiences themselves sustain relations of domination. The Benjaminian warning "there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (2008, p. 68) is the thorn in the side of one who would write critical history and who would not allow themselves to be enchanted by "great events," even by those that are just being discovered. A task, without a doubt, difficult to sustain along the way when the finding of the unspoken surprises us.

On the other hand, in our time it has become urgent to question the very limits of the anthropocentric paradigm in politics. When in *The Storyteller* Benjamin asks himself if the course of the world "is determined by the history of salvation or by the history of nature?" (2009, p. 55), he shows how the historical paradigm, even messianic ones such as Marxism, has not managed to develop its premises beyond the limits of the anthropocentric border and has not understood what Maturana and Varela have called the autopoiesis<sup>3</sup> of life and which must be considered as other important theoretical moments of the political philosophy of liberation.

The reconstruction of history from below retraces the path in search of what has been forgotten, it is a "history against the grain" that offers guidelines, which looks at the past from messianic categories and situates itself in a present that demands the concrete action of justice. Instead of holding up new events that might allow the hegemonic history to be dislocated, the task would be, rather, to find the ruins of any possible history to be narrated. From the archaeosystem to the Roman empire, which is the historical fragment the paper deals with, what are the faces of oppression, what structures were consolidating themselves in the relationship of domination with the rest of life on the planet? It is not a question to be fully answered in this brief introductory text, but rather to point out ways in which we might approach this text on the history of politics of liberation to find some clues.

### **From archaeosystem to the Roman Empire**

#### ***The will to live at the origin of the political***

Unlike the so-called modern "contractualist theories" that found the state and power upon the idealistic opposition between a state of nature and a properly political one, Dussel takes an anthropological path to date the originating time of politics in the first institutions that the human gave itself during the Paleolithic that permitted grouping, alliance and the exchange between families. And unlike negative conceptions of power understood as domination in the Weberian tradition, Dussel will emphasize the power of the will-to-live that, although at this moment is established through a historical narrative, will be fundamental in the ethical scaffolding of the political philosophy developed in the second and third volumes of the *Politics of Liberation*.

What draws our attention at this first moment is the coinciding with a Freudian description of an economy of desire that allows Dussel to explain the emergence of institutionality: the ceding of instinct to social principles, the postponement of desire and the admission of suffering to postpone greater pains.<sup>4</sup> It draws our attention because, in some way, it appears to be in tension with the unitary and non-negative visions of corporeality that the author himself tries to recover from the horizon of Semitic understanding, and because it seems, additionally, to maintain the classic western

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: *Materiales para una política de la liberación* (2007, p. 121).

<sup>4</sup> Already in the 20 political theses published a year before the work that concerns us here, Dussel pointed out: "S. Freud thought that 'culture was the postponement of desire', in the sense that the desire to sleep, for example, of a peasant, must be disciplined to interrupt it, postpone it early in the morning to work the fields. The pain of the early rise, however, compensates for the hunger of the root collector or hunter. The discipline of the farmer is a certain pain; but the pain of hunger of those who must without security look for food all day is greater. The institution of agriculture postpones the desire to eat all the seeds (leaving some for next year's sowing), the desire to sleep longer, the desire to wander on the plains of the nomad, etc. But that discipline (...) is useful for life and necessary to improve it qualitatively. It is the moment a) of the institution. " (2006, p. 58)

paradigm of the nature-culture opposition<sup>5</sup>, animality-rationality, that is constitutive of a vision of the human necessarily integrated when thinking about its history and that from other historical paradigms would be called into question. It would be good to extend our analysis on these points to critique the Freudian conception of desire and what is not questioned in this historical paradigm, but the limits of this review prevent us from doing so, so we only leave these annotations as possible routes to continue working on the criticism of this critical history.

Now, the first institution, Dussel maintains, agreeing once again with Freud, is the incest taboo. This “proto-power” structure allows the constitution of an order—an order that required the development of implicit principles that made the political field more complex. Born with this first institution is the obligation to comply with consensual rule, the imposition of punishments, the celebration of rites of reparation and the demand for the respect of authority. All this in the Paleolithic which, as we previously stated, is the temporal setting for the constitution of political development.

Dussel points out: the “instinctive inhospitable nature” was transformed into “the nice cultural home of the human being” (Dussel, 2011, p. 4). But this characterization as the “nice cultural home of the human being” constituted upon incest taboo seems to forget that incest is not so much a rule that prohibits marriage with the mother, sister or daughter, as a rule that obliges the giving of the mother, sister or daughter to another in the establishment of alliances between clans, thus shaping, little by little, the gregarious life in increasingly broad social groups where the political field will gain in complexity (Rubin, 1975). In this sense, the oppression of women is a substantial element in the development of this archaeosystem in which “humanity demonstrated that it could remain, that it could exist as living, rational and pulsating” (Dussel, 2011, p. 5), but at the cost of women’s will-to-live, which consequently leads us to argue that we cannot properly speak of “humanity” universally, and that this archaeosystem, erected since the Paleolithic era, seems to show in the origin of institutionality not only a will-to-live, but also a will-to-power that denies, in this case, the will-to-live of women. How else could we, nevertheless, narrate the origin of the will-to-live as an institution without it being sustained by a relationship of gender domination? The question remains open.

### ***The Neolithic, the urban revolution and the conformation of regional systems***

With the end of nomadism and the establishment of the first cities, the field of politics was born, which, also for Dusselian philosophy, is a practical field that supposes the *polis*. But a *polis* constituted thousands of years before ancient Greece and Rome that will be rather its culmination. Six thousand years ago, sedentarism began a long process in the establishment of primitive cities that in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, the Indus Valley, China and the Eastern Mediterranean will become cities where the development of trade will bring with it the need for writing, the alphabet, and structures and institutions for the exercise of power resulting in “the highest institutional degree of rationalization of a community’s political relations” (Dussel, 2011, p. 9).

This history gives an account of how, for example, in the Mediterranean world, these cities were republics governed by oligarchies made up of farmers, industrialists and merchants—prototype of urban-port political systems, and of shipping and commercial empires that are the origin of the constitutional forms of Greek and Roman cities. Hence the possibility of overcoming the so-called

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<sup>5</sup> Dussel also refers to this opposition when he recovers the learning that the sophists had acquired throughout the experience of their travels that showed the cultural diversity of the peoples. (2007, p. 60)

"Greek miracle," and re-positions Greece in a more appropriate place in the history of politics as the culmination of a millennial process in Asia Minor and Egypt and not as the origin or birth of politics (as the narratives of modern history have ideologically taught us).

Furthermore, in this history it is important to show that writing allows the explicitness of political normativity in legal systems, for example, in Mesopotamia, almost 4500 years ago. Although these legal systems standardize a system of slavery and patriarchal domination, they also account for a critical opening. The Shulgi or Ur-Nammu Code (2094-2047 BC) shows a critical formulation of the law:

I did not give the orphan to the rich man, I did not give the widow to the powerful man, I did not give the man of one peso to the man of a thousand pesos, I did not give the man of a lamb to the man of an ox[...] I did not impose jobs, I made hatred, violence and the cry for justice disappear. I established justice in the country. (2007, p. 23)

This formulation, taken up by the Code of Hammurabi (1792-2750 BC) which, additionally, will make the public reading of the text possible, shows the construction of that space in which the rules are subject to common judgment, paves the way for intersubjective validity and creates a certain symmetry in the participation of those affected to socially apply pressure with legitimacy (2007, p. 24).

Another aspect that is important in this history is the construction of the symbolic narratives—like that of the resurrection of the dead and "the eye that sees everything" of Osiris—that gave rise to an ethical-political tradition that will be the source of what will later be Greece, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These symbolic narratives constitute the ethical-mythical nucleus that will be at the base—but denied, forgotten—of Western civilization and of the horizon of meaning from which we interpret and live out our quotidian reality. They are, for Dussel, those traditions that open the singular conscience to an ethical-political intersubjectivity that, on the one hand, places the actor on the public horizon and exposes that actor to both social and divine judgment. On the other hand, establishes a unitary, carnal anthropology that affirms the existence of the body, which will be a critical source in the opposition to the dualistic vision that later Manichaeism, Hellenism and Christianity will establish in their denial of corporality with the ethical-political consequences that follow from it.

Now, the narration of political development in the Neolithic on this side of the Atlantic is going to recover the *Maya*, *Mexica* and *Inca* civilizations as sources to think about political power from another, non-modern, horizon of meaning. In this story that begins more than 7000 years ago along with the first traces of agriculture, what Dussel recovers, beyond description, is the cosmogonic conception of politics and its cosmopolitanism. That is to say, it is a political power anchored to a history of the celestial universe that works in a context of ethnic, linguistic, political and cultural diversity. In the same way as in Egypt, the legitimizing myths will establish an order that allows the development of military and merchant power. The forms of organization in which life is reproduced in a community are rescued, such as the *altépetl* and the *ayllu*, and the ontologically distinct relation that exists between these civilizations and the cosmos. For example, in the case of the Incas, the constitution of the political order whose ultimate purpose is to maintain the order of the universe and thus avoid the occurrence of *pachakutik*, or disorder, disharmony.

### ***The great empires and the rationalized unification of the political***

In this stage, the history of politics will show how the empires forged on the Eurasian continent are macro-institutions of a political field that has gained in complexity and is now founded on war, thanks to the expansion of territories and wealth obtained by iron and horse as civilizing instruments.

From classical Chinese political philosophy, practical wisdom will be recovered, the conception of the time of politics as a time of opportunity very different from the Greek *kairos*, the strategic function of the doctrines that teach and stably organize the relations of power based on the virtue of obedience and respect for hierarchies. Almost two thousand years before the Christian era, the dynasties in China already had a bureaucratic, tributary system, supported by professional armies, with a collection of codes, with a construction of channels for navigation and walls to stop foreign invasions.

From the political thought of the Indian continent and the Iranian empires, an ethical-mythical nucleus will be born that will be put in conflict by philosophy of liberation with the one born on the horizon of Semitic understanding. On the one hand, the Brahminic tradition develops an ontology of subjectivity that brings with it an ethic of salvation, an interior vision and ascetic demands that renounce the pleasure of the body. The consequence is that the social order is not transcendent, a critique that will take effect when we look at politics and the common good in Aristotle. On the other hand, the Zoroastrianism that was born during the first Persian empire (559 BC), will produce a Manichaeism that will permeate political life with a certain dualism in which matter and body are related to evil.<sup>6</sup>

It is thus that Dussel reaches ancient Greece and Rome, but after a long journey of thousands of years in the process of complexification of intersubjective relations and political organization from the nomad of the Paleolithic to the great cities and empires of this Neolithic era in which we still find ourselves, but already situated in its final stage, of crisis and decadence. This work manages then, to dismantle the Greek miracle and reveal what has been hidden in the construction of its myth.

### ***Final thoughts***

We would like to point out some final reflections with the aim, not only of triggering the conversation in this space, but also to shore up the reasons for a broader reflection once it is time and to think more carefully about the exercise of philosophy of liberation in this effort to narrate another history of politics.

One of the clear bets of this effort, and which I think we cannot forget, is to narrate a sense of history that, unlike the empty and homogeneous time of modernity and the myth of progress, allows us to understand the open wound in the present that has yet to heal—"the enemy has not stopped winning" as Benjamin warns. This story seeks to be a political instrument. It is not the enjoyment of the cultured type that walks through the garden, following the image that Nietzsche himself (2000, p.

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<sup>6</sup> For more details on the development of this dualism in anthropology that has survived to this day, see: *El humanismo helénico* (1975) and *El dualismo en la antropología de la cristiandad* (1974) and contrast with *El humanismo semita* (1969).

32) sketches of the historian. It is not the amassing of new knowledge for the showcases of the academy. The vision of the past that is being built here does not seek the eternalization of a new image to replace the one that has been built by Modernity, but rather to establish a way of looking; a political way of looking at the past from the categories of a political philosophy situated in colonial critique that seeks the construction of a transmodern horizon of meaning that would enable another world of life more just than the one we live today.

And two more things: It seems to me that it is necessary to keep open the question regarding how to think about the relationship between life and history, life as a material principle that also transcends the living corporeality of the human and allows us to expand the sense of political action in the living organism we inhabit and call Earth. Additionally, I find it suggestive, in addition, to recover the myth of Cain and Abel that Dussel deals with in this text and that makes reference to the opposition between the utopia of desert nomadism represented by the innocence of Abel and the city as the space of the development of agriculture, domination and the evil that Cain represents.

In a historical moment of the culmination of the Neolithic in which most of humanity lives,, agglomerating in huge peripheries of hunger, impoverishment and violence and in which all forms of life are being threatened on the planet, maintaining the paradigm of politics in the space of the city seems to require us either to dismantle it in order to place the will-to-live and its institutional configuration beyond the cities, or to rethink the limits of the city itself and therefore, of politics, that allows the conservation and dignity of life. This is a task that philosophy of liberation has always taken as its own.

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