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Can There Be Religions Without Belief? Religion and the Normativity of Place in Latin America, Or Why Only Amerindians Can Save Our Modern Soul.

Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, Birkbeck College, University of London

0. Intro: Only Amerindia Can Save the European Soul.

A few years ago, the Greek human rights philosopher Costas Douzinas and I were in Brazil for a series of talks and conferences. We had been listening to and learning from our Brazilian friends for a long while, at a time of great creativity and enthusiasm associated to the rise to power of Brazil's multiform Left, constituted by various social movements and self-organised around the Workers Party. All of them were true interlocutors whose different yet mixed outlook made all the difference - liberation theologians and philosophers, feminist and leftist thinkers, landless activists, playwrights, the successors of Third Cinema, young decolonials, human rights advocates, and especially Afro and Amerindian intellectuals. Between each and all of these singular voices we found brilliant thinking and committed militancy ready to engage, critique and create.

We were following in the footsteps of thinkers like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, listening, learning, and being transformed by this amazing country and its extraordinary people. Brazil's creolised thought, deeply rooted in the religious and cosmological memory of indigenous communities that are both constitutive and contemporary, rather than mere "remnants" destined to be sublated by progress and the violent onslaughts of colonisation and capitalism, proved revelatory.

The crucial moment came when Costas began his final talk with a lapidarian phrase: "Europe is dead". The effect in the audience was very different from the

one he expected. He could just as well have shouted, “Fuck you. God is dead”. That would’ve been more acceptable. A member of the audience, a Brazilian gentleman of old age, stood up and before Costas could develop his argument firmly replied: “You cannot say that. Not here. We’ve spent five hundred years trying to think like Europe, be like Europe. It was the way of the future, you said; we were the past. We believed you. We believed in your belief. What now?”

The episode made the trip “interesting”, as our friend Slavoj (Žižek) would say, neither raw nor well cooked, but rather, in the middle.¹ Slavoj’s reference to Lévi-Strauss (neither raw nor cooked, but temperate) seems quite apposite in relation to the Brazilian episode. Not only it relates to the problem of dual organizations, the question of binaries originating in religious belief as the supposed key to the totality of culture and politics, and its radicalization in the indigenous milieu of the Americas. It also invokes Aristotle’s tri-partite geopsychology, a crucial and half-forgotten element in the colonial origins of modern philosophy, global standardization and the body politics of the law also known as “philosophical geography” without which modern capitalism wouldn’t have emerged.

It is the wager of this piece that the question of dual organizations and religious belief, radicalised in the indigenous thought of the Americas, merits renewed attention. If set in the framework of philosophical geography’s now half-forgotten significance in the colonial imposition of concepts of the human upon indigenous peoples and their conceptual universe, the dual structure of religious belief appears as part of a geopolitical design. If so, we may have to reverse and

¹ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (Granta, 2006) 16-17. See also Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Radical Dualism: A Meta-fantasy on the Square Root of Dual organizations, or a Savage Homage to Lévi-Strauss*, (Amsterdam: Hatje Kantz, 2012).

invert our own conception of religion: to think of it less as the royal road towards understanding culture in its totality, and more in terms of the historically specific political, economic and legal elements that have come to constitute the reactionary basis of capitalism (as itself a cosmology) which still operate under camouflage in much of today's modern philosophy and politics (including some strands of criticism). To radicalize the binary structure of religious belief from the perspective of indigenous thought, in this case the thought of Amazonian and other Amerindian groups, means to engage in the practice of a permanent decolonisation of modern/colonial thought as a project of global subsumption and standardization –a geopolitical design.

I refer in particular to the emphasis on the centre ground, the moderate and temperate middle. Also, to the (synthetic) middle or third way. This “third” way has been construed in accordance with the model of linear perspective, which proposes a sovereign viewpoint capable of systematising timespace and everything within it, while at the same time positing itself outside of it – a focal “centre-point” or the site and state of exception. This “centre-point” is often conceived as the proper place of thought, the well-grounded foundation of “normal” psyche and self-affirming subjectivity vis-à-vis the “madness” of particularly disposed, nervous, supposedly excessive “primitives”. Also, as the grounds for the resolution of alleged moral extremes and the taming of conflict.²

² See Frantz Fanon and Raymond Lacaton, “Conducts of Confession in North Africa”, previously unpublished transcript of a talk given at the 53rd session of the Congrès des médecins aliénistes et neurologues de France et des pays de langue française, Nice, 5-11 September 1955, now available in *Alienation and Freedom*, ed. by Jean Khalifa & Robert J. C. Young (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) 413-416, for my reference here to their take on “primitivist” and “modernist” attitudes to madness, spectator’s reports and confession in the context of a larger critique of western political philosophies of social contract that do not acknowledge their contradictory nature in colonial settings. Seen through Fanon’s eyes, the problem of the conditions and legal history of confession up to the colonial twentieth century echoes the sixteenth century problem of “inconstancy” among Amerindians. See also, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *A inconstância da*

More generally, this visual metaphor, based on a stable line (the horizon line), hinges on the stability of an observer imagined on a ground of sorts, a boat, a coastline, as the faithful spectator of an event out there, a shipwreck, a crime. In this metaphor, the horizon line determines not only the limits of communication and understanding but also acts as the very threshold of reason beyond which there's only muteness and silence, or the total liberation of instinct and appetite. Once imported into the realms of bio-psychology and geopolitics, or, later on, human and even post-human geographies, we rediscover this imaginary metaphor of the linear in the shape of the law of all or nothing: the ungrounded, deracinated and mobile "native" (alien, immigrant) in his or her inconstancy and madness, knows no limits.

First recovered between the two medieval and early modern Scholastic schools (from Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas to de Vitoria, Luis de Molina and Tomás de Mercado) by jurists and theologians, the moral authority of linear perspective and (the middle) place in philosophical geography operated as an organizing matrix of the lands and peoples of the Earth. From such perspective they were viewed, as it were, from a distance, thereby establishing the peoples that occupied the temperate or middle zones as more advanced and the very standard against which the peoples of the torrid zones (the "tropics of empire") and the outer worlds or peripheries would be defined as backwards, and their psyche as feminine or child-like, excessive, hysterical or mad.

This way of seeing the world and its peoples (from above, at a distance, as the universe was once thought to be organized for the all-seeing eye of God), which

alma selvagem (São Paulo: Cosic Naify, 2002) especially 183-266; there's an excerpted English version titled *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul. The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th Century Brazil* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2011).

functioned as an ontologically organizing and normative principle, obeyed a cosmological tradition that “that had long associated latitude with temperature, temperature with the nature of places, place with the physiology and psychology of peoples, and human nature with the ‘place’ that polities ought to occupy in a global world order”.³ Such a cosmological tradition, which included ancient and medieval intellectual sources, was re-elaborated, as you know, in the contexts of the Portuguese expansion into Atlantic Africa and later on to serve the needs of Spanish and other European powers’ imperialism across the Atlantic.

Moreover, in the wake of wars of secession and independence against external colonialism, this way of seeing, imagining and calculating became the framework for the organisation of post-war republics and economies around two central forms of internalisation of the colonial: the subjectivity of persons (an inclusive-exclusionary, or “slicing and dicing” conception of humanity) and the objectivity of territories (a “natural order” of centres and peripheries, north and south, in or out of history). It is in recognition of this fact that those of us who participated in the seminal debates which launched the so-called “decolonial turn” in the 1990s but have remained suspicious of theories and theorizations that perceive themselves as non-ideological (post-modernism, post-colonialism, post-racial theories, etc.), nowadays tend to avoid speaking of “coloniality” and prefer to engage with questions of (subjective) *self-colonisation* and *internal colonialism* as two sides of one and the same coin.

This “same coin”, this framework -visual, ontological, normative- is the result of a mixture of old and new ideas that nourished and informed the intellectual

³ Nicolás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire. Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008) 409.

mindset of explorers, conquerors, chroniclers, businessmen, lawmakers, contract theorists and missionaries at least from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onwards. Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, André Thevet and Jean de Léry, Antonio Vieira and Hans Staden, Francisco de Vitoria and Luis de Mercado, Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza and the Scottish pioneers of political economy as well as their successors, their imagination and their political ambitions. This was the framework that set and staged their view of the south and drove them there in the first place. Thereafter, setting the stage for what would become a decisive moment of original acquisition and accumulation, the very blueprint for globalization, both constitutive and contemporary.

Put otherwise, this is the moment when the “persecuting society” that had developed within medieval Europe “nourished by militarism and Christian intolerance, which viewed ‘the Other’ mainly as an object of aggression”,⁴ specifically in relation to “those who were regarded as deviants from standard Christian belief and practice”, and the “demonization” of such groups,⁵ on the one hand, and on the other the more concrete needs of labour force of conquering Spaniards and other Europeans, became entangled. They fused to provide the frame and filter through which businessmen like the Florentine Vespucci, missionaries like Vieira or De Léry, jurist-theologians like Sepúlveda or Mercado and the makers of the modern discipline of “Natural and Moral History”,

⁴ Silvia Federici, *Calibán y la bruja. Mujeres, cuerpo y acumulación originaria* (Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2010/17, 7a. ed.) 294, citing Seymour Phillips, “The Outer World of the Middle Ages”, in S. B. Schwartz, *Implicit Understandings: Observing, reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 60.

⁵ Seymour Phillips, “The Outer World of the Middle Ages”, 61-2.

interpreted the cultures, religious cosmologies and sexual customs of the inhabitants they found in the Americas.

Cultural markers such as nudism, women's sexual freedom or their autonomy vis-à-vis community chieftains, polygamy, and sodomy, which initially coexisted with more negative portrayals of devil worshiping and inconstant deviance contributed to the invention of the indigenous "Indian" as little more than beasts of burden. Together, such markers helped to configure the fiction that the conquest wasn't merely a financial enterprise, a rush for gold and silver, but rather a mission of conversion and civilization; and thus, that not everything about colonization was shameful.

Such claims, which in 1508 helped the Spanish Crown gain for itself papal benediction and absolute authority over the Christian Church in the Americas, are echoed nowadays by leading Oxford theology professors, conservative politicians and government officials, as well as peddlers of "prisoners of geography" discourse.⁶ This time, in the fire this time, the argument is often advanced in the name of rights to freedom of expression and alleged evidence-led academic research rather than strict religious doctrine. Posing as dispassionate examinations of imperial projects, they attempt to balance out the violence committed to build empires with their supposed benefits, testing ethical/political critiques of coloniality against "facts" rooted in the self-serving justifications of imperial administrators with the aim of developing a "Christian ethic of empire",

⁶ Nigel Biggar, "Don't Feel Guilty About our Colonial History", in *The Times*, posted 30-11-2017, available at <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/don-t-feel-guilty-about-our-colonial-history-ghvstdhmj>. For opposing arguments, see Richard Adams, "Oxford University Accused of Backing Apologists of British Colonialism", in *The Guardian*, published 22-12-2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/dec/22/oxford-university-accused-of-backing-apologists-of-british-colonialism>

thereby rehabilitating yesterday's imperialism as a force for moral good in a way that can help justify the military and economic interventions not only of yesterday but also of today.

Notice that in both cases, yesterday and today, the "centre" holds: the equation consisting of belief (grounded, centred, temperate) + Christendom = moral good. Belief is here understood as faith in the thaumaturgy of the immaterial, be it soul or mind, conceived as a potency that may transform the world from within. Such faith is based on the supposed intrinsic power of knowledge and values as pure public goods that arise and may be accumulated in the centre, and then transplanted elsewhere to exert their natural productive capacities. This sort of analysis not only conveniently forgets that the productive capacities of values and knowledge aren't naturally determined, but rather, that social norms and legal rules performatively instituted and sustained limit or not the fecundity and extension of knowledge. But also, that in the conditions of modern coloniality and capitalism this happens in terms of the organization, control and orientation of global and collective work, that is, in terms of domination (Christian domination).

As in the sixteenth century, these claims make invisible to the eyes of the world, and possibly to the colonizers themselves as well as their successors, any sanction or proper remedy against the beneficiaries of the atrocities that they may have committed or continue to commit against Amerindians, Africans and other "southern" peoples. This way of (not) seeing works "as a license to kill, independent of what the victims could do", as Silvia Federici says. She observes how in spite of early sermons about the kind Taínos or the good savage "an ideological machine was set in motion, complementing the military one, that

portrayed the colonized as ‘filthy’ and demonic beings practicing all kinds of abominations, while the same crimes that had been attributed to lack of religious education” were subsequently treated as signs of cognitive and ethical lack or physio-psychological deficiency. Amerindians were associated to the alleged nature of their environs – excessive and exuberant like the jungle, in contrast with the stone-like certainty of belief of the nations placed in the temperate zones of the earth. Set in such manner, this binary immediately evokes notions of certainty of belief versus threatening inconstancy and risk. Such images of the “torrid zones” would easily evoke in the minds of European observers familiar pictures of hellfire and damnation, and therefore appear as evidentiary signs “that the Indians were under the dominion of the devil and they could be justifiably deprived of their lands and their lives”.⁷

Hence the importance of asking the question I hope to examine in the rest of this paper in relation to the reversal of Western religious binary structures in Amerindian indigenous thought and cosmology: can there be religions without belief? In what follows, I’ll proceed by means of a brief genealogy of the religious creolisation that took place in the Americas, in the wake of the encounter between Christians and Amerindian “cannibals” as well as Africans.⁸ I’ll emphasize questions of method in relation to the transcendental categories of religion and the undoing of belief, as well as its consequences in terms of a philosophy of action, law and politics. In doing so, I’ll both supplement and criticise our modern onto-theological reliance on the synthesis of binaries in the unifying third, “simple”

⁷ Sylvia Federici, *Calibán y la bruja*, 296, for the English version see *Caliban and the Witch* (Autonomea: 2004) 222.

⁸ Jane Ana Gordon, “Creolising Political Identity and Social Scientific Method”, in *Africa Development*, Volume XXXIX, No. 1 (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2014, ISSN 0850-3907) 65-80, for my understanding of “creolisation”.

good/evil binaries, and the normative authority of the middle place as the immanent point from where a transcendental (immaterial) power can transform the world and inter-human relations, serve as “a force for good” due to its alleged intrinsic capacity, as well as a “sheet” that can be naturally balanced. My (genealogical) standpoint will be the perspective opened up by the dialogue that began to take place in the late 1960s between feminist theory, anthropology and Amerindians (the “spirit of 1968” in the Americas).

2. A Brief Genealogy of Religious Creolisation.

For the purposes of this brief genealogy, we can recognise in Christianity a body of knowledge about the human world, one that is a principal source of inspiration of the human sciences, but crucially, one that does not relate to other bodies of knowledge and values from a position of unique hegemony. In this framework of creolisation or “the association of associations of various classes and social” as well as political identities, militant agents may well include in their actions elements that are recognisable as “intellectually Christian” working together with indigenous (Afro and Amerindian), peasant, and workerist ones.⁹ This actional framework is a result of the opening of Scholastic thought to the historical conditions of its encounter with the explosive conditions of Amerindian cosmological and religious thought in the Americas. In time, a new religious and philosophical dimensionality would emerge out of this milieu informed by the Afro-Amerindian cosmologies that populate the world of the poor in our part of

⁹ Álvaro García-Linera, *La potencia plebeya. Acción colectiva e identidades indígenas, obreras y populares en Bolivia* (Clacso/Prometeo Libros, 2013) 16-7, also Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred* (Stanford University Press, 2013) 93, on being “intellectually a Christian” in contrast with “a Christian intellectual”.

the world. It may be recognised not only as a heterodoxy but actually as a worthy challenge against the “creeping neo-Christendom” of Christian theology.¹⁰ Known in the wake of the 1968 Medellín Conference as “Liberation Theology”, it’s also superior to most theological orthodoxies in that it’s the only one that inspires radical action through its prophetic voice and incarnational vision: “real incarnation in this world ... leading to the cross” and putting death to the service of life, in Jon Sobrino’s terms.¹¹

In this respect, and in the historical context of the struggle against colonization, Amerindian religious cosmology could be read not only as a “Death of God” a-theology but also as a cosmopolitical perspective in which “human beings proper are a species within a multiplicity of other species of human beings who form their own societies”. In other words, a generalised personhood. An implication of speaking of the “own societies” of meta-person others among the Araweté or the Achuar, is that they do not conceive of “the supernatural as a level of reality separate from nature”, insofar as the human condition is common to “all nature’s beings ... Human beings, and most plants, animals, and meteors are persons” with a soul and individual life. Divinity originates as a kind of animism of higher taxonomic order, with metapersons as participants in and controlling forces or ordering principles of life. Rather than economic or legal subject/object relations of production, in such a system women and men are recipients of the plants they cultivate, have a personal relationship with them, talking to and

¹⁰ Stephen J. Pope, “On Not ‘Abandoning the Historical World to Its Wretchedness’. A Prophetic Voice Serving an Incarnational Vision”, in *Hope & Solidarity. Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. by S. J. Pope, Orbis Books, 2008, 44-61, at 53. Pope cites Jon Sobrino, *Where Is God? Earthquakes, terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, Orbis Books, 2006, 136, and *Jesus the Liberator*, Orbis Books, 1993, 17.

¹¹ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, trans. by P. Burns & F. McDonagh, Orbis Books, 1993, 229.

helping them mature. Similarly, in this cosmo-political economy, laws and commands are the result of humans absorbing divine powers, and those humans will soon find themselves confined to the (utopian) space of the sacred and fought against if they try to become a ruling class.¹²

Such radical anti-institutionalist politics and fighting universalism informed the high Scholasticism of people like Bartolomé de las Casas in the 16th century, and 20th century Liberation Theology and Philosophy. Instead of the previous binary distinction between God's realm/this world, the problem of the bifurcation of being is reset in a way that refers back to a distinction between Life not itself alive (that is, the form and constancy of the soul according Aristotle's most post-Platonist work, *De anima*) and living beings. Arguably, what comes in the wake of the encounter between European Christians and indigenous cannibals after the fifteenth century is a new and different answer to the problem of multiplication and the order of beings: how does one bifurcate into two? How one comes to be (out of) two? How are we to make sense of this gap between creator or producer and the recipient produced? As can be seen, this matter pertains to life in the most concrete sense: on the one hand, to sex as both transmitter of life and disjunctive division (*sectus*); on the other, to the pathologies of freedom that emerge as soon as we realise we are no match for our creations, especially in the technological world, the technosphere that comes in the wake of tele-technologies of linear

¹² I use the term "Death of God a-theology" in the sense given by Linda Martín-Alcoff and John D. Caputo during a 2005 discussion on Paul's legacy a propos of Žižek's contribution. See John D. Caputo, "Postcards from Paul: Subtraction versus Grafting", in *Paul Among the Philosophers*, ed. by John D. Caputo & Linda Martín-Alcoff, Indiana University Press, 1-23, at 11 and 14. On Amerindian Perspectivism, see Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View. Humanity and Divinity in Amazonia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 55, and Philippe Descola, *In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 93.

vision applied to the navigation, conquest, colonisation and capitalist extractification of the globe -from maps to the stack.

As is known, the latter term in the Aristotelian distinction described above, living beings, is further differentiated into the three levels of the soul. These are three different levels in which living beings, especially but not only human humans, can be receptive to the soul's forming power (i. e. light, reason) to the extent allowed by the physical or bodily properties communicated by place, in accordance to the neo-Platonist reading of the distinction between cold Northerners, hot Africans and South-Asians, and temperate Greeks as well as Europeans in Book VIII of Aristotle's *Politeia*. This tri-partite model, itself indebted to the description of the human soul as constituted by three hierarchically related parts in Plato's *Republic*- appetite or instinctive perception (*epithumia*), spirit or emotion (*thumos*), and calculation or reason (*logismos*) - would provide not only a psychological but also the geo-political template for the encounter between Christians and Amerindian Caribs or Cannibals during and after the fifteenth century.

Aristotle's geo-political model accords to middling Greeks ("Greeks carrying gifts", as per the story of the Trojan horse in *The Iliad*) the ability to carry out reason's works by summoning will power against the predatory claims of unrestrained instinct. Barbarians, in contrast, either fail to reason properly or cannot summon the requisite strong will-power; they give in to laziness and inconstancy. Despite its apparent simplicity, in the hands of Christian jurists and theologians such as the Scottish Dominican John Mair and the Crown chaplain Bernardo Mesa, this model has proved an enduring rationale for Western colonialism and totalising racialist anthropologies, which posit religion and belief

as the royal road to the essence an ordering of being and culture. It assumes constant belief (in God or the Tribe and its King, with reason assisted by spiritedness) as the impulse to contemplate and constitute the whole, to restore oneness, and thus as the being and the perseverance in being of the group as a reflexive and identitarian totality.

From the outset, Amerindians and their allies questioned the centrality and totalising character of belief, casting suspicion on the idea of society as a calculated totality founded on the obsessive policing of an essential hard core and its limits, which uses the exterior as an inverted mirror for self-identity. Put simply, Amerindians were suspicious of their Greek-Christian fellows bearing the gift of totalising belief or “true faith”, much like the Brazilian gentleman of Costas’s story.

It’s not that they refused the gift. The fact is they accepted it. However, being experts in the alter-law of symbolic exchanges and reciprocity,¹³ Amerindians recognised it for what it really was. Namely, an empty gesture. For they were being asked to embrace freely what was already being forcibly imposed on them. In a move that enthused their conquerors, Amerindians accepted the Europeans’ true faith. But they would welcome God’s word and kingly order one day just to ignore it the next. Much like the Brazilian gentleman of Costas’ story.¹⁴

¹³ See on this, Marcel Hénaff, “Living With Others: Reciprocity and Alterity in Lévi-Strauss”, in *Rethinking Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009)*. *Yale French Studies*, volumen 123, Yale University Press, 2013, 63-82, at 65. Also Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Beacon Press, 1969, 51 and 496-497.

¹⁴ Serafim Leite, the historian of the Society of Jesus in Brazil, identified “deficiency of will” and “superficial feelings” as the main obstacles to the conversion of the Indians. Relying on a considerable archive of catechists’ records and chronicler’s observations, from Fernández de Oviedo and Antônio Vieira to Gandavo and Capistrano de Abreu, Leite and others speculated this was the reason why Christ had sent his disciple Saint Thomas to preach in Brazil: as punishment, the apostle of doubt was given this most difficult labour of bringing belief to those incapable of believing. See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul* (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2011) 4-5.

Put in relation with the question of method in the early modern constellation, the Amerindians' move can be understood thus: to deal with Belief, True Faith, Law and Life or Being as in some sense catapulted to the level of a totalising, transcendental ontological category or structure. Going further, to arrive at the bifurcation or multiplication at the heart of this totalising structure - which undoes the structuring order from within. Furthermore, the invitation is to move from the transcendental divide of the one intrinsic power towards multiple speculation and disobedience to any external force imposing itself upon the collective work and reasoning of all.¹⁵

3. From Bifurcation to Multiplication: Religion, Liberation and Permanent Decolonisation.

The move from bifurcation to multiplication in matters of belief via a method of quasi-Scholastic transcendental inquiry is the very mark of Liberation Theology and Philosophy as well as all philosophical anthropologies of permanent decolonisation. This is the case in the tradition that goes from the "defender of the Indians" Bartolomé de Las Casas's arguments in *De unico vocationis modo* (1530) to Jon Sobrino's incarnational vision (1992), Enrique Dussel's *anadialectical* transmodern method (2003), and the *Cannibal Metaphysics* of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, all of them informed by Amerindian religious cosmologies.¹⁶ The point

¹⁵ Among the religious and secular chroniclers, only the Capuchin monk Abbeville seems to have noticed this relation between inconstancy and method: "In truth they are inconstant", he wrote, "if allowing oneself to be guided only by reason may be called inconstancy". But even he mentions Reason to the detriment of Will, which Amerindians supposedly lack. Ibid. 5. Other examples in Hispanic Latin America include José María de Ripalda and Denis Mesland, Descartes' friend and correspondent.

¹⁶ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 158-159, and *Ética de la Liberación*, Editorial Trotta, 1998, 205, 209, 259. Also Eduardo Mendieta's introduction to Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, ed. by E. Mendieta, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, 5; and Roberto Goizueta, *Liberation, Method, and Dialogue: Enrique*

of Liberation philosophy and the anthropological theories of permanent decolonisation is that this fundamental multiplication must itself be thought within the framework of the totalising belief or structure – for instance the providential messianism of Europeans, which narrates historical events in the context of a universal confrontation between true faith and infidelity - which it simultaneously undoes.

This is to say that in accepting the Greek-Christian (religious) gift but choosing not to believe, Amerindians and their successors effectively challenged the religious ideological matrix of their Christian conquerors. In such a matrix, the image of the border separating the centre from the other parts of the world (and the soul) is read as a line of separation between “us” and “the enemy”, meaning that war (of extermination) plays a strategic role in the definition of the forces between the groups and peoples inhabiting the world, by rendering them defenceless and advancing the “desertification” necessary to the Christian capitalist colonization of the exterior.¹⁷ In Zizekian terms, Amerindians sought to disintegrate the semblance of freedom inherent to the symbolic and geopsychological order that emerged from the Greek-Christian gift offered by European religious missionaries and jurists.

Amerindians acknowledged the fact that the choice being offered by the Europeans was, like every choice we confront in language, a choice of choice itself; that it involved the question of belief in belief, or as Jean Pouillon would say, that there is always doubt at the heart of trust and conviction so that to believe is to

Dussel and North American Theological Discourse, Scholars Press, 1988, 68-73. See Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*, Orbis Books, 1992, 8 ff. and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View. Humanity and Divinity in Amazonian Perspective* (University of Chicago Press, 1992) as well as *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Univocal, 2014).
¹⁷ Elsa Dorlin, *Se defendre. Une philosophie de la violence* (La Découverte, 2017) 19-28.

confront that contradiction at the heart of one's faith. Moreover, Amerindians put forward the thesis that this was the result of distinguishing between two worlds, "this world" or nature, on the one hand, and on the other the "not this world" of mind, culture and supernatural religion, and sought to test such thesis.¹⁸

In both accepting and refusing the Greek-Christian gift, Amerindians made a choice that effectively changed the coordinates and object of their choosing. To perform an act that changes its very object, "the deliberate directing of ... energy in action that ... fashions new relationships and new reality", distinct from so-called free choice, is for liberation theologians what can be properly called freedom.¹⁹

Now we can understand how is it that in encountering Christian Europe, Latin Americans can be eagerly pro-European and fiercely anti-Eurocentric at the same time, and further, eagerly anthropomorphic and furiously anti-anthropocentric.

Let's now take a further step in our brief genealogy, moving to the story of what happened when Christians encountered the indigenous Carib, which they renamed Cannibals, and the latter engaged in an experiment concerning the possibility of religion without belief.

4. *The encounter between Christians and Cannibals.*

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, Granta, 2006, 14-17, referencing Lévi-Strauss and indirectly evoking the Aristotelian diagram of the three souls. Also, Jean Pouillon, "Remarks on the Verb 'to Believe'", in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. by M. Lambeck, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 90-96, at 94.

¹⁹ See Roger Haight S. J. "Juan Luis Segundo", in *Empire & The Christian Tradition. New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. by Kwok Pui-Lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger, Fortress Press, 2007, 439-454, at 443; and Stephen J. Pope, "On Not 'Abandoning the Historical World to Its Wretchedness'. A Prophetic Voice Serving an Incarnational Vision", in *Hope & Solidarity. Jon Sobrino's Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. by S. J. Pope, Orbis Books, 2008, 44-61, at 49, for action in solidarity.

On the fourth Sunday of Advent (21 December) 1511, after having enumerated what he called the *cruedades exquisitas* committed against enslaved Amerindians, Dominican friar Antonio Montesinos informed the stunned members of his audience in the island of Hispaniola, that the way things were going they could “no more expect salvation than the Moors ... who lack the Faith of Christ and do not wish to seek it”. The outraged audience included not only one of the future founders of liberation theology, Bartolomé de Las Casas, but also His Majesty’s governor Diego Colón (Christopher Columbus’s son).

Promptly afterwards, the settlers appealed to King Ferdinand the Catholic, by then the widower of Queen Isabella I of Castile whose main concern was to maximise extraction of gold and silver in the colonies and by implication the need for ever-greater quantities of forced labour. In their legal appeal, the settlers construed Montesinos’s diatribe as a challenge to the Crown’s sovereignty, and a declaration of war against the King’s title over the New World. This obliged King Ferdinand to call a gathering or *junta* of jurists and theologians to meet with his councillors at Burgos in 1512, in order to examine the legitimacy of his title in the Americas.²⁰

The Burgos *junta* concluded the Indians should be treated as free subjects of the King and could be ordered to work as long as their labour did not interfere with their conversion, and as long as it was tolerable labour. Unhappy with the findings, King Ferdinand and his settler-investors asked for a second opinion from the Crown’s chaplains. One of them, Bernardo Mesa, wrote in his *parecer* or legal opinion that the Indians weren’t slaves *de iure* (since they hadn’t been won in a

²⁰ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* 3.1.2.4, 1994, volumen 3, 1762.

Holy War against infidels and could not count as infidels themselves) neither were they slaves bought in the market nor born of other slaves. The only reason he found was “their lack of understanding ... and the absence of will to persevere in the practice of the Faith ... for that is the condition of natural slavery, as the philosopher says”.²¹

The philosopher in question was Aristotle. Mesa added, referencing Aristotle once more, “or perhaps they are, as the philosopher says, slaves on account of the nature of the land, because there are certain lands that the aspect of the heavens renders subject to others”. Although this was not the first time the doctrine of natural slavery was cited by European imperialists, it was certainly the first time that an official debate included the question of the so-called “inconstancy” of the soul of the Indians (the absence of will or spirit to persevere in the practice of the Faith, which they had “reasonably” accepted) as a problem that could lead to questioning the legitimacy of the King’s title in the New World, and thus to war. Crucially, the problematic nature of the Indian soul was linked in these debates to the alleged moral authority of place and geography. This was the first time that apologists of empire effectively argued the insignificance of the global south.²²

In his 1550 *Apologia pro libro de iustis belli*, a summary of his better known *Democrates secundus* (1544) the crown jurist and translator of Aristotle, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, cited the tripartite geography of races or nations which invoked the Aristotelian diagram of the three souls to claim that Indians did not meet the natural preconditions for preserving political autonomy from Christian

²¹ Ibid. 3.2.1.9, 1994, volumen 3, 1784-5

²² Ibid. 3.2.1.9, 1994, volumen 3, 1784-86. Also Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, 47-50.

Europeans. A quote from Thomas Aquinas's own commentary on Aristotle's *Politeia* permitted Ginés to render the issue in terms of the alleged inconstancy of the Amerindian soul. Barbarians, he said, are "those deficient in reason, whether because of the region of the heavens, which makes them weak, for the most part; or because of some evil custom, which makes them almost like beasts." As Las Casas put it after his confrontation with Ginés at the Valladolid *junta* of 1550, this learned articulation of geo-psychology and politics constitutes the most detailed and comprehensive blueprint for imperialism.²³

Recall that in what used to be called Hispaniola, today's Haiti, the native population, which numbered about one hundred thousand in 1492 had dropped to two hundred a century later. Many of them had died "of horror and disgust at European civilisation even more than of smallpox and physical ill treatment", to make ours Lévi-Strauss's words. "Commission after commission was sent out to determine the nature of the inhabitants", in the wake of the *juntas*. If they had souls "and were really men, could they be descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel? Were they Mongols who had ridden there on elephants?" If so, where did the elephants go since none were found? Or were they "Scotsmen brought over several centuries before by Prince Modoc? Had they always been pagans or were they lapsed Catholics baptized once upon a time by Saint Thomas?"²⁴

²³ Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Apologia pro libro de iustis belli*, Argument 4 [1550] 1997, 197. His formulation of the problem of inconstancy is derived from one of the earlier Iberian chroniclers, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia general y natural de las Indias* 13.6, 1535, xxviii; and, in theological and philosophical terms, from Thomas Aquinas's *In libros Politicorum Aristotelis expositio*, I.1.i.23 and 7.I.5. 968-1127, 1953, 23, 361-364. Another influential source attributed to Aquinas, *De regimine principum*, was largely written by his disciple Ptolemy di Lucca; see his *On the Government of Rulers* 2.1.5. 1997, 105. All sources cited also in Nicolás Wey Gómez, *Tropics of Empire. Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*, MIT Press, 2008, 68 n. 181.

²⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, Penguin Modern Classics, [1955] 2011, 75.

Some suspected the Amerindians indeed had a soul, but an inconstant one, given that, as the Jesuit Antônio Vieira put it another century later, “they receive everything that is taught to them with great docility and ease, without arguing, without objecting ... without resisting. But they are statues of myrtle that, if the gardener lifts his hands and his scissors, will soon lose their new form, and return to the old natural brutishness”. Vieira concluded that this people with no Faith, no Law, and no King “did not seem to offer a psychological and institutional ground in which the Gospel might take root”.²⁵

Of all these commissions the most deservedly famous was that of the monks of the Order of Saint Jerome. In the course of what was “tantamount to a psycho-sociological inquiry, conceived according to the most modern standards”, as Lévi-Strauss says, “the colonists were required to answer a series of questions, the purpose of which was to find out if, in their opinion, the Indians were or were not capable of living on their own”. All the replies were negative, of course, on the basis that the natives carry “perversity to the point of giving away their possessions ... Evidence given a few years later adds the finishing touch to the indictment: “They eat human flesh, and have no form of justice ... They do not have beards, and if by chance hair grows on their faces, they lose no time in plucking it out”.²⁶

These were “fact-finding” commissions in the sense in which the term has come to be used nowadays by political philosophers, international lawyers, experts on geopolitics, IMF economists and human rights do-gooders. On the basis of Aristotelian geo-psychology and Roman Law, following the model of inquiry

²⁵ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul. The Encounter of Catholics and cannibals in 16th Century Brazil*, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2011, 2-3, citing Antonio Vieira’s 1657 *Sermon of the Holy Spirit*.

²⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 75-76, citing the chronicles of Fernández de Oviedo and Ortiz’s 1525 address to the Council of the Indies.

inherited from the *concilium* and the *inquisitio* in places like Burgos, Valladolid, or Coimbra, and thereafter in Paris, London, Oxford and elsewhere, these experts attempted to solve the legal and theological problems posited by the existence of so-called naturals and their cosmologies in the Americas.

Notice that these were unfamiliar problems; for the enemy here was not a different orthodoxy or dogma, which they could recognise as a lower ranking belief-system in the hierarchy of beliefs, but rather, indifference to dogma and a refusal to choose to believe.

My contention is that the severity and persistence of this “problem” has had to do with the inability of standard normative historicism, Christian and otherwise derived from the model of Christendom, to come to terms with the challenge, a war-like challenge, implicit in the injunction to live with others and to learn how to live with others without a Big Other. This historicism has become more pronounced in our time, even after the various “linguistic” and deconstructive or rhetorical turns, as standardisation, persuasion (or confession and conversion) and the primacy of conventions take root in the humanities, law, psychology and the social sciences as the lines by Lévi-Strauss quoted above suggest.²⁷

Standardising historicism and conventionalism are accompanied by a much too poor understanding of performativity and rhetoric, and is firmly entrenched in the model of the self as economic man that developed in parallel with the emergence of global dominion, flows of trade, legalist contractualism, communication and financialization between the late middle ages and early

²⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 75, and Raoul Moati, *Derrida/Searle. Deconstruction and Ordinary Language*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014 on the maintenance of the primacy of conventions in the wake of the “linguistic turn”. Also, Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public. Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric*, Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012, on the debates regarding the nature of the public -the people- and public discourses.

modernity, supported even further by the late modern digital (counter) “revolution” of recent years. This is what the Amerindian refusal is all about. For (Christian) historicism makes true belief (not just *pistis*, or trust, but *kerygma*, or proclamation, precisely speaking) not only one belief among many but also and at the same time, allegedly, the one, unique or “unical” belief, hierarchically superior to all others. Similarly, persuasion and confession come to be treated as the expression of the sources of legitimacy of an organised compact or public in its “shared” values or conventional rules.

5. The (Amerindian) Problem with Christian Normative Historicism.

In brief, Christian historicism, which is a direct result of the admixture of imperial legalism, Greek-Christian geopolitical psychology, and the sort of psycho-sociological inquiry carried out in the Americas according to the “most modern standards”, proclaims the doctrinaire teaching about Jesus an aprioristically dictated, persuasive, conventional, posited source of legal legitimacy and a guaranteed (pre-destined) blueprint for action. In doing so, it makes the person-event that lies at the heart of the specific notion of Christian belief (i. e. resurrection/conversion/confession), or to be more precise the link between the particular incarnating person and the incarnated event or absolute experience, a necessary one. Notice, however, that if the link between the incarnated event or the absolute and the incarnating person or content becomes necessary, then the former would lose its dimension of transcendence, universality or beyond -its meta-personality, to make ours the language of anthropological explanations of original political society. Having lost its dimension of transcendence or meta-personality, the universal is subsumed by or absorbed in the incarnating particular thereby becoming merely a token of some invariant type or necessity.

In that case “one would be able to name God directly”, transforming it into an invariant type, a need, binding the god-figure to its function in response to our needs and ourselves to his representative authorities. Isn’t that, precisely, what the term “religion” (*re-ligare*) has come to stand for? Precisely, a civic cult. In other words, the one authority or the few may claim to have discursive and henceforth also ethical, legal and political “mastery of His essence”.²⁸

This is what occurs when, for example, formulary statements of damnation, condemnation, curse, or anathema, not only function to define the creed or to distinguish infidels, but moreover, to assume an organised state-like authority to deal with others and establish obedience to it, thereby becoming law-like in the sense of that term which is more familiar to us as subject-citizens of a world of rule-of-law states. In other words, the few come to rule over the many as the universal exception to the rule.

To be more precise, they, the one and the few, come to decide on what is to be taken as the exception and thus elevate themselves to the place of a universal predicate (constancy of belief, the will of all). This is done through a procedure of aggregation of approaches linked to otherwise divergent camps, groups or individuals, and their needs, interests or investments that fixes their attention on a specific text or object acting as the singular node for organising identity. Consequently, every relation with others becomes an object relation. Whereas the space of shared meanings in a cosmopolitical relation such as that produced in the ritual practice of the (Amerindian) original political society is the spacetime interval for active negotiation, the space of the object eliciting overlapping

²⁸ Ernesto Laclau, “On the Names of God”, in *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, Verso, 2014, 51.

attention (belief, faith, consent) from divergent groups or individuals evacuates the conflictual negotiation of meaning and orientation between subjects.

In such an emptied space labour comes to refer to the subject's production of the object as opposed to the object's mediation of the (receptive) labour between subjects. This is to say that what is at stake in such relation is no longer the intrinsic personhood, importance or uniqueness of the other, but rather, the ways that the exceptional subject figures the other (all others) as object(s) for its own purposes.

The result is, on the one hand, a practice of identity production, inseparable from imaginary cultural or conventional elaborations which isn't just symbolic but also makes symbolization into a site of self-affirmation and grounding. In other words, this phenomenon may be better understood as a politics of narcissistic projection and recognition in which practices of confession, proclamation and other rhetorical forms come to be conceived as a mode of inter-passive aggregation of overlapping approaches, rather than reciprocal inter-personal or inter-subjective negotiation. An idea of "public utility" begins to take shape here, based on the older emblem of pastoral power, the shepherd and his sheep, but, crucially, one that determines such relationship in a completely new way: one that reduces the plurality of the *sensibile* to mere ephemera and then submits such plurality to the unity of needs and the useful (*utilitas*), first, and, thereafter, to its exchange and expository value. That is, as useful objects for a subject. The usefulness or value of such objects, which may and have historically included human and other natural bodies, comes to an end in the very act of their consumption by a subject. Thus, we may speak of value as connected to their disposal or disappearance.

On the other hand, the public or people that emerges here as a social bond and boundary is only possible under conditions of specificity and particularity. Whether such conditions take the shape of a set of rules about how to relate to strangers (perhaps modelled on the Roman *ius gentium*) or a set of procedural rules and standards governing proper modes of mutual recognition as part of the public (on the basis of the presence of and constancy of will, taken as a psycho-geographical constant), the rendering of these conditions into the terms of the late *Respublica Christiana* (first, and later into so-called *ius publicum europeum*) entail conditions of exclusion, disposal or disappearance. For some modes of textual investment and procedural recognition to be meaningfully public, they must logically exclude other social links.

Thus, for instance, the *Respublica Christiana* that emerged on the basis of Christian political theology in the middle ages and early modernity established rules for the annexation of new territories with implications for those losing their grounds. In accordance to common law (*ius commune*, grounded on the common usage of Latin and legal as well as religious texts rendered in that language), Christian soil was annexed as equally important (*aeque principaliter*) whereas conquered heathen soil would be the object of *incorporación accesoria* or accession, as per the doctrine set by Guillelmus de Cugno and then taken up by Bartolus, Baldus and the Spanish school.

The kingdoms and ducados of Toledo, Navarra, Córdoba, Granada, Flanders and Naples, among others, were annexed *aeque principaliter*. In contrast, the Western Indies or *indias occidentales* of the Americas were the object of an accession. The former were recognised as bounded selves with cultural conventions, *fueros* and laws of their own, whereas the latter were absorbed

within the self of the conqueror and the conquering state, its laws and by force. Both entail forms of inclusion and exclusion, but only the latter is at the same time both integral -eliciting affective identification because the conditions of inclusion would help managing the problems of groundlessness in the wake of conquest, and of being a separate self by providing a set of narratives about who the subject is as well as practices of self-referential relations with the other from an exceptional standpoint -establishing a particular kind of asymmetry.²⁹

Here, investments at the level of the specific economy (bounded selves and self-referential relations grounded on textual forms) operate as a suture for the failed unicity of the more general economy (the ordering of beings proclaiming the unical authority of a central place, its Faith, King and Law). The conditions entailed by such a form of integral exclusion in a public generate a mode of enjoyment “that stems from embracing a violent dis-symmetry against others as a proxy for the problems of the general economy”. Moreover, this logic is made all the more efficient if (its violence) is repressed and erased from the historical record.³⁰

Thus, when revisionist historians like Elvira Roca Barea argue that the Américas weren't colonies because the specific character of their legal annexation meant there was no political subordination but total integration (legal, institutional, religious) with equal rights, or that the word “colony” wasn't frequently used until the accession of the Bourbons to the throne of the Spanish/Holy Roman Empire in the eighteenth century, and that Spaniards saw

²⁹ See Alexis Álvarez Nakagawa, *The Cannibal Laws. The Juridical Forms of Conquest and the Emergence of International Law*, submitted and defended for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the School of Law, Birkbeck College, University of London, May 2019, 35-6, for the sources of ideas used in this paragraph.

³⁰ See Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public*, 142.

themselves as continuing the enterprise of the Reconquista rather than engaging in a business operation (in contrast with the Dutch, the French or the English), they are effectively erasing the facts of exclusion as these were actually and differentially experienced by the various aborigines peoples.³¹

Not only that, they're also bolstering the fantasy of the social as a space of symmetrical and harmonious relations without violence. If this form of cultural annihilation isn't tantamount to genocide, at least not yet, it is at the very least continuous or derivative in relation to it. Its value depends on the repression of the underlier (violence), the over-appreciation of hypothetically shared values or the benefits of a supposed uniquely "civilizing" influence, and extracting pleasure (from anathematised others) in the (communicative) elevation of the contract-like communion of signs.

The repression of the violent impossibility of the (rhetorical, social, political) relation and of recognition of others through self-affirmation and mere aggregations is what makes up various forms of external and internal colonialism to this day. It's also what connects these more or less modern forms of internalised colonialism with older designations of others beyond the horizon of our perspective as mute, abject, or as objects incapable of making objections of their own and engage in combat or stasis -the kind of constant civil war that anthropologists, analysts and their interlocutors see in practice as the exception to the exception and the universal predicate (that there's no ultimate ratio and communion is missing).³²

³¹ See Elvira Roca Barea, *Imperiofobia y leyenda negra. Roma, Rusia, Estados Unidos y el Imperio español*, Barcelona: Siruela, 2016. For a thorough yet balanced criticism of Roca Barea's book, see José Luis Villacañas, *Imperiofilia y el populismo nacional-católico*, Madrid: Lengua de Trapo, 2019.

³² See, Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Boston: The MIT Press, 1996, especially 207 for the social-psychoanalytical on the other as amenable to the exception to the

The decisive event in this respect is the Council of Nicaea, convened by Emperor Constantine the Great in 325 AD with the aim of unifying the various tenets of Christology once, the empire having reached its limits, its rulers (first Licinius and then Constantine) embraced the movements of popular contestation that became remembered with the name of this great religious and philosophical tradition, in a sort of last-ditch attempt to restore and maintain their rule. In Nicaea, the assembled bishops were asked to accept a statement of teaching set out in the form of a declaratory creed.

The main point of such a statement was to exclude the teachings of the Libyan ascetic Arius, his mentor Lucian of Antioch *ad invidiam*, and his followers who disagreed with the doctrine of coequal Trinitarianism and imagined a time before the Son of God. After Lucian and Origen, Arius argued that the created Logos was not only subordinate to the Father in the order of beings but had also had a beginning. This means the Son/Logos was created and recipient of the rest of creation made by the Father, of a different substance in relation to the infinity and eternal character of the Father as a meta-person. If put in terms of historical development, this would mean that only the Son or Logos is historically determined and his coming a historical event rather than the result of necessity or a unilinear outcome of Christ's being co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father. The declaratory creed upholding the Christological teaching according to which the Son is co-eternal with the Father would mean, conversely, that the Son's coming isn't a rupture but a mere development or continuity.

universal predicate. See also, Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public*, 147 for the link between Aristotle's conception of stasis and the move from object to objection (*stasis, enstasis*) which I link here to the impossibility of communion and loving integration with the one king or ruler.

Decisively, 218 out of 220 bishops attending the Council signed their acceptance. An indication of the change in function of this, the first of the conciliar creeds, is the fact that the document drawn establishes, as if written in stone (as “the will of all”, to use other terms somewhat anachronistically) not only what is the received belief, but also what is not. The latter is anathematized. *Anathema*, a curse, was pronounced on those who held Arius’s propositions. Hereafter, belief comes to define not only the Christian in respect to the non-Christian, but also to distinguish the True Christian from the false (the heretic) in a manner that foregrounds later, modern friend/enemy distinctions that would be distinctive of state relations, internal or external. As in external or internal forms of colonialism and the kind of historicism which underlies it, or, more recently, in external or internal counter-insurgency decrees and operations.

My point is that not only the friend/enemy distinction is itself historical and contingent upon the appearance of state-like organisations. But also, that the enemy is represented as threatening to disrupt a line of historical development assumed as the most basic aspect of human existence. Which means that the friend/enemy is not ontologically primary and should not be taken as constitutive of the political as such. At best, it’s constitutive of the “modern” political if we understand the latter to mean only a politics of nations or publics emerging down the line from the great empires or religions, assumed to be determined by their more or less shared or homogenous appearance and values, constant loyalty before decreed rules and loving (fraternal, friendly) integration with the unique god-like ruler.

In contrast, I argue that what is primary is the antagonism between the ruler who seems himself as god-like and legitimised in our love for him, a purely self-

referential relation, and the people who emerge as such only in the context of *stasis*, lodging an (heretical) objection against the ruler's appeal to exceptionality, and engaging in protest or civil war. A corollary of my argument is that *stasis* - heresy, objection, or civil war- is primary vis-à-vis international war.

The Declaration of Nicaea invented the heretic, a figure of the stranger that didn't exist before insofar as its condition of possibility is integral exclusion: his exclusion is necessary for the perseverance of Christian society in its own being. His exclusion restores the past line. War against the heretic belongs to the order of restoration and *aletheia*; that is, return to origins and social reproduction. This is also the order of the instituted and re-constituted, politically and legally speaking, or a decisive effort seeking the restoration of (our) being against the contaminating presence of (their) external becomings. From here onwards, wars of reconquest, crusades and later on, wars of colonisation, evangelisation, and the civilizational mission could be justified by appealing to such a figure.

Moreover, the Declaration's "function [stating what must not be considered as the received belief] assumes an organised authority: bishops in council and not just in their sees".³³ In this sense, the heretic is not just a stranger, but also a stranger at war with the organised authority of a state-like institution and its posited rules. Not just an enemy, but *the* enemy of all. He is the image of external or internal enemies disloyal to "our" values not only because they might resist them in the name of some relative values that would be grounds for doubt and objection, or because they take up much effort before they give themselves over.

³³ Malcolm Ruel, "Christians as Believers", in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. by M. Lambeck, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 97-109, at 102.

This would mean that, conversely, “once they have received the faith, they stay firm and constant in it, like statues of marble”.³⁴

Instead, the heretic isn't merely able to choose, but in a sort of double-twist on the etymological Greek root of the term, he can choose and yet he does not. Like Arius, he's inside and outside, both at the same time. He's double, diabolical in the most literal sense of the term. But in inverted form, he's the conceptual persona of the subjectivity engaged in a war of liberation, not a war against infidels or outsiders but a war against “our” own declared authorities.

The circumstance of the Declaration of Nicaea was associated with the patronage of Emperor Constantine, on the one hand, and on the other with the acclamation of Constantine as Christian Emperor. It gave place, as its obverse, to the malediction of Arianism. As is known, the Arian controversy was never solved on its merits, but in terms of community loyalties and identities (chiefly, the major cleavage between East and West and the relationship of the Church and the Roman Empire). In this way, the demonstrative method of Greek philosophy (specially pre-Socratic philosophy) was pretty much abandoned and replaced by the legalistic and psycho-sociological method of declarations, acclamations, inquisitions, and anathematic or other such legalistic judgments. This decisive shift was to have momentous consequences for the development of medieval and early modern philosophy and politics, as well as for the anthropocentrism (and subsequent ethno-centrism) of the human sciences.³⁵

³⁴ Antonio Vieira, “Sermão do Espírito Santo”, in *Sermões*. São Paulo: Editora das Américas [1657] 1957, vol. 5, 205-55.

³⁵ See Fabián Romani Ludueña, *Una comunidad de espectros*, Niño & Dávila editores, 20??, for the enduring impact of anathematic forms of judgment at the heart of our anthropocentric human sciences.

Not only such use of belief actually turn the believer into its opposite, the unbeliever, somewhat paradoxically. It is also the case that in fending off the threat of (moral, ethical) relativism, which it itself creates, the community of believers, or more precisely its authorities, come to occupy the dual position of being hierarchically superior to all others (like a super-species, or the only species) and yet one among such others (just another species). As the judge of/against relativism, the “vertical” ethics and moral vision of the community of believers is placed *sub species aeternitatis*, rendering it more or less incapable of helping in the construction of ethico-political, economic, historical and geological life, which as we all know, takes place in a terrain that is less than eternal.

It is precisely against this sense of “legalised resurrection” as creed, as both historicism and a priori necessitarianism, that Liberation philosophers like Enrique Dussel, Jon Sobrino, or Ignacio Ellacuría, inspired by the thought and struggles of Amerindians, have directed their challenge. They do so in precise terms. For they speak of and denounce “creeping neo-Christendom” or the becoming-empire of Christianity, while emphasizing the dimensionality (i. e. time-changing engagement, utopian vision and prophetism, or *kairós*, in Enrique Dussel’s parlance) of the incarnational vision of the theology of the cross. This is a “radical drawing near for love and in love, without escaping history or manipulating it from outside, wherever it leads” even unto death, death put in the service of life, to use Sobrino’s terms.³⁶ It is indeed the closest thing to a call to arms against the very model of historicism and modern empire.

³⁶ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 244.

6. On the Disobedient Transformation of Christian Normative Historicism.

This isn't just a matter of distinguishing between church authority and individual reason. Rather, it has to do with the distinction between belief as declaration and belief as commitment, the extra-dimension added by Luther when the latter renovated the explanation of belief as personal commitment, already implicit in Paul's *Letters*. Importantly, this distinction has organisational implications but relates mostly to the psychic drives. The distinction here is between the Law, not only as outward performance but also as internalised obedience, on the one hand, and on the other Grace as action in solidarity or "effective mercy" in the language of Jon Sobrino.³⁷

Here, one may draw a comparison with the Heidelberg Theses: "The Law says 'Do this' and it is never done. Grace says 'Believe this' and everything is done". The comparison stands. In fact this wouldn't be the first time it has been pointed out that liberation theologies and philosophies made the Americas "the land of the second Reformation".³⁸ But it would be more appropriate to speak of this reformation as the first to occur on American soil. Not only because, as Joerg Rieger says citing Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "North American Protestantism has always been a 'Protestantism without Reformation'",³⁹ but also because Amerindians, performing as inconstant heretics engaged in a war of liberation, were the first to drive a wedge between the Law and engaged action in that continent. In doing so, they provided the basic motif for liberation theologies and philosophies as well as

³⁷ Ibid. 269

³⁸ Joerg Rieger, "Introduction: Watch the Money", in *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon, and Theology*, ed. by Joerg Rieger, Fortress Press, 1998, 10

³⁹ Ibid.

anthropological theories of permanent decolonisation. Notice too that engaged action is precisely what's at stake in the idea of the "protection privilege of the poor", as Frederick Herzog would say, in a way that has nothing to do with post-modern appeals to "religious" or "cultural otherness" or with a Jesus subservient to some universal framework of religion. Rather, it refers to God's walk among the suffering, a moral image that invites us to commit to others in distress and struggle with them, yet not for them alone, concretely and subjectively, without reservation.⁴⁰

In this respect, we can go even further and say that Amerindians are the paradigm of the subject who possesses belief by actually being possessed by it, as in the case of the inconstant Indians of the 16th century or the jaguar shamans of the Amazon and elsewhere; more clearly so than in the case of Luther himself. Let the clash between Christians and Amerindians be understood in this precise sense. For in refusing to confess and believe, Amerindians were in fact refusing to obey the law (of the empire) in order to engage (to act in solidarity and reciprocity, to walk among the suffering, to think otherwise) so that, literally, everything could be done. This is what the Amerindian maxim to "multiply the multiple" and the Perspectivism of their religious cosmologies and philosophy stand for.

Later on, we may return to this refusal and its impact on the paradox reduplicated in our time by the (digitalised) human sciences: that it is the

⁴⁰ Frederick Herzog, "New Birth of Conscience", in *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon, and Theology*, ed. by Joerg Rieger, Fortress Press, 1998, 147, referring to walking the road that goes from Hispaniola to Wounded Knee "including the auction blocks of black slaves and the abuse of women. Walking this road, we break the spell of fitting Jesus into a universal of religion". See also *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, ed. by Stanley Hauerwas, Nancy Murphy and Mark Nation.

unbeliever who believes that the believer believes.⁴¹ For now, it will suffice to notice that the encounter between Christians and Amerindians was not a clash between two self-serving dogmas or ideologies, one more universal than the other, but a clash of cosmologies, a clash of universalities, both of them equally totalising, but only one of which would explore the possibility of perceiving otherwise a seemingly mutually exclusive situation.

This perceiving and thinking otherwise does bear comparison with the psychically driven meaning of belief in Luther, for whom the “perceived presence of the Word was the reaction with a total affect that leaves no doubt that one ‘means it’, as E. H. Erickson observed in his psychoanalytical study of the leading reformist.⁴² But as Erikson goes on to say, “we, the heirs of Protestantism, have made convention and pretence out of the very sound of meaning it”.⁴³

In the 1961 play based on Erikson’s influential study, “Martin” (Luther), alone on the stage, screams at the heavens: “Oh Lord, I believe. I do believe. Only help my unbelief!”⁴⁴

The point is this: now that we’ve all become true believers what is required is the strength of unbelief. That is why I have summoned here the strength of unbelief of the Amerindians and their perspectivist perception, via liberation philosophy and theology, as the most worthy ally. This would be a mode of perception, of reasoning and engaging, itself indissociable from the experience of falling towards and bumping against the “ground” of the totality, without

⁴¹ Jean Pouillon, “Remarks on the Verb ‘to Believe’”, in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. by M. Lambeck, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 90-96, at 93.

⁴² E. H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, Faber & Faber, 1959, 203.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ John Osborne, *Luther*, Faber & Faber, 1961, the two final scenes. Notice the homology in the final scenes of the play between Martin’s cry and Jesus’s cry on the cross, “Father, why have you forsaken me!” See also Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*, 106-151.

reservation or hope for return (*a fond perdue*, in Adorno's sense). This is also the space and the moment of the totality or the structure's vanishing; a methodological "opening to inexistence", as Badiouians might say.⁴⁵

7. *Boxing Theologians!*

Let me invoke a Borgesian-Badiouian demarcation of structural vanishing and thinking otherwise as the point at, or the event in which, the totality or structure nearly succeeds in bringing together the orthodox believer and the heretic. As in Borges' short story *The Theologians*.⁴⁶ Alas, this is the same structural demarcation to be found in Enrique Dussel's philosophical rendition of the term *kairós* as the event of liberation in his reading of the contemporary debates about Paul among philosophers and political theologians (mainly John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Giorgio Agamben). As said before, this is the mark of Liberation Theology and Philosophy as well as Amerindian-driven anthropologies of permanent decolonisation.⁴⁷

It's important to recall that the poor of Liberation Theology have, in principle, little to do with the poor of neoclassical economics or Rawlsian theories of justice.⁴⁸ For liberation theologies and philosophies "the poor" is a person who

⁴⁵ See Alain Badiou, *Logic of Worlds*, Continuum, 2009, and 'Politics: A non-Expressive Dialectics' in *Philosophy for Militants*, 75, for my use of "inexistence" and "vanishing".

⁴⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, "The Theologians", included in *Labyrinths*, Penguin, 1970, 150, also "Del rigor en la ciencia", in *El hacedor* and "On Exactitude in Science" in *A Universal History of Infamy*, Penguin, 1975. Here again I follow E. Kaufman, *Do Dual Structures Exist?* 93. See also G. García Márquez, 'Posibilidades de la antropofagia', in *Anthropofagia Hoje?*, ed. by J. Ruffinelli and J. C. De Castro Rocha, Editorial Realizacoes, 2011, 47.

⁴⁷ Enrique Dussel, *Kairós: El acontecimiento liberador en Pablo de Tarso*, manuscript on file with the autor, 2009. Also available at www.enriquedussel.com/txt/II-CAP-4-31.pdf

⁴⁸ In such conceptualisations, the law of reciprocity is circumvented by linear narratives of historical time. In such narratives, current beneficiaries of past injustice are said to owe nothing in return to those from whom they received so much, and conversely, those who come later receive something from preceding generations but can give nothing back. Worse still, since in such narratives progress dictates that "developed" societies and future generations must be wiser and better, but moral duty rests with the weaker societies, the poor, and current generations, it is only the latter who are said to have a moral burden. This adds to the historical injuries inflicted upon less developed nations, the poor and worst-off present/future generations an insult: you're not

dwells in a place (actual or virtual) and not just a representative agent, the “relatively poor” of the space-economy of globalised flows. The poor of liberation philosophy not only dwells, but she’s at war. We speak of communities left behind and worst-off generations that constitute our destination, not only as humankind but even beyond humanity, as in the arrangement between humans and nonhumans we call Nature. In this respect, the mark of Liberation Philosophy and the Amerindian anthropology of permanent decolonisation is indeed to wage a war of liberation, but not necessarily a war of national liberation. Can we not speak of a war of natural liberation? Let’s do so in the sense of the liberation of place in combat with the dispossession of place –permanent decolonisation versus permanent “original” accumulation- as the main destination of a history defined not solely in social or biological terms, but also in geological and even cosmological terms, as is the case when we confront 21st century challenges such as climate change and the Anthropo- or Capitalocene.

As S. J. Pope says apropos of Jon Sobrino’s theology, “God is for the poor, *but not for the poor alone*. In other words the universality of divine love is expressed in a special care for those who suffer the most in this world”. This radically inclusive love gives rise to hope, which is a civic plebeian virtue, not other-worldly resignation, charitable dignity or justice as fairness. This radically inclusive love or hope-principle is what Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Enrique Dussel

really “poor”, you just happen to occupy a relatively low rank in a hierarchy of poverty; as such, you can aspire to advance, and you can do so since only you’re responsible for your own condition, only you can give! Such theories of justice, and the economic theologies and teleologies that underpin them, constitute an option for the poor *alone*. As such, they’re bad explanations of engaged belief and even worse blueprints for political action. Given the theoretical insult that is added nowadays to historical injustices, is there really any surprise in the fact that weaker societies, the poor and worst-off present/future generations cannot help but feel resentment (Adam Smith’s envy/sympathy) and give in to violence? See Jaen-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*, Chapter 5; and Marcel Hénaff, *The Price of Truth. Gift, Money and Philosophy*, Stanford University Press, 2010.

identify with *agape*. The latter is construed here as “issuing in mercy”; that is, as letting go (also of the object and nature), as gift and giving, or to dare approach the site of truth as the place where God is absent, an unbearable truth no less,⁴⁹ which suffers and struggles with the victims of injustice. This would be a love-driven “fighting universality”, to put it in Zizekian terms.⁵⁰

If this is the case, then hope and (attainable) utopia are not a delusion. Hope cannot be understood as being captivated by what does not exist, not yet, but is waited for since it is supposed to come. Rather, in accordance with the Amerindian axiom that “the earth is loaned to us by our children”, hope must be conceived of as an experimental device or a forward-looking tool (a technology of speculation or anticipatory realism) that invites us to reconfigure time not only as cyclical but as a continuous loop, as it happens in the mythical stories and philosophemes contained in the *Popol Vuh* of the jaguar people or in the myths decoded by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

By contemplating ourselves from the future in order to salvage what has been left by a ruinous past in the present, without reservation or (probabilistic) hedging, come what may, we re-establish the law of reciprocity between the future and the present as well as the link between our present and the past. The result is to act, in the present, as if the (final) catastrophe that may be projected onto the future had already occurred.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Stephen J. Pope, “On Not ‘Abandoning the Historical World to Its Wretchedness’. A Prophetic Voice Serving an Incarnational Vision”, in *Hope & Solidarity. Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. by S. J. Pope, Orbis Books, 2008, 48, for the prophet/priest dialectic, and 57 for *agape* as issuing, releasing or liberating in mercy. Also Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, Orbis Books, 1993, 34.

⁵⁰ Stephen J. Pope, “On Not ‘Abandoning the Historical World to Its Wretchedness’. A Prophetic Voice Serving an Incarnational Vision”, in *Hope & Solidarity. Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. by S. J. Pope, Orbis Books, 2008, 51.

⁵¹ *Popol Vuh. Relato Maya del origen del mundo y de la vida*, Trotta, 2008; and Francisco J. Varela, “The Dance: Subjectivity-Objectivity”, available at www.youtube.com, for a scientific distant

The connection between this speculative device and high Scholastic method (the transformation of early modern philosophy impacted upon by Amerindian religious cosmologies and other forms of thinking and philosophizing about contingent claims and the medium of contingency) is best rendered in the commentator's motto quoted by the priest during his discussion with Joseph K. after the Parable of the Door of the Law in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*: "the right perception of any matter and a misunderstanding of the same matter do not wholly exclude each other".⁵² The phrase resonates well with my invocation of Borges and Latin American literature earlier on. It could also resonate with current, challenging understandings of Hegel, but let me stick with the Latin American authors for now. After all, it is well known that Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Julio Cortázar were keen readers of Kafka.

Just as in Kafka's story, from the perspective of the priest the really deluded person in the parable is not the man from the country but the door-keeper himself. More or less could be said of the door-keepers of knowledge and power in the story of the post-16th century commissions told by Lévi-Strauss, which meditates upon their hold on theological and philosophical thinking as well as the social sciences: It is not the indigenous peoples who were duped but the European door-keepers, the jurists and theologians themselves.

As said before, it's the latter not the former who can be seen as the unbelievers. Historicism and unbelief creep into Christianity when the Christian

relative of perspectivism. Also Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, *Being Against the World*, Routledge & Birkbeck Law Press, 2009; Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet*, Zero Books; Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*, 62-63; and Evan Calder Williams, *Uneven and Combined Apocalypse*, Zero Books, 2011, for catastrophism and contemplating disaster from the future.

⁵² Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, Penguin Books, 1985, 238, cited by Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*, Routledge, 2001, 110.

theologian or his secularised version expresses his faith not only as trust but as certainty and belief in the existence of God just as well. For “he knows that by this very fact it is contestable and contested”, as Jean Pouillon puts it.⁵³ Above all, the Christian or the secularised Christian knows that there are other beliefs because his religion has a history and was constituted against the false gods. But also because this history has not ended since there are still idols and idolatries yet to be eliminated. For instance, Capitalism.

And with historicism, as Jon Sobrino observed, “neo-Christendom” also creeps in.⁵⁴ This is the imperial “domain of the provision of services and goods”.⁵⁵ In such a domain freedom is reduced to “free” market choice aided by probability, and nature enclosed into a reservoir of resources. Once enclosed “out there”, as lacking intentionality, and divided “in here” into objects with use-and exchange-value, not just as commodities but also as options or derivatives, and thus a subject-matter for calculation and “fair” pricing by markets, as the 16th century economical theologian Luis de Molina already implied (probability algorithms applied to markets may be the 21st century version of a 16th century debate about pricing and infinitesimals), nature becomes the practico-inert backdrop of the progress of humankind’s unique and universal culture.

The former, nature or rather “natural resources”, being judged unically as either a curse or a blessing.⁵⁶ In the meantime, nature is in fact being pushed to

⁵³ After all, the Christian cannot avoid expressing his faith not only as trust in God (confiance en, in French, confianza en, in Spanish), but also as belief in (croyance à, in French, creencia en, in Spanish) his existence and belief that (croyance que, in French, creer que, in Spanish) “God possesses such and such attributes, that the world was created, and so forth”. See Jean Pouillon, *Remarks on the Verb ‘to Believe’*, 94.

⁵⁴ Jon Sobrino, *Where Is God? Earthquakes, terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, Orbis Books, 2006, 136, and *Jesus the Liberator*, Orbis Books, 1993, 17.

⁵⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*, 113, citing both Hannah Arendt and Alain Badiou.

⁵⁶ This is in accordance to the anathematic form of Christian judgement.

the brink of extinction, together with everything else, us included. What is to be done? The choice is clear: we can either wait in line for the next catastrophe, or else break free from the enclosure together with the poor, future generations, and nature itself. The latter is the destination of a philosophy engaged in and pursuing the ends of a war of liberation; this is an action-oriented philosophy inspired by the historical and religious memory of the collective practices and cosmologies of “traditional” and indigenous communities in the Americas (Amerindians, Afro-Americans and Latin Americans, etc.) that for over five hundred years have resisted complete colonisation by and subordination to industrial rationality and standardization while becoming creolised.

Amerindian religions are creolised religions, not merely hybrid, but rather, intensified forms of cultural mixture : to liberate nature and the dimensionality of times and place from their colonisation by the space of (financial/communicative) flows.

8. Conclusion: Liberating Nature, or The Other Side of the Story/The Other Sides of History.

This is the perfect point to complete the brief genealogy of religion and the religious ordering of beings that began with the story about post-16th century theological-legal commissions in the Americas providing the dualist matrix (this world/the next one) of our human and practical sciences; and end with a conclusion concerning the ethical-political choice that lies before us.

While European jurists and theologians kept gathering psycho-sociological data on the natives of Haiti, Mexico, central Colombia, and southern Brazil, in the neighbouring countries Amerindians would capture white men and drown them sometimes in cold sometimes in hot water. They would mount guard round the

drowned bodies for several weeks, cut them in bits and even taste them in order to find out whether or not they were subject to decay. This is a straight story: the white Europeans who believed in belief trusted to social science; the unbelieving Indians believed in the natural sciences.⁵⁷

The point is not that they all believed in something, that all of them had cultures of their own which should be respected and so on, but the more interesting one that the Indians saw no reason to accept the Greek-Christian gift of the Great Divide between nature and culture that ends up rendering the latter into an archipelago of reflexive-identitarian totalities (vgr. tribes, groups, nations, corporations, etc.). And crucially, of course, their doubt wasn't postmodern! ⁵⁸

Amerindians refused to accept the discontinuity proposed by the Europeans' encirclement of intentionality as unical and uniquely human, grounding or foundational. The keyword in this argument, crucial to understand the destiny of Christian/modern metaphysics and the progression of belief, is not the term "unique" but the more technical and less familiar term "unical".

In post-Platonist Christian theology God is said to be unical in the sense that "he defines and measures all the multitude of beings. For all multitudes being in their own nature indefinite, are bounded through the one".⁵⁹ It is precisely in this sense that the humanist matrix of modern humanities and the social sciences,

⁵⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 76.

⁵⁸ This is a reference to Bellah's paper "The Historical Background of Unbelief", included in *The Culture of Unbelief. Proceedings from the First International Symposium on Belief*, Rome, 22-27 March, 1969; also to the continuous progression from belief-as-batch to belief-as-inward-experience and from then onto belief-as-shared values (albeit different) evident in *Christian Believing, Doctrine Commission of the Church of England*, SPCK, 1976, both cited by Malcolm Ruel, *Christians as Believers*, 105. There was no case of "diffuse belief" among Amerindians or a comparable one central to them in the same way belief is for Christians.

⁵⁹ See Proclus, *The Six Books of Proclus, the Platonic Successor, on the Theology of Plato*, volume II, Proposition CXVII, 380-384, trans. by T. Taylor, 1816, digitized by The University of Michigan, April 2008.

informed by the Greek-Christian gift, the nature/culture divide, is both unique and unical. The unical status granted to the uniquely human reduces natural multiplicity, but also the various cosmological models exploring the multiplication of the multiple, to a case of the one dividing into two. Thus, for instance, our human and social sciences treat these as cases of “human nature” being internally divided into myriad cultural differences – a naturalism (“Western naturalism”, according to Viveiros de Castro) supplemented by cultural relativism.⁶⁰

Crucially, mainstream law and anthropology, human rights, economics and so on, declare external human exceptionalism (our alleged “shared values” or “common nature”) and set it against internal divisions such as race, gender, and especially class. After the critique of philosophical essentialism, we’re being told that since there’s no a priori grounds for belief or moral engagement then “anything goes” and, consequently, no way of discriminating between ethical and unethical actions or find the right ethical content and wage war for/against it.

That’s one reason why in this time of capitalist globalisation and political correctness, the Anthro-Capitalocene, it has become nearly impossible for the working class to present itself as such (but also for racialised or gendered peoples) not just negatively but also excessively, and in consequence engage both ethically and politically.

But to say that we cannot discriminate a priori between particular actions, does not logically imply that serious moral commitment could not be attached to “less than aprioristically dictated courses of action. To conclude the opposite would be the same as saying that only the particularity of a course of action

⁶⁰ Similarly, infinity becomes the finite (i. e. the uniquely human activity of the intellect drawing the line between the sensible and the intelligible, as well as projecting upon the globe, in space and time, a horizontal line dividing what is within sight from what lies beyond).

conceived *as particularity* could be the source of a serious” moral engagement.⁶¹ Workers, racialised and gendered peoples, are conceived of nowadays only qua particularities and their engagements declared or acclaimed as serious or worthy of respect but nonetheless particular. Such particularities are then opposed to the alleged universality and unity of mankind, and effectively banned as threatening violence against such unity.⁶²

This is exactly what the perspectivism found in Amerindian cosmologies and religions without belief denies. Herein lies also the reason for their actuality. The correct analogy is between Amerindian religions without belief, on the one hand, and the mystical discourses of people like Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross and Theresa of Ávila, but also the “God is dead” a-theology and “effective mercy” ethics of the liberationist challenge to Christian theology and Eurocentric philosophy, on the other.

In both cases it is only insofar as we have the kind of contact with the Divinity or the Supernatural as an absolute, beyond all particularised content (either the reflexive “I” or the impersonal “It” of the other) that engages the body in all its concrete affectivity (as in Luther’s belief, but also in the incomparable dimension of Amerindian inconstancy and the protection privilege of the poor that Herzog speaks of, which have nothing to do with psychological states) that we can give to our particular actions their moral density, seriousness, and clarity of object. And only if we sense the affect of the absolute as coming from an utterly empty place,

⁶¹ Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, Verso, 2014, 37-51, at 50-51. Here and in what follows I take the direction explored by Laclau’s investigation of mystical discourses on the names of God.

⁶² *Ibid.*

as if we were responding to a “You” spoken by a non-human, that we can project onto contingent courses of action a moral depth that, left to themselves, they lack.

This leaves us, indeed, with no a priori rule declaring with assumed authority what are the right incarnating contents or actions. Our belief can only be inconstant, as the Amerindians concluded after their tests.⁶³

In both cases, that of Amerindians and that of mystics and liberation philosophers-theologians, if there was an a priori link between the absolute and its incarnating body or content then the link between the incarnated absolute and its incarnating body would have become a necessary one and the absolute would have lost its excessive dimension. In that case we would be able to name God or claim mastery in the same way that Christian missionaries claimed discursive mastery over the Word and the Law, and the King claimed sovereignty over the lands and peoples of the New World in the 16th century.

To state this is not to say that *any content, at any moment* can be an equal candidate for the incarnation of the absolute or the supernatural in nature. Ditto, this would be true only from the point of view of eternity. But just as in Amerindian religions without belief encounters with the supernatural are only contingent and

⁶³ It's such lack of a priori rules what explains the experiments of Amerindians. In testing whether or not Europeans had bodies, whether they would rot or resurrect, they were not only trying to falsify the promise of advent. Not merely testing the facts but testing the ways in which we can establish what are the facts. It's in this respect that the Amerindians (and the mystics and liberation theologians) appear as the champions of facticity, insofar as they deny the existence of an aprioristic logic linking the encounter with the absolute to particular actions or contents. Amerindians see such encounters as purely contingent. For instance, as suddenly finding out in the middle of the jungle that the other is human, that “It” is human. All of a sudden being called “You” by the non-human subjectivities and spirits that populate nature and the supernatural thus shedding one's particular body to transform into another, thereby acquiring a perspective that is less than absolute and yet not merely that of a particular body. See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism”, in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 4, no. 3, September 1998, 469-488, at 483, also included in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. by M. Lambeck, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, 280-297.

can be lethal for the interlocutor, so for us it's clear that serious engagements take place in a terrain that is less than eternity.

That's precisely why for Amerindians only shamans, strangers, multi-natural beings by office and engagement, not by declaration or manifest destination, are capable of transiting the various perspectives, worm-holing between contexts without possibilities, and balancing the two sides of the ethical equation. Or rather, transforming the entire context.

In their example we can find the answer to our current ethical conundrums. For in construing meaningful ethical lives based on effective mercy and taking responsibility for reality – from mounting inequality to man-made climate change – we must keep open the two sides of the ethical equation.

Yes, an absolute or transcendence that can only be actualised by transforming into something less than itself, and a particularity whose actual engagement is to transcend or shed its own body. And yes, a perpetual alteration. For we humans now occupy the place of enemies through climate change and extractivism, as we hope to be transformed, through death and mercy to the weak, into our enemies/affines, the gods.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ibid. See also Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, 103; and “Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism”, in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 4, no. 3, September 1998, 469-488, at 483 for borrowings and paraphrases; and for context, Bruno Latour, “Perspectivism: Type or Bomb?”, in *Anthropology Today*, vol. 25, no. 2, April 2009, London & Oxford: Blackwell, 1, referring to the work of E Viveiros de Castro; and T Stolze Lima, “The Two and Its Many: Reflections on Perspectivism in a Tuna Cosmology”, in *Ethnos*, vol. 64, no. 1, 1999, 107-131. For humans occupying the place of enemies in relation to man-made climate change and extractivism, and moving beyond anthropocentrism in history and the humanities, see Dipesh Chakravarty, “The Climate of History”, in *Critical Inquiry*, 35, The University of Chicago, Winter 2009, 197 ff.

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