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## The Link between Radicalism, Human Liberation, and Ethics

(Ryšys tarp radikalios refleksijos, žmogaus laisvės ir etikos)

**Abstract.** *The point of this article is that critical philosophical reflection is vital to human liberation. This sort of philosophy reveals the fundamental (or radical) connection between human action and any resulting reality. In this way, realism is undermined, including any claims that try to diminish utopian thought. New, more humane social imagery and embodied ethics can be proposed that elevate in importance the communal character of social life.*

**Key Words:** *Embodied ethics, socialism, radical reflection, community, Humanism.*

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** *įkūnytoji etika, socializmas, radikalioji refleksija, bendruomenė, humanizmas.*

### Introduction

Although not especially welcomed, radicalism has been a part of the history of social and political thought. Between the calls for better or more rigorous empirical analyses and a public sociology, a so-called radical tradition has survived. But throughout this history, a nagging question has existed just below the surface of claims and counterclaims. Specifically, who is radical? Conservatives are not likely to be considered too radical, but how about Marxists?

Probably most social critics would agree with Enrique Dussel that functionalists are not radical. After all, they are realists who seek order, stability, and control. Roles,

structures, and equilibrium, for example, are their focus of attention. Additionally, they view change to be unduly disruptive and strive to provide an adequate answer to the Hobbesian problem of order.<sup>1</sup> Functionalists conclude their analysis by describing society to be an all-encompassing regulatory system.

Although the stability or stasis sought by functionalists is not likely coveted by radicals, but what about change? In this context, terms such as rebellion and revolution are regularly used. To be a radical often requires or at least suggests a commitment to disrupt, or perhaps overthrow the *status quo*. And at

<sup>1</sup> Parsons, Talcott. 1951. *The Social System*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

least in the case of Marxists, a rejection of capitalism is involved. Others might reject patriarchy or racism.

But is change, even in so-called progressive movements, necessarily radical? Yet the issue at this juncture is not the content but the mechanism of change. What if this process, for example, is evolutionary and persons are merely capable of responding to social or cultural conditions? As a result, they do not necessarily choose the direction or rate of change, and may be overwhelmed by any results. Clearly Marxists have experienced this nasty turn of events. In the end, change becomes a juggernaut that swamps and contravenes the intent and general aims of the majority of persons. For example, often governments are established that violate the basic principles of a movement.

At this point of where *praxis* enters the picture.<sup>2</sup> Consistent with the writing of Marx, this capacity is identified with the eventual liberation of persons, particularly those who are poor or marginalized in other ways. These groups may or may not be the proletariat. Nonetheless, human liberation is often tied to the exercise of this creative ability of persons to remake themselves, their social conditions, and the future.

In this discussion of liberation, *praxis* is typically differentiated from theory. *Praxis*, indeed, is action. But is true action the product of material or other autonomous forces?

In this regard, *praxis* seems to be diluted if this action is the result of causal factors. In such a situation, persons choose neither the course of action nor the outcome. Such action can hardly be considered liberating, if persons are simply the pawns of history. To paraphrase Marx, they are condemned to make history within pre-established parameters and ends.<sup>3</sup> What is so radical about this prospect?

In his inimitable manner, Dussel argues that liberation must be radical. He notes that liberatory action must be unconditioned and free to envision and implement real alternatives.<sup>4</sup> Rather than simply being against something, such as a repressive regime, those who liberate create a new reality. True liberation is thus not a reaction but action, while simultaneously unmasking the limitations that have been imposed on this freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly radicalism is something weighty. But what philosophical maneuvers are presupposed by this notion? Marx once wrote, in well-known passages, that radicals go to the core of a matter and do not simply interpret the world. But does this claim demand a new style of philosophy? Presumably both philosophers and other agents of change must begin to think in a profound way that is very different from the past, if their actions are going to be radical.

<sup>2</sup> Dussel, Enrique. 1985. *Philosophy of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, Karl. 1963. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. NY: International Publishers, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Dussel, Enrique. 1977. *Introducción a una Filosofía de la Liberación*. México, DF: Editorial Extemporáneos, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Feagin, Joe R. and Hernán Vera. 2001. *Liberation Sociology*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

## What is Radicalism?

The key issue is that radicals want to transform the world; they do not want to repeat the past or ruminate on the future. In this sense, they are neither determinists nor dreamers. The possibility exists, in other words, for them to act freely and construct an entirely new social order. Accordingly, radicals are utopians, in that protest and a fresh start are thought to be possible.

Radicals nowadays declare that another world is both needed and possible. The point, these critics assume, is that a clean break can be made with the past. Without necessarily supplying a myriad of details, the idea is that persons can join together in novel and supportive ways and create a more just and humane world. The exact nature of these innovative relationships is not specified, probably for good reasons. Why define *a priori* the dimensions of human action and initiative?

But again to borrow from Marx, the assumption is that repressive institutions will be abolished. Coercive or exploitive relations will be replaced by the free and creative association of persons. The resulting social order—presumably one that is collective—will not be imposed on persons by history, material forces, or the dictatorship of anyone. That is, social reality is not granted the autonomy indicative of alienation, and thus cannot begin to dominate the citizenry.

Therefore, in order to be radical, action must be special, even that viewed ostensibly to be progressive. The exercise of *praxis*, in short, is radical only when the scope of human action is both self-created and self-imposed by persons. More modern writers, such as existentialists, might say that such action is authentic, or undertaken without guarantees or final explanations. Those who are authentic have the courage, as Paul Tillich describes, to invent themselves in a world that does not necessarily reward such audacity.<sup>6</sup> Such invention defies the prevailing claims about necessity and rigid order.

Marx addressed this matter when he declared that radical, derived from the Latin *radix*, means to go to the root of something.<sup>7</sup> And as he goes on to say, the root of everything is man and thus *praxis*. Such radicalism, suggests Marx, leads to humanism, since human action is the center of social life. But in this case, humanity is not some generic foundation, such as God, Spirit, or nature. As Marx recognized, liberation would not arrive by simply turning the vision of Hegel upside down. In short, Marx was not announcing that he is a realist. A naturalistic realism would not advance much beyond the idealism of Hegel; in neither example would humans control or define their nature or destiny.

At the root of history, for example, are persons who do not merely carry the past

<sup>6</sup> Tillich, Paul. 1952. *The Courage to Be*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, Karl. 1967. "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction" (p. 257), in *Writing of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, edited by Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat. NY: Anchor Books, pp. 249-264.

forward but invent this entire trajectory. Hence humans are the base of all other realities. Even under the worst of conditions, noted Marx, repressive institutions are based on the labor of those who are suppressed. Much later, Bourdieu tries to capture this sentiment when he declares that persons are regularly complicit in their own suppression.<sup>8</sup> They “misrecognize” their relationship to the products of their labor. The *praxis* of the past, through the efforts of a very sophisticated ideological apparatus, is transformed into something foreign that entraps persons and convinces them that they have no authority. Their association with every facet of reality is thus inauthentic. As Sartre might say, they exist in a state of “bad faith”, since they deny and subvert their agency.<sup>9</sup>

Radical action, therefore, is predicated on a very unique element. Specifically, a style of reflection is present that reveals praxis to be at the core of reality, thereby preventing the products of this action from becoming autonomous. The institutions that persons invent, accordingly, are understood to be devoid of necessity and can be modified or discarded at any time. The resulting reality is authentic because persons are aware that they are responsible for this creation; their praxis is revealed to even legitimize their tormentors. The removal of these odious characters or unresponsive institutions may be difficult, but they are not sustained by the usual metaphysical claims, such as Divine Right or structural requirements.

In effect, radical action subverts the dualism that has been the cornerstone of most of the Western intellectual tradition. No longer, for example, is the One, Good, or the True, the standard bases of reality, sequestered from the activity of humans. Correspondingly, personal or collective identities are not tied to equally imperturbable foundations. Now *praxis* is uninhibited by these referents and can enact any number of social worlds. In short, no level of reality is independent of and escapes unscathed from human intervention.

Radical action is obviously liberating because persons lose their illusions about the urgency of reality and any inherent limits imposed on social relationships. In the end, any restrictions are the consequence of and sanctioned by human action, even the mores formerly thought to be an outgrowth of nature of divine revelation. There is no space available, accordingly, to harbor the excuses that have been invoked traditionally to sustain reality. Due to radical action, with apologies to Sartre, persons are condemned to behave in an authentic manner and transform open possibility (and not potentiality) into a reality.

The old bromide that some change or social arrangement has never existed in history, and thus is impossible, is meaningless within this framework. Consistent with Marx’s favorite maxim that nothing is foreign to him is the realization that history does nothing; indeed, history follows

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 117-118.

<sup>9</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1964. *Being and Nothingness*. NY: The Citadel Press, p. 449.

the path cleared by human action. Persons, therefore, are free to alter human nature and travel where history has never gone before. There is nothing outside, behind, or under *praxis* that can restrict inherently this action. As Roland Barthes announced in a different context, there is no other side of writing or *praxis* that defines and channels this process.<sup>10</sup>

Radicals face an abyss and make history even when they choose not to act. But the impression can be created that institutions demand conformity and persons must relent to the reality woven by these modes of expression. As Marx once described, past labor can begin to weigh on the spirit of persons under specific social conditions. Nevertheless, these situations are not natural or part of some cosmic scheme. The sad aspect of alienation is that persons often decide not to take the steps that would remedy this malady, because they believe that their role in promoting change is irrelevant or muted by more powerful forces.

### **New and Liberating Social Imagery**

But the question that remains to be asked is: How does radicalism prevent the establishment of inhumane or repressive social conditions? A central element of contemporary radical action is that social order should reflect solidarity, instead of internecine rivalries and exploitation. What would be gained

if radical change did not extend beyond the present unsavory situation?

As Sartre pointed out in his book *Anti-Semite and Jew*, those who want to exploit others engage in “first philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> Those who want to marginalize or dominate persons or groups cannot justify these plans with reference simply to personal whims, opinions, or ambitions alone. Such dire actions require a much sounder and more profound source of legitimacy. Therefore, those who colonize others invoke regularly some universal in order to explain their proposals. Usually they engage in essentialism, whereby those who are dominated are determined to deserve this treatment because of their biological or cultural inferiority.

This maneuver eliminates any contingency from the process of exploitation. The aim is to conceal the politics of racism, for example, behind the cloak of principles that are allegedly not historical. And given the range of disparities among persons, contend racists, persons do not deserve equal treatment. Within the context of this application of first philosophy, racial discrimination is only logical. After all, the best persons deserve special treatment and favorable social placements.

But radical action destroys the facade of legitimacy provided by such philosophy. Stated simply, the a-historical character of essentialism is undermined by radicalism. Because all realities are mediated thorough-

<sup>10</sup> Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image-Text-Music*. NY: Hill and Wang, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1969. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. NY: Schocken. See also Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, p. 170.

ly by human *praxis*, all universals are transformed into particulars that are *granted* a special status. As described by Alfred Schutz, a specific option, through various means, including the use of power, begins to represent a paramount reality.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, this exalted position is completely arbitrary and cannot be treated reasonably as inherently universal. Such an ideal is universal only within a unique network of *praxis*.

In this sense, radical reflection is linked to liberation. Marx appreciated this association when he stated that philosophy is the head of any true revolution. Social movements, accordingly, are radical when they strive to fulfill their desires rather than merely confront so-called political realities. Radicals are not this pragmatic.

But how does this radicalism affect the conceptualization of social life? Typically domination is encouraged by the models that are adopted to describe social order. The resulting control, however, is not necessarily envisioned to be overt and intrusive. Because these strategies are predicated on realism, a centered image of society is advanced. This imagery, accordingly, establishes the conditions favorable to domination and justifies subtly and rationally the accompanying hierarchies.

How does the centered image of society operate? Usually some sort of unrestricted foundation is introduced to coordinate the various segments of society. At times this base has been referred to as a reality *sui*

*generis*, while others have opted for the term system.<sup>13</sup> In either case, the claim is that a universal and often idealized source is available to organize society.

Problems begin to arise when all persons are expected to adjust to this standard. This centered imagery, in fact, establishes what might be called the metaphysics of assimilation, which persons must use to judge their character and behavior. In reality, this method of adjustment constitutes another form of first philosophy, because a dominant norm is revealed that is granted the latitude to envelop and overshadow all others.

The standard that is introduced by this model is given a seigniorial status. All persons, accordingly, must internalize these norms if they are going to be integrated effectively into society. But then the question becomes, what standards should be adopted? What often occurs is that those who can illustrate that they most closely represent these ideals, often through chicanery or coercion, begin to embody the paragon of beauty, intelligence, or morality.

In the United States, for example, Europeans were able to shape the discourse about these and other facets of social life. Paul Gilroy argues that these particular qualities were simply dressed up as universals and imposed on everyone without any reservations.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, those who most closely approximated these traits have been considered regularly superior to others and worthy of emulation. In point of fact,

<sup>12</sup> Schutz, Alfred. 1962. *Collected Papers*. Vol. I. The Hague: Nijhoff, pp. 226ff.

<sup>13</sup> Durkheim, Emile. 1983. *Pragmatism and Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 86-88.

<sup>14</sup> Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic*. London: Verso, p. 190.

in order to assimilate successfully to these standards, persons have often changed everything about themselves from their names to their skin color to achieve social mobility and widespread acceptance.

But as is discussed earlier, radicalism undercuts all forms of first philosophy. Radicals, accordingly, are not impressed by the claims of assimilationists that some characteristics are naturally more desirable than others and should be employed to judge all persons. The reason behind this rejection of assimilation is quite simple: no standard exists *sui generis* and has the status to identify superior groups or social classes. All that exists are various options that must be reconciled.

Indeed, radicals propose that society is centerless. Of course attempts can be made to coordinate the resulting diversity, but natural universals are not available to accomplish this task. For this reason, different imagery has been proposed to describe the resulting reality, such as the collage, rhizome, salad bar, and quilt. The point conveyed by each one is that a society can be integrated without an a-historical center or cosmopolitan vision through the direct and flexible relationship established through the recognition of diversity.

Often this rendition of order is called radical multiculturalism. While going beyond pluralism, these radicals contend that society consists of nothing more than con-

trasts and differences. In other words, there is no foundational norm and simply acceptable variations on this basic or central theme.<sup>15</sup> All that exists, instead, is a multiplicity of perspectives, mores, or standards and the accompanying comparisons. And as these multiculturalists are fond of saying, a rational and just society respects these differences, and thus does not subordinate any one to the others.

The resulting social order is certainly de-centered. Rather than coordinated by a single referent, differences are juxtaposed and sutured together, so to speak, at their borders to form a coherent but multivalent unit. Lyotard calls this outcome concatenation, whereby a flat organization of the parts of any phenomenon is established, including society.<sup>16</sup> These links are substantial, variegated, and extend in many directions simultaneously.

But these relations are not simply external, as if persons exist simply side-by-side like objects. Persons, instead, are connected because of their experience of sharing a common domain and dwelling together. Their fields of experience crisscross and form a multivalent but unified picture. As portrayed by Merleau-Ponty, due to the overlapping of their paths, gazes, and intentions, the lives of persons are illustrated to be thoroughly enmeshed.<sup>17</sup>

Nestor Garcia Canclini refers to such societies as hybrid, because their integration

<sup>15</sup> Schlesinger, Arthur. 1993. *The Disuniting of America*. NY: W.W. Norton.

<sup>16</sup> Lyotard, Jean-Francois. 1988. *The Differend*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

does not sacrifice complexity and diversity.<sup>18</sup> Their integration, stated differently, is more lateral than vertical.

For example, according to Canclini, Latin America had little choice but to be a hybrid. After all, the colonial enterprise failed miserably, but not before dividing the region in many ways.

On the other hand, Carlos Fuentes remarks that this part of the globe has always been baroque, or a mixture of very diverse elements.<sup>19</sup> But this condition is common subsequent to the demise of first philosophy, with the metaphysics of assimilation discredited. In view of this significant reorientation, why should any culture accept a subordinate position? Without an absolute foundation, their relationships must be negotiated instead of specified in advance. And persons are not knowingly going to negotiate their marginalization or exclusion from society. Instead, persons navigate a field of diverse others who, in fact, complement and enrich one another. An interesting mosaic is thus created that is only enhanced, rather than threatened, by increasing diversity.

### **Ethics without a Center**

At this juncture is where ethics enters the picture. Clearly something must guide the negotiation process whereby behavioral expectations are established. Nonetheless, ethical principles cannot assume their usual

ethereal form associated with first philosophy.

When supported by this philosophy, ethics is based on a set of universal rules or axioms that evaluate and direct behavior.<sup>20</sup> Traditionally this ground of ethics has been linked to divine or natural laws, behavioral imperatives, or psychological propensities. The general theme is that an exalted system is present to regulate personal choices. But gradually this reliable foundation begins to conceal the world and subvert the mundane yet real character of ethical demands.<sup>21</sup>

The first message conveyed to everyone is that ethics is a personal affair. In order to act ethically, persons have to merely internalize the rules of ethical behavior. Conformity to these standards is sufficient to insure that a person acts appropriately in one context or another.

A second, but correlative, theme is that persons are not necessarily responsible for one another. How others live is their concern, although the expectation is that they will abide by the universal rules of morality. But whether or not they do so is not their neighbors' concern. At best, any transgressions are dealt with by an impersonal legal system.

In the end, society is a fairly lonely place. Persons pursue their personal salvation and assume that their neighbors are on a similar

<sup>18</sup> Canclini, Nestor Garcia. 1995. *Hybrid Cultures*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>19</sup> Fuentes, Carlos. 1992. *El Espejo Enterrado*. México, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

<sup>20</sup> Ben Simpson, Christopher. 2009. *Religion, Metaphysics, and the Postmodern*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, p. 57.



course. And along the way, persons try to insure that they have a clear conscience. But no-one has any obligation to intervene in the lives of others, in order to provide assistance. In fact, such involvement is often thought to curtail the freedom of everyone, although limited charity is deemed acceptable.

Gradually persons begin to assume that morality is derived from something other-worldly, perhaps inspired by God or some esoteric insight.<sup>22</sup> And in everyday life they pursue their respective goals and try to survive, while hoping they make the ethically correct choices within the confines of the available options. How they might intervene and change the course of events, in order to create a more just world, is not necessarily part of this scenario. Typically such collective responsibility and possible widely scattered disruption is not linked to personal salvation.

But in the absence of first philosophy, persons do not have recourse to such abstract and ultimately valid rules. Accordingly, instead of looking inward or upward for advice, they must begin to realize that morality is discovered in the direct encounters between persons. Persons do not respect the rule of law, says Dussel, but others and their desire for a productive existence.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, part of this realization is that they share an existential space and a common fate. Rather than following idiosyncratic trajectories, persons are, in reality,

part of an expansive community and rise or fall together. Persons who are marginalized, for example, do not disappear but haunt the community with logistical concerns, service demands, and moral questions.

Marx says that persons are involved fundamentally in sensuous relationships, although these are eclipsed regularly in the modern industrial world. This critique is aimed at the perspective on liberal individualism offered by Locke and the accompanying social indifference and fragmentation. Accordingly, he writes that a vital part of human nature is the collective character of social existence: "human nature is the true community of men".<sup>24</sup> The "species-life" of persons, in other words, is a result of the "essential bond" that exists between persons, prior to the alienation that has been cultivated by capitalism.

The operative principle is that when persons are not distracted by abstractions, such as moral imperatives, they will become attuned to and understand their fundamental ties to others and act in concert with them. Hence their obligation is not simply to themselves, and possibly their families, but to preserve the integrity of everyone. As a member of a community, nothing less would be expected! Morality, accordingly, is not merely personal or abstract but primordially collective.

Although insightful, Marx's description of collectivity sounds somewhat organic

<sup>22</sup> Buber, Martin. 1965. *The Knowledge of Man*. NY: Harper and Row, pp. 89-109.

<sup>23</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. 1975. *Collected Works*. Vol. 3. NY: International Publishers, pp. 216-217.

and devoid of *praxis*. At this point is where the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas becomes important. His central idea is that ethics precedes ontology.<sup>25</sup> What he means is that persons encounter one another long before they invent abstract moral principles to guide or justify their interaction. As a result, a different approach to morality emerges from this new social imagery. In contrast to first philosophy, the message is that persons are contingent and unmistakably related to one another—a relationship he calls face-to-face—and thus none has the status or right to dominate others. Accordingly, mutual consultation and support are expected in order to maintain the implied solidarity.

This approach to cooperation is different from discourse ethics, which has gathered a following nowadays.<sup>26</sup> Two points are particularly noteworthy. First, persons are not originally separate and must somehow be united. Therefore, the sacrifice of personal autonomy is not a prerequisite for exhibiting social responsibility. And second, the barriers to non-repressive interaction—such as poverty or racism—are readily acknowledged, and thus discourse is not imagined to occur in an idealized realm. Establishing social solidarity, accordingly, does not encounter obstacles that render illogical or futile such an undertaking. In other words, because community ties are not unnatural, as is the case in discourse ethics, an equitable and supportive order is well within the grasp of persons.

Through discourse ethics, for example, persons are thought to reach agreement or consensus and are eventually brought together. Furthermore, this process enables them to resolve satisfactorily disagreements. But presupposed by this process is a fundamental connection between persons. And if discord were placed in this network of community, many social problems would be viewed in a very different and more productive manner, and may not arise in the first place. For example, against this backdrop of solidarity, ethnic strife would not appear so natural or inevitable. Community, accordingly, is more radical than the dialogue envisioned by those who advocate discourse ethics, because togetherness is not sought but is a part of everyone's existence.

In such a community, there are no acceptable excuses for exploitation or other forms of marginalization. Persons are responsible for others and obligated to attack and remove any barriers to their inclusion. In actuality, persons are not drawn to an abstract community, but to those who comprise daily life. But in many ways such responsibility is more demanding than abstract causes, since an immediate response to the difficulties of others is required. Although moral lessons are valuable, care and action are essential.

In this regard, Gustavo Gutiérrez declares that liberation is a communal matter related to opening the basic institutions of a society to everyone, even those in the popular or

<sup>25</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, pp. 206-207.

<sup>26</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

lower classes.<sup>27</sup> Such a transformation, he believes, requires that persons insert themselves into the core of history and give the world a new direction. Persons must remain faithful to others and adopt a collective orientation. Using the words of Marx, he goes so far as to say that persons should opt for the collective means of production. His point is that the masses of persons are not necessarily or automatically at the whims of those who deny regularly the feasibility of collective responsibility, and likely benefit from any discord.

What he calls the “self-creation” of humans thus becomes the focus of attention. Without a doubt, Gutiérrez believes that liberation is a radical and prophetic act, whereby persons leap collectively into an unknown but humanly created future. However, as a radical act, this movement is not eschatological but propelled by collective and worldly aims that persons bring to fruition through their thoughts and labor. There is no hidden or overt *telos* that underpins this process and controls the course of history. As Marx once declared, the real passions are responsible for any changes.

## Conclusion

As a part of the various popular movements around the world, many persons are unwilling nowadays to accept their traditional subordinate position. As exemplified by the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the Piqueteros in Argentina, indigenous resi-

dents are demanding freedom and dignity. Their aim is no longer to integrate or assimilate, but to redefine the social order. Similarly Subcommandante Marcos argues that rather than acquire power in a corrupt system, the purpose of radical action is to redefine politics. But central to this change is a new definition of collective life.

At this time, many radicals eschew the traditional understanding of the collective as state control or ownership. Such an abstraction or totality, again, sets the state for domination, since the question of equitable integration is bypassed. If the state, and thus the collective, constitutes a reality *sui generis*, persons must subordinate themselves to this force. Consequently, they lose their uniqueness and freedom, not to mention the face-to-face association identified by Levinas as basic to ethics.

As might be expected, in the absence of first philosophy, such an organizational strategy is unwarranted. In the words of Dussel, the collective is no longer a fetish or divine.<sup>28</sup> And thus in many ways socialism is dead, but the collective, in the form of interpersonal solidarity, is still very important. Only now, instead of an abstraction, the collective represents different actors, coming from diverse angles, who support and protect one another. Such a community is enacted between persons, rather than imposed from above or below. Additionally, the bond between persons is their dignity and mutual recognition and support. And as a corollary, their goal is the establishment of

<sup>27</sup> Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, p. 151.

<sup>28</sup> Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, p. 95.

equitable relationships that reflect this direct and balanced link between persons. The only universal that is present is an inter-subjective awareness of and accessibility to others.

Such an image of society, Dussel maintains, is a real utopia.<sup>29</sup> Others are recognized not as absolute others, but as co-conspirators in the development and maintenance of a new reality. And rather than simply surviving in a bankrupt system, persons are in the service of one another so that each lives well. In fact, says Dussel, the ethos of liberation requires this reinvention of order without the aid of the old metaphysical props, or first philosophy, so that the creative activities of citizens are not inhibited in advance. Now persons are expected to remake the world together, without the imperatives that in the past separated them and dictated beforehand who should benefit most from any changes. Clearly seeking such advantages contravenes the communal basis of persons and the process of co-creation that is essential to reduce internecine rivalries and the related social conflicts.

Within this context, liberation is significantly different from how this idea is often conceived. The focus is no longer simply un-

limited freedom, personal autonomy, or the satisfaction of personal needs or ambitions, often referred to nowadays as self-actualization or self-promotion. Accordingly, others are no longer irrelevant or an impediment to individual growth. Now that all persons are understood to share a common fate, liberation occurs within this societal framework. And any compromise of the implied diversity should not be a part of this activity.

What liberation represents is the opportunity for persons to create a world<sup>30</sup>, as Pablo Richard says, where “everyone fits.” Through mutual consultation, persons can establish inclusive institutions that encourage the full participation of all sectors of society and insure no-one is left behind. And as a result of such robust intervention, persons can produce the outcomes they desire. The actual nature of these ends is unclear, but they should reflect the solidarity witnessed in the process of their creation. Societal goals, in other words, reflect the collective spirit of persons. In this regard, liberation does not represent an escape from social responsibility but rather enables persons to act in a socially conscious manner and become fully human.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> Richard, Pablo, *Interview*, San José, Costa Rica, March 15, 2009.

## **SANTRAUKA**

### **RYŠYS TARP RADIKALIOS REFLEKSIJOS, ŽMOGAUS LAISVĖS IR ETIKOS**

Pagrindinis šio straipsnio argumentas yra tas, kad kritinė filosofinė refleksija yra esminė žmogaus laisvės prielaida. Šioji filosofinė paskata atveria kertinį, arba radikalų, ryšį tarp žmogaus veiksmo ir įgyvendinamos tikrovės. Šitaip apribojamas realizmas, įskaitant ir pastangas suvaržyti utopinę mintį. O kartu išlaisvinama žmogaus vaizduotė ir įkūnytoji etika, perteikianti bendruomeninį socialinio gyvenimo pobūdį.

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