

12-2011

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Alexander V. Stehn

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, alex.stehn@utrgv.edu

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Recommended Citation

Stehn, Alexander. "Toward an Inter-American Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Liberation." *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 2, Dec. 2011, pp. 14–36, https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/phi_fac/58.

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Toward an Inter-American Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Liberation

by Alexander V. Stehn

English Abstract

This essay suggests that the U.S.-American Pragmatist tradition could be fruitfully reconstructed by way of a dialogue with Latin American Liberation Philosophy. More specifically, I work to establish a common ground for future comparative work by: 1) gathering and interpreting Enrique Dussel's scattered comments on Pragmatism, 2) showing how the concept of liberation already functions in John Dewey's Pragmatism, and 3) suggesting reasons for further developing this inter-American philosophical dialogue and debate.

Resumen en español

En este ensayo se sugiere que la tradición del pragmatismo estadounidense podría ser reconstruida de forma fructífera en un diálogo con la filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana. En concreto, con el propósito de establecer una base común para estudios comparativos futuros, el autor: 1) recoge y interpreta las observaciones dispersas hechas por Enrique Dussel sobre el pragmatismo; 2) demuestra el modo en que el concepto de liberación funciona ya en el pragmatismo de John Dewey; y 3) aproxima las razones para seguir desarrollando a este diálogo y debate filosófico interamericano.

Resumo em português

Este ensaio sugere que a tradição pragmátista dos EUA poderia ser reconstruída frutuosamente por via de diálogo com filosofia latinoamericana da liberação. Mais especificamente, pretendo estabelecer uma posição comum para futuros trabalhos por meio de: 1) colher e interpretar os comentários espalhados de Enrique Dussel sobre pragmatismo; 2) mostrar como a ideia de liberação já funciona no pragmatismo de John Dewey; 3) sugerir razões para desenvolver mais este diálogo e debate inter-americano filosófico.

From the perspective of Deweyan Pragmatism, philosophy should begin with and return to the problems that emerge in the everyday experiences of ordinary people, providing critical tools for the identification, clarification, and amelioration of these problems.[1] Given this concern with addressing people's problems in intelligent ways, American Pragmatism is also a living tradition, as suggested by the recent articles and

books that speak of Pragmatism's "resurgence," "renaissance," or "revival." [2] Of course, one of the questions that has emerged in the course of Pragmatism's resurgence concerns our expanding understanding of the remarkable scope of American experience. February 2010 witnessed the First International Conference on Pragmatism and the Hispanic/Latino World as well as the launch of this journal, *The Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*. The March 2010 meeting of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy (SAAP) included a panel titled "Am I an American Philosopher?" as well as a plenary session titled "What is 'American' about American philosophy?" Likewise, the 2010 Summer Institute in American Philosophy hosted a number of related seminars, including: 1) "How to be an American Philosopher," 2) "Expanding Pragmatist Political Philosophy," and 3) "Latin American Philosophy." Riffing off these seminar titles, this essay suggests that an excellent way to be an American philosopher is by expanding Pragmatist political philosophy by way of Latin American philosophy.

More specifically, I take up the ethical and political problem of liberation by way of an inter-American dialogue between John Dewey's Pragmatism and Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation. Given its pluralism, any Pragmatism prefaced by the word *American* is ultimately defensible only as a philosophy of the many nations that constitute the Americas, re-imagined in a global context. [3] Otherwise, American philosophy will continue to be just what Dewey feared. In an address given to the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy in 1926 (the first to be held in the United States), Dewey said: "If American civilization does not eventuate in an imaginative formulation of itself, if it merely re-arranges the figures already named and placed, in playing an inherited European game, that fact [will be] the measure of the culture which we have achieved" (LW 3:9). To a far greater extent than Dewey himself ever imagined, this imaginative reformulation of American culture must reflect nothing less than the cultures of the Americas in their mutually sustaining, conflicting, and (far too often) tragically destructive entanglements. Looking back at what Dewey referred to as the "measure of the culture which we have achieved," Dussel told those gathered in Seoul, Korea at the Twenty-Second World Congress of Philosophy in 2008 that the philosophical task of the twenty-first century is the "recognition and acceptance of the meaning, value, and history of all regional philosophical traditions on the planet," beginning with "a dialogue between North and South, because we will be reminded of the continuing presence of colonialism and its legacies." [4]

My aim in the essay that follows is to contribute to this dialogue by suggesting that the theme of liberation provides common ground for future comparative work on North American Pragmatism and Latin American Liberation Philosophy. In the first section I gather and interpret Dussel's comments on Pragmatism. I next examine how the concept of liberation already functions in Dewey's ethical and political philosophy. In the final section I show how Dewey's reflections naturally suggest further dialogue and debate with Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation.

Assembling and Interpreting Dussel's Comments on Pragmatism

Enrique Dussel has gestured toward a dialogue between North American Pragmatism and Latin American Liberation Philosophy, though almost always in passing. His remarks on Pragmatism can be roughly divided into two periods, early and late. Dussel's early references to Pragmatism occur in the 1970s and early 1980s in his writings on liberation pedagogy, which generally cast Dewey and Pragmatism in a negative light.[5] In broad strokes, he paints "Dewey's followers" as the last in a long line of "pedagogical fetishism" that "worships" and replicates oppressive social institutions as though they were divinely instituted.[6] But shortly after Pragmatism's resurgence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dussel seems to have begun reevaluating his position, particularly in light of the North-South dialogues that he had with Karl-Otto Apel and Richard Rorty.[7] Apel led Dussel to a reconsideration (and partial endorsement) of Peircean Pragmatism, while Rorty led him to a reconsideration (and partial endorsement) of Deweyan Pragmatism.[8]

Before treating the substance of Dussel's reconsidered view of Pragmatism, it is worth noting the fascinating way in which he positions Latin American Liberation Philosophy in the geopolitics of knowledge by way of an analogy with North American Pragmatism.[9] During an interview titled "The Barbarian Words Coming from the Third World," Dussel says:

I would say that there is a philosophical practice in Latin America that originates from the Latin American horizon. It is, of course, the philosophy of liberation. I like repeating the following anecdote about William James visiting Edinburgh around 1907, lecturing the English about the philosophy of religion. We may imagine him planning ahead in the following manner: "I [James] will do this in the manner which is proper to what we call pragmatism." I [Dussel] wish I had seen the faces of the English sitting down on the schoolroom benches getting the "inappropriate" lesson coming to them from barbarous (North) America, quite barbarous, of course, from the cultural and philosophical viewpoint of these imaginary turn-of-the-century English scholars and students. ... I doubt very much that James was successful in the eyes of those English students. But in a sense, he did become successful, only much later. Today, everyone talks about pragmatism as a given. I think this anecdote applies also to Latin American philosophy.[10]

Dussel's basic point is that, at least initially, U.S. Pragmatists discovered that they were seen as philosophical barbarians "excluded from the hegemonic *European* philosophical community." [11] He is also trading on the (admittedly problematic) commonplace that Pragmatism is America's only "indigenous philosophy." [12] While scholars have found it difficult to say precisely *what* is so "American" about Pragmatism, [13] there has been a fair degree of consensus *that* there is something "American" about Pragmatism. [14] Dussel's suggestion that Latin American philosophy finds itself in a similar situation is perceptive, since (at least historically speaking) there is something dominating about Europe as the epistemic location for philosophy. Similarly, though with a more recent

historical focus, Nelson Maldonado-Torres has suggested that “U.S.-American philosophers in the late 1980s turned to pragmatism as a way to articulate a U.S.-American philosophy” just as “a group of young Latin American philosophers [including Dussel] met in Argentina during the 1970s to discuss the relevance of space for philosophy and the possibility of grounding philosophical reflection in Latin America, not Europe.”[15]

In sum, U.S.-American and Latin American philosophy generally, as well as Pragmatism and Liberation Philosophy more specifically, have had to prove their status as philosophies that are different enough from European philosophy to have something “original” to contribute while still being similar enough to European philosophy to merit inclusion in the category “philosophy” to begin with. In other words, the philosophical debates over the nature/legitimacy of these two schools of philosophy in the Americas are always already politically charged. Hence, Eduardo Mendieta urges philosophers “to look at the resurgence of pragmatism and the development of an autochthonous black liberation theology, for instance, after the late sixties, as a parallel process to the emergence of Liberation Theology and Liberation Philosophy in the southern cone of the continent.”[16] In this respect, Dussel does have a kind of vested interest in Pragmatism’s revival, since Pragmatism and Liberation Philosophy are at least partially linked by both being American philosophies.[17]

At the same time, since the time of Pragmatism’s founding the United States has become a global economic power, thus assuming Europe’s historical position of imperial dominance. In terms of philosophical dominance, the United States has likewise become the new Europe so that Latin America Liberation Philosophy now stands in the place of U.S.-American Pragmatism a century earlier, leading Dussel to say that he has personally had the same experience as James when giving talks in the United States or Europe. Modifying James’s introduction to *Varieties of Religious Experience* (delivered as lectures between 1901 and 1902 at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland), Dussel writes: “It is with no small amount of trepidation that I take my place behind this desk, and face this learned audience. To us Americans [read: Latin Americans today], the experience of receiving instruction from the living voice, as well as from the books, of European [read: and North American] scholars, is very familiar ... It seems the natural thing for us to listen whilst the Europeans [and North Americans] talk. The contrary habit, of talking whilst the Europeans [and North Americans] listen, we have not yet acquired; and in him who first makes the adventure it begets a certain sense of apology being do for so presumptuous an act.”[18] In light of this shared sense of being excluded due to being perceived as a philosophical barbarian, Dussel encourages “the return to the great philosophical theses of Pragmatism,” but he adds that “this will not be possible if the Pragmatism of the *North* does not open itself to a necessary dialogue with the impoverished, exploited, and excluded *South*.”[19]

Dussel’s substantial philosophical agreement with classical Pragmatism is made explicit during his philosophical dialogue with Rorty in Mexico City, a meeting that led

Dussel to understand “the opinion of some North American friends when they indicated the apparent similarity between Liberation Philosophy and North American pragmatism” (UM, 113). On the one hand, Dussel applauds Rorty as a critic of merely analytic philosophy and as someone who assumes the “profoundly ethical attitude” of solidarity with those who suffer (104).[20] On the other hand, Dussel criticizes Rorty’s neopragmatism for: 1) failing to notice that liberalism and democracy are contradictory logics, 2) rejecting all philosophical claims to reason, universal validity, or reality, and 3) falling into a “liberal Northamericanism of Eurocentric character” (105).[21]

In contrast, Dussel holds that Deweyan Pragmatism is guilty of only the last of these three charges. As discussed in the next section, Dewey criticizes liberalism insofar as it has become an ideological justification for the status quo rather than a radically democratic attempt to liberate individuals from present-day forms of oppression, most of which are economic.[22] With respect to the second charge, classical Pragmatism never rejects the language of “reason” or “reality” in the way that Rorty’s neopragmatism does. Dussel recalls that, at the beginning of Rorty’s address in Mexico City, “Rorty advised us Latin Americans to abandon Marxist great narratives, at least when we present our thinking to North Americans. This discourse, he suggested, has lost all of its validity” (126). In response, Dussel asked: “Pragmatically (in Dewey’s sense) speaking, if someone is in misery, in absolute poverty [...] which language will be more “pragmatically useful”: your banalization or Marx’s language, which tries to rationally explain the *causes* of their pain, and which pronounced the “law of accumulation” thus: the accumulation of wealth is the counterpart of the accumulation of misery?’ Rorty could not but answer that Marx’s language would be more useful. With this the entire question of Liberation Philosophy becomes clear, at least from the point of view of Dewey’s ‘pragmatism!’” (127; translation slightly modified). According to Dussel, Dewey’s Pragmatism is vastly preferable to Rorty’s neopragmatism because, while both may take up the question of suffering as a philosophical theme, Rorty’s liberal ironism undercuts the rationality necessary to seriously address the further questions: 1) “What are the *causes* of this suffering” (105), and 2) “Pragmatically speaking, how might we abolish it?” or “How can I help?” (117-18). In other words, Rorty’s neopragmatism “takes away from us reason as a weapon, the very same philosophical reason of our liberation” (110). In contrast, Dussel’s Liberation Philosophy and Dewey’s Pragmatism insist that “the negation of a certain illegitimate exercise of reason (essentialist, “metaphysical”) and a dominating language does not negate the necessity of an affirmation of a *new* liberating language” (115).[23]

The task of developing “a new liberating language and reason” in response to suffering in the world establishes a common ground for Pragmatism and Liberation Philosophy as American philosophies of social reconstruction and political transformation. Indeed, Dussel recognizes that the ethical and political demand to “be in solidarity [with the exploited] and attempt to ‘clarify’ the cause of their suffering” is “the objective of a pragmatic philosophy, at least in the sense of Dewey’s or Cornel West’s vision” (UM, xi).[24] Dussel also agrees with Deweyan Pragmatism concerning the

need for reconstruction (not just deconstruction) when he writes: “The Philosophy of Liberation affirms decisively and unequivocally the communicative, strategic, and liberating importance of ‘reason’ ... and commits itself to the reconstruction of a critical philosophical discourse” (UM, ix).

However, Dussel’s third charge against Rorty’s neopragmatism mentioned above—that it falls into a “liberal Northamericanism of Eurocentric character” (105)—can also be leveled against classical Pragmatism. Dussel is critical of Pragmatism insofar as he perceives it to depend (at least partially) on the calculative, bureaucratic, and oppressive reason of modernity: “Pragmatism still could not discover the phenomenon of Eurocentrism, because it self-interpreted the United States as the full Western realization of Europe—in the long journey of cultural history from East to West, just as Hegel had conceived it.”[25] We could say that while classical Pragmatism’s methodological emphasis on experience eventually arrives at the suffering of the oppressed and calls for the reconstruction of the economic and political systems that produce such suffering, Dussel’s Liberation Philosophy departs “from the category of ‘Exteriority’ (with Marx and Levinas, for example) and assumes a practico-political ‘responsibility’ in the ‘clarification’ of the liberating praxis of the oppressed” (UM, ix-x).

In other words, Pragmatism begins with what it takes to be general experience, when it is actually setting out from a historical experience that is located in the privileged center of a global system whose development began with the violent colonization (not discovery) of the Americas.[26] In contrast, Liberation Philosophy begins with the experience of the oppressed, i.e., those who are excluded from or external to the world’s dominant institutions and systems: “To ‘localize’ (in Homi Bhabha’s sense) its discourse has always been the intent of the philosophy of liberation. It has sought to situate itself on the periphery of the world-system from the perspective of dominated races, from the point of view of women in a patriarchal system, from the standpoint of disadvantaged children living in misery.”[27] Pragmatism’s radical empiricism and its democratic commitments may lead it to the same liberating project of social and political reconstruction, but the starting point of Liberation Philosophy is still a difference that makes a difference.[28] However, before I begin to parse out this difference further in the third and final section below, I examine the way in which Dewey’s own attention to the problem of liberation establishes the grounds for a common inter-American philosophical project.

The Concept of Liberation in Dewey’s Pragmatism

In 1927, the year after Dewey addressed the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy as quoted in the introduction above, he published *The Public and Its Problems*, his most detailed and penetrating analysis of our political practices in their distinctively modern form. What is often missed is just how radical a critic Dewey was of two closely aligned doctrines, those of traditional individualism and political liberalism in its classical sense. Born in revolt against the established government of Great

Britain, the original democracy of the United States was afraid of government and sought to structurally limit it. Thus “freedom presented itself as an end in itself, though it signified in fact *liberation from oppression*” (LW 2:289; italics added). (Note that Dewey understands freedom here as “liberation from oppression,” which lies at the heart of Dussel’s philosophical project.) Dewey continues: “Since established authority was upon the side of institutional life, the natural recourse was appeal to some inalienable sacred authority resident in the protesting individuals. Thus “individualism” was born The revolt against old and limiting associations was converted, intellectually, into the doctrine of independence of any and all associations” (289). Dewey understands liberalism as a political doctrine that rightly insists on individual rights, but classical liberalism mistakenly severed individuals from one another by making isolation rather than association natural.[29] At the same time, and perhaps even more importantly, the older metaphysical conception of Natural Law was reinterpreted as Economic Law: “Laws of nature, implanted in human nature, regulated the production and exchange of goods and services, and in such a way that when they were kept from artificial, that is political, meddling, they resulted in the maximum possible social prosperity and progress” (291). These two movements combined to create a dread of artificial governmental interference with the natural independence of individuals and the natural laws of a growing capitalist economy, effectively restricting government to playing the minimal roles of protecting private property and enforcing contracts of commercial exchange (292).

The great irony of all of this for Dewey is that the doctrine of individualism came about amidst the rise of powerful industrial and economic forces that were decidedly impersonal: “We may say that ‘the individual,’ about which the new philosophy centered itself, was in process of complete submergence in fact at the very time in which he was being elevated on high in theory” (294). Likewise, the emphasis on economic law as natural was decidedly artificial in the sense that many of the economic processes and laws that govern individual behavior are historically variable (299). These contradictory intellectual moves, which exalted the individual in economic and political theory just as the average individual was steadily losing power in economic and political practice, only continued to gain momentum up through Dewey’s time.

Yet Dewey still maintained a radical hope in the capacity of persons across countless forms of human boundaries and borders to constitute themselves into effective coalitions. Dewey appears naïve only to those who fail to perceive that he reinterprets the public itself (the fact of its insubstantial, largely illusory character) as, first and foremost, a problem: “What, after all, is the public under present conditions? What are the reasons for its eclipse? What hinders it from finding and identifying itself? By what means shall its inchoate and amorphous estate be organized into effective political action relevant to present social needs and opportunities? What has happened to the Public in the century and a half since the theory of political democracy was urged with such assurance and hope?” (313). Wherever there are extensive, indirect, and serious consequences following upon large-scale forms of associated action, there are

the necessary (though by no means sufficient) grounds for a public because there is a common interest in controlling these consequences. The trouble is that this is not generally apparent because the overwhelming complexity of the modern world has made it difficult to identify our common interests. Individuals do not understand, much less control, the bulk of the forces governing their lives (which is not a slight against their individual intelligence as much as a testament to just how complicated and interconnected the world is, as well as an indictment of the present state of more socialized forms of intelligence, including the educational system).[30]

Nonetheless, the consequences of these vast and sweeping changes are felt, even if they are not understood. This becomes even more apparent if we look at the world as a global system, as Dewey was increasingly inclined to do. Writing a second introduction to *The Public and Its Problems* in 1946, Dewey points to a developing sense that “relations between nations are taking on the properties that constitute a public, and hence call for some measure of political organization” (375). This is true not only with respect to the continuing development of increasingly massive destructive technologies, but also with respect to the even more basic fact that international political relations are now predominately determined by economic factors the same point that Dewey had so clearly argued twenty years earlier with respect to the domestic sphere. Indeed, Dewey’s choice to foreground questions concerning global economics is yet another reason for a conversation with Liberation Philosophy, which I return to in the final section below.

According to Dewey, the pressing political need is for individuals and local face-to-face communities like schools and churches to intelligently reconstruct the political structure in order to gain control over the economic forces that dominate present-day political culture. He acknowledges that this task is exceptionally difficult given the fact that most people’s lives are so wrapped up in work (with the remaining time going to compensatory amusements) that political participation has little draw. He writes: “Who is sufficient unto these things? Men feel that they are caught in the sweep of forces too vast to understand or master. Thought is brought to a standstill and action paralyzed” (319). Nevertheless, Dewey believes that he can at least name the conversion that must take place: the conversion of the Great Society into a Great Community. Having restricted himself in the opening of *The Public and Its Problems* to the strictly political meaning of “democracy,” Dewey turns toward the wider ethico-religious significance of this word in his fifth chapter, “Search for the Great Community”: “The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion. And even as far as political arrangements are concerned, governmental institutions are but a mechanism for securing to an idea channels of effective operation” (325). While criticisms of the present political machinery are deeply relevant, those to whom Dewey refers as “the believers” in democracy or “the faithful” rightly insist that the idea of democracy must not be reduced to its external organs and structures (326).

Dewey therefore suggests that we interrogate the very idea of democracy in order to intelligently reconstruct its political instrumentalities and agencies. The Socratic character of Deweyan democracy is rarely noted, but it is central to his task. He is trying to help us realize that we do not know the practical meaning of the most basic terms in our philosophical lexicon, including “democracy.” Hence, in an effort to illuminate the ideal of democracy, he writes: “From the standpoint of the individual, [democracy] consists in having a responsible share according to capacity in forming and directing the activities of the groups to which one belongs and in participating according to need in the values which the groups sustain. From the standpoint of the groups, it demands *liberation* of the potentialities of members of a group in harmony with the interests and goods which are common” (328; italics added). Here we have Dewey’s second major use of the word *liberation*. We could call his first usage (freedom understood as liberation from oppression) “political,” whereas this second usage might be termed “ethical” or even “ethico-religious” in that it posits democracy as an ideal way of individual and communal life.[31] According to Dewey’s understanding, communities are individuals in association with one another, though in more constitutive and fundamental respects than is ordinarily appreciated. In turn, individuals are always already participants in the complexly entangled associations of their everyday lives. Regarded as an idea, then, democracy is “the idea of community life itself” so that “clear consciousness of a communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the ideal of democracy” (328).

Of course, we must not use the vagueness of our most potent ideals to avoid the difficult task of creating the habits and institutions for realizing them. At one and the same time, Dewey is: 1) stressing the way in which our most worthwhile ethical and political ideals outrun our own capacity to understand how they might be embodied (hence the need for a kind of “faith”), and 2) insisting that any worthwhile attention to ideal ends must not distract our attention from the need to develop means for their realization, since “the idea remains barren and empty save as it is incarnated in human relationships” (325). In order for the ideal of democracy to be further realized, the old doctrines of “individualism” and “liberalism” must be reconstructed in keeping with present social and economic realities.[32] Genuine individuality is not an innate possession nor a matter of mere self-sufficiency, much less isolation. Individuality is a matter of becoming an individual through associated activities, shared meanings, and common values. With his lifelong interest in education understood as continuing growth, Dewey insists that each individual must learn to “develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community ... who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values” (332).

Community, just like individuality, always remains an ongoing task: “The work of

conversion of the physical and organic phase of associated behavior into a community of action saturated and regulated by mutual interest in shared meanings ... does not occur all at once nor completely. At any given time, it sets a problem rather than marks a settled achievement” (331). In other words, democratic community, like genuine individuality, is an ideal,[33] and its realization thus presents not just an economic and political but also an ethical and religious problem for Dewey.[34] Dewey notes that the rapid development of increasingly sophisticated technological tools of communication has not led to an increase in community,[35] since “no amount of aggregated collective action of itself constitutes a community” (330). Dewey also points out the flaw in parallel doctrines claiming that increasing economic interdependence will necessarily bring about social harmony. The mere possession of more sophisticated tools of communication or the sheer rise of global forms of industry do not make it any less likely that some humans will use many other forms of life, including other humans, as “animated tools.”

New forms of technology and industry do not automatically render ethico-religious “conversion” unnecessary: “The old Adam, the unregenerate element in human nature, persists. ... To the doctrine of ‘natural’ economy which held that commercial exchange would bring about such an interdependence that harmony would automatically result, Rousseau gave an adequate answer in advance. He pointed out that interdependence provides just the situation which makes it possible and worth while for the stronger and abler to exploit others for their own ends, to keep others in a state of subjection where they can be utilized as animated tools” (332). Here we have Dewey’s own account of the world of oppression, exploitation, and subjugation that lies at the center of Dussel’s ethical, political, and religious call for liberation. While Dewey insists on the importance of ideals, he recognizes that we cannot simply forgo the analysis of material and historical conditions, which continue to operate even when “we refuse to note them, or ... smear them over with sentimental idealizations” (333).

Nevertheless, contrary to the doctrines of classical liberalism and individualism, there is no inherent opposition or antithesis between individuals and societies. A human individual could not come into existence outside of some society, and no human society could function without individuals. Of course, real conflicts exist. Individuals are often opposed to one another, just as groups are. So too may an individual be pulled in conflicting directions by being a member of multiple groups. According to Dewey, the real problem is thus “one of reconstruction of the ways and forms in which men unite in associated activity” (355). Two centuries ago this appeared politically under the guise of “the struggle of the individual as such to liberate himself from society as such and to claim his inherent or ‘natural’ self-possessed and self-sufficing rights” (355). However, the historically dominant form of individualism has lost touch with the actual dangers to liberty, since “the oligarchy which now dominates is that of an economic class” (362). By focusing on the natural rights of the individual, classical liberalism had in fact “effected a great and needed work of liberation,” but “as the newly emancipated forces gained momentum, they actually imposed new burdens and subjected to new modes of

oppression the mass of individuals who did not have a privileged economic status” (LW 3:99, 100). As spelled out further in *Liberalism and Social Action*, many of the ethical and political problems of present-day life are therefore a matter of controlling economic forces in such a way that those who suffer the effects of economic forces come to play a much larger role in directing them.

This demands the work of our best intelligence, but it cannot be reduced to a merely intellectual problem. The actual task before us—the task that Dewey named “Creative Democracy” on his eightieth birthday (LW 14:244)—is always “a problem of readjusting social relationships, or, from the distributive side, ... that of securing a more equable *liberation* of the power of all individual members of all groupings” (355; italics added). Once again, we encounter Dewey’s emphasis on liberation. Combining the first political meaning (“liberation from oppression”) with the ethico-religious meaning (“conversion” to democracy as a way of life), Dewey recognizes that the economic and political problems surrounding equable distribution cannot be separated from the ethico-religious need to search for greater community as part of the reconstruction of individuality: “Democracy as a moral ideal is thus an endeavor to unite two ideas which have historically often worked antagonistically: *liberation* of individuals on one hand and promotion of a common good on the other” (LW 7:349; italics added). Classical liberalism had “assisted the emancipation of individuals having a privileged antecedent status, but promoted no general *liberation* of all individuals” (LW 3:100; italics added).

The methodological lesson to be learned is clear. The individuals and groups who are effectively shut out from public political debates and decisions or barred from a given moral community are those most crucial to the further realization of democracy, whether understood in the narrower sense as a form of government or in the wider sense as a way of life. As Dewey puts it using a homely metaphor, “The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches” (364). Nonetheless, Dewey is oddly reticent when it comes to specifying who the shoe is pinching. While he urges an empirical look at the present state of society and advocates an experimental approach to its democratic reconstruction, I find it disconcerting that he does not more flatly state the empirical fact that the shoe was (and still is) disproportionately pinching, for example, women, poor people, or African-Americans.[36]

To be sure, Dewey does occasionally say that we must not allow the shoe to pinch anyone based on such factors as “race, color, sex, birth and family, [or] material or cultural wealth” (LW 14:226). Moreover, he claims that “liberalism must now become radical” and take practical steps to “institute the socialized economy of material security and plenty that will release human energy for pursuit of higher values” (LW 11:45, 63). Dewey’s Pragmatism is methodologically rooted in the concrete and theoretically sensitive to the need to undertake a radical reconstruction of liberalism in order to continue the ongoing struggle for liberation from present-day forms of oppression, particularly economic oppression.[37] Dewey therefore writes: “Nothing is clearer than that the conception of liberty is always relative to forces that at a given time and place

are increasingly felt to be oppressive. ... Today, [liberty] signifies *liberation* from material insecurity and from the coercions and repressions that prevent multitudes from participation in the vast cultural resources that are at hand. The direct impact of liberty always has to do with some class or group that is suffering in a special way from some form of constraint exercised by the distributions of powers that exists in contemporary society” (LW 11:35; italics added). While from a book titled *Liberalism and Social Action*, [38] this passage is perhaps the closest Dewey ever came to articulating Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Liberation. In any case, the need to specify and analyze the concrete forms that oppression takes in an increasingly globalized world is reason enough to develop the dialogue between U.S.-American Pragmatism and Latin American Liberation Philosophy.

Furthering Inter-American Philosophical Dialogue and Debate

Then and now, U.S.-American pragmatism is an emancipatory philosophical movement operating under the ambiguous advantage of having a place in the machinery of a formally democratic government that has slowly come to lie at the center of an unjust global economy. But Pragmatism is, in aspiration, a liberatory philosophy of much broader scope and deeper significance. To borrow words from *Democracy and Education*, it is dedicated to continuously “breaking down the barriers of class, race, and national territory” (MW 9:93). The genealogy of this broader and deeper movement—which we might also tie to what Randolph Bourne prophetically called “Trans-National America”—has yet to be written, or even sufficiently imagined.[39] If W. E. B. DuBois, C. Wright Mills, and Sidney Hook are, on Cornel West’s telling, integral to the U.S.-American evasion of epistemology-centered philosophy,[40] then Enrique Dussel, Roberto Unger, and Gloria Anzaldúa, to select but three names, are pivotal in the inter-American engagement with the struggles of marginalized groups, countries, and cultures.[41]

Focusing on only one of these figures, Dussel’s philosophy begins by affirming the reality and demanding the liberation of those who are outside of or beyond the totality of our present socioeconomic or political systems, i.e., those who do not really “count” when we are making ethical or political decisions. He writes: “*We must criticize, or reject as unsustainable, all political systems, actions, and institutions whose negative effects are suffered by oppressed or excluded victims!*”[42] Compare this demand with the following passage from Dewey’s *Experience and Nature*: “Respect for experience is respect for its possibilities in thought and knowledge as well as an enforced attention to its joys and sorrows. Intellectual piety toward experience is a precondition of the direction of life and of tolerant and generous cooperation among men. Respect for the things of experience alone brings with it such a respect for others, the centres of experience, as is free from patronage, domination and the will to impose” (LW 1:391).

From a Pragmatist perspective, we could interpret Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation as critically engaging this Deweyan “piety toward experience,” radically

dramatizing the Pragmatist's "respect for others" and persistently demanding "an enforced attention to [the] joys and sorrows" revealed in the experience of poor, oppressed, excluded, marginalized, or otherwise de-centered "centres of experience." In fact, these two American philosophical traditions—Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Liberation—share a metaphilosophy insofar as they take experience as both the fundamental point of departure and the necessary point of arrival for every philosophy worth its salt.[43] But by more forcefully asking, "Whose experience? Whose concrete life has been, is, and will be taken seriously?" Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation constitutes a faithful critique of Pragmatism's own professed commitments, or perhaps more accurately, a prophetic criticism of those who cry "Experience! Experience!" and then proceed to do philosophy without taking the experience of the "Third World" seriously.

This "Northamericanism of Eurocentric character" (UM, 105) is particularly tragic since, as Dussel rightly reminds us, the "Third World" might more accurately be called the "Two-Thirds World" as home to two-thirds of the world's human experience:

The Philosophy of Liberation that I practice, not only in Latin America, but also regarding all types of oppression on the planet (of women, the discriminated races, the exploited classes, the marginalized poor, the impoverished countries, the old and homeless exiled and buried in shelters and asylums, the local religions, the homeless and orphaned children (a lost generation) of inhospitable cities, the systems destroyed by capital and the market...in short, the *immense majority of humanity*), begins a dialogue with the hegemonic European-North American philosophical community [concerning] eurocentrism and the invisibility of "economics" that in turn prevent the development out of poverty of the *greater part of humanity* as a fundamental philosophical and ethical theme. (UM, vii)

Far more than Dewey, Dussel is disposed to name the particular groups who are being oppressed. Dussel has also done much more to develop an economic theory to account for the world's unjust distribution of wealth.[44] But like Dewey, who also understood philosophy as criticism,[45] Dussel believes that these negative or critical moments must ultimately serve as a means to positive, liberatory, and transformative moments that work toward greater community: "We must produce and reproduce the lives of the oppressed and excluded, the victims, discovering the causes of their negation and adequately transforming institutions to suit them, which will as a result improve the life of the community as a whole" (TTP, 86).

Both Liberation Philosophy and Deweyan Pragmatism thus seek to contribute to the critical transformation of the world. As Dussel himself notes, both traditions accept Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach by insisting that "it is necessary to change the social structures in order to end the pain of those who suffer, or at least mitigate it" (UM, 128). Likewise, both philosophies share a tendency to charge the horns of false dilemmas, to mediate between clashing opponent pairs like classical liberalism vs. classical Marxism or individualism vs. collectivism. Temperamentally, both Dewey and

Dussel are inclined toward meliorism as an attitude that stresses the importance of passionately intelligent struggle that lies effectively between blind optimism and debilitating pessimism. Both believe wholeheartedly in what is often referred to as the “social self” in Pragmatist circles, a point that Dussel makes by drawing on the phenomenological tradition, as when he writes “all subjectivity is always intersubjective” (TTP, 8). In turn, both Dewey and Dussel take the distinction between the public and the private to be a functional distinction rather than a metaphysical one. In Dussel’s words, they refer to “two different modes of exercising intersubjectivity” (8).

Each philosopher also unequivocally roots the basis and legitimacy of all political power in what Dewey calls the public and Dussel calls *el pueblo* or the people. This shared view of the people as the ultimate political authority is intimately tied to their radical rethinking of democracy as an ideal, not an accomplished reality. As Dussel claims, “The *perfect* empirical institutionalization [of democracy] is impossible” (89). Nonetheless, democracy remains a powerful regulative ideal for guiding our attempts to transform present-day political institutions. Both philosophers believe that our political progress can be empirically measured by the yardstick of how well present systems manage to satisfy the ethical demands of all individuals and groups. Dewey and Dussel thus view democracy as something fundamentally experimental, or in the words of Dussel “a system to be perennially reinvented,” since any given attempt to institutionalize democracy must be viewed in the end as fallible (89). So too do they agree that the greatest present impediment to the healthy function of democratic institutions is the overpowering sway of economic forces, which are the single largest (though by no means exclusive) cause of oppression. In effect, Dewey and Dussel both work to subsume the bourgeois revolution’s ideal of liberty under the ideal of liberation. In fact, Dussel’s final political thesis even includes an explicit reference to Pragmatism with respect to this point: “In North American pragmatism, one does not speak of *truth* but rather of *verification*. So now we do not refer to liberty but instead to liber-*ation* as a process” (137).

These are all substantial similarities, but they are not identities. There are vast differences in the two philosophers’ historical and cultural contexts. Dewey’s U.S.-American Pragmatism wants us to begin with our own admittedly attenuated experiences of community as a good and build from there. While he can certainly see that the world must be radically transformed, he believes that once we begin to reconstruct all dimensions of our local forms of life along increasingly democratic lines, we will become progressively more capable of transforming larger political structures to reflect genuinely democratic, rather than narrowly economic, values. Dussel cannot wait for this process to take place. Writing from a Latin American perspective, he argues that present forms of local life in the United States rest on a fundamentally unjust global economy: “There is a certain solidarity with the ‘American way of life’ which is deathly, unjust, and tyrannical for a ‘Latin American way of life’” (UM, 123). So whereas Dewey sees democracy beginning at home and spreading to the far corners of the earth, Dussel has witnessed the kind of so-called “democracy” actually exported by

the United States since Dewey's death. Dussel thus believes that we must begin by recognizing the fact that the so-called "American way of life" rests on global structures of exploitation and oppression. Even our local practices must therefore be forcefully interrupted before being reconstructed.

While this may sound very close to reviving the old reform vs. revolution debate, we should be wary of casting Dewey as the stodgy white reformist and Dussel as the fiery Latin revolutionary. Such portrayals may tell us more about our own stereotypes than anything else. After all, Dewey's commitment to democracy as a way of life is no less radical than Dussel's, as indicated when Dewey writes: "The end of democracy is a radical end. For it is an end that has not been adequately realized in any country at any time. It is radical because it requires great change in existing social institutions, economic, legal and cultural. A democratic liberalism that does not recognize these things in thought and action is not awake to its own meaning and to what that meaning demands. There is, moreover, nothing more radical than insistence upon democratic methods as the means by which radical social changes be effected" (LW 11: 298-99). [46]

In turn, Dussel's insistence that we strive for continuity between democratic means and democratic ends is no less pragmatic than Dewey's. Dussel plainly states that actions following the logic of "the ends justify any means" are "always destructive in the end" (TTP, 97). He also goes on to explicitly reject the traditional opposition between reform and revolution: "Revolutionaries are often believed to use violent means, producing the transformation from one political-economic system to another immediately, through a leap in time. Social democracy, on the other hand, is presented as an opposing, reformist, peaceful, institutionalist approach, etc. It is time to radically rethink the question" (TTP, 111). I believe that a more fruitful way of "radically rethinking the question" while addressing the nuances and complexities of the intersections between Dewey and Dussel lies in understanding a fundamental difference in their respective philosophies of religion. Through Marx and Levinas, Dussel creatively appropriates the Semitic, prophetic language of social justice in a way that is largely foreign to Dewey's Pragmatism, which generally prefers the Greco-Roman religious language of piety.[47] In other words, there is considerable disagreement concerning the nature of the ethico-religious "conversion" necessary for a radically liberatory politics.

But since an adequate discussion of the different approaches to ethics and religion taken by Dewey and Dussel lies beyond the scope of this paper, allow me to conclude instead with a brief reflection on what further conversation between Pragmatism and Liberation Philosophy might contribute to the field of American philosophy when understood in the broader inter-American sense articulated by Eduardo Mendieta: "Perhaps in the near future, as a new generation of scholars and philosophers begins to develop, mature, and conceive of a greater America that includes all of its subcontinents, we will begin to think of Latin American and North

American philosophies as chapters in a larger geo-political and world-historical school of American philosophy from this hemisphere.”[48] Scholars like Steven Rockefeller have argued for Pragmatism’s value as a tool for developing a global ethics by pointing out how Dewey’s conception of a common moral faith might serve as a banner under which people’s economic goals could be united with a global quest for peace, justice, and ecological well being.[49] I share Rockefeller’s (and Dewey’s) hope, but I worry about the fact that so many people who work exclusively from within the pragmatist tradition miss the way in which our “we” is still a national, and even a nationalistic, “we.”[50] To quote Rockefeller again, Pragmatism was certainly developed “as a method of critical thought for free men and women engaged in creative democratic living and social reconstruction in an evolving world,”[51] but classical Pragmatism was fairly limited when it came to thinking about how “our” democracy or economic prosperity at home might be predicated on “their” lack of democracy or poverty abroad. Thus Rockefeller probably goes too far in crediting James and Dewey with developing the critical method of Pragmatism in “an effort to free and empower the individual and all groups, *especially those who are oppressed or the victims of injustice.*”[52]

While Rockefeller’s “especially” seems to be a bit of an exaggeration, this popular reconstruction of the spirit of Pragmatism is overwhelmingly close to the comparatively unknown (at least in North American circles) Philosophy of Liberation, which seeks to understand the production of poverty and injustice in order to help liberate the oppressed. In fact, if Pragmatism is, according to Mendieta (reading Cornel West), “the American name for a sense of moral outrage combined with a sense of hope and belief in the power of people to redeem and transform themselves,”[53] then one might even be tempted to borrow James’ subtitle for *Pragmatism* and say that Dussel’s Liberation Philosophy is a new Latin American name for some old Pragmatist ways of thinking.[54] We should not give in to this temptation, lest we unwittingly curtail the “sense of moral outrage.” Pragmatism and Liberation Philosophy share a “sense of hope and belief” in future possibilities for redemption and transformation, but we must underscore their critical edges. The Philosophy of Liberation is a direct challenge to Pragmatism, just as Pragmatism was a direct challenge to some old ways of thinking. Recognizing philosophical differences with a steady eye toward solidarity is the task before us. Such a project will no doubt require many more inter-American confrontations and conversations.

Notes

[1] In “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” John Dewey famously wrote: “Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men” (MW 10:46). Parenthetical references to Dewey’s works are to the

critical edition: John Dewey, *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, 37 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969-1991). I follow the convention of indicating whether the citation is from the *Early Works* (EW), *Middle Works* (MW), or *Later Works* (LW), followed by volume number and page number. The present example (MW 10:46) thus indicates that the quotation is from *The Middle Works*, volume 10, page 46.

[2] The classic essay on Pragmatism's resurgence is Richard J. Bernstein, "The Resurgence of Pragmatism," *Social Research* 59 (1992). Reference to Pragmatism's revival occurs, for example, in Morris Dickstein, *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture* (Duke University Press, 1998). For a discussion of Pragmatism's renaissance see John J. McDermott, "Epilogue: The Renaissance of Classical American Philosophy," in *The Blackwell Guide to American Philosophy*, ed. Armen T. Marsoobian and John Ryder (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

[3] There are a number of studies that propose Pragmatism as a framework for tackling the world's problems. As but one example, consider Steven Rockefeller's compelling argument for Pragmatism's value as a tool for developing a global ethics under which people's economic goals could be united with a global quest for peace, justice, and ecological well-being. Steven C. Rockefeller, "Faith and Ethics in an Interdependent World," in *Pragmatism and Religion: Classical Sources and Original Essays*, ed. Stuart E. Rosenbaum (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). In an even more far-reaching vein, see Giles Gunn, *Beyond Solidarity: Pragmatism and Difference in a Globalized World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[4] Enrique Dussel, "A New Age in the History of Philosophy: The World Dialogue between Philosophical Traditions," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 35, no. 5 (2009), 499, 511.

[5] Dussel never gives a detailed analysis of the Pragmatism that he associates with Deweyan pedagogy in this period. While still very brief, his most extended discussion is found in: Enrique Dussel, *La Pedagogía Latinoamericana* (Bogotá: Editorial Nueva América, 1980), 34-37.

[6] Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 97.

[7] Dussel's philosophical conversations with Apel took place in Freiburg (1989), Mexico City (1991), and Frankfurt (1992). His briefer conversation with Rorty took place in Mexico City (1991). See Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1996), vii-viii (henceforth UM).

[8] On page 28 of *The Underside of Modernity*, Dussel refers to the following work on Peirce by Apel as "magnificent": Karl-Otto Apel, *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981). While Dussel's reflections on Peirce are relevant to the broader possibility for a philosophical conversation between Pragmatism and Liberation Philosophy, my focus here is primarily on Pragmatism's ethical and political philosophy, thus leading to the present form of selective attention toward Pragmatism as conceived in a Deweyan vein.

[9] Walter Mignolo has probably done the most to broadly situate Dussel's

Liberation Philosophy in the geopolitics of knowledge. See “Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation: Ethics and the Geopolitics of Knowledge,” in Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta, *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel’s Philosophy of Liberation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 27-50 and Walter Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002), 57-96.

[10] Fernando Gomez, “Ethics Is the Original Philosophy; or, The Barbarian Words Coming from the Third World: An Interview with Enrique Dussel,” *boundary 2* 28, no. 1 (2001).

[11] Enrique Dussel, “Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce,” *Anthropos*, no. 31 (1995), 35; translation mine.

[12] The claim that Pragmatism is the “indigenous” or “native” philosophy that emerged from the United States shows up in a number of books and articles. I have in mind John E. Smith’s claim that “pragmatism clearly represents an indigenous and original philosophical outlook.” John E. Smith, *America’s Philosophical Vision* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2. This claim is highly problematic and contentious given that Pragmatism’s “Americanism” does not seem to acknowledge or reflect the culture or thought of Native Americans, although a couple of books make the case for a meaningful connection: Scott L. Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) and Bruce Wilshire, *The Primal Roots of American Philosophy: Pragmatism, Phenomenology, and Native American Thought* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

[13] See “Do American Philosophers Exist? Visions of American Philosophy and Culture,” in John J. Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience, and Community* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 21-44.

[14] This opinion is not restricted to philosophers in the United States. Consider, for instance, Heidegger’s definition of Pragmatism as “the American interpretation of Americanism” in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 153. Dewey mentions this same “Americanism” with respect to the question of technology in “The Crisis in Culture” (MW 5:109).

[15] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “La Topología del Ser y la Geopolítica del Saber: Modernidad, Imperio, Colonialidad,” in *(Des)Colonialidad del Ser y del Saber: (Videos Indígenas y los Límites Coloniales de la Izquierda) en Bolivia*, ed. Freya Schiwy and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2006), 66; translation mine.

[16] Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, xxi.

[17] Here I am using the phrase “American philosophies” in the broader sense to refer to what we might also call inter-American philosophy or philosophy in the Americas. Insistence on this less reductionistic usage of the term “American” is part of a larger attempt to avoid (in Dussel’s words) “cornering Latin Americans into becoming nothing” (UM, 109). Of course, this linguistic parsing of the term “American,” while intended to reflect the plurality of the Americas, does not mark the problematic negation of America’s indigenous populations since the word “America” itself is of decidedly

European and colonial origins. For a reflection on the possibility of a decolonized way of thinking “America” see the Postface to Walter Dignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 149-62.

[18] Dussel, “Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce,” 35; translation mine, with Dussel’s modifications to James’s original text in brackets. The original text is from William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 11.

[19] Dussel, “Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce,” 36; translation mine.

[20] As the basis for their conversation, Dussel takes the following passage from Rorty: “*Are you suffering?* In my jargon, this is the ability to distinguish the question of whether you and I share the same final vocabulary from the question of *whether you are in pain*” (qtd. in UM, 103). The original passage is from Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 198.

[21] I am not necessarily endorsing Dussel’s interpretation of Rorty, though it does strike me as astute. I am simply using Dussel’s comments on Rorty’s neopragmatism to draw out Dussel’s understanding of Dewey’s Pragmatism.

[22] Insofar as Dewey holds on to the language of liberalism (even while marking the need for its radical reconstruction), Dussel may not be *completely* willing to let Dewey off the hook.

[23] Elsewhere, Dussel writes: “Certainly, an Ethics of Liberation could be closer to a ‘Deweyan pragmatist’ than the ‘estheticism’ of a Rorty.” Dussel, “Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce,” 50.

[24] Dussel acknowledges Cornel West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy* as “an interesting effort to reconstitute pragmatism.” Enrique Dussel, “The Architectonic of the Ethics of Liberation: On Material Ethics and Formal Moralities,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 23, no. 3 (1997), 28. While Dussel does not emphasize the point, we may clearly infer that he takes West’s version of Dewey to be more faithful to Pragmatism than Rorty’s.

[25] Dussel, “Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce,” 50; translation mine. For more on Dussel’s notion of Eurocentrism, see “The ‘World System’: Europe as ‘Center’ and Its ‘Periphery’ beyond Eurocentrism,” in Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 53-81.

[26] To be sure, Pragmatism never intentionally makes this mistake, since it recognizes that “a standpoint which is nowhere in particular and from which things are not seen at a special angle is an absurdity” (LW 6:15). Nonetheless, the Pragmatists often have trouble recognizing their own particularly privileged vantage points. For Dussel’s reflections on the “discovery” of America, see Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael Barber (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995).

[27] Enrique Dussel, “Philosophy of Liberation, The Postmodern Debate, and

Latin American Studies,” in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 342.

[28] In an attempt to describe the difference in starting point more fully, Dussel writes: “If Pragmatism thinks preferentially from the experience of the scientific community, from the natural sciences (from Darwinism, for example), and from North American *common sense*, the Ethics of Liberation prefers to think preferentially and primarily from the experience of the practico-political community, from the critical social sciences (from the global Political Economy, for example), and from the oppressed or excluded in the periphery, and in the center as well.” Dussel, “Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce,” 49-50; translation mine.

[29] As for why classical liberalism made this mistake, Dewey writes: “The easiest way out [of oppressive political relationships] was to go back to the naked individual, to sweep away all associations as foreign to his nature and rights save as they proceeded from his own voluntary choice, and guaranteed his own private ends” (LW 2:290).

[30] Dewey writes: “The indictments that are drawn against the intelligence of individuals are in truth indictments of a social order that does not permit the average individual to have access to the rich store of the accumulated wealth of mankind in knowledge, ideas and purposes. There does not now exist the kind of social organization that even permits the average human being to share the potentially available social intelligence” (LW 11:38).

[31] For a brief consideration of Dewey’s concept of democracy as “an ethico-religious ideal,” see Dwayne A. Tunstall, “Cornel West, John Dewey, and the Tragicomic Undercurrents of Deweyan Creative Democracy,” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 5, no. 2 (2008). While Dewey never uses the term “ethico-religious,” he undoubtedly sees the ethical and the religious as inextricably linked. In one of his earliest works, “The Ethics of Democracy,” he writes: “Democracy, in a word, is a social, that is to say, an ethical conception, and upon its ethical significance is based its significance as governmental. Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association” (LW 1:240). Likewise, one of his much later works, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” makes the connection just as clearly: “Democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature. Belief in the Common Man is a familiar article in the democratic creed. That belief is without basis and significance save as it means faith in the potentialities of human nature as that nature is exhibited in every human being irrespective of race, color, sex, birth and family, of material or cultural wealth” (LW 14:226).

[32] Dewey attempts these two intellectual reconstructions in *Individualism Old and New* (LW 5:43-123) and in *Liberalism and Social Action* (LW 11:1-65) respectively.

[33] Dewey defines “an ideal in the only intelligible sense of an ideal” as “the tendency and movement of some thing which exists carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected” (LW 2:328).

[34] As Dewey’s later work *Freedom and Culture* clarifies, the problem of

realizing ideals is actually as wide as the problem of reconstructing culture itself, with ethical, political, legal, religious, artistic, scientific, economic, and educational dimensions, to name only some of the most prominent. See LW 13:118.

[35] Since I do not explore here the philosophy of technology that accompanies Dewey's ethical and political philosophy, I simply refer the reader to the following substantial treatment: Larry A. Hickman, *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Chapter 7, "Publics as Products," is particularly relevant to the subject of community.

[36] Although a great proponent of Pragmatism generally and Dewey specifically, Cornel West provocatively stated: "If a Martian were to come down to America and look at the American pragmatist tradition, they would never know that there was slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, discrimination, segregation in the history of America. This is a major indictment." Cornel West, "Afterword" in Bill Lawson and Donald Koch, *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 275.

[37] In *Liberalism and Social Action*, Dewey clearly states that present-day politics are fundamentally plutocratic: "Our institutions, democratic in form, tend to favor in substance a privileged plutocracy" (LW 11:60).

[38] Whether or not we choose to retain the label of liberalism or not, Dewey clearly states that given present conditions, liberalism must become focused on socioeconomic liberation in order to remain consistent: "Since liberation of the capacities of individuals for free, self-initiated expression is an essential part of the creed of liberalism, liberalism that is sincere must will the means that condition the achieving of its ends. ... Earlier liberalism regarded the separate and competing economic action of individuals as the means to social well-being as the end. We must reverse the perspective and see that socialized economy is the means of free individual development as the end" (LW 11:63-64).

[39] Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly* 118, no. 1 (1916).

[40] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

[41] In this essay I am focusing exclusively on Dussel, who has had very diverse experiences as a person situated on the border of many linguistic, cultural, disciplinary, and even national worlds. See the Introduction to Alcoff and Mendieta, *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation*, 1-26. Nevertheless, Dussel can scarcely represent Latin American philosophy (or even the Philosophy of Liberation) singlehandedly. See Ofelia Schutte, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). I mention Roberto Unger, both because he is from Brazil (a country that is often effectively excluded from Latin America because its population is not Spanish-speaking) and because of his attempts to develop a radical Pragmatism: Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). As a Chicana feminist and queer theorist who spent her life in South Texas on the border between the two Americas while developing rich

reflections upon *mestizaje*, marginalization, and resistance, Gloria Anzaldúa makes an ideal third representative. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

[42] Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. George Ciccariello-Maher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 85 (henceforth TTP).

[43] The claim for metaphilosophical common ground between the Americas is made by Gregory Pappas, "Experience: The Starting Point of Philosophy According to Risieri Frondizi and Pragmatism," in *Pragmatism in the Americas*, ed. Gregory Pappas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011). I am extending Pappas's argument to cover the case of Pragmatism and Liberation Philosophy.

[44] Dussel's economic theory, while heavily influenced by world systems theory, is more often attributed to his retrieval of what both Michael Barber and Eduardo Mendieta have anachronistically called a "Levinasian Marx." The phrase is found in Michael Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationalism in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), xx. For a helpful synopsis of Dussel's work on Marx, see Eduardo Mendieta, *Global Fragments: Globalizations, Latinamericanisms, and Critical Theory* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 129-33.

[45] See Dewey, "Existence, Value and Criticism," in *Experience and Nature* (LW 1:295-326).

[46] Robert Westbrook argues that Dewey is "a more radical voice than has generally been assumed," "a deviant among American liberals, a liberal steadily radicalized by his distinctive faith in thoroughgoing democracy." Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), xiv, xvi. Dewey illustrates this point most clearly in his own words when he writes: "The end of democracy is a radical end. For it is an end that has not been adequately realized in any country at any time. It is radical because it requires great change in existing social institutions, economic, legal and cultural. A democratic liberalism that does not recognize these things in thought and action is not awake to its own meaning and to what that meaning demands. There is, moreover, nothing more radical than insistence upon democratic methods as the means by which radical social changes be effected" (LW 11: 298-99).

[47] This difference has also come into focus within the Pragmatist tradition itself in recent discussions surrounding Cornel West's prophetic Pragmatism, beginning with Rorty's review of West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy*: Richard Rorty, "The Professor and the Prophet," *Transition*, no. 52 (1991). West's prophetic Pragmatism in particular has led Dussel to hope that "there will be an extremely fruitful dialogue in the near future between Pragmatism and the Philosophy of Liberation." Dussel, "Algunas Reflexiones Sobre el Pragmatismo de Charles S. Peirce," 51; translation mine. For an excellent discussion of the debate between Rorty and West over what role prophetic religion might legitimately play in Pragmatism, see Shannon Sullivan, "Prophetic Vision and Trash Talkin': Pragmatism, Feminism, and Racial Privilege," in *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire*, ed. Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[48] Eduardo Mendieta, *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 5.

[49] Rockefeller, "Faith and Ethics in an Interdependent World."

[50] On some of the dangerous ties between "American" nationalism and "American" Pragmatism from William James to Richard Rorty, see Djelal Kadir, "Pragmatismo y Patriotismo: William James Cien Años Después," in *Aproximaciones a la Obra de William James: La Formulación del Pragmatismo*, ed. Jaime de Salas and Félix Martín, *Razón y Sociedad* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2005).

[51] Rockefeller, "Faith and Ethics in an Interdependent World," 306.

[52] *Ibid.*, 307; italics added.

[53] Eduardo Mendieta, "Which Pragmatism? Whose America?" in *Cornel West: A Critical Reader*, ed. George Yancy (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 100.

[54] The subtitle to James's *Pragmatism is A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Much like James, I choose to provocatively describe the Philosophy of Liberation as a new name for some old Pragmatist ways of thinking because I think that gaining a wider hearing for Liberation Philosophy is important, not because I think it amounts to something like a Spanish translation of Pragmatism.