THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION IN CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

OFELIA SCHUTTE
The Peron Era in Argentina*

- **1946** - Peron wins elections for the presidency. He had promised workers higher wages and social security. His wife, Eva Peron - 'Evita' - is put in charge of labour relations.
- **1949** - A new constitution strengthens the power of the president. Congress - dominated by Peron's supporters - passes legislation providing jail terms for anyone showing disrespect for the government. Regime opponents are subsequently imprisoned, independent newspapers are suppressed.
- **1951** - Peron is re-elected president with a huge majority.
- **1952** - Peron's wife, Evita, dies of cancer. Peron's support begins to decline.
- **1955** June - An attempted coup by the Argentine navy is crushed as the army remains loyal to Peron.
- **1955** September - Coup by all three branches of the armed forces succeeds after three days of fighting, during which thousands are killed. Peron resigns and takes refuge on a Paraguayan gunboat. He subsequently goes into exile in Paraguay, and later in Spain. The federal constitution of 1853, based on that of the United States, is restored.
- **1966** - Military rule is imposed again with a coup led by General Juan Carlos Ongania.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE: ARGENTINA

The return of Peron*

- **1974** - Peron dies in July. His third wife, Isabel, succeeds him. Terrorism from right and left escalates, leaving hundreds dead. There are strikes, demonstrations and high inflation.
- **1975** - Inflation rises to more than 300%.
- **1976** - A military junta under General Jorge Videla seizes power. Parliament is dissolved. Opponents of the regime are rounded up in the 'Dirty War', which is to see thousands of people 'disappear'.
- **1981** - General Leopoldo Galtieri heads the military regime.

The Malvinas/Falklands War

- **1982** April - Argentine forces occupy the British-held Falkland Islands, which Argentina calls Islas Malvinas and over which it had long claimed sovereignty. The United Kingdom dispatches a force to re-take the islands, which it does in June. More than 700 Argentines are killed in the fighting. Galtieri is replaced by General Reynaldo Bignone.
- **1983** - Argentina returns to civilian rule. Raul Alfonsin becomes president. Argentina begins to investigate the 'Dirty War' and charge former military leaders with human rights abuses. Inflation is running at more than 900%.
- **1989** - Carlos Menem of the Peronist party is elected president. He imposes an economic austerity programme.
- **1990** - Full diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom are restored, with Argentina still maintaining its claim to the Falklands.

PERONISM: THE EARLY YEARS

• “The Peronist movement arose as the personal following of Col. Juan Perón. In 1943, after participating in a successful military coup, Perón became Argentina's minister of labour, a position through which he enacted various social measures to help the country’s growing class of urban industrial workers.

• Gaining the admiration of the masses, Perón called for the state to take a leading role in the economy to ensure cooperation between businesses and labour. In 1946 he was elected to the presidency with the strong support of the workers and their labour unions; he also gained the support of many lower-middle-class citizens and of the country’s industrialists.

• After Perón was overthrown and exiled in 1955 by the military, the leaderless Peronist movement was weakened by factional conflicts, since it was composed of many divergent elements, from left-wing trade unionists to right-wing authoritarian nationalists. Nonetheless, the movement remained the main civilian contender for power in Argentina.”

She met Perón in either 1955 or 1956 and, giving up her career (as a cabaret dancer), became his personal secretary, accompanying him in exile to Madrid, where they were married in 1961 (Isabel was his third wife).

She visited Argentina several times in the 1960s and early '70s, building support for Perón.

When Perón finally returned to Argentina to run for president in 1973, Isabel was chosen as his running mate on the suggestion of Perón’s close adviser José López Rega.

Perón’s illness several times elevated her to the position of acting president, and when he died on July 1, 1974, she succeeded him in office, becoming the world’s first woman president.

“Her regime inherited problems of inflation, labour unrest, and political violence. She attempted to solve the problems by appointing new Cabinet ministers, printing money to pay foreign debts, and imposing a state of siege in November 1974 as the country was on the brink of anarchy.

The controversy surrounding her social-welfare minister López Rega, who was forced into exile for graft and terrorist activities, did not help her situation. Moderate military officers urged her to resign, but she stubbornly refused; the economic and political situation continued to worsen, and on March 24, 1976, she was seized by air force officers and held under house arrest for five years.

In 1981 she was convicted of corrupt practices, but she was paroled in the summer of that year and went into exile in Spain. Pardoned in late 1983, she submitted her resignation as head of the Partido Justicialista, the Peronist party, from her home in Madrid in 1985.

In 2007 an Argentine judge issued a warrant for her arrest on charges of allowing the armed forces to commit human rights abuses during her presidency.”

(Isabel) María Estela Martínez de Perón
• “López Rega - known as ‘the Wizard’ and sometimes described as ‘Argentina’s Rasputin’ - is said to have recruited followers from the police, the military, trades unions and right-wing sectors of Peronism.

• …an official commission later found documentary evidence to show the group killed 428 people, although some estimates suggest the number is closer to 1,000.

• López Rega used the generous budget he enjoyed as a government minister to buy huge amounts of weapons.

• When he resigned on 11 July 1975 - after being accused by the Peronist Party of instigating the Triple A - he was appointed special ambassador to Spain, and fled there.

• An arsenal including machine guns, grenades and snipers' guns were later found in his office in the ministry.

• The Triple A was dismantled although the military governments that held power between 1976 and 1983 shared and targeted many of the same “enemies”.

• López Rega was extradited to Argentina in 1986. He died three years later in a Buenos Aires jail awaiting sentence at the age of 73.”

THE IMPACT OF THE TRIPLE A ON ARGENTINIAN PHILOSOPHERS

• “...the coup led to very serious divisions among philosophers. Some proponents of liberation sided with groups supporting the coup, while others were ostracized or persecuted by the forces of the repression. The former ‘went so far as to favor the dismissal of their colleagues and former associates’ from university positions; they also collaborated with the military in various ways. At this time many faculty members lost their jobs, and large numbers of students were expelled from the universities.” (p.175)

• Among those forced to leave Argentinian “state terrorism” in 1976 were Arturo Andrés Roig, Horacio Cerutti Guldberg and Enrique Dussel. (pp.175-76)
THE IMPACT OF THE TRIPLE A ON ARGENTINIAN PHILOSOPHERS

• Because of this brutal repression and resulting scattering of the intellectual community, the articulation, development and critical analysis of a “philosophy of liberation” was thwarted.

• There is a further problem in that many of the ideas endorsed by various supporters of this “philosophy of liberation” are logically contradictory due to the diverse interests and political affiliations of the members of the group.

• Students attacked at the University of Buenos Aires in 1983
  • (www.thepianosachronicle.com)

  (Schutte p.176)
WHAT SHOULD BE THE POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR A LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION?

• There were two general strategies for identifying the “point of departure” (punto de partida):

  • 1st: the historicist or post-Hegelian which “appeals to the notion of a concrete or historically situated, in contrast to an abstract, universality….Latin American philosophy represents or ought to represent a development in Western culture.” (p.182) (e.g. Cerutti)

  • 2nd: the “metaphysical or ‘ontologicist,’ a recognizable product of Heideggerian thought….attempts to situate itself in a different order of being than that represented by a universal reasoning….Latin American philosophy ought to represent a radical otherness to Western culture.” (ibid.) (e.g. Ardiles & Dussel)

• “Both approaches have in common a rejection of the universalist thesis that truth-claims are independent of time, place, history, culture, economics, and so on. Both are largely concerned with what it means to do philosophy ‘from’ (desde) a Latin American standpoint….Both contest the universality of philosophical discourse.” (ibid.)
In the early 1970's, Ardiles articulated a goal and methodology of liberation that was nationalistic, populistic, pre-scientific, exclusivist, and anti-Western which he wrote must “…break with dependence, defeat imperialism, and place the nation’s cultural, political, economic, and social power under the control of the popular sections.” (p.184)

The “popular sections” Ardiles defined as “exploited social sectors in struggle against Imperialism as well as internal and external dependence.” (ibid.)

This definition excluded the philosophers employed in Latin American universities, since he viewed them as part of the system.

Ardiles admired the populist movements such as Peronism citing it as an ‘‘organic expression’ of various distinct sectors of the popular base of the nation.” (p.185)
DUSSEL ON NATIONALISM, POPULISM AND RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATION:

• Dussel essentially agrees with Ardiles regarding liberation as a nationalist and populist movement.
• For Dussel the justification of this project can be found in his concept of “alterity,” holding God as the “absolute Other, from which all moral commands emanate.” (p.186)
• One must live one’s life in service to and be prepared to die for “the Other”
• In the moral and political dimension, “the Other” can also refer to the people, the poor, the hungry, etc. So...service to God is service to the nation and to the people. (ibid.) Dussel wrote, “Latin America is ‘the Other’.” (p.187)
DUSSEL: THE FOUNDATION OF A PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

• “The philosophical formation ...are raised out of the Argentine political praxis; a praxis that is popular, national, of liberation.” (p.178)

• “Latin American liberation is impossible [sic] if it fails to be a national liberation, and every national liberation is [only] definitively such if it is a popular liberation, that is to say, [a liberation] of the workers, peasants and marginal [sectors].... Only the poor, the Other, the people have sufficient reality, exteriority and life to accomplish the construction of a new order.” (p.187)

❖ (sic= "thus"; abbreviation for Latin phrase in full: sic erat scriptum, "thus was it written")
DUSSEL’S TWO CENTRAL CLAIMS:

1st: That there is at the core, an “absolutely untainted” source for truth and justice from which philosophical theories may be derived. (God in 1968 and then later by 1978, Marx)

“It is God himself, the Bishops proclaim, who, in the plenitude of time, sends his son so that made flesh, he can come to liberate all men from all forms of slavery to which they are subjected by sin, ignorance, hunger, misery, and oppression.” (p.180)

“In this work we offer a direct entry into the essential moment of [Marx’s] theoretical production, for whoever wants to ‘get into’ Marx himself. And we say ‘essential’ in the sense that in the Grundrisse* the reader...will be led by Marx himself, with his own pedagogical hand, to his central, fundamental discoveries....” (p.180)

*The “Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie” is an unfinished manuscript by Karl Marx.)
DUSSEL’S TWO CENTRAL CLAIMS:

• 2nd: Theories on ethics and justice are premised on the idea that good (alterity) and evil (totality) exist as polar opposites and are thus “mutually exclusive.”

Dussel associates totality with modernity and subsequent oppression and relates it to a scientific, secular approach to life emphasizing individuality and autonomy. (p.180)

Alterity then is interpreted in a “highly traditionalist conception of ‘Latin American being’...based on such values as procreation-oriented or ‘pro-life’ family, the rejection of individualism, the critique of a secular-scientific education, and the repudiation of philosophical materialism. As envisioned by Dussel, the socialist revolution resting on these traditionalist values would be a completely separate political phenomenon from ‘totalitarian Marxism.’ ...Dussel was actually trying to construct a religiously grounded socialist theory that would serve as an alternative to Marxism. (ibid.)

• Dussel described this goal of alterity as “…a socialism unlike any other.” (p.181)
1) Political: “The dilemma then must be defined as follows: national popular liberation or regression to dependence. There is no other possibility!” (p.187)

2) Religious: “To act against the interests of the Other is evil.” (ibid.)

3) The Unification of the Political and the Religious: “…individual private property is the exclusive cause of division, hatred, and struggle…it is the source of all evils and tyrannies.” (Dussel quoting Aloisius Hubert) (ibid.)
Schutte writes: “If the political aim of Dussel’s use of the ‘Other’ is to promote the cause of religious, national-popular liberation movements, the rational tool used in support of this aim is the so-called analectical logic of ‘exteriority’.” (p.188)

- **Analectical** for Dussel means the opposite of dialectical – it is the method of critique by which the “Other” understands a system of dialectical totalities and which will allow one to theorize about an unpredictable and different world outside of that totality.

- **Exteriority** is the “logically privileged” and “uncontaminated” frame of reference the “Other” maintains - standing outside / exterior to totality (e.g. the point of view of the poor person in relation to a system of wealth).
1) “The fact that something is described as being outside of something else, however, does not make the former a privileged moral subject. Nor does being in a particular place condemn one to a special fate or predisposition.” Philosophies of liberation are meant to prevent people from being discriminated against on account of race, national origin, or place of residence rather than reify the basis for such prejudice.” (p.190)

2) “…whatever is associated with ‘totality’ becomes a candidate for destruction, while anything associated with ‘alterity’ is thought to carry an absolute mandate for justice on its behalf. When used in conjunction with certain intransigent political positions – how else would an absolutist ethics function in society? – the practical results of the ‘philosophy of liberation’ …appear truly frightening” (ibid.)
“Of course, Dussel’s intention is not to promote fascism; on the contrary, he is arguing for liberation from totalities, including totalized thinking and fascist ideologies. But his argument is seriously flawed, regardless of the intention. The flaw has to do with the manner of perceiving relations between parts and wholes, or between an ethical position and a physical, or spatial location.” (p.200)
“How Dussel would translate his vision of a national-popular liberation into a program of social reforms that would benefit the popular sectors and society as a whole is not clear. He has been an opponent of state power as well as a strong critic of capitalism. One wonders how social reforms would be brought about in the organic community he envisaged. For example, how would education and health-care be distributed as equally as possible to all citizens if, as it is argued, centralization is wrong and equality inadmissible? The pedagogical section of Dussel’s ethics dismisses the value of a secular, state-sponsored education, and the section on ‘erotics’ has been used to condemn contraception and abortion, as well as any sexual practice not conducive to procreation (homosexuality is singled out as the most important example).” (pp.201-2)
“One of the most important conceptual flaws in the framework of alterity as used by Dussel is the refusal to accept the legitimacy of the concept of difference. In place of the category of that which is different (differente), he substitutes the category of ‘what is distinct’ (lo distinto). Difference, it is said, negates the possibility of recognizing true distinction, since any (one) difference may be conceived as interchangeable with any other. According to this model, ethical relationships are not conceived in terms of a person’s decision to undertake certain responsibilities in the context of various specific circumstances, but only as responses (of service) to the analectically determined needs of an alteratively positioned Other.” (p.204)