

# *Liberation Philosophy, Anti-Fetishism, and Decolonization\**

RAFAEL VIZCAÍNO

DePaul University, USA (r.vizcaino@depaul.edu)

*The trope of fetishization is central to Latin American liberation philosophy and its proposal for an “anti-fetishist” method. In this essay, I offer a genealogy of the trope of fetishization in the work of the Argentine-Mexican philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel. Engaging recent work in cultural anthropology that demonstrates how the notion of “fetishism” develops out of a one-sided Eurocentric anthropology of religion that misrepresents elements of Afro-Atlantic religions, I argue that without a serious revision of the metaphysical premises of “anti-fetishism,” liberation philosophy risks perpetuating a Eurocentrism that runs counter to the interests of epistemic decolonization to which it is committed. This essay therefore concludes by outlining the prospects of a decolonial “anti-fetishist” method that might overcome the Eurocentric misapprehension of Afro-Atlantic religions.*

**Key words:** Latin America; coloniality; religion; Africa; Marxism; postsecular

## 1 Introduction

Liberation philosophy emerged in Latin America during the 1960s and 70s as a response to two interrelated concerns: 1) an intellectual debate concerning the validity of a potential “Latin American philosophy,” and 2) a series of socio-political movements against dictatorship and economic exploitation in the region, especially in the Southern Cone. Incorporating these two concerns (thereby fusing theory and practice), liberation philosophy advocates a rupture from the Eurocentric narrative of world history and the history of philosophy (which silences most of the world’s population) in order to advance a philosophical reflection on domination and liberation rooted in the specific historical and cultural context of Latin America. One of the major contributors to the recent “decolonial turn” across the humanities and social sciences, liberation philosophy has been a forceful pioneer in the necessary decolonization of philosophy throughout the world.<sup>1</sup>

The circumstances of liberation philosophy’s emergence help us to better understand “the first thesis of Liberation Philosophy,” the anti-fetishist method, elaborated primarily by the Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel.<sup>2</sup> The anti-fetishist method is the main framework through which liberation philosophy theorizes domination. Echoing the Marxist critique of commodification as well as the Judeo-Christian critique of idolatry, the anti-fetishist method consists of deciphering the man-made character of oppressive power relations that behave as if they were necessary and

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unchangeable transhistorical absolutes.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the anti-fetishist method sheds light on those relations, structures, and/or institutions that behave as if there were not man-made, when, in fact, they are. Appearing to be beyond the scope of human agency, these relations, structures, and/or institutions self-enclose and breed domination by excluding everything that is taken to be outside of themselves—thus becoming “totalities.” *Fetishization* seeks to describe such processes of ossification, alluding to the African practice of venerating handcrafted gods or “fetishes.” Perhaps the chief metaphor for alienation and mystification in European philosophy, the trope of fetishization in its Marxist formulation (as a critique of commodification) becomes a vehicle for Dussel to further his own inquiry on liberation within the Latin American situation.

The practice of so-called “fetish worship,” first found in West Africa, illustrates Marx’s analysis of commodities in the first volume of *Capital*. Like many European figures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Marx saw the ways in which African peoples venerate such fetishes as analogical to how modern Europeans perceive the workings of commodities in the capitalist market. What made these commodities in the capitalist market like the African fetish is the concealment of their man-made value. To accurately understand the workings of the capitalist market, Marx then famously claims that:

we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>4</sup>

One of the questions undergirding this essay then, is how much does liberation philosophy’s anti-fetishist method reproduce the Marxist understanding of fetishism? In both accounts by Marx and Dussel, the trope of fetishization shares a presupposition: that the divinity of the fetish is false because of the fetish’s human-made status. To be sure, Marx and Dussel part ways in the next step, which is the locus of truth to judge the falsity of divinity as such. For Marx, a materialist critic of religious ideologies, the immanent praxis of human action obliterates any heavenly divinities, i.e., there is no truth other than the material praxis of humanity. For Dussel, however, a first-generation liberation theologian and “postsecular” philosopher in his own right, this anthropological affirmation is only the first of two steps.<sup>5</sup> The second step is the affirmation of the *true Divine* that exists beyond human immanence, i.e., divinity as Absolute transcendental exteriority from which liberatory praxis can draw an infinite surplus of normativity to critique fetishized totalities. This second step partly grounds liberation philosophy in a long Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition critical of idolatry. The aim of the present essay is to elucidate what is at stake in such framing from the perspective of epistemic decolonization.

In my previous work, I have offered a preliminary analysis of how this second (politico-theological) moment puts liberation philosophy on *postsecular* grounds—*postsecular*, in so far as the old secular/religious divide is destabilized and new vistas emerge—with the outcome of broadening the very scope of philosophy of religion.<sup>6</sup> In the present essay, I build on such previous work of mine to advance a constructive meta-theoretical critique of liberation philosophy on *decolonial* grounds.<sup>7</sup> If it is the case that the entire trope of fetishization as found in modern European philosophy demonstrates a Eurocentric anthropology of religion that severely misrepresents elements of Afro-Atlantic religions and their so-called fetishes, as recent work by religious studies scholars has established, I argue that liberation philosophers cannot take for granted the validity of such method.<sup>8</sup> For if the premises behind the account of fetishization prove to be an effect of the *coloniality of knowledge*, then, in

uncritically reproducing such a trope, liberation philosophy would be running against its purported project of epistemic decolonization.<sup>9</sup>

In the second half of the essay, I specifically think alongside Lorand Matory's *The Fetish Revisited* (2018), an intervention into the cultural anthropology of African religions, to probe the degree to which the anti-fetishist method would need to be reworked to avoid a biased misapprehension of Afro-Atlantic religions tantamount to reinforcing the coloniality of knowledge. This is a challenge that must be affronted if liberation philosophy is to earnestly retain its Marxist influences, as well as its status as a *philosophical* project—against the criticisms that see in liberation philosophy nothing more than a *theological* project.<sup>10</sup> In the way of conclusion, I suggest that the more recent (post-1990s) embracing of the pragmatic and linguistic turns in liberation philosophy contains a potential solution to this challenge. Two things are involved in this reworking: first, the possibility of a *postmetaphysical* critique of fetishism, and second the launching of a sincere South-South (Latin America-Africa) dialogue against coloniality for a decolonial liberation philosophy that pays particular attention to religion.<sup>11</sup>

## 2 Liberation Philosophy and the Anti-Fetishist Method

The earliest systematic critique of fetishism in Dussel's work can be found in a lecture titled "El ateísmo de los profetas de Israel y de Marx [The Atheism of the Prophets of Israel and Marx]," delivered in 1972 at the second meeting of the Association of Argentine Theologians. Initially published in the meeting's proceedings, with a limited readership, the essay was soon reprinted as an appendix to Dussel's *Método para una filosofía de la liberación [Method for a Philosophy of Liberation]* (1974), the first of Dussel's books to achieve international circulation, with many subsequent reprints since.<sup>12</sup> This "Atheism" essay belongs to Dussel's theological work, so it should not be taken as exemplary of liberation philosophy proper.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to liberation philosophy because it was a resource from which liberation philosophy drew inspiration.

In this 1972 essay, Dussel deploys a Judeo-Christian critique of idolatry as a foundation to understand the process of fetishization. Suitably, Dussel situates his study in the Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition. This is the tradition that was accused of being atheist in the eyes of the Roman emperor who purported to be divine. From such an early Christian perspective, however, this atheism is not anti-theist by principle; that is, it is not a one-dimensional denial of the concept of God. Instead, this atheism is premised on the affirmation of another god, a *true* god, the God of Israel.<sup>14</sup> The Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition then held that the "atheism of the prophets" is a rejection of the Roman idol that totalizes itself into a false divinity. In this view, the Roman idol usurped the place of the true God of Israel who, far from being totalizable (the Same), dwells in the transcendental of the beyond (the Other). The God of Israel is accordingly the transcendental alterity (the Other) from which the prophet draws strength to destroy the Roman self-totalizing idol (the Same).

In the prophet's "logic of alterity," Dussel consequently identifies the method that will become the "first thesis" of liberation philosophy (Dussel 1993: 242, 1996: 11). The assertion of transcendental alterity as the seat of divinity becomes in liberation philosophy the basis for a critique of the profane world and its pseudo-divine assertions. Dussel earmarks, therefore, a theological argument that would be channeled by liberation philosophy in a "secularized" form. The logic of alterity turns the negative imperial accusation of atheism on its head into a positive critique of the Empire as *idolatrous*. Put simply, for the prophet, idolatry ensues when the God of Israel is rejected to the point of profane solipsistic self-absolutization, exemplified by an agent like the Roman emperor's rejection of the beyond in his claim for self-sufficiency. Moreover, in such a move, (theological) idolatry becomes the basis of (anthropological) injustice: the oppressive Roman social order that colonizes and represses

rests on its own claim to divinity (Dussel 1993: 242). The negation of the theological Other thus has the consequences of legitimizing the domination of the anthropological other. Such dynamic of idolatrous domination is what Dussel's 1972 essay names in the concept of "fetishism."

In the face of oppression and persecution, Dussel argues that the task of the prophet is to negate the fetishistic idol that in turn negates alterity. Doing so unmasks the fetish as an oppressive self-totalization against alterity, this being the first (negative) moment of the anti-fetishist method. A modern example of such first moment, for Dussel, is Marx's own anti-fetishism, in which Marx follows Feuerbach's critique of the alienating aspect of religious fetishization to diagnose the fetishistic aspect of capitalist commodification. In Dussel's reading of Marx, capital functions as a profane divinity that requires compulsory worship and offerings in the form of the living labor of the worker.<sup>15</sup>

As crucial and necessary as this first moment in the anti-fetishist method is, however, it alone is insufficient to destroy the fetish. A second (positive) moment in the anti-fetishist method and its logic of alterity, therefore, is necessary to destroy the fetish: "the proclamation of a God who reveals himself through the poor, the widow and the orphan, by whom, being outside the system or the totality, is welcomed and served by the one who has an attentive ear and a heart ready to justice, to the other" (Dussel 1993: 244).

And it is this second moment that is indeed the key outcome that Dussel brings to the conversation in the 1972 "Atheism" essay. Dedicated to theorizing liberation within a growing context of military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, Dussel here criticizes the reigning radical discourse of the time, Marxism, for being unable to embrace this second positive step. While helpful in the first negative (profane) moment of unmaking, Dussel suggests that Marxism's secularist anthropological lens largely fails to identify the normative value of transcendental alterity, thereby closing itself into yet a new self-sufficient fetish. This is seen, for instance, in Soviet bureaucratic materialism and its denial of the revolutionary potential of religious life forms. The aim of this intervention in 1972 is then to consolidate liberation theology's unfolding engagement with Marxist philosophy in a way that would reconcile a theological commitment to "a God who reveals himself through the poor" with a historical praxis of liberation.

On this note, Dussel concludes the "Atheism" essay with a call to recover the liberatory, prophetic, and critically subversive sense of religion absent in the Marxist variant of anti-fetishism. In particular, Dussel urges the democratic socialist movement of Latin America (again, to an audience of theologians) to relaunch the atheism of the fetish once embarked by Marx, but in a way that recuperates its lost messianic origins exemplified in the prophetic critique of idolatry and its positive affirmation of transcendental alterity. For it is not only necessary to negate the negation (the idol or fetish), but it is also necessary to "affirm divine otherness in a Latin America, Asia and Africa, where the religious, mythical, symbolic world represents an effectively liberating moment" (Dussel 1993: 254–5).

Five years later, Dussel expands on the above 1972 theological account of (anti-)fetishism in the context of his participation at the international conference, "The Future of Religion: End or Renewal?" Organized by Rudolf J. Siebert in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia in 1977, this important conference drew prominent figures at the crossroads of philosophy and theology, such as Jürgen Habermas, Jürgen Moltmann, Johannes B. Metz, and Rubem Alves, among others.<sup>16</sup> Unlike his 1972 theological account, Dussel's 1977 contribution now operates within a strictly philosophical framework that distinguishes between liberatory and oppressive modalities of religion.

Drawing from the Marxist conceptual apparatus of "substructure and superstructure," in this newer work Dussel locates the liberatory, prophetic, and critically subversive form of religion in the position of the "infrastructure," while the ideologically oppressive form takes the place of the "superstructure." Accordingly, the trope of fetishization helps to comprehend the superstructural functioning of religion, which, by the same token, entails that the true (non-fetishized) religious

function is found in its infrastructural form.<sup>17</sup> This distinction, using Marx's own conceptual apparatus, aimed to correct the Marxist wholesale dismissal of religion's revolutionary potential diagnosed at the conclusion of the earlier "Atheism" essay.

It is such Marxist reframing that helps disclose the mystifying aspect of fetishism, that is, the mechanisms used to ideologically legitimize domination. One such illustration criticized by Marx and other Young Hegelians is the Christian foundation of the state in Hegel's philosophy of right. For both Feuerbach and Marx, religion in Hegel's work is an inverted expression of human alienation. When Marx thus deploys the metaphor of religious alienation to understand economic alienation, such as in his study of commodity fetishism, what he portrays is the ideological overshadowing of a real fact (exploitation) by a false appearance (objective value). In Dussel's 1977 account, fetishism is thus not so much a dynamic of *idolatrous domination*, as was the case in the 1972 (admittedly theological) account, as it is the ideological *concealment of reality*.<sup>18</sup> What we have here is a clear case of a Marxist model of fetishism, through which, as the above passage from *Capital* said, "productions of the human brain appear as independent beings."

Additionally, now building on the distinction between infrastructural and superstructural religion, it subsequently becomes easier for Dussel to diagnose the limitations of the conventional Marxist account of religion. His argument is that Marx betrayed his own methodology when he missed the universal for the concrete, which is to say, Marx failed to deepen the dialectic of the universal and the particular as it pertains to his analysis of religion, confusing the universal "essence" of religion for its concrete historical praxis (Dussel 1980: 103). It is the proper application of such dialectic that allows Dussel to differentiate between religion's superstructural modality (its historically particular praxis) from its infrastructural modality (its universal "essence").<sup>19</sup>

If the superstructural names the fetishized formations of the Roman Empire or Hegel's conception of the state, the infrastructural names the eschatological criticality of the prophets, such as the early Christians accused of atheism, anticolonial figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas and Miguel Hidalgo, as well as more recent martyrs of Latin American liberation, such as Óscar Romero. Like Marx, the prophets are invested in destroying the fetish. Unlike Marx, however, their praxis goes beyond historical materialism. The difference between these two approaches now reveals more clearly how the metaphysical transcendentalism of the Infinite prevents the totalizing self-enclosure of fetishization: the eschatological domain withholds a "remainder" of absolute criticality, a remainder that always exceeds the historical utopia that is attempted in praxis (Dussel 1980: 116). Marx's unwillingness to affirm such transcendentalism led to the fetishization of the historical-materialist attempt, a fetishization that generated its own superstructural ideologies fulfilling a function similar to that previously achieved by a bourgeois Christendom, e.g., Stalin's "cult of personality."

If Dussel agrees with Marx that the historical process is dialectical, it comes to a halt when fetishization, as an absolutist self-enclosing, conceals historical contingency and thus lends a given totality the appearance of necessity. The anti-fetishist moment then seeks to jumpstart such halted process. And to proceed dialectically, one must affirm that which is beyond the fetish. Ultimately, Dussel's 1977 conclusion reaffirms what he had defended in the 1972 articulation with two notable changes: more evidently articulating the ideological function of religion in the process of liberation, yet without presupposing the commitment to any particular religious faith. These two positions (1972 and 1977) would be synthesized one last time in the publication of the fifth volume of Dussel's *Filosofía ética latinoamericana* [Latin American Philosophical Ethics] (1980), giving shape to an "antifetishist philosophy of religion."

*Filosofía ética latinoamericana V* gathers everything that has been said above into an "archaeology" of religion in the Americas. The dual task of the liberation philosopher in this "archaeology" is the criticism of religion's fetishization and the careful interpretation of religion's critically subversive practices. As a Latin American philosophy, such archaeology starts with the

religious traditions of Mesoamerica and the Andes and passes through the imposition of a colonial Christendom advocated by the Spanish project of colonization (Dussel 1980: 25). It culminates, moreover, in Hegel's onto-theology of Spirit as the foundation of the modern imperial state, the fetish against which the Young Hegelians would react, as discussed above. For Dussel, such onto-theology is "the 'god' of modern philosophers of whom one must know how to be atheist as a theoretical condition of possibility to be able to think a philosophy of liberation" (Dussel 1980: 45). To conceive of the onto-theological moment as fetishism is the original articulation of anti-fetishism as "the first thesis of Liberation Philosophy" (Dussel 1996: 11).

A Latin American anti-fetishist philosophy (of religion) thus begins with such atheism of the fetish-god that sacralizes modernity and justifies its colonial exploits.<sup>20</sup> The process of fetishization, in this move, is understood as a synthesis between both the Judeo-Christian idolatry model and the Marxist anthropological model. As such, fetishization encompasses different aspects of man-made self-divination that legitimizes a practical power relation. Dussel writes:

Man-made absolutization of the foundation of the system with the will to power, and as a reason in which men are dominated, is the process of fetishization [...] Fetishization, however, is not only 'absolutization', but it is also the foundation of action and worship: the fetish is operant as well as fascinating, bright, sacred. The fetish is the sacralization of the object that is the necessary mediation for the *practical* fulfillment of the system of domination: the erotic fetish is the 'phallus', the pedagogical fetish is 'aristocratic culture', the political economic fetish of capitalism is 'money'. Fetishism as a covering representation is ideological, and in regards to its operation it is magical. (Dussel 1980: 46–7)

The Judeo-Christian model of idolatry as injustice is here evident when Dussel sees the fetish as the "foundation of action and worship" and thus the source of domination. The Marxist model of religious mystification, on the other hand, is articulated in the "ideological" and "magical" functioning of the fetish, the sacralization of which is the "necessary mediation for the *practical* fulfillment of the system of domination."

It is from this position of synthesis that Dussel then subsumes Marx's anti-fetishism into the project of liberation philosophy. For Marx, the critique of religion is "the premise of all criticism" (Marx and Engels 1975: 175).<sup>21</sup> The murderous negation of the Other in the idolatrous act is here carried out by the "fratricidal tradition" of European modernity, which is founded upon the "death of the Other, the poor, the Indian, the African, the Asian (Dussel 1980: 57). By demanding the anthropological affirmation of these sacrificial victims, Dussel's "archaeology" thus concretizes the anti-fetishist method in a way that connects this philosophy of religion to the ethics, politics, erotics, and pedagogics of liberation at work in the broader program of liberation philosophy. Like Marx, for whom the "the criticism of heaven" turns into "the criticism of the earth," the "criticism of religion" into the "criticism of law," and the "criticism of theology" into the "criticism of politics," for Dussel, the unmasking of *fetishization* by way of a certain atheism is the first step in the enacting of a praxis of liberation (Marx and Engels 1975: 176).<sup>22</sup>

As seen in the prior two interventions, however, this atheism needs a second positive step, provided by the realm of transcendental alterity that could prevent the critical project from self-absolutizing into yet a new totality. *Filosofía ética latinoamericana V* strongly articulates this position, asserting that "the Divine is Other than every system":

Beyond the being of the world, the Infinite is the guarantee of history and uninterrupted liberation of the woman, the son, and the brother. Only the affirmation of the Divine as other than every system is the starting point of radically liberating philosophical discourse. From the

infinite exteriority, even if negatively, philosophical discourse has criteria to accuse (to carry out the critique) any system of being guilty. Only the one who affirms the exteriority of the Sacred can definitely be an atheist of every system. (Dussel 1980: 59)

This is to say that the realm of transcendental alterity is the domain in which religion preserves its “authentic” reality, a reality that is anti-systemic and thus critically subversive (Dussel 1980: 34). The Absolute, as infinite transcendental alterity, as the beyond to any human system, is the locus from which the falsity of the fetish becomes demonstratable, the locus from which the liberationist draws the normative surplus needed to advance the anti-fetishist praxis. Against Hegel’s onto-theology, the liberation philosopher sees religion as encompassing the affirmation of the anthropological other (the oppressed) in praxis before the Absolute Other (Dussel 1980: 52). With such capacious understanding of religion, the critique of religion is indeed the premise of *all* criticism.

### 3 The Coloniality of (Anti-)Fetishism

Liberation philosophy uses the anti-fetishist method to theorize the alienating and contingent character of domination, with the goal of destroying the fetish in question through a praxis of liberation. The method draws influence from liberation theology, emerges “secularly” as part of a philosophy of religion, and granting the Marxist premise that the critique of religion is the premise of all criticism, further expands the method to understand other domains beyond the “traditional question” of religion (Dussel 1996: 11). This is why the anti-fetishist method is also a crucial part of the political philosophy of liberation, where fetishization entails the institutional corruption of power taken away from *the people*.<sup>23</sup> Across the specific subfields of liberation philosophy, the anti-fetishist method helps to identify the profane fetishes that require compulsory worship. Against such worship, what is demanded is an anti-fetishist atheism (Vizcaíno 2021a).

The colonialist “myth of modernity” (or what has been simply called “modernity/coloniality”) is one such fetish that compels our atheism.<sup>24</sup> Through such a diagnosis, liberation philosophy advocates for a process of decolonization that ought to recover and affirm what has been sacked and subjugated by the modern/colonial project. It is with such goal in mind that I now turn the gaze inwards and critically evaluate the extent to which the metaphysical premises of anti-fetishism consent to a decolonial agenda. Liberation philosophers would be remiss to ignore the degree to which the Judeo-Christian critique of idolatry, as the theoretical kernel of liberation philosophy’s anti-fetishism, has *also* been partly deployed to advance the modern/colonial project. Untangling this knot would help to solidify the contributions of liberation philosophy to the “decolonial turn.”

The case most relevant here is the fifteenth and sixteenth century European colonialist encroachment in West Africa, which is in fact the conceptual origin of the modern discourse of fetishism as deployed by figures such as Marx and Freud. Put simply, what the Portuguese merchants that landed in Africa’s Gold Coast witnessed could only be interpreted with their epistemic categories of medieval Christendom.<sup>25</sup> The non-Christian social arrangements and cultural productions of the Africans were thus first interpreted through the interrelated lenses of idolatry and witchcraft (*feiticaria*), whose joint purpose was to censure deviant faiths and pathological Christianities within the Iberian Peninsula. Such a Christian epistemic horizon was instinctively assumed to be the superior and undisputed arbiter of truth in this emerging cross-cultural encounter. This assumption, however self-referential and inaccurate in its understanding of African societies (as we shall see below), nevertheless becomes the unquestioned premise that through further interpretation culminates in the coinage of “fetishism” to explain the specific socio-cultural norms of African societies. Its credulous perpetuation

then permits Marx to make self-evident use of the trope of fetishism as a critique of the “magical” workings of the capitalist market.

William Pietz (1985, 1987) has traced this creolizing encounter, carefully demonstrating the subtle distinctions between idolatry and witchcraft in a way not found in Dussel’s analysis of anti-fetishism.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, the critique of idolatry is a long-standing theological question at the heart of Abrahamic religions, through which their status as monotheistic religions was eventually solidified—in essence the idea behind Dussel’s 1972 analysis of fetishization. The condemnation of witchcraft, on the other hand, emerges not from a theological position per se, but as a legal concern with the folk practices of ethnic minorities in the Iberian Peninsula. This is seen, for instance, in the legal charters of the Visigoths and afterwards in the *Siete Partidas* of Castile, where *fechiceros* are labeled as individuals that produce *fechizos* or magical objects.<sup>27</sup> The *material* element that would be so important in the discourse of modern fetishism is slowly emerging here, moreover is made explicit in the etymological analysis of *fechizo* (medieval Spanish) or *feitiço* (Portuguese). Both terms are rooted in the Latin *facticius* (artificial/non-natural manufacturing), itself an adjective that originates from the verb *facere* (to make) (Pietz 1987: 24).<sup>28</sup>

The European merchants, travelers, and priests who now found themselves in West Africa sought to figure out the theological and legal attributes of the societies they were interacting with. It is here where the medieval Christian debate between idolatry and witchcraft takes place in a fresh setting. Because Africans did not know the God of Abraham, it did not seem accurate to comprehend their practices as idolatrous, especially if idolatry is a rejection of Christian spiritual law.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the apparent “lawlessness” of Africans, as exemplified by the divergent materialities of their various religious objects, came closer to the practice of witchcraft or *feitiçaria* (Pietz 1985: 8).<sup>30</sup> From this supposition, the medieval notion of the *feitiço* would be stretched into new non-Christian circumstances by way of daily inter-cultural linguistic exchanges to the point of morphing into the pidgin *fetisso*. For Pietz, this new designation that emerges on colonial grounds ought to be taken to be a distinct concept beyond the *feitiço*, the latter of which does not raise the essential problem of the former: “the social and personal value of material objects” (Pietz 1987: 35). The colonial *fetisso* thus “spoke of the deluded personification of material objects whose true efficacy lay in physical and psychological rather than spiritual causality” (Pietz 1987: 45).<sup>31</sup> These strange *fetissos* were “quasi-personal powers and material objects that were capable of being influenced both through acts of worship, such as making food offerings, and through manipulations of material substances” (Pietz 1987: 40). In other words, and this is key, the transformation from *feitiço* to *fetisso* that grounds the conceptual framework of *fetichism* arises in order to deal with the limitations of the conceptual framework of idolatry, which had difficulties explaining the non-Christian systems of social and spiritual value found in West Africa.

This brief historical contextualization demonstrates for the purposes of the present essay that the discourse of fetishism is less a direct product of critical inquiry and more a result of the contingent interplay between an unfolding coloniality of power (European mercantilism) and its epistemic corollary (the coloniality of knowledge developing from Europe’s emerging one-sided anthropology)—a process where the West African perspective of this entire dynamic is simply absent from the conversation. The coloniality of fetish-talk therefore raises serious questions regarding the theoretical suitability of anti-fetishism for a project of epistemic decolonization.

In the case of liberation philosophy, one cannot but probe the anti-fetishist method’s potential to inadvertently replicate an aspect of the coloniality that it seeks to overcome. If the Judeo-Christian critique of idolatry is at the center of both the European colonialist encroachment in West Africa (even if only to demarcate the content of *feitiçaria*) and liberation philosophy’s account of domination (however abstractly), the question is: does this theoretical influence represent a limitation inherent to liberation philosophy that would hinder a properly global (South-South, especially Latin America-

Africa) decolonial account of modernity/coloniality? Can the method of anti-fetishism be salvaged from the coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge and be redeployed in the interests of global decolonization?<sup>32</sup>

To begin to address this question, I find it helpful to draw on recent work in cultural anthropology, the kind of work that fills in the gaps that the coloniality of knowledge overlooks in its one-sided anthropological version. The groundbreaking work of Lorand Matory, exemplified by his recent monograph *The Fetish Revisited* (2018), precisely recuperates the silenced West African perspective on the question of fetishization. Not only does Matory demonstrate how Marx and Freud—the two central operators of the trope of fetishization in European thought—took for granted the validity of the trope of fetishization fabricated in the colonial encounter, but he also goes on to then supply the missing account of the fetish from the standpoint of the African practitioners themselves. Contrary to the European assumption that that the so-called fetishist is unaware of the source of the fetish's value, Matory provocatively retorts that “Afro-Atlantic priests typically know that it is people who make gods” (Matory 2018: xix). This simple assertion shakes the principle behind the Marxist model of fetishism as mystification and reveals its deep flaws.

Matory's ethnographic fieldwork spans four decades, offering erudite analyses of the material elements in Afro-Atlantic religions, or the so-called “fetish” things that become spirited (e.g., sculptures, pots, beads, stones, among others). Through this work, Matory unveils a multidimensional philosophical anthropology that refutes the charge of naïve and alienated mystification. Against the biased, if not outright ignorant, Eurocentric account, Matory shows that such religious practices are in fact manifestations of a self-conscious agential reciprocity.

What appeared to Marx as a simple case of a man-made alienated projection (the invention of “beings endowed with life”), entails, for the African practitioner, a *mutual* dependence between human agency and the things that become gods through *their* worship (Matory 2018: 251). In these traditions, Matory argues, “the gods' power, their will, and their presence in their physical vessels are of a piece with the *conscious choice* of the worshipper to enact and uphold the reality of the god” (Matory 2018: 242; my emphasis). Humans and gods, therefore, depend on each other, *mutually* making each other possible. In the end, the material things that the Europeans claim are “fetishes” cannot be said to naively represent an alienated mystification of human agency. Instead, a much more complex articulation of value and agency is at stake, such as one of “conscious choice” that leads to mutual dependence. Without immersing ourselves in Matory's entire argument (which would go beyond the scope of the present essay), this glimpse of a picture unquestionably outstrips what the trope of fetishization pretends to describe in its European social-theoretical deployments.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4 Towards a Postmetaphysical Critique of Fetishism

Matory's comparative anthropology puts African conceptual frameworks on a level playing field *vis-à-vis* their European counterparts. In doing so, it also presents a meta-theoretical reflection on the problematic aspects of fetish-talk. Accordingly, if any discussion of fetishization is to be of analytic significance beyond its Eurocentric construction, it certainly ought to signify something else besides naïve mystification. It is from such original comparative framing that what is taken to be fetishization radically changes shape, bracketing the question of truth to make way to a neutral-aspiring examination of intercultural contestations.

What in the end makes a fetish a fetish for Matory “is not its falsity” per se, *vis-à-vis* a truth-value of real divinity (say, the God of Abraham) (Matory 2018: 31). Instead, what ends up being called a fetish exposes broader processes of intercultural encounters that indicate rivaling interpretations of value and agency. By utilizing fetish-talk, Matory claims, “the speaker normally means to establish a

hierarchy of truth, value, and competency. And, naturally, the speaker places himself in the superior position” (Matory 2018: 294). Of course, far from safely securing access to any transcendental truths, what such claim to epistemic superiority betrays is a context of “intercultural, interclass, intergender, or interpersonal controversy and contestation that leads some people to call the thing a fetish (in Hegel’s, Marx’s, or Freud’s sense), while other people call it a true god, a true spirit, a true repository of value or agency, or an authentic metonym of some real force that matters” (Matory 2018: 31). Our meta-theoretical reflection indicates that, for us (westernized academic readers of Matory), the stuff of fetishization is such contestation, tension, and conflict of value codes, and not the wrongness of the other’s value code *per se* (Matory 2018: 294).

For the purposes of our analysis of liberation philosophy’s “anti-fetishist” method, Matory’s argument then advises us to question the metaphysical framework that leads to the accusation of fetishization. This calls for a careful reassessment of the logic of transcendental alterity as the grounds from which the atheism of the fetish is turned into an avowed liberatory praxis.<sup>34</sup> My intent here (and in the larger project of which this essay is only a part) is to attempt to salvage the diagnosis of domination as totalization but in a way that does not reinforce the Eurocentric misunderstanding of African conceptual frameworks upon which the Enlightenment trope of fetishism is built.

Indeed, if liberation philosophy is to sustain a commitment to a global project of decolonization, instead of implicitly presupposing a derogative dismissal of African conceptual frameworks, it ought to follow Matory’s exemplary model and build a reciprocal South-South engagement with African thought. This would no doubt be a breath of fresh air for the Latin American movement, which has been characterized by a longstanding North-South dialogue with European philosophy, especially Levinasian ethics, Marxism, and the Frankfurt School. The South-South dialogue between Latin America and Africa on the question of anti-fetishism signals a new horizon of liberation philosophy for a twenty-first century, which aims to fulfill its aspiration of becoming a “critical philosophy with global validity.”<sup>35</sup>

Surely, such a South-South dialogue would not mean abandoning the important dialogue with European philosophy, as that would simply result in the breakdown of global validity—Europe, after all its imperialist baggage, is *still* part of the world. Any future North-South dialogues, however, would now have to hinge on the evolving South-South dialogues beyond Europe.<sup>36</sup> On this point, I argue that a decisive aid in the revision of the anti-fetishist method could already be found in liberation philosophy’s ongoing dialogue with the Frankfurt School. I have in mind, for example, the *postmetaphysical* approach advocated by Jürgen Habermas, which here would help interrogate the metaphysical framework of transcendental alterity.<sup>37</sup> The outstanding task is to synthesize such postmetaphysical approach with the South-South dialogues in question.<sup>38</sup>

For Habermas, the postmetaphysical horizon emerges when the paradigm of consciousness in philosophy is abandoned in the name of the paradigm of language. It is consequently an aspect of the *linguistic turn* that “detranscendentalizes” reason by embedding philosophical practice in a specific socio-cultural/communicative historical context (Habermas 1992: 33–4). To detranscendentalize reason shifts the task of philosophy to embark on the rational reconstruction of its socio-cultural/communicative historical embeddedness. Such an approach would supplement, rather than replace, liberation philosophy’s focus on providing a substantive geopolitical historical point of departure for its philosophical practice—whether in the form of a new world history of philosophy, or in the more concrete analysis of the birth of Latin America and its philosophical production.

To be clear, liberation philosophy has already begun to undertake such postmetaphysical theoretical restructuring, but *only* in its subfields of ethics and political philosophy. This is palpable since the dialogues with Karl-Otto Apel in the 1990s that led to the publication of what is perhaps now considered Dussel’s *magnum opus*, his *Ética de la Liberación* [*Ethics of Liberation*].<sup>39</sup> This new ethics circumvents some of the heaviest metaphysical premises of the first two volumes of Dussel’s 1970s

*Filosofía ética latinoamericana*. It does so by couching the normativity of critique in the formalist framework of the pragmatic and linguistic turns made famous by the second generation of the Frankfurt School, thus in some ways superseding the earlier phenomenological ethics. My claim is that such an approach ought to be applied to revise the “anti-fetishist method,” especially in relation to the South-South dialogue with African thought that aims to overcome the Eurocentrism of the trope of fetishization.

In more concrete terms, what is at issue here is the effective development of a new liberation philosophy of religion that would do to the 1970s phenomenological archaeology of religion (the fifth volume of *Filosofía ética latinoamericana*) what the 1990s *Ethics of Liberation* did to the first two volumes of *Filosofía ética latinoamericana*. Embracing the postmetaphysical move, in particular its thematization of discursivity and intersubjectivity, would allow one to respond to the concerns raised by Matory’s work regarding the potentially harmful tendencies of a Eurocentric understanding of fetishization rooted in a Judeo-Christian conceptual framework.

Because if anything, from Matory’s angle, it may appear that the metaphysical fixation on transcendental exteriority as the ultimate guarantor of criticality would be a fetish in its own right. Instead of such an image of the Absolute, the postmetaphysical liberation philosopher might turn the gaze closer to home to engage in a more robust rational reconstruction of its own socio-cultural/communicative historical embeddedness, that which is between its “facts and norms.”<sup>40</sup> From this viewpoint, which pays attention to intersubjective processes of material community-building, liberation philosophy might be able to understand fetishization in the way that Matory has done, as a conflict of value codes embedded within a larger cultural-communicative contestation.<sup>41</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

In this essay, I have examined the trope of fetishization in Enrique Dussel’s liberation philosophy, tracing its growth from a theological articulation to a (post)secular philosophy of religion. By way of recent work in anthropology of religion, I have also highlighted how a vital aspect of liberation philosophy’s “anti-fetishist” method runs the risk of perpetuating a Eurocentric construction of Afro-Atlantic religions. Indeed, the colonialist origins of all fetish-talk put into question the “anti-fetishist” method’s aptness for a project of epistemic decolonization. I have concluded that for liberation philosophy to sustain a commitment to a global project of decolonization, it ought to follow Matory’s exemplary model to build a reciprocal, South-South engagement with African thought. Such a move may also coincide with the postmetaphysical turn that liberation has already begun to undertake in ethics and politics, but which has yet to be applied to the philosophy of religion. At stake here is the development of a liberation philosophy of religion with global validity that does not rely on problematic colonialist tropes.

**Rafael Vizcaíno** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at DePaul University. His work focuses on Latin American and Caribbean philosophy, especially decolonial thought, and on the intersection between religion, politics, and secularization. Winner of the American Philosophical Association’s 2020 Essay Prize in Latin American Thought, Rafael is currently working on a book-length manuscript that interprets the modern dialectics of secularization from the perspective of Latin American and Caribbean thought. His publications appear in the anthology *Decolonising the University*, the *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy*, and the following journals: *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, *Political Theology, Philosophy and Global Affairs*, *The CLR James Journal*, and *Radical*

*Philosophy Review*. Forthcoming work is scheduled to appear in *The CLR James Journal*, *Lápiz*, and *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*.

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- 1 See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Enrique Dussel’s Liberation Thought in the Decolonial Turn,” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–30; Nelson Maldonado-Torres et al., “Decolonising Philosophy,” in *Decolonising the University*, ed. Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nisancioglu (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2018), 64–90.
- 2 Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 11.
- 3 I use the notion of “Judeo-Christian” as a tentative placeholder to only highlight the conceptual overlaps between Jewish and *early* Christian monotheistic criticisms of idolatry (particularly Roman paganism). I do not aim to replicate its problematic ideological usage as a signifier of the western cause in the post-war “clash of civilization” narrative—whether against “godless communism” or “Islamic terrorism”—that conveniently glosses over two thousand years of (Christian) anti-Semitism. See Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 7; Gil Z. Hochberg, “‘Remembering Semitism’ or ‘On the Prospect of Re-Membering the Semites,’” *ReOrient* 1, no. 2 (2016): 192–223.
- 4 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works Volume 35: Karl Marx—Capital Volume I* (London, UK: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996), 83.
- 5 See Rafael Vizcaíno, “Which Secular Grounds? The Atheism of Liberation Philosophy,” *APA Newsletter on Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2021a): 2–5.
- 6 Vizcaíno (2021a). I expand this argument in a book manuscript currently in progress.
- 7 I find inspiration in Linda Alcoff’s constructive critiques of liberation philosophy, which aim to respond to more sweeping criticisms of the theory, on the one hand, as well as to defend the theory’s decolonizing effectiveness vis-à-vis competing theoretical frameworks, on the other. Linda Alcoff, “Enrique Dussel’s Transmodernism,” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (2012): 60–8.
- 8 William D. Hart, “Secular Coloniality: The Afterlife of Religious and Racial Tropes,” in *Race and Secularism in America*, ed. Jonathon S. Kahn and Vincent W. Lloyd (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016): 176–206; J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
- 9 Edgardo Lander, ed. *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales: Perspectivas Latinoamericanas* (Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2000); Grant J. Silva, “Comparative Philosophy and Decolonial Struggle: The Epistemic Injustice of Colonization and Liberation of Human Reason,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 57, Spindel Supplement (2019): 107–34; Rafael Vizcaíno, “Did You Listen? Zapatismo and Epistemic Decolonization,” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 9, no. 6 (2021b): 1–18.
- 10 I analyze the influence of liberation theology on liberation philosophy in the aforementioned book manuscript in progress.
- 11 Liberation philosophy (and decolonial thought in general) must also engage with Asian critiques of western modernity, as Jeong Eun Annabel We has recently argued; see Maldonado-Torres et al., “Decolonising Philosophy,” 71–75; Jeong Eun Annabel We, “Spirit of Bandung Beyond Colonial Mobility,” *Bandung: Journal of the Global South* 6, no. 2 (2019): 190–209. Professor We and I are working on spelling out a “South-South” critique of western modernity in dialogue between Latin American liberation philosophy and the Japanese Pan-Asianist historical philosophers. Her early reflections on this project can be found in the conference proceedings to the 9th Conference on East-West Intercultural Relations (“Global South, Latin America, and the Luso-Hispanic World”), which took place in 2017 at the Seoul National University Institute of Latin American Studies (South Korea).

- 12 Besides appearing in the journal *Selecciones de Teología* and a few edited anthologies, this essay was also reprinted as the second appendix to the fifth volume of Dussel's *Filosofía ética latinoamericana* (1980). It would not be until the publication of *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx* (1993), however, that its arguments would be expanded into a full-length monograph. The "Atheism" essay is here once again reprinted as chapter six of *Las metáforas*, this being the version that I cite in my analysis below. In full disclosure, all translations from Spanish to English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.
- 13 As I already alluded to above, in addition to his pioneering work in liberation philosophy, Dussel is also considered an important contributor to liberation theology. Nevertheless, Dussel has always maintained a strict division of labor between his theological and his philosophical work. See Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
- 14 Enrique Dussel, *Las Metáforas Teológicas De Marx* (Navarra, Spain: Verbo Divino, 1993), 237.
- 15 This is the main argument that, two decades after the publication of this 1972 essay, is expanded in the entirety of *Las metáforas teológicas de Marx*. I analyze this argument in another essay manuscript in progress.
- 16 This 1977 lecture was first quickly published in full as Dussel's *Religión* volume (1977). It also appeared as the first appendix to the fifth volume of the *Filosofía ética latinoamericana* (1980)—the version that I mainly cite in the present essay. It is also noteworthy to mention that while Yugoslavia was a socialist republic, it was not aligned with the Soviet Union and its policy of state atheism. On the contrary, Yugoslavia was a co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement, and its religious policy was based on a rather liberal-secular model of freedom of expression. For a contextualization of the significance of the conference series "The Future of Religion," which continues to run as of 2020, see Anita Lunić, "The 40th Anniversary of the International Course on the Future of Religion," *Synthesis Philosophica* 61, no. 1 (2016): 199–201.
- 17 Enrique Dussel, *Religión* (Mexico City, Mexico: Editorial Edicol, 1977), 12.
- 18 Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía ética Latinoamericana V: Arqueológica Latinoamericana: Una filosofía de la religión antifetichista* (Bogotá, Colombia: Universidad Santo Tomás, 1980), 103.
- 19 Here Dussel is implicitly channeling Kant's philosophy of religion, as when Kant makes the distinction between "ecclesiastical faith" and "religious faith"—the former being the Church dogma of the theologian, and the latter the rational essence of religion, which is the domain of the philosopher. Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 262.
- 20 Here we see liberation philosophy's postsecularity at work, as it unmasks secularism as yet another fetish, a modern fetish that demands worship and negates, in a moment of self-enclosing totalization, what it single-handedly projects as its own Other, i.e., "religion." See Vizcaíno (2021a).
- 21 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works Volume 3: Karl Marx—March 1843–August 1844* (London, UK: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975).
- 22 I expand on this *postsecular* reading of Marx in the aforementioned essay manuscript in progress.
- 23 Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. George Ciccariello-Maher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 30–5.
- 24 Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York, NY: Continuum, 1995); Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program," in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010): 33–64.
- 25 Sylvia Wynter has analyzed how the voyages of Portugal and Spain contributed to the process of secularization in a way that led to the modern/colonial world. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—an Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

- 26 Following Pietz, Mario Orospe also notes that Dussel does not clearly distinguish the idol from the fetish. Putting that question aside, Orospe then distinguishes three analytic dimensions in Dussel's deployment of fetishism: the logical, the ontological, and the ideological. Mario Orospe Hernández, "Fetichismo y antifetichismo en la Filosofía de la Liberación de Enrique Dussel," *Latinoamérica. Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos* 62 (2016): 79–102. My argument is that to uncritically collapse the idol and the fetish tacitly upholds a one-sided Eurocentric anthropology of religion that misrepresents elements of Afro-Atlantic religions. Michael Barber's account of idolatry in Dussel's reading of Marx, while helpful and critical to an extent (as we shall see below), also does not properly distinguish between the idol and the fetish. Michael D. Barber, "Theory and Alterity: Dussel's Marx and Marion on Idolatry," in *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation*, ed. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000): 195–212.
- 27 William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 13 (1987): 23–45.
- 28 At some point around the end of the first millennium A.D., Castilian Spanish turned the letter "f" into an "h"—thereby further differentiating itself from the Portuguese language. The old Spanish terms *fechizo*, *fechicero*, and *fechiceria* are thus closer to the Portuguese terms that arrived in Africa's Gold Coast at the end of the fifteenth century. They find their analogous counterparts in the modern Castilian Spanish *hechizo*, *hechicero*, and *hechicería* (Pietz 1987: 34).
- 29 For an account of how these theological debates morphed into the racial hierarchies of the modern/colonial world, see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "AAR Centennial Roundtable: Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (2014): 636–65; "Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 4 (2014): 691–711.
- 30 William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 9 (1985): 5–17.
- 31 Such designation once again gestures at the fundamental distinction between the idol and the fetish, a distinction blurred in Dussel's work. For Pietz, the essential characteristic of the fetish is its "irreducible materiality," unlike the idol whose truth is not material but immaterial or spiritual. Such distinction serves as a justification for Hegel's notorious claim that Africa is outside of universal world history or "the Idea"—as Africa only deals with the particularity of the material object (Pietz 1985: 7).
- 32 Or as Hart puts it, does the trope of fetishism have a "radioactive half-life" after which its colonial roots would be "detoxified"? (Hart 2016: 186).
- 33 In the larger project of which the present essay is a part, I expand on the arguments of William Pietz, Lorand Matory, as well as Bruno Latour on the question of the fetish and anti-fetishism. For a wider elucidation of Matory's work, see Rafael Vizcaíno, "The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make" *Philosophy and Global Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2021c): 404–6.
- 34 This is where my project overlaps with Barber's interests to develop "a critical examination of theory itself, including its own theory, in reference to alterity" as deployed in Dussel's work (Barber 2000: 204). Barber advances this examination by way of a comparative reading between Dussel and the work of Jean-Luc Marion. I do so by way of a South-South dialogue between Latin America and Africa.
- 35 Enrique Dussel, "From Critical Theory to the Philosophy of Liberation: Some Themes for Dialogue," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (2011): 16–43.
- 36 Enrique Dussel, "Agenda for a South-South Philosophical Dialogue," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 11, no. 1 (2013): 3–18.
- 37 Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); *Postmetaphysical Thinking II: Essays and Replies*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Malden, MA: Polity, 2017).
- 38 Enrique Dussel, "Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 3 (2012): 28–59.

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- <sup>39</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y la exclusión* (Madrid, Spain: Trotta, 1998); *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta, et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
- <sup>40</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). To be clear, this move is not a return to an anti-transcendental purely immanent materialism. It is, rather, a dialectical overcoming of the immanence/transcendence binary by way of the linguistic turn. Another resource for this move can be found in Dussel's notion of "interior transcendentality," which aims to narrow the gap between history and the Absolute. Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 47. The task that I am outlining here (and that I develop in the larger project of which the present essay is a part) is to reinterpret such notion of "interior transcendentality" in a postmetaphysical way, beyond the philosophy of consciousness.
- <sup>41</sup> The work of Sylvia Wynter also has a great deal to contribute to this issue, particularly her attempts to develop a *transcultural* space beyond the value codes of the modern/colonial world. Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," *boundary 2* 12/13 (1984): 10–70; "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overturn, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition," in *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 184–252. I stage a conversation between Dussel's and Wynter's respective projects in a book manuscript in progress. See also my essay "Sylvia Wynter's New Science of the Word," forthcoming in *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*.