

Transmodernity: Enrique Dussel at Research Across Boundaries

Editor's Note

In 2010, a rare event occurred, a gathering of researchers from several diverse domains brought together by their passion for integrative, transdisciplinary approaches to research.

The international symposium “Research across Boundaries – Advances in Theory-building” was held at the University of Luxembourg in June of 2010. It brought together, for the first time, many leading boundary spanning and meta-level researchers from more than 15 countries across all continents and as many different research areas. In what became a set of truly global dialogues, the participants presented and commented an astounding array of contemporary integrative frameworks, as well as inter- and transdisciplinary reviews and research practices across various fields of inquiry of high relevance for the future. (Molz and Edwards, 2013, p. 3)

While a large portion of the works presented have been published previously, (<https://integral-review.org/backissue/vol-9-no-2-jun-2013/>), a few items have sat unpublished for a variety of reasons. In particular, the present transcript was never submitted in written form. However, the video recording of this session has sat in the background of my hard drive for 10 years.

I recall that session quite vividly. The topic was transmodernity. The setup of each breakout session was to have three presenters, each presenting one of the others' works, followed by dialogue among participants and clarifications or elaborations by the author. However, due to circumstances, Enrique Dussel was unable to participate in this manner and was only able to arrive part way into the session. The first two presenters presented each other's works and there was commentary and general discussion of these going on when Dussel arrived. As he listened to the conversation, I remember him leaning over and whispering in my ear that these people did not know what they were talking about.

Dussel then took his turn and presented his work on transmodernity. In my view, and I believe that of many of those present in the room, he was able to enlighten all of us that indeed, we did not know what transmodernity meant. His passionate and engaging presentation, followed by some questions and commentary, stood out for me during this conference as a window into a truly transdisciplinary and transcultural view.

After repeated unsuccessful attempts to contact Dussel and get a copy of the paper he mentioned at one point, or clarification on segments of the video that were too difficult to decipher, I have decided to publish this as is. You will need to bear with several gaps in the text, but I hope that the main thrust of the presentation comes through. You can find some items, mostly in Spanish at <https://enriquedussel.com/index.html>.

Enrique Dussel

I would like to come to our discussion. I will improve and say something from the material that we begin to share. I would like to speak of three words. The words are important in our conversation. *Modernity*, *postmodernity*, and *transmodernity*. I will try to clarify, not to say that this is the content of this conference. But my vision of the three words is to put more material to the discourse.

Modernity

First, modernity. On this question there is a big discussion, and you know better than I. I would like to put my distinction in two questions. When begins the modernity? That is the problem of the old vision. For example you said (*pointing to somebody to his left*) that modernity is the “Ausgang,” is the liberation of the stupidity that means the coup de tat, the immaturity. That is the definition of that. That means that you think that the modernity begins at the end of 18th century, for example. And Wallerstein thought that the modernity begins with enlightenment at the end of the 18th century. But we discussed this with Wallerstein and we convinced him that it didn’t begin in the 18th century. It began before the modernity. The question of origin is a question of content.

For me, and I can say among a group of thinkers in the United States and Latin America, we agree that modernity begins when Europe woke up of the war that the Islamic world took to Europe. Seventh century. That means the seventh century and the fifteenth century in Europe was various small geographic organisms, very small. Europe was from Vienna until Granada One million kilometer square. Sixty million persons. But the big world, and the universal world was the Islamic world. In..., Egypt, Middle orient, Afghanistan, India and Indochina, until we meet now in the Pacific. That means that Europe was a provincial, secondary, never center of history and the only universal world was the Islamic one until 1492. That is very important when talking about modernity, because the modernity comes from their world.

Ibn Rushd, the big great philosopher from Cordoba was the creator of the 17th century philosophical renewal. And modernity comes from the south. That is a clear hypothesis that we can use. For us, modernity is when Europe broke out of this world, of the Islamic world.

The modernity began when Europe went out to Africa, through Portugal, to India, Japan with the Portuguese empire and to America with the Spanish expansion. That is the beginning of modernity. That means 1492. In the 15th century begins the modernity. That is a discussion. For me, it is clear. That is against Habermas, against Toynbee. That is a discussion.

If modernity begins in the expansion of Europe, we have four phenomena simultaneously. That means, we have first modernity as a companion? but that is the beginning of the world system in the sense of Wallerstein. That is the beginning of the connection between Europe, Africa, Asia, America, the first world system in history because America was not part of any system before. What system? This is the beginning of the colonialism, because never were there colonists in the other part of the continent. The Roman Empire did not have colonies, it was an expansion of the same. Chinese empire was the expansion of the same. But to have colonies in the other part of the ocean is a novelty in modernity. That is colonialism.

Then capitalism. Capitalism begins not only in the experience of the feudal cities but is the accumulation of wealth from the periphery to the center. From America come more than 20,000 tons of silver. And that is the primitive accumulation. And all of that doesn't give a possibility of a very Eurocentricism of value.

That means the centrality of Europe in the world system is not in 1492, not for three centuries. After industrial revolution, that means in the 18th century, Europe becomes hegemonical in this world system. But during three centuries, until the 18th century, China and India were the center of technology, astronomy, mathematics and commerce. That is to discuss. But only Europe took advance to China and India in the end of the 18th century, beginning of the 20th. That is the centrality of the world system, is in the hand of Europe only two centuries ago. That is for me modernity. The culture of Europe that is the hegemony from two hundred years. That is the idea for discussion.

Postmodernity

The second, what is postmodernity. Postmodernity is very recent. In 1979 Lyotard wrote this book on the postmodern condition. But before and in parallel there are many epistemological narratives like, cultural studies, post-colonial studies in the colonial English departments. Subaltern studies beginning in India, and after they became very popular in the United States and many others.

But the last moment now is the coloniality of the epistemology. It is a Latin American group in the United States that said exactly that coloniality begins not like in the Commonwealth in the 18th century but began in the 16th century. That means there, for three centuries before, a colonial world and a modernity. We are against this hypothesis of the postmodern. For us, postmodernity is the last moment of modernity. It is a Eurocentric criticism of the dominant reason of Europe. But it is from the point of view of Europe. Because Lyotard and others, all these thinkers are Europeans. For us, it is not a question. We use the word *transmodernity* in a very precise meaning. That is against postmodernity and is another moment of modernity. It is not one preview of modernity, but it is another epoch. This other, I cannot say how, these 500 years of modernity begin to finish. And this is another age of the planet, or epoch.

But I would like now to make a description. (*Draws on the flip chart*). If the modernity is like a cone of light. That means here is the light and that is the cone of light. And for example, Latin America is here as a culture (*Dussel drawing an intersection into the cone*) plus the process of the inclusion of Latin America as a colony began in 1492. That is the exploitation of richness, the importation of food, many dominational processes in relation with Latin America that began there. But the inclusion for example of Africa is after. Because in 1885 was the congress of Berlin. That means Africa was invited one century for us. That means the question of the invasion of Africa is true that the slaves of Africa were from Africa to Latin America, the Caribbean and North America. The other groups were invited in the 19th century. India was conquered by England in 1780 was the occupation of the river Ganges etc. China was never a colony but was dependent. The modernity, not only the European culture but the inclusion of exploitable periphery that was absorbed in the world system under the hegemony of Europe.

Transmodernity

But now begins the concept of transmodernity. That is completely different than any other position that I know. It is a question of exteriority. And that is the concept. Dare I say totality as a category and exteriority as a category. That is a category of the philosopher of (...?) in Latin America. Exteriority is the The modernity exploited a part of the richness of the peripheral countries in the coloniality. But some of the parts said that had no value and what has a value was not included, was a pure negation.

And now begins the question of transmodernity. For me, the postmodernity is a moment of modernity where Europe decides itself. That is the postmodernity. But now begins the criticism from the exteriority of Europe. There is one in Latin America, myself. There is one in Africa, Bantu. There is one, Tariq Ramadan, an Islamic thinker. There is Quan yon Ming, a Confucian philosopher in China, who has criticized all the capitalism today in Asia, because in China, Singapore, Hong Kong etc. is not the Calvinism like Weber thought. It is the neo-Confucianism, and Quan yon Ming (?) is a philosopher of the 16th century in China, that is not European. That is a thing in another tradition.

From this exteriority of Europe begin four movements. The first movement is the positive evaluation of their own culture, denied in modernity as barbarian, as not being, as “sauvage” (wild). Now they publish the first history of philosophy in Sao Paulo. The first. Now they publish thousands of pages in a big Encyclopedia. First, the history of philosophy land in America. The first. That means there is first a recognition of their own value, not against modernity. But not modern! First, that is a problem.

Second, that means that we need to make a reconstruction of the history of our traditions. And that is coming back to the Indian traditions, to the Bantu tradition, to the Brahmanic tradition, Taoist, Buddhist etc. etc. traditions. In each of these cultures, Islam begins to discover a big important tradition. Baghdad was the center of science for 500 years. In 756, Baghdad was founded. Baghdad was the MIT of the time. Numbers, we call them Arabic numbers. The old mathematic of the 9th, 10th, 11th 12th century was Arabic. Europe was in the Middle Age. They knew nothing. Baghdad was the center. Baghdad was connected to China, with India through Kabul and with Constantinople. Baghdad was the center of civilization for 500 years.

But that means, it is a vision that is impossible for a European. There are many specialists in Latin American culture, Bantu culture, Islamic culture, Chinese culture, in Oxford, Cambridge, Berlin. But it is very different to be a specialist, than to be an Arab, to speak Arabic, in the flesh. In Arabic at least, for the philosophy of the Arabic civilization. That is impossible for a European because it is Arab culture. This is the second movement.

The third movement is the dialog with modernity. Yes, we don't deny, like the fundamentalists, modernity. We don't say modernity is nothing and we are all right. It is not true, because the modernity is not an essence, but it is a process, and the culture of the periphery too, are in process. To all this in relation to modernity, that changed all cultures. This dialog has a difference when a European does a dialog with the periphery, than when the peripheral thinker does the dialog with Europe. Because the peripheral thinker, for example one Islamic person said “I think that to do a

new interpretation of the Koran and the problem of the woman, feminism,” they can go to Europe to do a new interpretation of the Koran. But they chose what of modernity is useful for them, and not the position of Europe. That is what is better for them. And after is the most important. After this there is the development of this culture that begins to be right now.

All the cultures in this movement, Chinese is an example, went to the Hindus, Brahmanic civilization, and to Africa, and to the Arabs and to Latin America begin from their own exteriority situation in dialogue with the modernity. This project for the future. For me is full of content. But it is not ... a universality, an abstraction. That was in position of the modern of Europe to all countries. Is one analogical project of pluriversality. The pluriversality is the universality. The pluriversality is one thing and not the other, they are very different.

The analogy is where they have come to be together in some aspects and this seems enough. That means there are some parts where we are all together. A. B. C. D. Different cultures. A can coincide with B, with C, with D. And this significant is not identical. It is a similarity where each distinction to a different meaning to this similarity that is not a unique view abstract to the understanding, it is a question of logic. This pluriversality, not universality, it is pluriverse. It is transmodern. That means beyond modernity. Trans is not postmodern in the sense of the last moment of modernity. I think that will define it very precise. And I do not know another person that does a clear definition.

Discussion

Discussant 1: And this is another definition of the same thing ... (pointing to posters on the floor).

Enrique Dussel: Yes, but it is very “leer.” The truth is leer (empty). But it is not empty. This is the universality. That is very important.

Discussant 1: It is different.

Enrique Dussel: But it is not the identity. But it is the similarity. And then we can make many centuries. I think that is what we meet now. China, India, Africa, Europe, Latin America. We make constructions parallel to cultures. That many similarities make a dialogue between us. Not only north south. But south south. That means the dialogue between Latin America and Africa. Between China and Europe. But south south. And that goes to a new project. And that is for me the transmodernity in the analogical pluriversality of the new age. And I agree that this age through the ecological question and the very negative intentional effect of capitalism ... But we may ask a definition. What is capitalism? ... in century ... I do not know how much time because of the ecological problem....

Discussant 2: Could you please say something about the difference between 1 and 2?

Enrique Dussel: ... For one Islamic person or for one Bantu now is South Africa.... In football we see Africa as folklore-Africa. But it was difficult for this third world, of this south civilization of a culture is to have a positive evaluation on the out existence of ... I have values, not only

Europe. For example, we have this very strong sense of community. The modernity loses the sense of community is the father, the mother, and the daughter.... This is their reality. It is the discovery of the own values. First.

Second. It is necessary now to.... the memory of these countries. That they lose their memory because ...the antiquity.... After middle age that was the only civilization that has a middle age is Europe and that is exactly the moment where Europe was in this situation. The Arab world was and not feudal. And there is not any feudal society out of Europe. And we use a universal category of history. Antiquity, middle age, modernity, there is a has nothing to do with science. That means, the memory of the own culture, the second.

The third. We need instruments. And the modernity is not only an invention of Europe. The modernity took information of all cultures. And this information is the beginning of almost all inventions in Europe. For example, the industrial revolution. All instruments to the machine from China. And we know the industrial revolution begun before... And all machines are from China. ... in the 6th century the Chinese discovered the printer machine. The paper in the 8th century. The 9th century printed paper... And when the Venetian messenger in China, Marco Polo, ... could not explain the paper and the people didn't believe. We need to pay the ecological, philosophical and historical advance of the modernity because it is not only the construction of Europe, but it is the construction of the center of the ...

...so much depth to other cultures, when they took the culture and they say it is our revenge ..., the renaissance. The renaissance from Constantinople and from China. Now there is a ... on the China astronomy and the China mathematics in the beginning of the renaissance. That is the dialogue, the third.

In the third begins the ... independent movement. And how is the question of China? China is a ..., the colonial. It is totally ... And in 1860 China produces more iron ... How is that possible? in ... years China must produce more iron. China must develop more and begun a crisis and Europe was underdeveloped and begins the development in this cross.... Europe took the advance and was a ... crisis in India and China. And now they come back to the history of the own development. And it is not a miracle. It is a normal process of development. For example now, it is technology and capitalism. But sure there is a ... where they begin to rethink their tradition. I will go to China the next month. And we ... on Marx. But we have a very different interpretation of Marx than the Soviet Union. And they are very interested in the definition question is Marx in the Many questions. The Chinese people, they begin their development. And in India the same. Now ... there is big development etc. etc.

Discussant 3: I noticed you were talking from notes.

Enrique Dussel: Yes, the paper is done.

Discussant 3: It is done. So we will see it.

Enrique Dussel: I don't know. Transmodernity and interculturality is my paper.

Jonathan: It is not on the website yet. We will put it out on the website for the conference. That was a ... tour and expanded our horizon and enlarged our scope of dialogue, and we acknowledge that and take a deep breath before we engage in further discussions and questions and so on.

Enrique Dussel: Now it is the sense that you have a broader horizon of themes. And not only Eurocentric.

Discussant 4: What is exciting about it

Discussant 1: You see, I feel. I agree completely with your Because what I feel is that we are all lost. Modernity cannot find a solution for the sustainable future. So, Europe goes to nowhere. The United States are no states for the moment. The states are still very modern and they

Enrique Dussel: ... That means, which are the necessary negative effects of the system? The necessary negative effects. Unintentional. Because the modernity ... and has not any measure to exploit/explore(?) the reality, the nature. But now we see that this nature is not infinitive. It is very finished. And the logic of modernity cannot stop the movement. That is the question. And HOW we can stop, that is the sense of capitalism. The rationality of capitalism is the growth of ... of profit. And if I invest money and I have more ... of profit, that is rational and efficient. If I don't have this ... of profit, that is inefficient. We need other criteria. And as you say (points to discussant 1) ...the criteria is the life criteria. And the true rational is the suspendability ... the life. But that was not any criteria in the modernity because the life was evident and was not a problem. But now it has become a problem. The of the planet is a negative effect of the system. We can't stop this machine ... to show the rationality of these economies. They have not the life after And this case is irrational because the true rationality is the suspendability of life in the long term. In the next 1000 years. Not the next president election. 1000! That is rationality. But the criteria are very close.

Discussant 1: But you see in your design. In every culture we have something in common. But it is not a universality anymore. It is a kind of pluriversality. Ok, I like that idea. But at the same moment, Europeans are here (points to poster on the floor). They are only one seat. One seat. Americans are here. Islamic countries are there. And no one knows the solution. That is the situation today. Therefore I say that this is empty. We do not know. We have no trends.

Enrique Dussel: This question is symmetrical. But it is not symmetrical. The United States are the military power today.... It is not a symmetrical moment. It is a center moment. And that is identity. That means a beautiful Today the domination is in the hand of the atom bombs of the US. And they are now for the humanity a danger because they have no other criteria than profit in the US.

Jonathan: Now we are going to bring more voices in.

Discussant 4: Ok, just about the intensity of the whole discussion.... When you talk about the question of life and sustainability, is there something that also has been an intentional impact. When you talked about China producing more iron than Europe and the US together, they were obviously sustainable. So, when you talk about the history here, first of all I would like your interpretation

here. What we finally have now is What you just presented has of course been very critical discussion of your.... But still we have to acknowledge that some come from other cultures

Enrique Dussel: Yes, but the question of life is very ambiguous. And because of that the human and the life is a more objective criteria. An affirmation of life. And the love as a moment was affirmation, because I can love Or I can love the capital. This case is ambiguous. But the affirmation of life as a ... is a very rational concept I think. Now the Chinese have the problem. Because they developed a very modern rationality and now they have to decide for the future China not to be responsible for the destruction of life through the ecological question, yes. We need now some global principles and the human and the life it brings.

Discussant 4: Do you think in this moment of reflection interior conditions and traditions, they were not critical enough to realize that the world of our next ... is

Enrique Dussel: ... all human beings. All is global. And there are some global principles, but the life and the consensus and the This I think, is ethical consideration. But that there are some principles for all human beings and this is possible in the similarity of the different cultures.

Discussant 2: ... The Universities for Humanity, which perhaps we should not call, exactly wanted to give expression to what Enrique is talking about. So, it is actually alike what is happening and when I read your paper as well, it would inform us even more deeply. So, the first thing is that it is alike what is happening...and thank you for

Second. There is another similarity between your four moments and our model. And after reading your paper, I immediately see a deep resonance between the four moments and that process of grounding, emergence, having an effect. So, that is profound.

And the third thing was the invitation to what we expressed before, as for example I was talking to Charles about the amazing.... That you are doing here. You never really make that ... division to life. I mean it is ... it is rich, it is very very particular. The model in a very ... unique kind of way and really it hurts me, coming from Africa, with something from a feminine soul as well, feel.... I am looking at Vietnam, I am looking at ... other woman. And you have given us a powerful performance. Thank you.

Discussant 5: ... he does a beautiful job in describing the ... I really like that ... division. But ... a new form of economy because of markets. And this other book, the balance side, ... quick story. I read this book and I teach these courses ... we analyzed this book and he has pages and pages of other things you can do to push back against this and She printed out postcards, and on each postcard, it said, right now, my only choice is yours because you are not in the hospital or whatever. Literally, ... an alternative. I am switching to another company and whenever she is applying for a new job she is going Mailbox She is a miracle. She has been doing that since I taught that course in 2001. A postcard every day. So this book is full of things that we can do And I find the connections to the future. That is one of the best ...

Discussant 6: I also want to reflect about my own process. I reflected 2 days ago when I in this group from Thursday already and I am happy to have chosen this group. And when I think back, I think I stepped into this group with an attitude of searching. I am searching for answers and

experiences and I wanted to learn from you what is the future. What is the future we have, and what about the vision we develop. And I learned a lot in terms of knowledge, in terms of experiences, your experiences. But there still is this empty spot. Sometimes, I think that contains everything. There are moments in life in touch with the empty spot. And I feel that for me that is the most important thing that I have learned, this bad consciousness, a state of consciousness. More than everything else. But this contains that at the same time. So we need knowledge and experiences.... states of consciousness. So that is my sharing. What I have learned today. And my question to you. I enjoy being at your presentation and this discussion and especially the four steps, the four points in But what I need, perhaps you have said something and I didn't gather it, what I miss is when you talk about evaluating the own culture, existence of values and the histmats(?) becoming dependent. What I miss here is the connection, forms of honoring the other, the culture or the origin or your own roots. But the other.

Enrique Dussel: ... But for me it is evident that the cultures discover in the and in this case it is the modernity and in this case discover the otherness of the own in relation with the modernity. But in the dialogue between the different cultures. Who? It is a person that is related to the own culture, that means, that is attentive to otherness in the own culture that is to deny. That is You must be responsible for the other in your own culture to discover the value. It is a very important question you put. The sense of consciousness, all this growth through. ...

Discussant 3: The question that emerged for me that we can see visibly the scale and scope of the global credit crisis. For me, that is just a symptom. And it is about the ... nature of present-day capitalism. This story you tell implies that we will find a way to put a collar on it, to limit and to find a way. How do you see that happen?

Enrique Dussel: I say that we slowly come to this point because the most important countries, governments begin to see the financial capital as a danger for the state. Because the big business today is exploiting the state. And the state exploited after the population to take the money to pay the debt. In this moment we have a very ... never happened until today.... And the bank becomes this enemy of the national state. That is new because they were together. But now the interest of capitalism and the interest of the state, or better, of the population. Not only in the colonial countries but now in the central countries. And that is new. It was never like this. That is very important for the new theory in many aspects of economy. This is not sufficient. And the ... logical theory of all time is...but we see now the failure.... the capital in favor with the people. The people of Germany, England, Kenya or Argentina. That is now to hope.

Discussant 3: So your hope is that we will that deeply enough and fast enough to make a difference.

Enrique Dussel: It is slowly through the suffering because the people must suffer to begin to understand. When it is very happy, nothing. But now it is the problem of many people and in the suffering they say that is What has happened? Where is the theory? ... there is mysteries. They will not know what happened. Now with the new theory on all these questions.

Reference

Molz, M. and Edwards, M. (2013). Research Across Boundaries: Introduction to the First Part of the Special Issue. *Integral Review*, 9(2). 1-11.