

A Study of the Attempt to Develop Latin American Philosophy: With a Focus on Enrique Dussel's Theory of the Other

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Introduction

The word “philosophy” is often referred to thinking systems born in ancient Greece and that flourished in Europe. However, recently, a relationship between philosophy and locality is gaining attention. The questions are: Is there philosophy outside of the occidental world? If there is, how? Does it have the same theoretical strictness as in the occidental world?

Among non-Western regions, especially in Latin America, such discussions have occurred actively since the early 20th century.⁴³ In this article, a movement called “Philosophy of Liberation” is introduced as an example of an attempt to develop the “Latin American philosophy.”

“Philosophy of Liberation” is a movement that occurred in Latin America during the ‘70s. This philosophical movement was influenced by the “Theology of Liberation,” which arose in the late ‘60s⁴⁴. “Philosophy of Liberation” focuses on the dependency theory and the liberation from it; however, each thinker has different disputed points. One of the most notable thinkers of this movement is Enrique Dussel.

Dussel was born in Argentine in 1934 and exiled to Mexico in 1975 being persecuted by the military regime. Dussel’s main work titled *Filosofía de la liberación* shares the same name as the movement. *Filosofía de la liberación* was published in Spanish in 1977, and the latest version was reprinted as the 5th edition in 1996. In this article, the 5th edition is used as the quoted source.

In this book, Dussel understands the world as divided into “center” and “periphery” based on geopolitical factors. In this present world, the so-called occidental world, such as Europe and the United States, is considered the “center,” while other areas like Latin America, Africa, and Asia are regarded as the “periphery.”⁴⁵ He explains this geopolitical classification using Levinas’ concepts, such as “totality” and “the Other.” Dussel rephrases “totality” as “center,” “imperial,” and “oppressors,” while “the Other” is reworded as “periphery,” “exteriority,” “the poor,” and “the oppressed,” etc.

His *Filosofía de la liberación* greatly influenced the intelligentsia in Latin America and has been discussed in and outside this region. However, evaluations and opinions on the work are poles apart.

⁴³ For example, for previous works, we can see: Zea, 1945; Frondizi, 1949; Salazar Bondy, 2006[1968]; Miro Quesada, 1974; Argote 1993; Nucchietelli, 2002 and 2010; Nakano, 2017.

⁴⁴ Regarding “Theology of Liberation,” some of the main works are Gutierrez, 1971, and Boff and Boff, 1987. Regarding “Philosophy of Liberation,” there are several general surveys, including Cerutti, 2006[1983]; Scannone, 2009; Dussel, 1995[1977].

⁴⁵ In fact, Japan is placed as a “center” country. Dussel, 1996[1977], p.14.

For example, American philosopher Ofelia Schutte severely criticizes Dussel and calls this book a self-contradictory ideology. Finnish theologian Elina Vuola also criticizes him from a feminist standpoint. Argentine philosopher Horacio Cerutti Guldberg, who is known as one of the key figures of the Philosophy of Liberation, views Dussel's theory negatively observing that Dussel pretends his own position to be exempted from criticism. Meanwhile, American philosopher Michael Barber believes that Dussel's philosophy applies Emmanuel Levinas' ethics in a practical dimension and puts a high value on it. Argentine philosopher Walter D. Mignoro positively views Dussel's text, reading it as a weapon for social transformation.⁴⁶

In this article, to clarify the structure and motivation of Dussel's theory of the Other in *Filosofía de la liberación*, two of the most conflicting texts are investigated: Schutte's "The Philosophy of Liberation in Critical Perspective" in *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*, which criticizes Dussel, and Barber's *Ethical Hermeneutics*, which defends him.

Section 1. Two interpretations of Dussel's theory of the Other

In this section, an overview of Schutte's point of view is presented, and the focus of her criticism is clarified. Then, Barber's argument against Schutte's criticism is examined.

Schutte points out that the theory of the Other in Dussel's *Filosofía de la liberación* falls into a self-contradiction, and the cognitive scheme he embraces in this book has the same structure as the fanatic ideology that he originally tried to criticize. Schutte understands Dussel's "the Other" as follows:

In religion, this refers to God as the absolute Other, from which all moral commands emanate. In Philosophy, it is the Other as oppressed, who nevertheless is the earthly revelation of the absolute Other. From this standpoint, the earthly Other's demands signify the absolute Other's commands. The supreme law of Dussel's ethical system is "service to the Other," a maxim that may include the duty to lay down one's life for the Other. But "the Other" is only a metaphysical term which, like its ethical counterpart "alterity," serves as a placeholder for a vast number of metonymic replacements. (...) Through the strategic placement and development of the formula "the Other demands justice," it is possible to move from a religious context to a political, social, economic, or metaphysical context without engaging in a detailed elaboration of arguments in support of particular claims.⁴⁷

"To say 'yes-to-the-Other,' to the political Other," Dussel concludes, "is the *absolute*

⁴⁶ Schutte, 1993. Vuola, 2000. Cerutti, 2006[1983]. Barber, 1998. Mignoro, 2000.

⁴⁷ Schutte, 1993, p.186

criterion of a political ethics [*eticidad política*].”⁴⁸

According to Schutte, Dussel replaces the meaning of the absolute Other—which is God in religion, from which all moral commands arise—with the earthly oppressed through the substitution of terminology and its context. That is, moral values, such as justice and goodness, are associated with the acts of the Other, or of the earthly oppressed. Therefore, Schutte accuses that Dussel’s theory of the Other falls into religious absolutism in a political context. Indeed, the following lines from his text help understand Schutte’s argument:

In this way, the liberating act or act of gratuitous kindness, inasmuch as it is beyond the intrasystematic interest, is and cannot not be illegal, against current laws, which, being those of an old just but now oppressive order, are unjust. The subversive illegality is the inevitable position of liberation.⁴⁹

Here, Dussel argues that the liberating act, which is considered an act of gratuitous kindness, is inevitably illegal and subversive under current laws. Schutte believes that Dussel justifies this illegal and subversive liberating act through religion for the absolute Other. So, what kind of conclusion does Schutte think will be brought by this absolutism of liberating act for the Other?

The prolific use of “metonymic reasoning” is most disturbing insofar as 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” as elaborated by Dussel and other exponents of this type of analectical reasoning appear truly frightening.⁵⁰

Schutte is of the opinion that endowing the Other with an absolute value and regarding the liberating act for the Other as having an absolute moral value lead to fascism or fetishism⁵¹ that Dussel wanted to avoid, making it theoretically self-contradictive. Thus, she concludes that Dussel’s *Filosofía de la*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.187 the Italic and the brackets are by Schutte.

⁴⁹ Dussel,1996, p.85. Hereinafter, Dussel’s quotations are translated by the author from the Spanish version.

⁵⁰ Schutte, 1993, p.190

⁵¹ In Dussel’s text, the word “fetishism” is always used as the worship of “totality.” “Totality,” mentioned later in this article, is a word adopted from Levinas, and Dussel expands the meaning from a merely metaphysical term to a social, non-abstract term.

liberación is merely an ideology justifying the claims of National-Popular Liberation⁵², which Dussel supports.

We have seen that the focus of Schutte's criticism is on the absolutism and deification of the Other, which signifies the earthly oppressed.

Next, we discuss how Barber objects to Schutte's criticisms in *Ethical Hermeneutics*. In the preface to this work, Barber defends Dussel by observing that "the substance of Dussel's philosophy can be grasped through the idea of an "ethical hermeneutics" that seeks to interpret reality from the viewpoint of the "Other," as philosopher Emmanuel Levinas presents him or her"⁵³ and claims that his philosophy is not "indulging in irrationalism"⁵⁴ as claimed by Schutte.

Barber examines⁵⁵ Dussel's rationality based on the rationality of Levinas' theory. According to Barber, in Levinas' theory of the Other, the foundation of rationality is self-critique, which is an essence of the Other. This self-critique is regarded as a spirit of phenomenology, and he presumes that this concept originates in phenomenology. Phenomenology in this context is thought of as a study that constructs rational thinking by doubting any prior opinion, which is assumed to be natural and revealing hidden horizons. Barber says, "Not only is the rationality of Levinas's position shown in the fact that he uncovers the forgotten Other, but this very Other itself also augments rationality by initiating self-criticism."⁵⁶ The Other questions the I from the outside about what I assure or what I am content with. A human can put a question to oneself, but in the theory of Levinas, as Barber interprets, a spontaneous self-critique can never be truly thorough. "To locate the origin of reflective self-criticism here would leave my spontaneity both unchallenged at its root and intact. Rather, self-critique is born in the Other, who calls my spontaneity itself into question."⁵⁷ Only when the Other appears in front of me, the real self-critique that doubts even my spontaneity will be achieved. Barber identifies this self-criticism by referring to Levinas' words as follows: "The essence of reason consists not in securing for man a foundation and powers, but in calling him into question and in inviting him to justice."⁵⁸

Based on Barber's understanding, the structure itself that the Other puts in question to the I makes Levinas' theory of the Other more rational. He also believes that because this structure is inherited in Dussel's theory of the Other, Dussel's theory cannot be irrational as Schutte interprets it.

So far, we have seen how Schutte criticizes Dussel's theory and how Barber offers a counterargument. But are Schutte's criticisms appropriate? And, does Barber's counterargument really succeed? To examine these two points, first, we must analyze the concepts of Dussel's theory. Then,

⁵² Schutte, 1993, p.178

⁵³ Barber, 1998, preface ix

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xi

⁵⁵ The explanation in this paragraph is based on Barber, pp. 2-8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6

to see whether Barber's counterargument works well, we must inspect whether Levinas' and Dussel's theories of the Other have the same structure because this is the premise that Barber adopts here. In the next section, we investigate some of the core concepts of Dussel's theory of the Other and explore how these concepts relate to each other and whether the structure of the relationship is the same as that of Levinas'.

Section 2. Analysis of the concepts in Dussel's theory of the Other

First, some of the core concepts of the theory of the Other and their relationship in *Filosofía de la liberación* are examined. We take "totality"⁵⁹ and "the Other"⁶⁰ as the fundamental concepts. We analyze how these two concepts are employed in this text and how related core concepts, such as "ethics," "justice," and "responsibility," are used.

"Totality" and "the Other" are counter-concepts, so it is difficult to investigate them separately. Nevertheless, here we start from "totality" as it is the starting point of thought for both Levinas and Dussel.

In *Filosofía de la liberación*, the concept of totality starts from a metaphysical description in Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*.⁶¹ Totality is a world that surrounds the "I," a subject of thinking. This world means one's daily horizon, which is captured as a totality with temporality and spatiality. Dussel points out that Western philosophy so far has exclusively given preponderance to temporality neglecting spatial totality. "The where-I-was-born is the predetermination of all other determinations. (...) to be born in another world, to be born especially in a world that predetermines as the past, and therefore determines, never absolutely but sufficiently and radically, the implementation of the future *proyecto*."⁶² ⁶³ That is to say, depending on the place where the spatial totality is located, which forms the world of the I, my future will differ. Therefore, Dussel believes that spatiality is a more fundamental determination than temporality.

Also, in this spatial and temporal totality, I am surrounded by "being (el ser)," which is given a meaning by the I. Per Levinas' definition, totality is where I can have power, and I can dominate all beings through possession or cognition. In other words, all beings in totality are exerted power by the I and are turned into objects that are possessed or known, that is, dominated. However, when these objects speak, they appear as the Other. Like in the case of Levinas', the Other appears from the exterior to the totality, the exterior where I cannot possess. This exteriority is "the ambit from where

⁵⁹ The expression "the same" is a synonym of "totality."

⁶⁰ "Alterity" is also used as a synonym of "the Other."

⁶¹ The explanation in this paragraph is based on Dussel 1996, pp.36-40.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.39

⁶³ Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky, translators of *Filosofía de la liberación* from Spanish to English, made a note that the word "proyecto" is a translation from Heidegger's "Entwurf," though Dussel himself does not mention it in his original text. A.Martinez and C. Morkovsky, 1985[1977], p.24

other persons, as free and not conditioned by my system and not as part of my world, reveals himself.”⁶⁴ Exteriority means places that are outside of the totality, that is, where I cannot exert my power nor dominate.

So far, Dussel’s descriptions of totality and the Other are in the same metaphysical dimension as Levinas’. Totality means the world that the I occupies at the center and is surrounded by beings on which I can exert power. The Other refers to an existence that appears from the exterior to the totality, and I cannot dominate.

Nonetheless, Dussel gradually and intentionally expands the meaning of totality and the Other. The concept of totality does not only designate a world of an I but also has a political connotation. It means a collective conception, and the spatial aspect of it is emphasized. For Dussel, this spatial aspect, as mentioned already, is a more fundamental concept than temporality. Therefore, a totality that is thought of as a collective conception with emphasized spatiality embraces a non-abstract facet. Particularly, Dussel describes the totality in the current world using concrete names of the developed-capitalist countries.⁶⁵ At the same time, the concept of the Other is also modified as a collective conception—which means the earthly oppressed people in developing countries—that is placed exterior to this expanded conception of totality.⁶⁶

For Dussel, the usage of totality and the Other is not completely in the metaphysical dimension like that of Levinas’ but is in a collective meaning that includes a non-abstract dimension. Furthermore, Dussel adopts a concept that Levinas invented, which is the concept of “ethics” representing the moment to establish a relationship with the Other as oppressed by discourse. This concept of ethics is also fundamental for Levinas.

We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge.⁶⁷

Calling the I into question by the Other, which is never reduced to the totality of the I, is what is called ethics. Accordingly, this questioning is never complete within oneself. Dussel adopts this idea, and he names the questioning by the Other as “ethical conscience,” whereas the questioning that occurs within oneself is named as “moral conscience.”

⁶⁴ Dussel, 1996, p.57

⁶⁵ See part 3.1.3.3 in Dussel, p.90

⁶⁶ See part 2.5.4.3 in Dussel, p.69

⁶⁷ Levinas, 1969, p.43

I call ethical conscience the capacity that one has to listen to the voice of the other, which is transontological words that burst into from beyond the current system. The just protest of the other can put questions to the moral principles of the system. Only those who have ethical conscience can accept this questioning starts from the absolute criterion: the other as other in justice.⁶⁸

For Dussel, ethics is employed based on the usage by Levinas. For Levinas as well as for Dussel, the I can establish an ethical relationship with the Other through discourse. However, for Dussel, this discourse is realized as the liberation of the Other. The ethical conscience, as shown in the previous citation, is necessary for accepting that the questioning starts from the absolute criterion, which means, the Other as other in justice. This means ethics needs the Other to be in justice. As already seen, Schutte regards Dussel's concept of justice as the central concept that demonstrates his theory as irrational, which is the absolutism for the Other, but let us check how this concept is used in his text.

The practical affirmation of atheism is the struggle for justice. It means, those who fight for the liberation of the poor affirm practically that the system is unjust, that is, not divine. (...) Thus, to discover and take a risk for the poor is to know the non-divinity of the oppressive totality (because the divinity, the absolute Other, is goodness itself, justice).⁶⁹

As we have seen, indeed, we can recognize that the Other, which is described as the poor, and justice are closely tied. However, it is important to pay attention to the term "the system." The system is a term that paraphrases totality in the social dimension and represents injustice that one has to struggle against. So, in what sense is this system, that is the totality, unjust?

The hunger of the oppressed, of the poor is a harvest of an unjust system. As such, it does not have place in the system. (...) to satiate structurally the hunger of the oppressed is to change radically the system.⁷⁰

Domination is the act by which the other is coerced to participate in the system that alienates him. He is forced to perform actions contrary to his nature, contrary to his historical essence. Domination is an act of pressure, of force. The servant obeys out of fear, out of habit.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Dussel, 1996, p.77

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.121-122

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.72

The above citations show that the system produces the hunger of the oppressed and the poor as its harvest. In addition, the act of bringing the Other into the system that alienates him/her is called domination. Hence, the system is a place where there are oppressors as well as oppressed. Dussel calls the system unjust, and by “unjust,” he refers to a state where there is an oppressor-oppressed relationship. If we think in this term, what he calls justice, which is the opposite of the concept of unjust, is a state where this relationship does not exist, so it is not the absolutism for the Other as Schutte conceives.

Schutte’s interpretation of the concept of justice is inconsistent with some of Dussel’s texts. If justice was thought to be the absolutism for the Other, oppression by totality has to be a necessary evil, because, for this justice, there has to be the Other who is oppressed. Schutte herself mentioned that Dussel’s theory of the Other has a structure in which the Other is ethically privileged as long as being oppressed.

The argument that exteriority is always logically privileged rests on an artificial premise, namely, the ability to set up a certain logical space (the position of the Other), which by definition is external to a given “totality,” or system of domination. Thus, according to analectical logic, the oppressed must always speak “from the exteriority of the established system.” To do so, they must be represented as morally privileged prior to entering into “the system.”⁷²

If Schutte’s interpretations are correct, when the liberation for the Other would be realized, there would be no Other and there would be no justice. However, in Dussel’s text, he explains that “political systems or social formations can go through four structural moments”⁷³: 1. The period of liberation, 2. The period of reconstruction, 3. The period of stabilization, 4. The period of decadence. Through liberation, a classic order is destructed, and then a new order is constructed. This order stays stable for a moment, and after a while, it becomes corrupt. Dussel describes the second, the period of reconstruction, as the time for justice.⁷⁴ This point shows that Schutte’s interpretation is at variance with Dussel’s text. We can read it consistently when the concept of justice signifies the state when the oppressor-oppressed relationship does not exist. This comprehension of the concept of justice and social formation also explains that for Dussel the practice of liberation does not have a straight structure but a dynamic and circular structure that repeats creation and destruction. Dussel modifies Levinas’ structure into a social dimension, that is, through discourse the Other and the I form a

⁷² Schutte, 1993, p.189

⁷³ Dussel, 1996, p.98

⁷⁴ “The second period is of the organization of a new mode of production and the state. It is the time of Lenin, of Lincoln, of Borge. It is time of justice. There is room for everyone.” *Ibid.*, p.98

relationship. As the liberation of the Other is based on a dynamic structure, we can understand that Dussel does not seem to presume a concept of justice as the absolutism for the Other. Dussel's liberation aims to serve the Other, who is variable in the cycle of social formation, so the concept of justice for Dussel cannot be something that aims at the absolutism for specific Others, and therefore, it is not fanatical as Schutte thinks.

For Levinas, ethics is a concept in which the Other calls the I into question, and this calling into question is a relationship based on discourse. But in this discourse, what the Other speaks is never perfectly comprehended by the I.

Whoever speaks attends his manifestation, is non-adequate to the meaning that the hearer would like to retain of it as a result acquired outside of the very relationship of discourse, as though this presence in speech were reducible to the *Sinngebung* of him who listens. Language is the incessant surpassing of the *Sinngebung* by the signification.⁷⁵

Even if I give a meaning to the speech of the Other and reckon that I understand his/her words, the words of the Other are never reduced to an understanding of the I. I never really know in what sense the Other speaks, nor what the meaning of the Other's words really is, because the Other is always outside of the totality of the I and never settles in my understanding.⁷⁶ Hence, a discourse between the Other and the I is undone at the moment of receiving the speech and slips off my understanding. That is why the speaker and the receiver have to try to make a discourse repeatedly. A discourse is not composed of straight movements but of dynamic and circular movements that repeat creation and destruction.

Dussel adopts this structure of discourse and replaces it in a social context, which is called liberation. Practicing liberation for the sake of realizing justice for the Other and creating a new order might be merely actions I reckon that benefit the Other, and it can differ from what the Other really demands. Therefore, it is required to destruct what was once constructed and reconstruct a new one. Yet, liberation can never be fully accomplished, for I cannot fully understand the Other. Based on this impossibility, repeating an effort for liberation is needed.

Supposedly, by liberation, Dussel wants to aim at constructing an ethical relationship with the Other using the structure of Levinas' discourse. Explaining the creation of an ethical relationship in the real society using this structure seems to work well as a non-abstract application of the theory of Levinas.

⁷⁵ Levinas, 1969, p.296

⁷⁶ In fact, Dussel uses a method called "analéctica," which is used particularly by some thinkers of Philosophy of Liberation. Dussel says that by using this method, one can translate words from the Other, though it is not fully understood. Barber praises him saying that Dussel overcomes Levinas' defect (see Barber pp.50-57), but this point needs further examination. According to Cerutti, this term is invented by Juan Carlos Scannone (see Cerutti, p.372).

Section 3. Structural differences between the two theories of the Other

The previous section investigates the relationship between the Other and the I that Dussel tries to establish by liberation, including central conceptions of Dussel's theory of the Other. Certainly, the practice of liberation, which is composed of dynamic and circular movements, has the same structure as the structure of discourse, which Levinas considers as the ethical relationship between the Other and the I. However, can we really say that Dussel's and Levinas' theories of the Other have the same structure, or to put it another way, is *Filosofía de la liberación* comprehensible using the framework of Levinas' theory of the Other as Barber argues? Here, we examine the structural difference between Dussel's and Levinas' theories of the Other and why this difference occurs.

For Levinas as well as for Dussel, what is called ethics is to put the I into question by the Other. For Levinas, the I is posited as responsible by the Other's resistance against the I's possession or domination, that is, by the Other's calling the I into question. By being called into question, I am imposed responsibility and I cannot avoid it.

(...) in discourse, I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response -acuteness of the present- engenders me for responsibility; as responsible I am brought to my final reality.⁷⁷

Thus, I cannot evade by silence the discourse which the epiphany that occurs as a face opens, (...) it is irrecusable. The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no "interiority" permits avoiding.⁷⁸

When the Other calls me into question, the I cannot refuse nor ignore it by silence. It is because silence itself is already one type of response. In other words, this shows that I am responsible. Therefore, I cannot evade this responsibility. Moreover, this responsibility is "an infinite responsibility"⁷⁹ and "increasing in the measure that it is assumed,"⁸⁰ so I can never say that a certain level is enough. Then, why do I have to assume such responsibility? According to Levinas, responsibility is required because the fact that I cannot evade this responsibility nor transfer it to other people establishes the unicity of the I.⁸¹ However, Levinas adds that even though the responsibility is

⁷⁷ Levinas, 1969, p.178

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.201

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.244

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.244 the Italic is by Levinas

⁸¹ "To utter "I" to affirm the irreducible singularity in which the apology is pursued, means to possess a privileged place with regard to responsibilities for which no one can replace me and from which no one can release me. To be unable to shirk: this is the I." *Ibid.*, p.245. The singularity here means "the unicity of subjectivity" *Ibid.*, p.246.

not something I can evade, it is possible not to assume it. Not assuming the responsibility means that I do not accept resistance or call into question the Other, and this connotes that the I negates the Other or kills the Other. Yet, killing the Other is not the same as establishing a relationship with the Other. At the same time, if I do not assume this responsibility, my unicity will never be guaranteed. Without unicity, I am no more I, and I am reduced to a mere impersonal thing.⁸² This concept of responsibility shows that it is essentially unavoidable to assume responsibility by being called into question, that is, to establish a relationship with the Other by discourse.

Also, “an I that has arisen in enjoyment as separated, but whose separation would itself be necessary for infinity *to be* -for its infinitude is accomplished as the ‘facing.’”⁸³ For Levinas, infinity denotes the Other or something exterior to totality, and infinitude means the alterity of the Other. Separation signifies letting the I stand as an existence that has unicity, and the alterity of the Other is accomplished by the facing, that is, the face of the Other appears in front of me and calls me into question. Paradoxically, for the existence of this Other, the existence of the I, who has unicity, is needed because I cannot establish a relationship with the Other until I make myself the starting point beforehand. That is to say, for the responsibility that the Other imposes on me, I can be myself, and also, I am needed for the existence of the Other. As we see here, for Levinas, to be imposed an unavoidable responsibility by the Other is an important factor for making the I exist as well as the Other. Since this responsibility is unavoidable, I cannot help being passive against it.

The concept of responsibility in Dussel’s text is portrayed significantly differently, though Dussel uses the same word. Responsibility for Dussel is not an unavoidable compulsion but something that requires an active attitude toward the Other. For responding to the Other, that is, to be responsible to the Other, some conditions are needed. Those conditions are “Firstly, to be able to listen to the voice of the Other, it is necessary to be atheistic to the system or to discover its fetishism. Secondly, it is necessary to respect the Other as other.”⁸⁴ A system is, as mentioned previously, an expression of a totality where the Other is oppressed in a social dimension. Fetishism to the system is an attitude that deifies the totality not to be modified or destructed, though it is created by humans.⁸⁵ To respect the Other as other is considered as accepting the alterity of the Other. In sum, to question the deification of an existing system and to accept the alterity of the Other are the conditions for assuming responsibility. Unless a person who owes the responsibility meets those conditions, he/she cannot listen to the voice of the Other.

The contrast between Levinas’ and Dussel’s concept of responsibility is due to a fundamental

⁸² In the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas declares that “This book then does present itself as a defense of subjectivity” (p.26). From this excerpt, we can understand that establishing the unicity of the I is also an important point in Levinas.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.208-209 the Italic is by Levinas

⁸⁴ Dussel, 1996, p.78

⁸⁵ About “fetishism,” see note 9 of this article.

difference in their theories of the Other. Though for Levinas, responsibility is a concept that one cannot avoid assuming, for Dussel, it is a concept that needs some conditions to assume. So, in Dussel's text, this results in the existence of the I whose unicity is not ensured.

This point shows that for Dussel the subject who assumes responsibility differs from the subject in Levinas', and Dussel does not take account of the problem of the unicity of the subject. In *Filosofía de la liberación*, some historical figures are called as "hero(es) of liberation": for example, Simon Bolívar, Fidel Castro, San Martín, etc.⁸⁶ On the other hand, "antiheroes" are expressed as "heroes of the system," and "dominating heroes": for example, Julius Caesar, Hernán Cortés, Napoléon, etc.⁸⁷ This distinction between "hero" and "antihero" seems obviously based on the distinction established by Dussel between the dominant and the dominated group at that time. These "heroes of liberation" are described as people who practice liberation for the oppressed Other, questioning a fetishism of the system and respecting the Other, that is to say, who respond to the Other and who assume responsibility. All of them are people who emerge from the dominated group. From this description, we can understand that for Dussel the subject who assumes the responsibility of the Other is on the dominated side or the side of the Other.

So, for Dussel, totality or the I, that is the subject in the metaphysical dimension, changes into an oppressive system in a social dimension, and it loses its property as a subject. Instead, this property is given to the Other, and it causes a paradox that I, who assume the responsibility, am the Other. To put the I in the place of the Other can have the same meaning as saying "I am the Other," but this is thought to be logically inconsistent⁸⁸. Moreover, this way of modification by Dussel results in diminishing the significance of the theory of the Other for Levinas. For Levinas, it is not possible to think of "if I were the Other." The I cannot understand or translate, and it is "the radical impossibility of seeing oneself from the outside and of speaking in the same sense of oneself and of the others."⁸⁹ So for Levinas, the very facts that I can never place myself in the Other's position and I cannot speak for the Other are necessary for constructing an ethical relationship with the Other. However, for Dussel, because this replacement of the I in the place of the Other is possible, it loses the original ethical significance of the theory of the Other.⁹⁰ This indicates that Dussel's theory of the Other is not comprehensible by

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.98

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.97

⁸⁸ Elina Vuola criticizes Dussel's positioning of the Other and the I from another point of view. She argues from a feminist perspective and points out that Dussel's usage of "the Other" is based on a man's viewpoint, and that for women, a woman is not "the Other" but "the I." "Many feminist theorists take a critical distance to Dussel's kind of use of the term "Otherness," or "alterity."...woman as the absolute Other is a male projection. In this situation, the man in fact does not encounter the woman. Woman's alterity is not equivalent to woman's being for herself." Vuola, p.154.

⁸⁹ Levinas, 1969, p.53

⁹⁰ Cerutti rejects Dussel's attempt to represent the words of the Other and says that this is also a repression. Cerutti indicates that the role of a philosopher for Dussel is "master" or "prophet" who "teach to think" "the Other (disciple, poor, people, etc.) who lacks the capacity for thinking." Therefore, it falls into salvationism. Cerutti, 2006, pp.414-417.

the framework of Levinas' theory of the Other.

However, it is too early to conclude that Dussel's theory does not have any significance. We have to consider why Dussel had to make this modification. This question is related to why a liberating subject should be responsible to the Other and also to why liberation should be practiced. The answer to this question is that the most fundamental belief in building his theory is that in society, there should not be a relation of oppression. The desire for a state where there is no oppressor-oppressed relation, in other words, a just state, is the foundation of the theory and is also what liberation aims for. That is to say, the idea of a relationship between totality and the Other rests upon the belief in justice.

What will be the consequence of his concept of justice being more fundamental than the relationship with the Other? When the concept of totality transforms into a collective conception in a social dimension it becomes oppressive, and simultaneously, the concept of the Other transforms into oppressed people. While for Levinas the theory of the Other aims to establish an ethical relationship between totality and the Other, for Dussel, the objective of liberation is to realize justice, so to repeat discourse is an interim process that aims at a justice in which there is no oppressor-oppressed relationship. However, as mentioned above, society has four structural moments.⁹¹ Though once justice is realized, this state will no longer be stable and will inevitably collapse, and a new liberation will be needed. The important difference is that for Levinas, it does not make sense to question the purpose of repeating discourse, whereas, for Dussel, it does make sense. For Dussel, there is a purpose of repeating liberation in the social dimension, i.e., realizing a just state.

For Levinas, totality is a concept that intends to possess or dominate the Other or other beings, but totality itself is not evil. This concept is necessary as a starting point for establishing a relationship with the Other, and through this relationship, totality becomes an ethical being. However, for Dussel, insofar as totality is totality, it is always a being that oppresses the Other, and insofar as the Other is the Other, it is the oppressed. We can understand from here that Dussel's theory of the Other aims to achieve a state in which the framework of the totality and the Other is destructed. When this framework is destroyed and there is no totality nor the Other, it is then that justice is achieved. Aiming for this justice is the objective of his *Filosofía de la liberación*.

Dussel's theory of the Other does not have the same structure as that of Levinas' because in his theory it is possible to put the I in the place of the Other, and thus the subject assuming responsibility is different. The ultimate aim of the theory is to destruct the framework of the theory itself. Therefore, we conclude that Barber's contention that the structure of the theory of the Other in *Filosofía de la liberación* is inherited from Levinas' theory is not persuasive. If Levinas' theory had the same structure as that of Dussel's, as Barber insists, the criticisms by Schutte would be appropriate because, for Levinas, the Other is situated at such a height to which the I can never reach, which is not the same dimension as where I am. Furthermore, it imposes an unavoidable responsibility, so the Other is an

⁹¹ See p.7 of this article.

existence that should receive absolute worship. In other words, the totality in Dussel's context, which is Europe, North America, etc., would be forced to obey the Other, which is Latin America, Africa, Asia, etc. Therefore, this is the very structure that Schutte points out as a "truly frightening" ideology. In this case, it would lead to a self-contradiction in which *Filosofía de la liberación* falls into a fetish ideology that Dussel himself tries to avoid.

The reason why Dussel's theory of the Other differs fundamentally from Levinas' theory, though he adopts many of Levinas' terminologies, is his motivation to solve the problems that Latin America faced. He tried to create a theory to criticize countries with political and economical power at that time, such as the United States and West Europe, and to defend regions that he thought were persecuted by the strong, such as Latin America and Africa. For him, establishing a theory that creates a truly even relationship among components with overwhelming power differences is the most fundamental challenge.

As he emphasizes spatiality, in the real world, it is certain that the where-I-was-born has significant importance on the social gap. It is not possible to choose to be born in a wealthy family in a developed country or a poor family in Latin America. Also, it is difficult to overturn this social gap, which Dussel thinks of as oppression by individual effort alone. To think that it is unjust to be forced into being under oppression by something that is not one's responsibility and that therefore such a system should be overturned is neither a fanatic ideology nor irrational. Such a concept of justice underlies Dussel's theory.

Conclusion

In this article, we examine Dussel's theory of the Other by considering the interpretations of Schutte and Barber. Schutte considers that Dussel's theory is based on a self-contradictive ideology, whereas Barber defends Dussel saying that the essence of his theory is based on Levinas' theory of the Other. Furthermore, we inspect some core concepts of Dussel's theory and clarify its structure and objective. We further show that it is incorrect to say that the essence of Dussel's theory is the same as that of Levinas', as thought by Barber.

Though the counterargument by Barber against Schutte is not persuasive, Schutte's interpretation is neither plausible. Schutte regards Dussel's justice as a concept that aims at absolutism for the Other, when in fact it is a concept that aims at a state where there is no oppressor-oppressed relationship. Also, this just state is not fixed and has a dynamic structure that repeats creation and destruction by liberation. This structure of creation and destruction is what Dussel tries to explain as modifying the concept of discourse from a metaphysical dimension to a social dimension. Therefore, we cannot view Dussel's theory as a fanatic ideology as Schutte implies.

As we have seen, his *Filosofía de la liberación* has a theoretical problem in which there is a logical inconsistency where the I and the Other reverse. However, it must be appreciated as practical thinking,

which is based on the problems that Latin American society suffers from.

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