Decoloniality as an Ethical Challenge

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Abstract

This paper argues that, while positive attempts to integrate European ethical approaches to the decolonial context have contributed much to decolonial ethics and have their place, a better means to understand the ethical content of the decolonial is through the challenge that it poses. That is, decolonial theory itself confronts one with a challenge–if one is truly engage in decolonial critique in good faith, one must attempt to decolonize oneself, one's relations, one's actions, one's life. The question of what exactly this means and the depths to which one must confront this is examined through an engagement with the work of Fausto Reinaga and his argument that we must "turn our back to Europe." Reading this both through the context of his political engagement as indigenous activist and also through the lens of Foucault's reflections on the Cynic as a figure who haunts philosophy, demanding that it live up to its own commitments, it finds that decoloniaty thus stands as a challenge, not just of uniting theory and practice but of living one's thought. What both Reinaga and the Cynic have in common is the challenge–that one recognize the tensions that animate their lives and point toward the possibility of an *other* life.

Keywords: Fausto Reinaga, Decolonial, Ethics, Politics, Indigenous thought.

Decolonial thought has already provided an invaluable contribution to the criticism of the Eurocentrism of the academy. Its concepts have provided us with new ways to conceptualize the relations between the global center and its peripheries, in terms of knowledge, economics, and race. What it has not provided, however, is an ethics, one which would be based on the impulse which motivates the general move toward the decolonial. Which is not to say that there are not already certain reference points that inform decolonial thinking of the ethical. Enrique Dussel's voluminous output is an especially key touchpoint, as well as Nelson Maldonado-Torres's attempt to bring Dussel's thought together with that of Frantz Fanon. But both are still too reliant on European ethical traditions, primarily bringing in thought from the Americas as correctives to these traditions, as criticisms of their universalism, and thus end up primarily characterizing them fundamentally as "Others" and representatives of "Otherness" to a Europe which does not recognize them.

Contrary to this approach, I argue here that if there is to be a properly decolonial ethics, it must start from resources in the Americas, insofar as decolonial thought aims not merely to give a voice to the excluded others from the Global South as excluded "Other," but rather to *start* from those voices, reorient our thought in relation to them, and thereby see how this changes our vision of the world. From there one *then*, if it is useful to the decolonial project, would look toward European thought for additional resources, means to understand these perspectives in a broader fashion, to make them more intelligible, and so on. In this respect, to start from the perspective of European thought which sees Latin America and the rest of the Global South as "Others," as in the Levinasian approach that informs Dussel and Maldonado-Torres insofar as he depends on Dussel, is to miss the impetus of decolonial thought–it is not that the people of the Global South should be respected as this radical "Other" or derive their value from this position, itself imposed by colonization. Rather, their thought must be understood as relevant, knowable, unique, and valuable in its own terms, not in terms of its reception by Europe or its relative difference to it.

Of course, any criticism of Dussel's ethical system requires far more than what an article such as this that hopes to achieve; as such, the reasons for preferring another approach as opposed to attempting to correct Dussel's mistakes and expand on the work of Maldonado-Torres must here be limited to those most directly relevant to the decolonial project and must be cursory at best. What Dussel does in his construction of an ethics from the Global South and, by extension, Madonado-Torres insofar as he takes Dussel as his major interlocutor (even if he turns to Fanon), is not just to ignore the ethical traditions of Latin American civilizations that existed prior to colonization and in some cases have survived albeit in drastically altered forms in the post-conquest world, but also to

leave aside a whole swath of global philosophical traditions that actually have much in common with the traditions of Latin American and share with these traditions their being or having been brushed aside as not properly philosophical.

Indeed, for all the good that can be said of Dussel's decentering Europe by retracing the development of thought in terms of world systems, via his historical treatment of world ethical systems that makes up the introduction to his *Ethics of Liberation* (2013), he quickly leaves these other alternatives behind in favor of his preferred thread, which is essentially the modern European ethical tradition of the Anglo-American academy. When they are brought in, it is mostly as examples of the limits of European ethical thinking, highlighting in large part their status as Others and, especially, as Victims.[1] Here Victim is given a capital V precisely because this is, in its own way, the limit of their existence in Dussel's thought. They suffer, they bear the brunt of the wrongs that the Occident, that Global Capitalism, and that colonization has wrought. This, for Dussel, is precisely because they are negated as others and as such are outside of discourse, and thereby outside of democratic institutions. It is thus *our* responsibility (and here it is key to note whose Dussel's audience its, namely an academic audience of bourgeois individuals who are not suffering in the same way these victims are) to "take up their burden as our own in the face of the system, and first and foremost to *criticize* the system… that causes this victimization" (286).

Rigoberta Menchú is a sort of absolute Victim in this sense, who provides testimony, explains her reality, and creates solidarity among those who suffer (299-302). Her role, however, seems to ultimately to lie in her being able to "'interpellate' those with 'ethical conscience' or those who know how to hear in the current system," that is, to approach those academics, politicians, theorists, and the like, and effectively ask for recognition. In this she ultimately completes her role in this ethical situation and leaves the rest to the protagonist academics, politicians, and the like, who then will assume responsibility for the other (303). One can see here uncomfortable echoes of the paternalistic relationship to actually-existing indigenous people that characterizes *indigenismo* in general. When other movements that resist this sort of paternalism are brought up, such as those pursued by EZLN, they seem to only be able to appear in this context as representatives of "a crisis in the system's legitimacy" (408), as opposed to radical rejections of the actually existing state, effectively illustrating how the ultimate end can in fact only be representation of indigenous peoples within a liberal democratic polity.

It is likely that it is this tendency that also makes Dussel incapable of fully integrating ethical insights from other traditions into his thought and what makes his approach, for all its thoroughness, not meet up to the standard that he himself sets in trying to approach it from a world historical

perspective. Surely such an ethics, one which would take a global perspective, would warrant more attention not just to other traditions but, more importantly, those traditions that themselves continue to be excluded for not properly appearing as philosophy. Indeed, Dussel (2012) in the past has argued that a proper perspective from the Global South which would recognize its unique location must not simply try to reject European thought but rather become a thought which "subsumes within itself the best elements of Modernity" and develop a "*trans*-modern *pluriversality* (with many elements similar in common: European, Islamic, Vedic, Taoist, Buddhist, Latin Amerian, Bantu, etc.)" (50). But this is precisely what is lacking in Dussel's ethics: he treats a massive array of theorists from the twentieth century and beyond, from the Frankfurt School, to Rawls, Apel, Levinas, Marx, and others, but one finds scant mention of any of these other traditions mentioned above that seem to be also necessary to integrate into his transmodern project. Whatever value we may find in Dussel's deep theoretical nuance, it is clear that Dussel's ethical thought thus also does not meet up to the standards that he himself proposes.

And Maldonado-Torres? Here it might be said that his work on Dussel's ethics has more deeply taken up the mantle of the transmodern perspective that Dussel identifies as important for the future of thought. Maldonado-Torres reads into this transmodern approach a certain ethical valence that is highlighted in a fashion that Dussel does not. As he says, in relation to the issue of recognition which he identifies as key to the ethics of both Dussel and Fanon,

> Transmodernity involves a double movement: on the one hand the subsumption of "the best of globalized European and North American modernity" from the perspective of liberating reason (not European emancipation), and on the other the critical affirmation of the liberating aspects of the cultures and knowledges excluded from or occluded by modernity. (223)

This would mean, for the decolonial thinker that Maldonado-Torres envisions, this ethical project would be a dialogical project of "de-colonial phenomenology" wherein "the dialogue in question breaks through Eurocentric prejudices and seeks to expand the horizon of interlocutors beyond colonial and imperial differences," and which "seeks to be able to listen to what has been silenced" (234). This, as Maldonado-Torres suggests, means moving beyond a focus of the traditions found in the US and Europe, something that he also criticizes in the work of Dussel, and looking to others, something that he does in his engagement with the work of Fanon, which is deeply nuanced and a rich source, to be sure. As such, Maldonado-Torres is to be lauded for recognizing how Dussel is useful and also must be improved upon. But what he has not done is pushed this forward in a positive

sense, in the development of a sort of positive ethical program. By this is meant an even deeper integration and engagement with these silenced perspectives and these silenced works in a positive manner, to move beyond critique of European thought towards the construction of a positive ethics. It would mean taking on, interpreting, and engaging with the different worlds that different ethics emerge from.

It is precisely this, then, that one should attempt in developing a decolonial ethics, which means changing one's approach. This means starting at the beginning, the very obvious question: why pursue a decolonial approach at all? It would, after all, be easier to take the tack of postcolonial approaches and be satisfied with integrating different voices from different areas of the Global South into a framework that still orients itself from European theory, whether in its poststructural, deconstructionist, or critical theory modes. Decolonial thought, at least insofar as it understands its own impetus, is not and must not be satisfied with this solution. It demands that we go further, and in doing so change the way we think, change our references, and, ideally, change our entire lives, at least if its own logic is followed to its conclusion. It requires, in a sense, that one decolonize oneself, and in doing this to understand what this means is to talk about ethics, of what one does as a result of a decolonial commitment. In the current decolonial literature this fact remains underexplored, and while there is talk of ethics, there is an inadequate concern with more concrete aspects of what this ethics demands.

All of which is to say that there is a lack of recognition of this issue, if not reluctance to claim that there is any imperative to take the so-called decolonial turn. Walter Mignolo explains this reluctance in his own work by saying that such a demand would align itself with the same sort of European universalism that constitutes modernity as inherently colonial, and would thus risk the same sort of missionary overtones that go hand in hand with any universalism. His justification for this claim is illustrated via Kant's ethics: "Kantian imperatives justified what modernity/coloniality achieved: management, control, and unidirectional cosmopolitanism" (Mignolo and Walsh 224). Universalistic ethics demand the same of everyone, and in this reflects the myopia Enlightenment thought. They proceed from local contexts and proclaim the same to everyone regardless of culture, location, and even time, thus ignoring key differences between Europe and its Others. Decolonial thought, on the other hand, seeks to upend this and because of this must thus avoid the same mistakes it identifies in Europe which stem from this tendency, which is why one must resist making any universal demands. This is precisely why he frames decoloniality a sort of option, one option among

many, one which one can choose or not, an option among a set of options, and which must not claim final truth, as European universalism does (224-25).

If there is no imperative, how then is one presented with these options in a meaningful way, come to see them as possible, and thereby find oneself confronted with the choice between different options and possibilities? Mignolo illustrates this in earlier work via the retelling of Rafael Guillén's shift from Marxist to Zapatista via his encounter with an Old Man Antonio discussing Zapata and the spiritual figure of Votan Zapata. To quote it at length:

> In the first encounter between Antonio and Guillén, Emiliano Zapata came in as a topic of conversation. Guillén told the story of Mexico from a Marxist perspective and situated Zapata, indeed, Votan/Zapata in that history. After this exchange of stories, in which Zapata became a connector of two stories embedded in different cosmologies, Old Man Antonio extended a photograph of Votan/Zapata to Guillén. In the picture, Votan/Zapata is standing up, with his right hand grabbing the handle of the sword that is hanging from his right side. While Guillén was looking at this picture, Old Man Antonio asked him whether Zapata was pulling the sword out of pushing it in. Once it is understood that both histories have their reasons, it is only an unconscious structure of power that can decided which one is history and which is myth. (2011, 210)

This encounter expresses a possibility, an option, pointedly illustrating via anecdote that there are different ways of knowing, of understanding, and of being in the world. As Mignolo says, this is not a simple matter of cultural relativism but rather illustrates how the interpretation of this single story contains behind it a whole set of presumptions, a whole history of racialization and of differentiating the original inhabitants of the Americas from Europeans and mestizos, expressing inherently within it the superiority of Occidental thought (221). Guillén recognized an alternate possibility and embraced it, in doing so looking at the situation of the indigenous peoples of the Lacandon jungle from the position of the people themselves, rather than remaining someone from the outside who came to spread Marxist insurgency. In doing so, he ceased being Rafael Guillén and became Subcomandante Marcos, embracing the possibility of an organization of the world otherwise, of different possibilities which would contribute to the true dignity of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas.

And yet, in Mignolo's treatment of this example, there is a disquieting lack of attention to the *why* of it all, by which is meant a going beyond seeing Guillén's apparent choice as expressing possibility and instead also asking what such an example can mean for oneself as audience, as one

addressed by Mignolo's use of the example Guillén's making his decision clearly and with full commitment it entailed. That is, it means asking whether one should do as he does, indeed whether one could actually bring oneself to do the same. Sure, Guillén is Guillén and I am me, and so we are different, and I thus cannot be expected to make the same choice because I am not in his circumstances. But why bring up this possibility if not to point out that one *could*, after all, do as he did, given the appropriate circumstances? Or, even more, that one could, just as he did, after all, leave the relative comfort of his position and go somewhere similar where one might be of use?

Which is precisely what leads us to this *why*, the *why* that makes itself apparent via its own absence. And this consideration of *why* further brings with it all the proper considerations that appear when one asks this question of oneself, especially seeing Guillén himself having accepted all of the difficulties that followed his choice. Given what followed for Guillén the philosopher, all of the risk, the possibility of death, the impossibility of returning to his former life, and so on, this cannot be seen a mere option but, rather, to him must have been a felt necessity. Even if Mignolo didn't intend to go this far by citing this example, it cannot help but look like more than just an expression of possibility, instead also appearing as an example that calls to us and makes us ask ourselves why we are not doing the same. It is the confrontation of this question that is thus lacking in Mignolo, insofar as calling such a choice mere option understates the stakes, the lived feeling, the necessity experienced, and the real danger felt. In this respect, seeing it as an option makes it appear a voluntaristic possibility, one choice among a range of choices that one can make but need not. Seen in this way, it would be radically underdetermined.

It is thus clear that this understanding of decoloniality as a mere option is not adequate for the clear reason that there is something deeper to decolonial thought and action that does in fact confront one in a certain ethical fashion as imperative. It is not theorized in the traditional sense, but felt, experienced not in terms of Occidental standards of reason, but instead emerging from an entirely different perspective altogether. Its root is found in the intolerable situation of the present. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos puts it, for those who suffer oppression, "resisting and fighting oppression are often as much a necessity as living or experiencing oppression" (81). This includes those "epistemologies of the South" that Mignolo and others focus on, those knowledges that are marginalized, are oppressed, and which the coloniality of power, as it operates according to Quijano, attempts to supplant and ultimately replace. It is thus not a squarely academic or epistemological question, and quite frankly could not be, because "the epistemologies of the South do not distinguish between knowledge, ethics, and politics" (91). This tying in is precisely what links together the

epistemological and ethical aspects, such that the analysis of coloniality does not just help one understand the situation but also gives one motivation to resist it. For de Sousa Santos this can be seen as the "warming up of reason" or "corozonar," "whereby ideas and concepts go on awakening motivating emotions, creative and empowering emotions that increase the determination to struggle and the willingness to run risks" (98).

From the perspective of a more formal ethics, this can be seen as a unique type of moral motivation that decolonial accounts give us. If it is felt with necessity, if it is felt as an inevitable reaction to the intolerable situation, then the insight that decolonial thought provides us with is one which must drive us to action. This would be where decolonial ethics would begin, from this initial insight that would then lead one analyze one's own actions and, in the course of this, to changing oneself, the world that one lives in, and the relations that characterize it. Of course, one could here note that the dimension of action in relation to decolonial isn't lacking examination of decoloniality, and, indeed, that attention to the link between decolonial thought and action is one of the most characteristic aspects of its project. But such linking and its analysis in decolonial terms tends to be limited by the theory/praxis framing of the issue, which limits it to identifying political actions, movements, and the like that reflect what decolonial thought would have as action which accords with its principles, as opposed to looking more directly at the link between its principles that would motivate such activity and the activity that proceeds from it in the ethical sense identified above.

Thus, in Catherine Walsh's "Decoloniality in/as Praxis" (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018), for example, we are taken through a set of examples of activism, of thought/knowledge/pedagogy, and of actual insurgency, whose concomitant examples are: the movements of indigenous movements from Standing Rock to Pueblos en Camino (35-38), indigenous education from *Amawtay Wasi* to Uniterra (69-74), and, of course, the Zapatista movement in Mexico (46-50). All of these are no doubt important and political and ethical projects that are informed by currently existing conditions and the resistance to it by local actors. We must ask, however, to understand what it is about them that makes them properly decolonial, and if it isn't to be merely a matter of who they are referencing or what justifications they use, we need to search deeper. If decolonial thought must entail this changing of oneself and one's actions to act in such ways, we must think of relation of thought and action at the personal level as well as the political, which includes recognizing one's own position, especially if one is to approach such things from the outside.

This is something that most decolonial thinkers still have to reckon with and which they have not adequately contended with in terms that take into consideration not just such personal factors but

also questions of institutions, access, cultural capital, and financial support, at least for those who are located at institutions in the Global North. After all, there is a very clear lack of balance in terms of the power, capital, academic networks, and all that comes with the relations between the centers of global knowledge production–where the major universities that legitimize inquiry are found–and the Global South, which has traditionally found itself in a subordinate position. All of this must also be taken into consideration to see whether one's actions themselves are adequate to the demands that decolonial thought presents itself with, and in this line we can in fact criticize decolonial thinking for not being decolonial enough.

This is ultimately the reasoning behind Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's (2012) scathing critique of Walter Mignolo and others in the decolonial mold, and why apparent affinities are not enough for her to not only engage with such work. When she says that "the multiculturalism of Mignolo and company neutralizes the practices of decolonization by enthroning within the academy a limited and illusory discussion regarding modernity and decolonization," what this means is that they, "without altering anything of the relations of force in the 'palaces of empire,'" have achieved nothing more than "creating a jargon, a conceptual apparatus, and forms of reference and counterreference that have isolated academic treatises from any obligation to or dialogue with insurgent social forces" (104; 98). Their references to indigenous people, when they occur, according to her, in large part follow the official discourse of liberalism that sees them as "original peoples" who thus are seen as remnants of colonization, which effectively ignores their current and continued existence (98-99).

This is precisely what Arturo Arias confronts in his own work with indigenous literatures of Central America. Positioning himself as engaging with decolonial thought but nonetheless receptive of the Cusicanqui's critiques, he recognizes the difficulties a scholar must deal with when one in in an uneven relationship with those who he is studying, which requires one to address the same concerns that anthropology and sociology in Latin America have struggled with in second half of the twentieth century, with the final aim being that one might engage with them in a properly equal relationship.[2] As Arias puts it, to understand indigenous thought, issues, and the like, "a most respectful and ritualized dialogic relationship needs to be formed before such an exchanged takes place," and, moreover, "if we were to engage decoloniality strictly on careerist grounds, it would lack a moral center" (618). The first step in doing this, then, is turning toward indigenous peoples and listening to them, as well as looking at literature written by them about their situation, to understand the internal motivation, to see what they themselves think about coloniality, and to thereby see that, in a sense,

what decolonial thought talks about is not new except in that it has created its own language for understanding the same situation that earlier thinkers had also found intolerable.

It is in this regard, of attending to the experience of actual indigenous people and their thought, that addressing Fausto Reinaga work appears relevant as a potential direction in which one could begin the work of a proper decolonial ethics, in recognizing just what would be implied if one where to fully embrace what decoloniality implies. From this perspective, it might be said that Guillén is an example of what taking the option means, then we can see Reinaga as going further by making himself an example for what it means not just to do this but also call for others to follow suit. He is thus particularly useful for this task precisely because we can see in him an expression of an ethics developed beyond the merely theoretical mode, one which necessarily entails a certain form of performative aspect, insofar as the form of his work, polemic, and the method of publication, popular and via his own publishing house, are necessary to understand his ethical and political philosophy. He can be seen both as a sort of precursor to decolonial thought, as part of the so-called decolonial archive, but also as providing the roots for the same critique of decolonial thought that is found in Cusicanqui. As such, his work is invaluable as a resource to see what decoloniality could be, as well key in identifying the limits of developing decolonial primarily via the lens of theory. Indeed, his focus on a sort of integration of life, politics, and thought can thus serve as an example for what it would mean to properly act and think in a decolonial fashion.

Reinaga, as Odin Ávila Rojas (2016) suggests, can be understood as expressing in his criticism the same idea that is today understood by Anibal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, and the movement toward decoloniality, albeit in a cruder form (424-25). Where Quijano presents a heavily formalized understanding of coloniality in terms a sort of dry and schematized process of racialization, knowledge production, material production, culture, and so on, to produce the current situation of a world of peripheries which must confront and push against the dominance of the global centers, Reinaga uses rather blunt and non-academic and non-theoretical language to give a polemical understanding of the situation in Bolivia from an indigenous perspective, which reflects the indigenous experience of this firsthand in the manner of an "organic intellectual" (Arias 616). In this presentation of his thought, he is in fact enacting and living this link between thought and practice rhetorically as a means to push others towards it and show that it is possible. Doing this, Reinaga is calling forth his own community to head in this direction and calling others to in fact join it.

Of course, this is accompanied by a sustained analysis and critique of Bolivian reality, but one which, as mentioned above, hews toward polemic. For Reinaga Europe is essentially nothing but

murder and hatred, having brough this murder and hatred with it as a means of cementing its position its world via subjugation of the Americas. Its major sin is not just that it subjugated the land and the original inhabitants of the Americas, but also that its conquest led to its internalization of its thought, its categories, its view of history and of race upon the indigenous peoples of the Americas. His approach therefore entails undoing this, meaning that it involves something akin to the decolonization of the mind that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) calls for. Though, whereas Thiong'o is concerned with literature and the politics of language, Reinaga is focused on ethics and politics more directly, which means calling attention not just to language as the avenue for internal colonization but also calling for an entire change of mentality, a change of orientation, a change of one's cosmovision, and ultimately a change in one's entire way of life. This last part is especially important to him because, if Eurocentric thought continues its domination, its logical end is annihilation of all life on earth. To this seemingly inevitable end, Reinaga proposed the alternative of Indian thought, the thought of the original inhabitants of the Americas which would provide an alternative way of living and doing, and which in this would not just save Indians themselves but the world as well.[3] In this regard, his project is not to remain at the level of analysis, but, as in the work of Marx, to change the world through his very thought in action, through his polemic. As Gustavo R. Cruz (2013) puts it, his "mission in philosophy is realized in annihilating the fetishes that, like malignant tumors, are in the brain of mankind" (389).

Thus, his first self-appointed task was to reach out with his message and to show the people of Bolivia, especially the youth, how the thought of Europe has artificially divided Latin America, created racial divisions that have no basis in reality, and achieved this all through categories of thought that end up denigrating the Indian as subhuman. By recounting the crimes of Europe in his works and portraying a utopian alternative in the thought of the Amauta, by showing how racial thought has perverted the mestizo into hoping for an impossible recognition from Europe, he aimed to force the recognition of the power of Indian thought. While he was easily dismissed by crillolos, mestizos, and even respectable Indians, he nonetheless was greatly influential for the development of Indigenous movements in Bolivia and was even cited by Bolivian president Evo Morales as an important influence on his thought (Lucero, 2008a, 13).

In this light, Reinaga can be understood as performing the ethics that lies at the heart of decolonial thought, one which goes beyond merely expressing the possibility of the decolonial option. Instead of giving us an option he instead expresses, in his writings and his life, a *challenge*. That is, an existence as a model of a possibility of a way of life that is different, being *other* to Europe but also corresponding to the lived reality of Bolivian Indians and the reality that they face. His writing shows,

by example, exactly how one might live and be otherwise in an absolutely uncompromising fashion. He took the decolonial motivation and followed it to its extreme conclusion, which ultimately entailed a process constant self-critique and flirtation with different sorts of possibilities by which one might achieve his goal.[4] In this regard his thought is best understood as an experiment in a sort of performative ethics, of an ethics as a way of life, one which challenges not with mere argument but with the extremes of rhetoric in the form of polemic, with manifestoes and the founding of political parties which served as mouthpieces of his thought, and with the founding of publishing houses for his work which would not meet the standards of any normal publisher.

If this does not look like ethics, this is precisely because it does not follow the formal structure that European theoretical philosophy demands in general, and which ethics in particular has made its own. But, if one shifts perspectives towards forgotten ethical traditions, in his missionary zeal, this challenge embodied in thought and action, we see in Reinaga's thought an example of ethics that can usefully be compared to that of the Cynic as described in Michel Foucault's final lectures. By engaging in this comparison, we not only get a better understanding of what such an ethics entails but also an alternate understanding of philosophy and ethical practice, which has been papered over by the same process that resulted in modern Enlightenment thought.

Of course, it might be asked why one should turn to Foucault of all people and the Cynics–Greeks after all, who in the European canon serve as their model forbears–for a comparison. The reasons that can be corralled for this are many: the similarities between approaches found in Greek and other world philosophies, the need to reconsider the history of western philosophy and the selective exclusions and inclusions in its historical canon, and with all of this, a reevaluation of the non-western sources that might have contributed to these traditions/ways in which western sources look different when considered from a more global perspective, though this would also require more than can be dealt with in the scope of this paper. Ultimately, what we can say is that not only is there a clear affinity between Reinaga's polemic approach and that of the Cynics, but these similarities in approach also make it so that they aren't taken seriously as approaches to be taken seriously by philosophy in general except as popular views.

Both, after all, do not create complicated theoretical edifices but rather present a view of the world and follow the consequences of it. In the case of the Cynics, we see a certain sort of naturalism, seeing virtue as sufficient for a good life, a desire for simplicity, and a demand that one live in accordance with one's beliefs. In the case of Reinaga we have a retelling of what Amauta thought was and is, and finds all of this ultimately summarized in three precepts from this worldview: don't lie,

don't steal, don't be lazy (1971, 18). Indigenous cosmovisions are not seen by official philosophy as being "true" philosophy but rather akin to worldviews and ways of being, which gives them their affinity to philosophy understood as a "way of life," as Pierre Hadot (1995) characterized the philosophical tradition the Hellenistic world. This tradition, as he notes, "appears in its original aspect: not as a theoretical construct, but as a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way" (107). If we are to take seriously the transmodern proposition of taking what is best from global traditions, then finding affinities would be the next step after turning to indigenous sources, wherein one might thus see a general ethical tendency shared by them, and taking seriously indigenous thought, would thus also teach us to look at the world in a new way and, indeed, *be* in the world in a new way as well.

Foucault's specific treatment of the Cynics helps us in the analysis of Reinaga's thought and action by clarifying the ethico-political dimensions that he finds visible in Cynic practice. Reinaga, contrary to the demands of the academy and the tradition of formally constructed systems of thought that so obsesses contemporary philosophers, even ethicists, instead presents his case through example, testimony, accusation, and self-reflection, and in this ties it into the life lived as the stage for ethics. His apparent personal choices and actions are, just as for the Cynics in Foucault's reading, highly politically charged, and in this represent a certain sort of performative ethics that seeks to have one's actions serve as the mark of one's belief. In this regard, a life is seen as the means by which one attests to one's views, one's politics, and one's hopes for others, and in this challenge others to take up the task of living in a different fashion. He, just as the Cynics, present the reader with a possibility; unlike the more theoretically constructed decolonial option as it is found in Mignolo and others, there is a greater weight behind it, a deeper emotional charge, and a quite explicit valence of challenging the reader with this possibility, which this different way of being. It is an emotionally laden message which, in bringing together the facts of the matter with anger, frustration, sadness, and even hope, aligns with the sort of *corozonando* that de Sousa Santos identifies as key to liberatory projects. Via his retelling of Bolivian history, Reinaga shows in an unvarnished form what the world is actually like in Bolivia for the so-called Indian; in doing this he also points beyond it, through his own actions, reflections, and thought. In this he shows us just how important one's answer to the challenge that of recognizing how things really are is, and what it truly means to believe what one does.

Just as with Diogenes the Cynic, Reinaga's task as a certain sort of truth telling Amauta was not initially his–indeed, it did not come until 1960, the year he turned fifty-four years old. But this turn marked a decisive shift in his thought. Having been disillusioned by his visit to the USSR, which he

described as a "prison, a concentration camp" which had no "spark of revolution" (Ticona Alejo, 144) he had a crisis of conscience and of confidence in Marxism, which in its extreme pushed him towards suicide. In light of this, he, like many who are brought to such crises, turned towards his own past to his Indian identity; just as Diogenes went to center of the Greek world at Delphi for his calling, Reinaga made a pilgrimage to the symbolic center of Machu Picchu (157). Here he had a revelation of his own, which led him back to his "ancestral thought, which in terms of political ideology he called *indianismo* and later *el pensamiento amáutico*" (158). This new program was best expressed, both in terms of clarity of thought and its importance to the indigenous movements in Bolivia, in *La revolución india*.[5] As he says at the beginning of a section near the beginning of the book, his aim above all is to "create an Indian ideology; an ideology of my race" (2010, 45).

For him, this was an eminently political act–the work as a text exists not merely as philosophical speculation but intervention, the creation of a political ideology unique to the Indian, one which would itself be essential to the platform of the political party he created and whose manifesto appears in the second edition of the book as an appendix, the *Partido Indio Boliviano*. For him, this meant taking up truth as his arm, which is akin to a "resplendent steel dagger" that requires no veil or covering but which he took as his right. Indeed, he takes this right absolutely, as part of his calling, saying that "he has a right to say the truth in a direct form, crudely" (45-46).

There are obvious parallels here with *parrhesia*, which is the right of the Cynic and an essential part of their mission; it is the avenue by which the expression of an ethics entailed in a philosophy as a way of life occurs. If, as Foucault (2011) argues that Cynicism is "a form of philosophy in which mode of life and truth-telling are directly and immediately linked to each other," it seems clear that Reinaga is quite close in his position, though drawing instead on his own specific cultural milieu. This can be seen as a more than superficial resemblance because, as Foucault notes, this *parrhesia* embodies a certain sort of "truth-telling without shame or fear…which pushes its courage and boldness to the point that it becomes intolerable insolence" (165-66). Of course, on the face of it, truth-telling does not in itself have ethical valence. It takes this on, however, when it takes the form of *parrhesia* due to the element of risk involved, as Foucault later puts it, "it demands the courage to speak truth in spite of some danger" (2001, 16). This danger comes precisely because of the danger to oneself from those who one addresses. As Foucault notes, the criticism of tyranny in the name of justice or one's standing in the name of holding an unpopular view are just some of the potential risks that proper *parrhesia* involves.

And so it is for Reinaga. His truth and his message contained disquieting truths for Bolivian society as a whole, but especially the audience who he focuses on first: Indians. His goal ultimately was to wake them up and in this to give Indians a "truth of fire." Here it is useful to quote him at length:

> It is necessary to put a finger in the sore of dignity, which has been wounded by four centuries of humiliation. To bore, with a red hot iron, their heart, until it splits in two, spilling waves of blood. To hit their head and their conscience until they turn into a volcano, spewing oceans of disgust, the disgust of 200 years. To roar like a lion until the storm is unleashed that turn to dust this lying and criminal society. (46)

Reinaga's tone here is apocalyptic, radical, even messianic. It does not just call for an Indian awakening against the mestizo, it calls for an absolute judgment against those who would continue the two-hundred years of oppression. Moreover, its target is not the right or the left but all of those entranced by Occidental thought as a whole, all of those who have their minds entranced by this thought, who look to Europe for this thought and legitimation of their own thought in this mode. He thus risked alienating even those sympathetic to the plight of the Indian who have awakened to this plight via other criticisms of social relations in Bolivia. This is because, for him, even the ideologies which appear most sympathetic to the Indians, communism and liberalism, are products of a thought cannot escape its Occidental origin in the Latin American context in general and Bolivia in particular. This is because they cannot reckon with the indigenous question, and without being able to integrate their existence into their programs, effectively left the Indian to the side, at first wishing to eliminate them and later attempting to assimilate them, whether via cultural integration with mestizo culture, as in the case of liberals, or spuriously integrating them into the state as *campesino*s, as in the case of communists (Stephenson, 289-293). Either way, there is only one way that actually-existing indigenous people can be seen by these political programs: as a problem, a problem whose solution is assimilation in one mode or another.

It is obvious for him that assimilation is a false solution insofar as it never seeks to recognize indigenous peoples as equal partners but instead eliminate the uncomfortable reality of the position and role of Indians in the state via elimination, making them fit with a vision of a state without Indians. A real solution, one which would respect the Indian, is liberation; for Reinaga this liberation must not come at their behest via the actions of others but rather be liberation of the Indian by the Indian's own hands, involving Indian thought, Indian values, and Indian agency (Reinaga, 2010, 141-44). Through a retelling of the history of Indian struggle, Reinaga intended to remind the Indians of Bolivia

that they comprise the majority and in this find the solidarity for the political parties that he created. The texts produced for these parties, which were more important in a symbolic sense than via their direct practical application, were the ones that served to center the fact that the history of Bolivia has been a history of criollos and mestizos turning them into problems which should be eliminated. As such they were calls to action, but calls which did not offer a program so much as serving the purpose of agitating the conscience of the Indian, and through this to convince the Indian population that they should be the ones to take power in Bolivia and forge its future.

All of this fiery language, this polemical unleashing of a long-repressed fury, this disgust with the treatment of Indians from colonization to his present did little to endear him to the criollo and mestizo elite, effectively making clear the reality of the risk and, therefore, the ethical dimension involved. As Lucía Rincón Soto (2014) puts it,

> For his work he was considered by the intellectual elite of his country a crazy man, a misanthrope, a radical, a renegade, and fundamentally irrational. It is understandable that the bourgeoisie, inheritors of colony and the principal segment of the population that oppressed the indigenous population, considered his work in this way insofar as he denounced in such a scathing way the activities of this group in history with respect to the Indian. (17-18)

He, of course, could not help but see this reaction and respond to it in kind, to address especially those concerns of sympathetic mestizos. Rather than causing him to temper his language, however, it instead spurred him further in the direction of extreme polemic, an intentional scandalization that expresses insult at the response from this sector of society. Having stirred them, he was ready to accept all that came with it, embracing with a shamelessness akin to the Cynics, which ultimately further expands the ethical meaning of his agitation. The scandal was a sign that his message was having effect, and even if it caused difficulty, he was ready to accept it

Indeed, Reinaga's experience of the hardship following his actions and words is constantly attested to. But rather than being a source of mere complaint, they instead serve to reinforce the resoluteness and sense of a mission that he had, a mission to save humanity from itself and from the West. In reinforcing this resoluteness and the urgency of his mission, he constantly evaluates and reevaluates past statements of his, and invokes the actual horrors he suffered–his imprisonment, losing his right arm as a child, having the vein beneath his tongue cut because of his opposition to the Chaco War–all attempts to silence him. And, in the face of all of this, it is not these violent attempts to stop him that bothered him but rather the indifference of the mestizos. Thus, he wrote: "But this world of

torture and sickness, of jails and concentration camps, hunger, misery and attempts on my life all do not have the dimension of terror that the silence that the mestizo intelligentsia has submerged me in" (1978b, 75). Even death was no concern to him, because what had done and continued to do all was rooted in, as he maintained, the love of humanity. Thus, to quote him at length further:

> The attorney general of the Republic and the police of Sucre cut my tongue to mute my voice; they stole my library; the broke my back and shoulder; they deny me rags and crusts of bread . . . but I continue the fight against the terror of silence… and I will die fighting for the free expression of thought.
> And why do I want the free expression of thought?
> So that the people of the Earth hear my **Message**, the message of the saga of the Andes…! (76)

His life was unconcealed as that of the Cynic, being brazen, shameless, scandalous (Foucault, 2011, 255). Even his suffering and all the ills that the world placed upon him matter little, as he would suffer them all and more for his message; the scandal and insult was a badge of honor, just as it was for the Cynic who cultivated *adoxia,* the "bad reputation" that accompanied them wherever they went (260).

Of course, not all accusations against Reinaga were welcomed. He was especially troubled by the accusation of racism that accompanied this response, that he would be understood as an Indian supremacist in a negative fashion.[6] This led him to develop a distinct criticism of race that is an essential part of his work. Where *La revolución india* Reinaga points toward the illusory nature of the importance of racial difference and naturalization of racial difference as an important feature of Occidental thought, this critique is taken further in later work via the lens of Indian thought.[7]

Thus, in *El ensamiento amáutico* (1978b), he writes:

> Within the cosmic conception of things, within the Amautic philosophy, there isn't even a shade of racism. In the languages of Maya, Aymara and Quechua the word "race" doesn't even exist. Not in thought, will, or act is the Indian racist. It is Europe that has nailed the concept of race in the mind of the Indian. It is the white beast who has shown racial hatred to the American Indian, to the black African, and to the Mongol of Asia. The white conquistador is who put the malignant tumor of hierarchy of racial value in the mind of the American Indian.
> The racism of the Indian is not hatred of the white man, it is the hatred of their chains. (45-46)

In rejecting the accusation of racism, he does not just deny the reality of race but integrates the imposition of racial thinking into his critique of the Occident. It is precisely this that makes the mestizo, in his words, "a void, a tragic void," a "zero," an "undefined bastard" (92-93) whose "mind and conscience is nothing more than shadow, echo and replica of Europe" (97). The mestizos only have their eyes toward Europe, living in shame at the blending with Indians, at the presence of Indian blood as part of them, and in seeing the denied part of their heritage as still living. This is precisely why they loathe the Indians, who are reminders of their impurity and lack in the face of the European.

However, this does not lead Reinaga toward hate. Even with the scathing characterization of the mestizo, he only considers the rejection of them and their Occidentalized minds as a response to their own desperate attempt to emulate Europe and not recognize their common patrimony with the Indian. Thus:

> The Mestizo does not think himself to be Indian, not an indigenous American–he thinks himself a "Latino" from America. And as well, he thinks himself to have a personality, a "myself." He thinks that he has thought. And, through each vile act they lose all shame. They have no blood in their faces. They do not want to be free. They hate freedom. They want to be a colony, a lackey in the colonies of Europe. (103)

Of course, the mestizo response to this is likely obvious–sure we have some past in common with the Indian of today, but we are, after all, culturally distinct or racially distinct in terms of mixing, and to claim this status would mean ignoring our history. To Reinaga this response only reproduces racial thought and is a remnant of the imposition of race upon the peoples of the continent, the same racial thought that separates the Indian from the mestizo, from the criollo, from the white European. In contradistinction to this, Reinaga suggests that the reality is different: "The indian is not the color of skin; not the color of one's hide. Indian is thought and faith: Amautic thought and *sabeista* faith. Whoever thinks the cosmos and feels the spark of the Sun is an INDIAN!" (21). Thus, for him, it is not one's skin or history that makes one belong to a certain group, but one's thought. If one's thought accords with nature, thinks from nature, thinks itself of the cosmos, as belonging to a grand cosmic community, one is Indian, no matter what one's thought is.

Reinaga thus intended to Indianize everyone in Bolivia, writing not to stoke hatred but undo it. He pointed toward the future, as a herald of what Bolivia might be. To use the language of Foucault's analysis of the Cynics, he could be seen as having taken upon himself the same mission as the Cynic, who is "sent ahead as a scout, in advance of humanity, to determine what may be favorable or hostile to man in the things of the world" (167). In doing so Reinaga saw himself, as the Cynics, to

be doing this out of the "function as benefactor of humanity" (169). This can be understood as a sort of lived "revolutionary militancy," which, in its Cynic expression, consisted of "bearing witness by one's lies life in the form of a style of existence" (184). To quote Foucault at length regarding this bearing witness:

> This style of existence specific to revolutionary militantism, and ensuring that one's life bears witness, breaks, and has to break with the conventions, habits, and values of society. And it must manifest directly, by its visible form, its constant practice, and its immediate existence, the concrete possibility and evident value of an *other* life, which is the true life. (184)

This imperative to show others an *other* possibility, for the Cynics as for Reinaga, was part and parcel of their truth-telling, of their love for humanity, and, ultimately, their political mission. The scandal Reinaga caused in Bolivia, to the government, the intelligentsia, to the assimilated indigenous activists, to the Marxists, all of this was necessary. This is precisely because he needed to wield the truth as his weapon to lay bare all the resentment, disgust, and hunger which still could not be recognized by those who would rather have the Indian disappear and assimilate. In this, he sought to save them from themselves.

Thus, rather than instituting a new racial order or hierarchy, as he was accused of in his writings, Reinaga instead points toward a new humanism, a "cosmic humanism" (1978b, 109). This is advocated as a means to pull us away from nuclear destruction at the hands of the Occident, the suicidal hubris of the "Nazifascist" US and the Communist USSR (1978a, pp. 173-77). All of humanity must ultimately change its consciousness and look to the Indian for the way forward. How? Again, to quote him at length:

> You and I must take our hands and say to humanity: this way!
>
> We cannot allow that Europe, the West, which is in its death throes, which finds itself in a coma, to exterminate all of the life on planet Earth; we will not allow that this criminal, Europe, to perpetrate its ultimate crime.
>
> Turning our backs to the West, we will yell to humanity: *This way! To the Indian global community! This way!* To the stellar era of human life on planet Earth. (1978b, 147)

Any and all who wish to save the world, to push against the suicidal drive toward the extermination of life on the planet must turn their back to Europe. This is perhaps the most apt statement of that very same impetus that pushes decolonial thought and takes it to the extreme, at once expressing a new universalist humanism that, at the same time, links humanity in the search for a liberation from

Occidental thought. There is no contemporary decolonial thinker who has put this dilemma so strikingly, in such a stark fashion as regards both what the decolonial turn *could* mean as well as the possible stakes.[8] It is precisely this that makes Reinaga valuable, insofar as he illustrates the logic behind decoloniality and, taking it to its extreme, expresses a challenge: will you turn your back? Will you join me in pushing toward liberation and toward a utopian communal vision (expressed in the figure of the fictional city of Sak'abamba)?

This starkness of conclusion, the simplicity of his message, and the broad strokes in which he treats European and Eurocentric thought could not be more at odds with the opposing tendency found contemporary attempts towards a decolonial ethics. Everything in his work is amplified and made simple, to the point of exaggeration. From the expression of the critique of Occidental thought (which can even be seen in the titles of his work, such as *europa, prostituta, asesina* or *la podredumbre criminal del pensamiento europeo*), to the critique of mestizos (bastards, zeros, and so on), to the ultimate solution to the problem of colonization (a literal turn away from Europe toward cosmic thought). It would be very easy to reduce his thought to mere polemic which is to be read merely historically. However, there is a richness to his thought and writings insofar as they themselves serve as an example of a person whose dedication to the decolonization of Bolivia was unwavering, even in the face of disdain, of a lack of recognition. Indeed, this marginalized position was in large part what defined him. Thus, Xavier Albo (1987) understands Reinaga as a "prolific and marginalized writer and self-publisher of Indianist themes, and the founder of a more symbolic than real Indian Party" (391).

Why, then, is he important for anyone wishing to construct a decolonial ethics? It is precisely because he is willing, in this seemingly oversimplistic account to really get at the heart and accept what properly implementing decoloniality's program would really mean. It is this that is the most challenging in his work and the most valuable. Just as with the Cynic's glib but very serious responses to more theoretically minded philosophy serve to illustrate the divide between the philosopher and the people, so the decolonial nudge from Reinaga serves as a challenge, one which makes anyone who would attempt to truly engage in all seriousness with a clear expression of what decolonization would properly mean. The utopian endings of his books all emphasize this–are you ready to come with me, or will you stay within the ambit of Europe and remain a curiosity that is tolerated if one is not too loud, at best, or actively oppressed, at worst? This is a challenge that must be taken seriously, as enacting its truth in a life, not as part but as essence, as Diogenes did by following "the example of the trainers of choruses; for they too set the note a little high, to ensure that the rest should hit the right note" (Diogenes Laertius, 1925, 37). If Reinaga sounds extreme it is precisely because this is the

only way that the challenge will be heard properly, understood with the seriousness it requires, presenting the challenge in its starkest terms, so that it must be confronted, just as the whole of the past of the horrors of the colonization. If decolonial thought is to have an ethics, it must listen to this cry, and must act accordingly. This would mean fulfilling the demands that are uncovered when one seeks to think and act decolonially, which means recognizing just how much it in fact is a challenge.

Notes

[1] Thus, in *Ethics of Liberation*, the treatment of non-Western traditions, as they are termed, is limited to the introduction, which is comprised of a global history of ethical systems. After this, other than cursory mentions to the Zapatistas, Rigoberta Menchú, and some of his preferred interlocutors from Latin America, the focus is on the highlights of European ethical thought.
[2] Here one can look especially at important early attempts to understand the situation of indigenous peoples and find in them something valuable while also trying to not impose an external perspective, as that of Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, to more recent work like that of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.
[3] Reinaga himself uses the term Indian and there are reasons for it that go beyond the scope of this paper. On the reasoning behind this, see chapter four of Esteban Ticona Alejo, "El indianismo de Fausto Reinaga: orígenes, desarrollo y experiencia en *Qullasuyu-Bolivia*," PhD. Diss, Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar, Sede Ecuador, 2013, http://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/handle/10644/3758. All translation from Spanish mine, unless otherwise indicated.
[4] It is precisely this aspect, the willingness to consider radical alternatives, that led him to his most controversial decision, his notorious support for the Meza regime, which must be understood as a product of a whole set of conditions that, while not absolving him of this decision or excusing it, does serve to explain this misstep. On this, see Gustavo R. Cruz's *Los senderos de Fausto Reinaga: filosofia de un pensamiento indio*, especially the last chapter.
[5] See Jose Antonio Lucero, (2008b): 81. Lucia Rincon Soto goes as far as to refer to *la revolución india* as so important that it can be seen as a sort of "Indian Bible" (p. 15).
[6] On this see Ticona Alejo, "El Indianismo de Fausto Reinaga," p. 179.
[7] See *la revolución india*, pp. 106-12 and what follows.
[8] Here, of course, one might change the main risk away from nuclear war to the environmental catastrophe that we seem to be facing, though it is not as if the nuclear threat has entirely gone away.

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