



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



The Pedagogical Failure Of Eurocentric Methodologies

Miguel A. De La Torre, *Illiff School of Theology*

Blog Series: Teaching, Religion, Politics

May 04, 2017

Tags: power and privilege | liberative pedagogy | teaching critical thinking

I am convinced that all eurocentric philosophical thought and movements – yes all – are oppressive to those who come from colonized spaces. When I contemplate every philosophical contribution made by the so-called Age of Enlightenment, it becomes obvious that the French Revolution's battle cry for *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* was never meant for her future colonies in Vietnam or Algiers. Hegel's entire endeavor for a historical truths rests on the presupposition of the superiority of the Europeans and the inferiority of non-whites. In his 1824 book, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Northern Europe – specifically the German Spirit – is the Spirit of the new World whose aim becomes the realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination of Freedom, a Freedom which has as its own absolute form itself as its purport (341). Such a Freedom was never meant for the “inferior” in need of civilization and Christianization. Even the U.S. rhetorical end to our daily oath of “liberty and justice for all” was never meant to include those from African descent, nor their neighbors south of the border.

The “all” in eurocentric philosophical thought just meant whites, definitely not her colonies or those among the colonized who followed their stolen raw material and cheap labor to the center of Empires. Abstract philosophical thought must be constructed to reconcile the quest for liberty and equality among whites with their purposeful exclusion of those whom they colonized. The issue is not so much hypocrisy on the part of the colonizer spewing rhetoric

about liberty; but rather, philosophically justifying oppression through freedom-based language. The move to the abstract serves the crucial purpose of obscuring the economic need of dispossessing and disenfranchising the colonized and their descendants. Universal eurocentric celestial concepts of rights blinds the oppressed to the concrete feet-on-the-ground reality of oppression at the hands of such freedom loving whites.

Over 125 years ago, José Martí saw the danger of adopting a eurocentric worldview detrimental to the existential intellectual space occupied by the colonized. He called the oppressed of the world to create a new way of thinking based on our indigeneity. To make our wine out of bananas (“Nuestro vino de plátano”) means such a wine would naturally be sweet. But if we instead make our wine out of the fruits of Europe and it becomes sour (“y si es agrio”), then we are stuck with it (“es nuestro vino”). Eurocentric philosophical thought not only sours our wine but also our teaching. To build liberative edifices on eurocentric philosophical foundations reproduces the same consequences as pouring new wines into old skins. Even our beloved liberation theological movements have, more often than not, looked toward their oppressors for means of expression. How much richer would our liberative thinking have been if we looked to our own original thinkers like Martí rather than the European liberal thinkers of the time?

When those of us seeking a liberative pedagogical methodology rest upon eurocentric philosophical paradigms, we construct resistance on shifting sand, contributing to our own oppression. And worse, when we teach in our classrooms our resistance to eurocentric thought, regardless of how loud, fearless, and passionate we may be, we are undermining our students’ ability to bring about subsistent change. The difficult task before us who call ourselves liberative scholar-activists is how do we think new thoughts that are less a response, and more an indigenous radical worldview different from the normative philosophies which have historically justified our subservient place within society.

True, we must learn the Eurocentric canon if we hope to obtain PhDs and be considered learned, even though our white colleagues need not bother with the discourses occurring on their margins. But rather than looking at the esteemed eurocentric thinkers who have historically written philosophies to remove us from humanity and the fruits of liberation, what would happen if we possessed the dexterity to teach what the children of the colonizers legitimized and normalized as well as a different worldview based on *lo cotidiano* - the every day of those purposely written off Hegel’s metaphysical dialectical history. To teach from the margins disabuses the regurgitation of foreign and deadly philosophical paradigms in favor of those which resonates with the least of these. Not solely to understand the world - as important as this may be, but also for its transformation.

<https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2017/05/the-pedagogical-failure-of-eurocentric-methodologies/>