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Identitäre Versuchungen
Identitätsverhandlungen zwischen
Emanzipation und Herrschaft

Identitary Temptations
Identity Negotiations between
Emancipation and Hegemony



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Longing for Authenticity in the Middle East and the Americas: Martin Buber and Enrique Dussel on Semitic Humanism*

Abstract: This article aims to analyze the place occupied by the Hebrew Semitic cultural heritage in the thought of Enrique Dussel, one of the prominent figures of the Latin American Philosophy of Liberation which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Dussel's conceptions of the Semitic sources of the Jewish tradition took nourishment from at least three sources: 1. The writings of the German Jewish philosopher and political leader Martin Buber; 2. Dussel's experience of two years living in Israel during his mid-twenties; 3. Dussel's reading of French Catholic philosophers and theologians, especially Paul Ricœur, and Claude Tresmontant. The Hebrew Semitic cultural heritage, articulated in *El Humanismo Semita*, would arrive together with Christianity to the Americas and stand at the core of Dussel's liberationist project.

Keywords: Semitic humanism, unity, Bedouins, evolution, universality, civilization

In diesem Artikel soll der Ort untersucht werden, den das hebräische semitische Kulturerbe im Denken Enrique Dussels einnimmt, einer der prominenten Persönlichkeiten der lateinamerikanischen Philosophie der Befreiung, die in den späten 1960er- und frühen 1970er-Jahren aufkam. Dussels Konzeption der semitischen Quellen der jüdischen Tradition nährt sich aus mindestens drei Quellen: 1. Die Schriften des deutschen jüdischen Philosophen und politischen Vordenkers Martin Buber; 2. Dussels persönliche Erfahrung, im Alter seiner Mitte zwanzig Jahre zwei Jahre lang in Israel gelebt zu haben; 3. Dussels Rezeption französischer katholischer Philosophen und Theologen, insbesondere Paul Ricœur und Claude Tresmontant. Das hebräische semitische Kulturerbe, zum Ausdruck gebracht in *El Humanismo Semita*, wäre mit dem Christentum nach Amerika gelangt und würde im Zentrum von Dussels Befreiungsprojekt stehen.

semitischer Humanismus, Einheit, Beduinen, Evolution, Universalität, Zivilisation

Introduction: Buber's Return to Oriental-Semitic Judaism

In 1909, Martin Buber (Vienna 1878 – Jerusalem 1965) was invited to give a series of lectures at the Zionist student association in Prague, the “Bar Kochba

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Union,” a group gathering young Jewish intellectuals, some of whom would become later influential figures in Zionism, willing to reflect and understand the meaning of their Jewish identity in Western Europe at the beginning of the new century. In these lectures, Buber called for a “sudden and immense”¹ renaissance of Judaism. The revolutionary element in these “Three Speeches” was the “existentialist” tone, which switched the “Jewish Question” from the abstract theoretical approach frequently used in Western Jews milieus, to the deepest personal inquiry for the Jew himself.²

One of the main concepts present in these conferences was that of unity. In his second lecture, called “Das Judentum und die Menschheit” (1910), Martin Buber widely developed the concept that the longing for unity is one of the main contributions of Judaism to mankind.³ Buber sees this characteristic as the “Asiatic genius of boundlessness and holy unity” present in many exemplary men like Lao-tse and Buddha, Moses and Isaiah, Jesus and Paul.⁴ Influenced by the romantic fin-de-siècle atmosphere, Buber linked this “holy unity” with the spirit of the Orient, and therefore, called the contemporary diasporic Jews to reconnect with their Oriental source in the Land of Israel.

As we will see, the idea of the unitarian cosmivision of Judaism stands at the core of Enrique Dussel’s *El Humanismo Semita*, the subject of this investigation. In it, mention is made of Buber’s lectures at the Prague Forum (published in 1923 under the title *Drei Reden über das Judentum*).⁵ In addition, Buber’s *Ich und Du* (1923) is the focus of one of the central chapters of Dussel’s book.

Another book mentioned by Dussel is Buber’s *Königtum Gottes*, published in 1932. In this biblical study Buber analyzes the process of the conformation of the People of Israel, and how their unique theocratic cosmivision influenced their character and their essence as a people, and the meaning of the passage from a theocratic to a monarchic form of government. Throughout the book, Buber retrieves the positive qualities of the nomadic peoples of the Middle East before monarchy. Among these ancient peoples, he says, embodied with “collective fertility,” every person, and not only the priest, could feel directly connected to God.⁶ This connection was best manifested in the ecstatic singing and dancing of

¹ Buber, Martin: *Renewal of Judaism*, in: Glazer, Nahum (ed.): *On Judaism*, New York 1965, 35.

² Friedman, Maurice: *Martin Buber’s Life and Work. The Early Years 1878–1923*, New York 1981, 130.

³ Buber, Martin: *Judaism and Mankind*, in: *On Judaism* (note 1), 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵ Dussel, Enrique: *El Humanismo Semita*, Buenos Aires 1969, 21.

⁶ Buber, Martin: *Kingship of God*, London 1967, 136.

a naïve religious conscience.⁷ It is this spirit which both Buber and Dussel called to awake in their respective interlocutors. In *El Humanismo Semita*, we can see several of the motifs brought by Buber, as the positive description of the Middle East Bedouin, the emphasis on the importance of the image of God as a King,⁸ and the Jewish concept of historical revelation, or what Buber called “sublime realism.”⁹

Finally, in October 1933 Buber gave a lecture at the Frankfurt Lehrhaus under the title “Biblischer Humanismus.” Although Dussel does not explicitly mention this text but only makes a general reference to the German compilation of Buber’s works (1962)¹⁰ which includes this text, it is evident that Dussel had read it, since not only the title of his book notably echoes the title of Buber’s lecture, but also its content. In this lecture Buber speaks of the renaissance of the Hebrew humanistic spirit, which is connected to the Bible and to the Land of Israel. However, Buber distinguishes between a historical and an existential approach to the past: “To be sure, a Hebrew man is not a biblical man. The ‘return’ that is meant here cannot in the nature of things mean a striving for the recurrence or continuation of something long past, but only a striving for its renewal in a genuinely contemporary manifestation.”¹¹ This is exactly the aim of Dussel’s enterprise: to bring about the renaissance of the Christian Semitic attitude in the contemporary world in general, and particularly in the Latin American context.¹²

Another significant contribution to the formation of Dussel’s conception of Semitic Christianity was Dussel’s experience in Israel.

1. Two Life-changing Years in Israel

Enrique Dussel (born in Mendoza, Argentina, in 1934) was one of many young Latin American intellectuals that during the turbulent years of the 1950s and 1960s travelled to Europe to continue their studies. Those were decades of political and social instability in Latin American countries, most of them facing military dictatorships and deep economic inequality. In this context, the young intellectuals found in Europe the theoretical language through which they would

⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁸ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 62.

⁹ Buber, *Kingship of God* (note 6), 22.

¹⁰ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 47.

¹¹ Buber, *Martin: On the Bible*, in: Glatzer, Nahum (ed.), *Eighteen Studies*, New York 1968, 212.

¹² Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), XII. This idea will be developed in Dussel, Enrique: *America Latina y Conciencia Cristiana*, Quito 1970, an issue based on Dussel’s lecture at the Latin American week in Paris in 1964, the same year Dussel finished writing *El Humanismo Semita*.

foster their own Latin American identities, and later formulate diverse intellectual articulations of resistance. After finishing his first doctorate in philosophy in Madrid, Dussel decided to travel to Israel searching for “the origin of Latin America.”¹³ Dussel spent two years in the young state of Israel (1959–1960). This experience left on him a deep impression that would mark his lifetime’s work. Dussel will recall his experience in Israel in several works, always emphasizing how it transformed him: “It was an existential experience of indelible permanence: definitive.”¹⁴ Dussel tells that during these two years, he was a building worker, learned Hebrew (and even “spoke Hebrew with the Palestinian Arabs in Nazareth,”¹⁵) and traveled all around the region. “I have founded then the totality of my work (from *El Humanismo Semita*, which I began to write in Paris in 1961, after my return from Israel) about that experience.”¹⁶

Dussel arrived in the young State of Israel and had to face its complex reality. A few years after the Independence War (1948), he joined the work cooperative of French priest Paul Gauthier. Residing in Nazareth, they were witnesses to the rules of the special military regime operating between 1948 and 1966 in Israeli Arab settlements. Under these impressions Dussel would write *El Humanismo Semita*, the conclusion of which could be summarized as the failure of the People of Israel in liberating itself from what it considers to be a need for political structures. Only Christianity succeeded in restoring the Kingdom of God through the *anavîm*, the “poor” that would open the alliance to the world. “This line will be fully developed by Christian humanism. History shows us that Israel took another path.”¹⁷

2. In Search of the Cultural Origins of Civilization:

The project of *El Humanismo Semita*

El Humanismo Semita (finished by 1964) was the second book written by Dussel. His first book, *El Humanismo Helénico* was written immediately after his return from Israel to Europe in 1961, but was published much later, in 1975.

¹³ Dussel, Enrique: *En Búsqueda del Sentido (Origen y desarrollo de una Filosofía de la Liberación)*, in: *Anthropos* 180 (1998), 16. Note: All the quotations from Dussel were translated from Spanish by the author, S. K. L.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ Dussel, Enrique: *Apel, Ricœur, Rorty, y la filosofía de la liberación, con respuestas de Karl Otto Apel y Paul Ricœur*, Guadalajara 1993, 139.

¹⁶ Dussel, Enrique: *Hacia los orígenes de Occidente, Meditaciones Semitas*, Mexico 2012, 12.

¹⁷ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 57.

El Humanismo Semita deals with the ethical-mythical nucleus of the Semitic peoples of the Middle East, especially the People of Israel, and presents it as opposed to that of the Indo-European worldview, principally the Greeks'. For Dussel, these two cosmovisions differ "like day and night."¹⁸ The gap between them can be summarized as follows: While the Hellenic culture sustains an anthropologic dualism of body-soul which derives in the ethical-political aporia of the attempt to reach perfection through individual contemplation and disdain for the body, the Semitic cosmovision speaks about an anthropological, "carnal" monism, the ethical implication of which is the demand for political involvement and social solidarity.¹⁹

El Humanismo Semita's project is to show historically and philosophically how the Semitic thought in general, and the Hebrew thought in particular as its highest expression, is an essential element for the understanding of the history of universal human culture. It presents a historical overview of the emergence of the Semitic peoples and the expansion of their cosmovision from their cradle in the Middle East to the whole world, through the universalized Christian religion. (I will leave Dussel's treatment of Islam and Arab thought out of the present paper).

Dussel's investigation is driven not only by his "profound sympathy" for the Semitic cultures, but especially by his assessment that Western culture, and within it the Hispanic American world, which is his primary concern, "is the fruit of a historical process whose *conductive focus* was Judeo-Christianity, and whose instrumentality is preponderantly inspired in the Greek-Roman *civilization*."²⁰ This distinction between conductive focus and civilization will be crucial in the building of Dussel's argument throughout the book.

The book is an attempt to conceptualize the Hebrew "*ethical-mythical nucleus*," a concept taken from Paul Ricœur (1913–2005), whose classes Dussel attended at the Sorbonne in the early 1960s. Dussel was attracted to the person and the writings of Ricœur,²¹ first as a model of the possibility of combining philosophy and religious beliefs, and second for his analysis of the relations between the universal civilization and the particular heritage of each culture,²² an approach Dussel would adopt as the thread of his book. As Dussel explains at the begin-

¹⁸ Ibid., XI.

¹⁹ Dussel, *En Búsqueda del Sentido* (note 13), 18.

²⁰ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 1.

²¹ Gonzales, Marcelo: Enrique Dussel, *La Erosión reflexiva en torno a 1964*, in: *La Filosofía de la Liberación en su 'Polo Argentino'*, Papeles de Trabajo, Cuadernos del CEL, Vol. II (2017), 93; Dussel, *Apel, Ricœur, Rorty* (note 15), 139.

²² As Ricœur said in a lecture at the Latin American Week organized by Dussel in Paris in 1964, published in Ricœur, Paul: *Tâches de l'educateur politique*, in: *Esprit* n. 340: 7/8 (1965), 91.

ning of the book, he understands the term “ethical-mythical nucleus” as that corpus of existential values and attitudes that stand at the core of every personal and collective behavior,²³ as opposed to a *civilization*, which represents the external practical expressions of a political system and civilian life.

As Buber and many others before him, Dussel was especially interested in the history of the encounter between East and West as the key to understanding the evolution of the actual world system.²⁴ Evolution is a key concept in Dussel’s project, whose objective is to show, as we will see, how Christianity (and Islam), thanks to their universalism, are the mature fruit of the Semitic cosmivision,²⁵ unlike the Jewish “unsensitive” choice for particularism.²⁶

The first part of the book consists in an overview of the history of the Semitic tribes and peoples, their migrations and military conquests in Mesopotamia, until he gets to the emergence of the People of Israel. Dussel explains that the Hebrew-Semitic people contributed to the human experience with a new concept of the Absolute.²⁷ “Certainly,” says Dussel, “it is not the ‘Absolute’ that can be reached through a philosophical reflection, but through a transcendental and personal interiority, discovered in a progressive, existential, concrete, historic and dialogical experience.”²⁸ Not being able, Dussel explains, to display an effective military resistance, the Hebrew people showed a strong religious-cultural opposition to external threats. With a consequent and original monotheism based on the idea of God as King (Dussel refers explicitly in this context to Buber’s *Königtum Gottes*),²⁹ the prophets became “the soul of the People.”³⁰ For Dussel, although the Semitic peoples, like many others, gradually transformed into urban civilizations, their ethical-mythical nucleus remained that of Bedouin-nomad shepherds, and it is in the name of that spirit, says Dussel, that the Hebrew prophets will raise their voice against material wealth and corruption. Therefore, for both Buber (who was influenced by the Orientalist trends of Western Europe’s intellectuals of the beginning of the twentieth century)³¹ and Dussel, the desert is associated with prophecy and nobility of spirit.

²³ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), XII.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 113, note 20. See also p. 62, where Dussel brings an interesting reference to the French Jewish philosopher André Neher.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

³¹ Mendel-Flohr, Paul: *Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism, the Ostjuden and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation*, in: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 1 (1984), 96-139.

2.1 Hellenic Dualism and Semitic Monism

As Martin Buber, who said that “For the Jew of antiquity, the world is not divided. Nor is man divided,”³² Dussel emphasizes that the “anthropology” in which the Semitic ethical system stands, is the longing for unity. The Semitic person conceives man as an inseparable unity, in opposition to the Hellenic dualism.³³ In this regard, we need to mention also Claude Tresmontant (1925–1997), whose biblical researches on the Hebrew sources of Christianity deeply influenced the Argentinian.³⁴ Fully identifying Christianity with biblical metaphysics, Tresmontant affirmed that “Christian philosophy opposes both idealism and dualism.”³⁵ Relying on both thinkers, Dussel explains that this system does not need the conception of “two powers: good-evil, body-soul,” because it is based on an “anthropic monism” which resembles Buber’s statement. This Semitic monistic paradigm can be identified for example, as early as the Egyptian culture in the form of their respect for the dead’s body and their belief in resurrection. In the Hebrew culture, Dussel says, following again Tresmontant, the term *nefesh* means the convergence of the two elements of the human being into one: man is not a body but a “spiritual flesh” or a “living and carnal I embodied in the individual *name*.”³⁶ The next pages will be dedicated to show how early Christianity develops this tradition of “flesh” instead of “body,” bringing the “Semitic consciousness to its adult state.”³⁷

2.2 Man as Responsible for His Own Fate

The next section of *El Humanismo Semita* is dedicated to analyzing the ethical implications of the dualistic and the monistic cosmovisions. For Dussel, the Hebrew Semitic culture will make possible the emergence of an anti-fatalist and anti-tragic morality.³⁸ With a series of examples Dussel shows that the dualistic worldview of the Greeks is tragic because it implies that man’s body is necessarily negative. Therefore, man is not responsible for any evil or disgrace, since everything is *just-like-it-is*.³⁹ However, in the Hebrew moral system, good and evil

³² Buber, *Judaism and Mankind* (note 3), 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁴ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 5 and *passim*. See also Gonzales, Marcelo: Enrique Dussel, *La Erosión reflexiva en torno a 1964* (note 21), 93.

³⁵ Claude Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*, Paris 1955, 215-216.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

are a human matter and a human responsibility. Dussel finds in the biblical myth of Adam, Eve and the serpent, the radical originality of the Hebrew culture. Man's position is now extremely dramatic: Man does evil, but, as God's partner in creation, he can also do good. This is, says Dussel quoting Tresmontant, the moral conscience according to the Bible: the genesis of thought resides in a primordial choice that is the foundation of every possible reason.⁴⁰ In Jewish Humanism, Man is free to reach his integrity, therefore nothing in existence is *necessary*, but everything is *dramatic*, in the sense that the human heart is an uncertainty. Once again, Dussel finishes this chapter saying that the New Testament is a loyal continuation of this tradition.

2.3 Hebrew Intersubjectivity and the Role of History

It is important for Dussel to emphasize that the Hebrew moral system is not abstract but always manifested within intersubjective relations, and in this lays its novelty. The Hebrew law, the Torah, is intersubjectivity established between free creatures gathering around a community, with no intervention of nature or any other forces. The next chapter of the book deals with this intersubjectivity.

Dussel explains that the novelty of the Hebrew moral system is that it introduced inter-subjectivity into history. Dussel puts on the front of this chapter the Buberian concept of *Ich und Du*, "whose consistency is not given in either of the two terms of the relationship, but in the 'between' (*zwischen*)."⁴¹ In opposition to the Greek culture in which the polis had only a functional place, and only for those who were privileged, in the Hebrew cosmivision, the individual only understands himself as part of a community, of a People permanently interpellated by the ultimate intersubjectivity of God. The individual is an "I" but also an "us." This relationship is best exemplified in the biblical figure of Abraham, who embodies for Dussel the dialogical relationship between the individual as an "I" and the community as a future "we" (Dussel emphasizes the Hebrew term *go'im gadol*,⁴² which should be *goi gadol*, S. K. L.⁴³), and the absolute "You," God.⁴⁴ This dialogue is the subject of the religious alliance (*brit*) within a concrete historical

⁴⁰ Tresmontant, Claude : *Essai sur la Pensée Hébraïque*, Paris 1953, 119, quoted by Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 41.

⁴¹ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 48.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49

⁴³ Several inaccuracies of this kind can be found throughout Dussel's book, like grammatical errors in the Hebrew, or mistaken references for quotations. For example, Dussel brings the paragraph *Shema Israel*, very central for the Jewish tradition, as taken from the book of Genesis, though it is from Deuteronomy. *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

context, and, Dussel explains, is always oriented to the future. History is in the Hebrew consciousness, “tension-towards,”⁴⁵ the tendency to the fulfillment of the final goal. Buber also saw the biblical figure of Abraham as the embodiment of the dialectics between the individual, the People and God, past, present and future.⁴⁶

Dussel continues advancing more or less in a chronological way, pointing to the moment when the people of Israel lost their nomadic characteristics and transformed into a monarchy, and then, after a period of moral crisis due to idolatry and material corruption, went into exile.

2.4 Exile, Individuation and Universalization

Only in exile, says Dussel, after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, did the Jewish people succeed in reaching maturity for their ethos. The prophets of exile would gradually complete the passage from “a primitive collectivism to moral individuation,”⁴⁷ an adult individualism within the community.⁴⁸ Only in exile the ambivalent ties between prophecy and monarchy would be broken, and the prophets could retrieve their freedom and audacity: “From this crisis, and by a purifying evolution, we will arrive in the time of the Roman Empire to the exclusively religious community of the synagogue.”⁴⁹ This means for Dussel that from now on the election of the alliance is not any more a national or political issue, but an individual choice open to all, free from any ethnic or territorial base.⁵⁰ Although, Dussel concludes, universalism was the best aspect of Jewish humanism in the proximity of the Christian era, Judaism would continue to enclose in itself, in a centrifugal [sic!] movement, in a nationalism, a particularism and a temporal messianism.⁵¹ For that reason primitive Christianity would be the religion in charge of spreading to the world the Hebrew ethos through the universalization of the mission. “In all this,” says Dussel, “Christianity continues without interruption the Jewish-Semitic tradition, but producing, however, a *‘qualitative leap,’* a revolution of structures that makes us think not in a synthesis or a syncretism but in a homogenic evolution.”⁵²

⁴⁵ Ibid., 97, 100.

⁴⁶ Buber, Kingship of God (note 6), 117.

⁴⁷ Dussel, El Humanismo Semita (note 5), 54.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁵¹ Ibid., 58.

⁵² Ibid., 60, my remark.

It is important to emphasize that Dussel's position here is radically the opposite of Buber's statements on the significance of the diaspora, with which Buber deals in the context of the Jewish longing for unity mentioned above. For Buber, the *galut*, the exile, provoked a duality in the Jews that was the cause of the degeneration of Judaism he felt in his time.⁵³ Life in the diaspora had provoked a dissonance between the inner and the outer existential experience of the Jews: the Jew has a community with which he shares the same constant elements of civil life, and a community with which he shares blood and homeland; he has a language in which he grew up, which is not the same as the language of his blood.⁵⁴ In the diaspora says Buber, the Jew lives in an unacceptable bipolarity between form and content, that can only be united with the return of the Jews to their ancient land.

The next part of the book is dedicated to explaining the difference between the creationist-historic conscience of Judaism and Islam, as opposed to the "anti-historic" conscience of the Indo-Europeans.⁵⁵ In the last chapter of the book, Dussel goes more into depth analyzing the meaning of the Hebrew Biblical monotheism: "a *personal and transcendent Yahweh*,"⁵⁶ on the development of human civilization.

The theological paper Dussel chose to add to the book as an appendix, titled "Universalismo y Misión en los poemas del 'Siervo de Yahveh'" (published in an Argentinian journal in 1963), is a radical and very explicit expression of this approach of the caducity of Israel that failed to understand the universal message of the prophets, especially Isaiah, and therefore had to be replaced by Christianity.⁵⁷

It is important to mention that these lines were written at the very same time, and in geographical and cultural proximity, to the celebration of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), in which the declaration *Nostra Aetate* will signify a turning point of the Catholic Church's attitude toward non-Christian religions, especially Judaism. In addition, the fact that Dussel decided to include this so explicitly supersessionist appendix in a compilation of writings about Jewish topics published in 2012,⁵⁸ can probably raise questions about the evolution of Dussel's approach to Judaism, even almost forty years after its first publication.

⁵³ Buber, *Judaism and Mankind* (note 3), 29.

⁵⁴ Buber, *Judaism and the Jews*, in: *On Judaism* (note 1), 16.

⁵⁵ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 95.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁸ Dussel, *Hacia los orígenes de Occidente* (note 16), 169-202.

3. Identifying with the Poor

The universalization of Judaism was possible, according to Dussel, due to the fact that “the Jewish people was one of the poorest of the history of humanity.”⁵⁹ The motif of poverty is also notably present in Dussel’s memories of his experience in Israel, only now the poor are not the Jews but the Arabs:

Those were years of exclusive manual work, ten hours per day, among poor Palestinian Christian building workers. [...] I remember Bulos, his coffees that we drank in deep fellowship in the cave he had as a home; of Musa, in his hut where we slept dressed and ate fish grilled on the rocks ... Infinite poverty, immense depth of wisdom of an exploited people ... but millennial.⁶⁰

The identification with the poor is what will facilitate for Dussel the link between the Semitic myth, the experience in Israel and the Latin American reality. On the one hand he says in his autobiography that in Israel he “discovered” poverty and thanks to Father Paul Gauthier started to see the world from the perspective of the poor: “Now it was not just Latin America; now there were the ‘poor’ (an obsession of Paul Gauthier), the oppressed, the miserable of my distant continent.”⁶¹ On the other hand, he says he discovered in the Hebrew humanism the moral bases for the building of a just society. These are the two keys for any Latin American future liberationist project:

For the reconstruction of a Latin American philosophy it was necessary to “de-stroy” the Greek *myth*. To understand the culture of the Latin American people it was necessary to begin with Jerusalem rather than Athens. Jerusalem spoke of the dignity of work, of the possibility of the revolution of the poor; Athens spoke of the dignity of free nobles, of the impossibility of the emancipation of slaves.⁶²

Conclusion: The Hebrew Semitic Nucleus and Latin America’s Christian Consciousness

Adjusting in *El Humanismo Semita* to a “carnal” and unitarian anthropology, to a creationist metaphysics and to a political ethics of compromise with justice,

⁵⁹ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 18.

⁶⁰ Dussel, *En Búsqueda del Sentido* (note 13), 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18.

Dussel saw himself in the same tradition with the Jewish philosophers Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber⁶³ (though the philosophy of Rosenzweig is quite different). The Semitic “ethical-mythical nucleus” was spread to the world by Christianity, and through it arrived in America.

In this way Dussel traces a direct evolutionary line that goes from the emergence of the Semitic cosmovision in the ancient peoples of the Middle East, the consolidation of the Hebrew humanism, its universalization through the “new alliance” of Christianity, the evangelization of the Amerindians (“giving them the key and the possibility of realization, of perfect humanization, without denaturalizing them from their own consciousness”),⁶⁴ to the actual liberationist projects of Latin America. This is a lineal evolution that does not leave place for particularism, or for Judaism.

In his lectures at the Prague Jewish student forum in 1911, Buber spoke with a tone of dramatic urgency⁶⁵ used by many Zionist intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century to awake Jews to the Zionist cause. Half a century after Buber’s call for a Jewish renaissance, Dussel’s call will redirect the sense of urgency to the renewal of the Catholic humanistic spirit in Latin America.⁶⁶

⁶³ Dussel, *Apel, Ricœur, Rorty* (note 15), 139.

⁶⁴ Dussel, *El Humanismo Semita* (note 5), 168.

⁶⁵ Buber, *Renewal of Judaism* (note 1), 35.

⁶⁶ Dussel, *América Latina y Conciencia Cristiana* (note 12), 47.