



ETHICS OF LIBERATION

In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion

ENRIQUE DUSSEL

Ethics of Liberation

A book in the series

LATIN AMERICA OTHERWISE

Languages, Empires, Nations

A series edited by

Walter D. Mignolo, Duke University

Irene Silverblatt, Duke University

Sonia Saldivar-Hull, University of Texas,

San Antonio

ENRIQUE DUSSEL

Ethics of Liberation

IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION
AND EXCLUSION

Translated by

EDUARDO MENDIETA, CAMILO PÉREZ BUSTILLO,
YOLANDA ANGULO, AND NELSON MALDONADO-TORRES

Translation edited by Alejandro A. Vallega

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TO RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ,
*woman, Mayan Indian, farmer, of brown-skinned race,
Guatemalan*

TO THE ZAPATISTA ARMY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION,
*which reminds us of the ethical path almost lost in the mountain
(new Holzwege), whose steps we have followed in the construction
of this philosophical work*

TO KARL-OTTO APEL,
*who dared to dialogue with the philosophers of the South,
inspiring us theoretically*

TO GUSTAVO ALBERTO DUSSEL (1936–76),
*dean of the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the University
of Buenos Aires in the time of the Rector Rodolfo Puiggrós, who
died in his youth in the sadness of political persecution*

TO JOHANNA,
who daily made possible this long book

But no *living being* believes that the shortcomings of his existence have their basis in the *principle* of his life [*Prinzip seines Lebens*], in the *essence* [*Wesen*] of his life; everyone believes that their basis lies in circumstances external to his life. *Suicide* is against nature.

— KARL MARX, *Vorwärts!*,
no. 63, August 7, 1844, Paris

Je pense, donc je suis [from Descartes, *La discours de la méthode*]
is the cause of the crime against *Je danse, donc je vie*.

— F. EBOUSSI BOULAGA,
La crise du Muntu, 56

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About the Series

Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations is a critical series. It aims to explore the emergence and consequences of concepts used to define “Latin America” while at the same time exploring the broad interplay of political, economic, and cultural practices that have shaped Latin American worlds. Latin America, at the crossroads of competing imperial designs and local responses, has been construed as a geocultural and geopolitical entity since the nineteenth century. This series provides a starting point to redefine Latin America as a configuration of political, linguistic, cultural, and economic intersections that demands a continuous reappraisal of the role of the Americas in history, and of the ongoing process of globalization and the relocation of people and cultures that have characterized Latin America’s experience. *Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations* is a forum that confronts established geocultural constructions, re-thinks area studies and disciplinary boundaries, assesses convictions of the academy and of public policy, and correspondingly demands that the practices through which we produce knowledge and understanding about and from Latin America be subject to rigorous and critical scrutiny.

Ethics of Liberation is the English-language translation of *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (1998), which followed Dussel’s *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977) and has been followed by the recently published (in Spanish) *Política de la liberación* (2007). A condensed version of *Philosophy of Liberation* can be found in *Twenty Theses on Politics*, which was published by Duke University Press in 2008.

If there is a thread that runs through Enrique Dussel’s work and life, it is his concern for unveiling the logic of oppression and exclusion that lies at the very foundation of the modern colonial world as we know it today. As

a Latin American philosopher, Dussel stands in for the two pillars of this type of critique who had searched for a conception of life that, when implemented in the state and the economy, would not build a system based on the exploitation and exclusion of human beings. Those two pillars were Bartolomé de las Casas, who witnessed Spanish excesses in the colonies of Indias Occidentales, and Karl Marx, who witnessed in England the excesses of the industrial bourgeoisie in the heart of Europe.

Las Casas wrote during the very beginnings of the modern colonial world, and Marx wrote at the moment of its consolidation, when the Industrial Revolution made possible both the expansion of Europe all over the world and Europe's encroachment within every existing civilization. Dussel, on the contrary, dwells within the history of the first European colonies in the New World, today called "Latin America." Dussel, being aware of this distinction, entitled the first chapter of *Philosophy of Liberation* as "Geopolitics and Philosophy," in which he stated that it is not the same when studying philosophy in Spain, Germany, England, or Latin America. Here, *Ethics* designates a basic universal attitude of human existence in society, the historicity of the modern colonial world founded on a racism, sexism, and power differential. *Ethics* is also a reflection on how a basic attitude of human existence cannot be one that is dictated from a single experience. Philosophical ethics needs its own geopolitics. And that is what Dussel has also made clear in his debates with European philosophers such as Karl-Otto Apel, Jürgen Habermas, and Paul Ricoeur.

In this regard, a geopolitics of knowledge stands at the very foundation of the Latin America Otherwise series.

WALTER MIGNOLO

Editor's Foreword to the English Edition

The publication in English of Enrique Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation* marks a long-awaited event. First of all, as those acquainted with the philosophy of liberation and particularly with Dussel's major role in its development worldwide know, this philosophy sets out with the situation and engagement of the excluded, silenced, oppressed, the "wretched" of the world. Its aim is to articulate new possibilities for humanity out of and in light of the suffering, dignity, and creative drive of those peripheral lives; a task that only has become more urgent and poignant with the struggle to resist and find alternatives to the dominating exploitative globalization of the world, its peoples, and resources. Thus, given that the philosophy of liberation is founded on these ethical insights, *Ethics of Liberation* is the work in Dussel's corpus that grounds all other works: it is the crucial cornerstone for the philosophy of liberation.

A second important characteristic of this translation is that, unlike many of the other major works of the most important figures in world philosophies, this translation was ultimately edited in direct collaboration with the author. Dussel collaborated with the correcting of the translation down to the last manuscript sent to the press. As a result, the translation includes certain neologisms and explanations from the author himself that do not appear in the original, and that will certainly be of interest to those scholars working on Dussel's thought. To name one crucial moment: in this translation, adding to the Spanish edition, Dussel begins to use the term "goodness claim" in direct association with "the good," "*to agathon*," and "*das Gute*." In terms of his choices in terminology, he chooses to refer to issues of embodiment by using the word "corporeality," and with regards to the possibilities of ethical experience in their concrete undergoing he uses "ful-

fillment" rather than "realization." All of these terms indicate distinct ways of articulating, situating, and undertaking the question of ethics. Last, the quotations from other sources used by Dussel are often his own translations from originals, or specifically chosen translations from Spanish translations. We have decided to keep these and translate them directly into English, in order to preserve the thematic emphasis and interpretative weight of the author's choices. The alternative would have been to replace Dussel's choices with standard English translations, which would have taken away part of the interpretative inflection of the author's voice.

Enrique Dussel began writing *Ethics of Liberation* in October 1993 and completed it in 1997. The first edition was published in 1998 and was soon followed by four editions (1998, 2000, 2002, and 2006). The preparation of this voluminous work took eight years and involved four translators. As a result the manuscript we had was tortuous, and at times translations were simply incomplete. In addition, often the choices of translation for terminology did not match. The translation was then recovered and brought to its present form, thanks to the effort of those listed below, without whom this version would have been impossible to publish. Although the translators at times referred to the various editions of the *Ethics*, the present translation refers to the latest edition published by Trotta in 2006.

I must thank Reynolds Smith and Miriam Angress at Duke University Press for their excitement and support. Also, I want to thank Justine Keel for her careful editorial work on the manuscript. I must also thank the editors of Duke University Press who so diligently worked on the project, particularly Maura High and Christine Dahlin. I am grateful to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oregon and to the philosophy department's office manager, T. K. Landázuri for their support in the last stages of the project.

ALEJANDRO A. VALLEGA
December 2010

Preface

We are confronted by the overwhelming yet contradictory reality of a “world system” in crisis five thousand years¹ after its inception, which has globalized its reach to the most distant corner of the planet at the same time that it has paradoxically excluded a majority of humanity. This is a matter of life and death. The human life invoked here is not a theoretical concept, an idea, or an abstract horizon, but rather a *mode of reality* of each concrete human being who is also the absolute prerequisite and ultimate demand of all forms of liberation. Given this framework it should not be surprising that *Ethics* is an ethics grounded in an avowed affirmation of life in the face of the collective murder and suicide that humanity is headed toward if it does not change the direction of its irrational behaviour. *Ethics of Liberation* seeks to think through this real and concrete ethical situation in which the majority of contemporary humanity is immersed, philosophically and rationally, as we hurtle toward a tragic conflagration on a scale that is unprecedented in the biological trajectory of the human species.

The themes explored here are of such dimensions that I can only seek to place them for descriptive purposes in an architectural framework of categories of analysis that will take shape as the result of an ethical “process” of construction. Our point of departure is a world system of globalized exclusion whose exploration requires the critical assimilation of the thought of numerous contemporary thinkers who have been selected because they are most relevant to the argument. Future works will explore such problems as the *grounding of the principles* of the ethical framework set forth here, as well as the concrete treatment of the most critical liberation struggles waged by emerging sociohistorical subjects seeking recognition within civil society in each country and on a global scale.

Contemporary ethics at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the third millennium has some “problematic knots” that must be disentangled—*aporiai* or dilemmas that we will address fully and polemically—while undertaking to analyze them from the perspective of the ethics of liberation. Two spheres of debate are particularly lively in this context. In the first place, the debates that proceed from (a) the denial that a normative ethics can be developed that is based upon a rationality with empirical validity given that its deployment would be grounded at the level of mere value judgments—a position maintained by the school of analytical metaethics (since G. Moore’s *Principia Ethica* in 1903), among others—all the way to (b) the affirmation of a utilitarian ethics of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number.” I will explore the first, continuing with Habermas’s discourse, with reference to the supposed existence of normative claims (which are not merely subjective judgments but instead have at least the intention of satisfying claims of rightfulness). But I will also attempt to go further by attempting to demonstrate the possibility of developing an ethics grounded in factual, empirical, and descriptive judgments. I will incorporate the contributions of utilitarianism, which has been so criticized by the metaethics of the philosophy of language and formalist moralities (including that of John Rawls), thereby retrieving the material aspect of the drives toward happiness, although I will demonstrate the inconsistency inherent in this approach in terms of the claim that seeks to ground a universal material principle with sufficient validity.

Second, I will situate the ethics of liberation with regard to a debate that is still in progress and which has confronted (c) the ethics of communitarianism, inspired by history and values, in the face of (d) formal ethics (particularly discourse ethics). I will incorporate both of these for varying reasons but will situate them at distinct moments of the architectural process of *Ethics of Liberation*. I will include the communitarian ethics (of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, or Michael Walzer) at the material level of my ethical architecture. In this way I seek to articulate the contributions of this school within a redefined horizon that will facilitate the transcendence of its particularistic incommensurability and open it up to a universalism of *content* beyond the merely historical, hypervalues, or the authenticity of a specific cultural identity. The practical truth of its content will thus enable a claim of universality. In a similar fashion I will also incorporate aspects of proceduralist and formalist moralities (ranging from Emmanuel Kant up through Karl-Otto Apel to Jürgen Habermas, in particular), but this will be accomplished through a radical reconstruction of their function in the overall ethical process. Their transformative incorporation will help clarify the moment of “application” of the ethical material principle.

We will also engage philosophical perspectives such those of (e) prag-

matism (as reflected in thinkers running the gamut from Charles Sanders Peirce to Hilary Putnam) or (f) system theory (Niklas Luhmann); I will draw from these what is necessary in order to define (g) a third principle: that of feasibility, inspired by the thought of Frank Hinkelammert.

In this way the goodness claim (with reference to the subject of the norm, action, microphysics of power, institution, or ethical system) is attained as the end result of a complex process wherein the content of truth, intersubjective validity, and ethical feasibility have the effect of producing or enabling the fulfillment of “the goodness claim” (*das Gute*). In a definitive sense “the good” person is a concrete ethical subject, but only once this subject has brought “goodness” into action upon a normative basis. This summary overview of the landscape we are about to explore concludes part I of this book, and it might appear that we have already exhausted the central themes of ethics in general. Nonetheless, it is only in part II of this book where the ethics of liberation as such begins to undertake the development of its own theses.

In fact it is upon the basis of the assumed “goodness claim” of norms, acts, microstructures, institutions, or ethical systems that victims appear as the concretion of the effects of their application, according to the mechanism that Max Horkheimer defined as one of “material negativity.” My point of departure here is from the perspective of the victim, such as Rigoberta Menchú (a woman, of Maya Quiché indigenous origin, brown-skinned, Guatemalan . . .). “Goodness claim” becomes inverted and is dialectically transformed into “evil” because it has produced a victim such as her. This is also the point at which the analysis of the great critical or “accursed” philosophers begins, such as Marx; those of the first Frankfurt school: Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin; and also Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Emmanuel Levinas, and so on. In this way, it is such ethical-material critiques that set the philosophies of negation into motion.

Suddenly, the consensus-building attributes of discursive reason that could not bring to bear its basic norms because the affected participants are always empirically and inevitably in asymmetry, can now be “applied” thanks to the symmetrical intersubjectivity of the victims who have joined together in a community of victims. New and unexpected problems emerge at this point, which have been dealt with by Jean Piaget or Lawrence Kohlberg, but in a new light following the reinterpretation undertaken by Paulo Freire. It is in this context that I formulate for the first time the epistemological question of the “third” criterion for the demarcation of the *critical* social sciences (superseding the position expressed in this regard by Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, P. Feyerabend, or I. Lákatos, and hoping also thereby to clarify certain ambiguities of “critical theory”). I also high-

light meanwhile how Ernst Bloch evidenced for us the positive meaning of yearning with hope for the possibility of utopia, from the perspective of the symmetrical intersubjectivity of the victims.

This is the path by which we arrive at the most critical moment in the architecture of the ethics of liberation, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, as I seek to give a contemporary meaning to long-standing debates played out by Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, José Carlos Mariátegui, and so many others. My purpose is to lay the basis for new horizons of strategic and tactical ethical reasoning grounded in the metaethics of liberation. These reflect complex processes of articulation among the victimized billions of the world system, who emerge as critical communities with critical activists at their core. Their expressions include the new social, political, economic, racial, environmental, gender-based, and ethnic movements that emerged during the last quarter of the twentieth century. These are struggles for the recognition of victims who *transform* the character of previous liberation movements, which this *Ethics* seeks to legitimize and to provide with a philosophical grounding. My hope is that *Ethics of Liberation* could provide these movements with some guidance as to ethical criteria and principles for the unfolding of the praxis of liberation from the perspective of the victims, as they confront the effects of oppressive norms, acts, microstructures, institutions, or ethical systems in the context of everyday life, in the present historical moment, instead of postponing their application to some later moment when the revolution has arrived.

It might seem to some that this is an endeavor limited to the elaboration of an ethics of “principles.” In fact, although my emphasis here is on criteria and principles, this is an ethics that is nonproceduralist in character, grounded in daily life and the dominant models prevalent in that context, and which seeks to encompass the nonintentional negative effects (the production of victims) resulting from every kind of autonomously organized and regulated structure. This ethics develops a material ethical discourse that is content-based and formal (and intersubjective in its validity) and that takes empirical feasibility into account, always seeking to approach issues from the perspective of the victims at all possible levels of intersubjectivity. Jürgen Habermas pointed out to me at a meeting in St. Louis in October 1996 that he did not expect very much from the normativity of ethics;² I wouldn’t expect much either if I believed that the only cause that motivates the demands that set processes of liberation of the victims into motion were of a purely ethical character. My approach instead is that such motivations include affective drives that are deeply rooted in the critical superego of the oppressed, and that are often nonintentional in character, grounded in social contexts and cultural values, and in historical and biographical causes and factors, and in the impetus of principles

such as responsibility and solidarity. Ethical philosophy expresses these in an articulated, structured, and rational manner that incorporates such non-proceduralist structures of this kind that are *always implicit*. To make them explicit is our philosophical responsibility. The enunciation of principles has a dynamic complementary relationship to play with respect to actions undertaken that seek liberation, by helping deconstruct false or incomplete contrary arguments, and by developing arguments in favor of such liberation processes.

I don't expect very much in terms of this ethics' explicit theoretical normative capacity, but I continue to believe that it can play a strategically necessary role in another dimension, which is especially important in collective learning processes where critical consciousness can be developed as part of the political, economic, and social organizing efforts of new emerging social movements in civil society.

I began to write this book in October 1993, twenty years after a bomb set by right-wing extremists partially destroyed my house and my study in Mendoza, Argentina, and drove me into exile in Mexico, where I have lived ever since. At that time I was writing *Towards an Ethics of Latin American Liberation*.³ This was an ethics that took the affirmation of "exteriority" as its point of departure, and which, beyond Heidegger, was inspired by Latin America's popular struggle. The present work takes the next step with respect to that initial effort and is characterized by a greater emphasis on issues of negation and materiality, with a much more elaborately constructed rational architecture of principles. My current approach is not only different because it comes twenty years later, but principally because during the intervening period the overall historical context has changed, and a new perspective has matured within me, at the same time as the discourse of ethics in contemporary philosophy has been transformed.

In the first place, the above-mentioned ethics was qualified as "*towards* an ethics." This book, instead, is an ethics as such. Second, my initial work was denominated as "*of Latin American liberation*." Now, I seek to situate myself in a global, planetary horizon, beyond the Latin American region, beyond the Hellenic- and Eurocentrism of contemporary Europe and the United States, in a broader sweep ranging from the "periphery" to the "center"⁴ and toward "globality."⁵ Third, as is evident, in the seventies I took my point of departure from the philosophers most studied during that period: the last stage of the work of Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer, the first Frankfurt school, the contributions of Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and many others. Now, we must take into account not only these philosophers, but also, in particular, more recent developments in philosophy in the United States and Europe—as I have already indicated

above. In addition, at that time the debate that my initial efforts at an ethics of liberation were grounded in had come out of the context of the Latin American reality I was immersed in, from the perspective of groups of activist scholars with whom I was engaged, and from my critical rereading of texts. Now, out of world reality and from some personal dialogues with philosophers of “the center,” the reflections have reached new pertinence. In the fourth place, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989,⁶ the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1990, and increased pressures on the Cuban Revolution through the U.S. blockade have together implied a series of setbacks for alternative models of social order that once nourished the hopes of people around the world in the possibility of a path out of their misery. All of this has contributed to a generalized sense of disenchantment and even desperation among the oppressed, and to the virtual disappearance of critical thinking among philosophers.

The Cold War is over, and along with it the geopolitics of bipolarity. At the same time the United States’ indisputable military hegemony has been restored, and the dictates of U.S. foreign and economic policy and culture have been globalized. The crisis of revolutionary utopias causes many to give up entirely the search for alternatives to the contemporary global system, and the metaphysical dogma of neoliberalism à la Friedrich Hayek (the new “grand narrative” and the only “utopia” acceptable to the powers that be) consolidates its domination. The prevailing judgment amid the “public opinion” that is dominant in philosophical circles assumes that “liberation” must give way to functional, reformist, “feasible” acts. But despite this, and contrary to what many claim, it seems as if the ancient suspicion of the necessity of an ethics of liberation from the perspective of the “victims,”⁷ of the “poor” and their “exteriority” and their “exclusion,” has reaffirmed its relevance amid the terror of a harrowing misery that destroys a significant portion of humanity at the end of the twentieth century,⁸ together with the unsustainable environmental destruction of the Earth.

The ethics of liberation does not seek to be an ethics for a minority, nor only for exceptional times of conflict and revolution. It aspires instead to be an ethics for everyday life, from the perspective and in the interests of the *immense majority of humanity excluded by globalization* throughout the world where the current historical “normality” prevails. The philosophical ethics most in fashion, the *standard* ones, and even those that have a critical orientation with a claim to being postconventional in character, are in fact themselves the ethics of minorities (most emphatically of hegemonic, dominating minorities; those that own the resources, the words, the arguments, the capital, the armies) that frequently and quite *cynically* can ignore the victims, those most affected, who have been dominated and excluded

from the “negotiating tables” of the ruling system and from the dominant communities of communication. These are victims whose rights have not been advocated or vindicated, who go unacknowledged by the *ethos* of authenticity, who are coerced by the dominant legality, and with a claim to legitimacy that demands recognition.

In any event, *Ethics of Liberation* does not supplant my previous effort, which includes themes, explored in five volumes, that I will not repeat here.⁹ Instead my emphasis here is on updating and where necessary reformulating and radicalizing the previous work, and on developing new, more fundamental aspects of its argument, clarifying, expanding, and retracting some of its elements in response to certain critiques of its approach. But because this is deliberately a work of *synthesis*, the themes to be addressed cannot be explored in all of their detail; instead I will only outline a “process” (in six specific moments or dimensions) and *situate* the “place” of the matter dealt with within the overall architectural framework of my approach. A full analytical exposition would require much greater space than is possible in a single work of this character. The themes that are “outlined” in this fashion can be studied in greater detail in other works of mine and in the works of colleagues to whom I will refer. Only in some cases will my exposition of these cases be more detailed, when it concerns questions that I deal with for the first time.

On the other hand, I have included in this book discussions of the work of numerous contemporary philosophers of ethics. I do this not because of some kind of purism of bibliographical scientificity, but instead because my purpose is to grapple with the thinking of relevant authors in order to incorporate their contributions to the discourse of the *Ethics of Liberation*, and to pursue the logic of its approach by “bringing water to the mill” of my central arguments from other sources. Frequently, as *Ethics* seeks to produce a double effect of developing an overall architecture and of subsuming the reflections of contemporary ethicists, it may seem that we have lost our path along the way. I ask for the reader’s patience in order to discover and pursue the driving thread of the discussion that is developed through the efforts of the authors whose work is explored here. In any event, many themes remain open for further exploration and study in the future. The research program of a fully developed critical ethics is developed initially only in broad strokes; other works in the tradition of the philosophy of liberation should complete it. I hope that colleagues and students will help to fill these necessary gaps.

I would like to emphasize that when I refer in this work to the concept of the “Other” I will situate myself *always and exclusively* at the anthropological level. It is too simplistic to pretend to refute *Ethics of Liberation* by misunderstanding the theme of the Other as that of a nonphilosophical prob-

lem—by suggesting, for example, that it is theological in character, as in the case of the work of Gianni Vattimo or Ofelia Schutte. In my approach, the Other is understood as being the other woman/man: a human being, an ethical subject, whose visage is conceived of as the epiphany of living human reality in bodily form (corporeality). The approach to the concept of the Other that I rely upon in this work is exclusively a matter of rational, philosophical, and anthropological significance. In the context of *Ethics*, the only Other that could be referred to in the most absolute terms would be something like an Amazonian tribe that has never had *any contact* with any other contemporary civilization, which is a very rare phenomenon. The freedom of the Other—following in this aspect the approach of Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹⁰—cannot be an absolute unconditionality, but instead is always a quasi-unconditionality with reference or “relative” to a context, a world, a concrete reality, or a feasibility. In *Ethics* the Other will not be denominated either metaphorically or economically with the label of the “poor.” Now, inspired by Walter Benjamin, I will refer instead to the subject of *Ethics* as a “victim,” a concept that is both broader and more exact.

The Fifth Congress of the Afro-Asiatic Association of Philosophy was held in Cairo in December 1994. There we organized an International Committee of the Third World in order to deal with South-South philosophical dialogue. This book seeks to contribute to the continuation and deepening of these dialogues in the context of the twenty-first century.

It should not be forgotten that the ultimate framework or context for *Ethics* is the process of *globalization*; but, unfortunately and simultaneously, this process also necessarily implies the *exclusion* of the great majority of humanity: the victims of the world system. My reference to the current historical age as one of globalization and exclusion seeks to capture the double-edged movement that the global periphery is caught between: on the one hand, the supposed modernization occasioned by the formal globalization of finance capital (“fictitious” capital as Marx characterized it); but, on the other hand, the increasing material, discursive, and formal exclusion of the victims of this purported civilizing process. *Ethics* seeks to provide an account of this contradictory dialectic, constructing the categories and the *critical* discourse capable of enabling us to reflect in philosophical terms regarding this self-referential performative system that destroys, negates, and impoverishes so many at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The threatened destruction of the majority of humanity demands an *ethics of life* in response, and it is their suffering on such a global scale which moves me to reflection, and to seek to justify the necessity of their liberation from the chains in which they are shackled.

I presented this work as a master’s-level course at the Escuela Nacional de Estudios Profesionales (ENEP Aragón) of the National Autonomous Uni-

versity of Mexico (UNAM), for which I am grateful. I am also grateful for the support provided by the UNAM's Department of Graduate Studies. I also presented it at the Philosophy Department of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM-Iztapalapa), various portions of it in Spain (Madrid, Valencia, Murcia, Pamplona, Cadíz, the Canary Islands), as well as in Haiti, Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Brazil, the United States, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Egypt, the Philippines, among other settings. My students at the UNAM participated actively in this work, especially those who encouraged it and criticized it creatively, including Marcio Cota, Germán Gutiérrez, Silvana Rabinovich, Juan José Bautista, Pedro Enrique Ruiz, and many others. Debates with Karl-Otto Apel, Paul Ricoeur, Gianni Vattimo, Richard Rorty, Franz Hinkelammert, and others preceded and accompanied the writing of this book. I am very grateful for the corrections to the text made by my friends Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, Eduardo Mendieta, Michael Barber, Hans Schelkshorn, Mariano Moreno, and James Marsh. Last, I want to express publicly my acknowledgment of two institutions, the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and Mexico's National System of Researchers, because the research that made this book possible is the fruit of the support provided to me as professor of the faculty of the university and as a member of Level 3 of the National System of Researchers.

Introduction

World History of Ethical Systems

[1] This introduction is neither an anecdotal description nor a simple history. It is instead a proposal with philosophical intent,¹ in which the historical *contents* of “ethical systems” are analyzed following a historical sequence that in some way, and always partially, conditions *ethical material and formal moral* levels² as well as ethical criticism (which in turn has *negative* and *positive* aspects).³ Empirically, neither in the present, nor in Europe, nor in the United States,⁴ is an absolutely postconventional morality possible.

I will try only to “situate” the ethical problematic within a global horizon, in order to remove it from the traditional interpretation that has been merely Hellenic- or Eurocentric, in order to open up the discussion beyond contemporary Euro-North American philosophical ethics. The entire discussion is merely indicative—neither exhaustive nor even sufficient—in order to show how we might expand our questioning toward broader panoramas of “globalism.”⁵

The content of a cultural ethical life should not be confused with philosophical formalism⁶ as such and insofar as it is taken as the method that originated in Greece (although with acknowledged antecedents in Egypt and with parallel processes in India and China). The contents of Greek culture should not, therefore, be identified with philosophy formally or as such. Mythical texts⁷ such as those of Homer or Hesiod can be studied as philosophical examples, taking notice of their contents of ethical life, while other narratives, such as that of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, Semitic or Hebrew texts, the Upanishads, or those by Lao Tzu, are discarded because they are not formally philosophical (ignoring them as mere mythical, literary, religious, or artistic examples). It is not generally noted that the prop-

erly philosophical aspect of Greek thought is not the mythical expression of the “immortal soul” or the “eternity” and “divinity” of the *physis*, but instead the formal philosophical method, because the Hellenic “immortal soul” and the Egyptian Osiris’s “resurrection of the flesh” are both cultural propositions of *contents* of ethical life, which may, or may not, be treated philosophically, but which are not intrinsically philosophical. For this reason we can broach here “philosophically” mythical texts of all the cultures of the history of humanity, which are of great importance for the interpretation of the ethical contents of contemporary ethical life (and which will have, in addition, pertinence to the formal development of ethics itself).

[2] This is to say, time was needed in order to be able to reach a degree of civilizing complexity sufficient to allow the “ethics systems” and “moral aspect” to achieve levels of more abstract *universality*,⁸ and to arrive in this way to evolutionary and growing levels of *criticism*. The historical evolution of the “interregional system,” which I want to describe in four stages (see table 1), is not a mere complementary example. It constitutes a central thesis: the “ethical lives” of humanity develop around and out of an Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean system,⁹ which from the sixteenth century becomes, for the first time, a “world system.” On the other hand, the maturation of these ethical lives slowly reached levels of sufficient development to allow an “ethics” that was increasingly aware of its universality (from the Egyptian-Mesopotamian period up through the second scholastic period of the sixteenth century with Francisco Vitoria, in the eighteenth century with Kant, and in the twentieth century with Apel or Habermas), and, at the same time, “ethical-critical” categories of great radicalism (from those mythically developed from the period of slavery in Egypt and the Hammurabian ethics of justice, up to Bartolomé de las Casas in the sixteenth century, Marx in the nineteenth, and the ethics of liberation today).

[3] In my interpretation,¹⁰ the first moment of a history of ethical historical systems occurs in the area between the north of Africa and the Middle East (Egypt and Mesopotamia), in what I call stage I of the interregional system (§I.1), which will have a profound later impact. In an uninterrupted form, for more than fifty centuries, a particular content of ethical life would, in some way, survive up to the end of the twentieth century. During this time, the ethical-critical categories that I want to formalize had already begun to gestate materially.¹¹ Continuing toward the East, across the Pacific Ocean, in the *extreme orient of the Orient*, we arrive at a disconnected fragment of the Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean interregional system: the Amerindian high cultures, which ought to be an extension of the interregional system (not in the Neolithic, but in the Paleolithic)—this is their place in the history of humanity (§I.2). The second moment in the history of ethical systems, a new stage in the Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean system (§I.3), unfolded among the peoples of the Euro-Asiatic steppes, who used

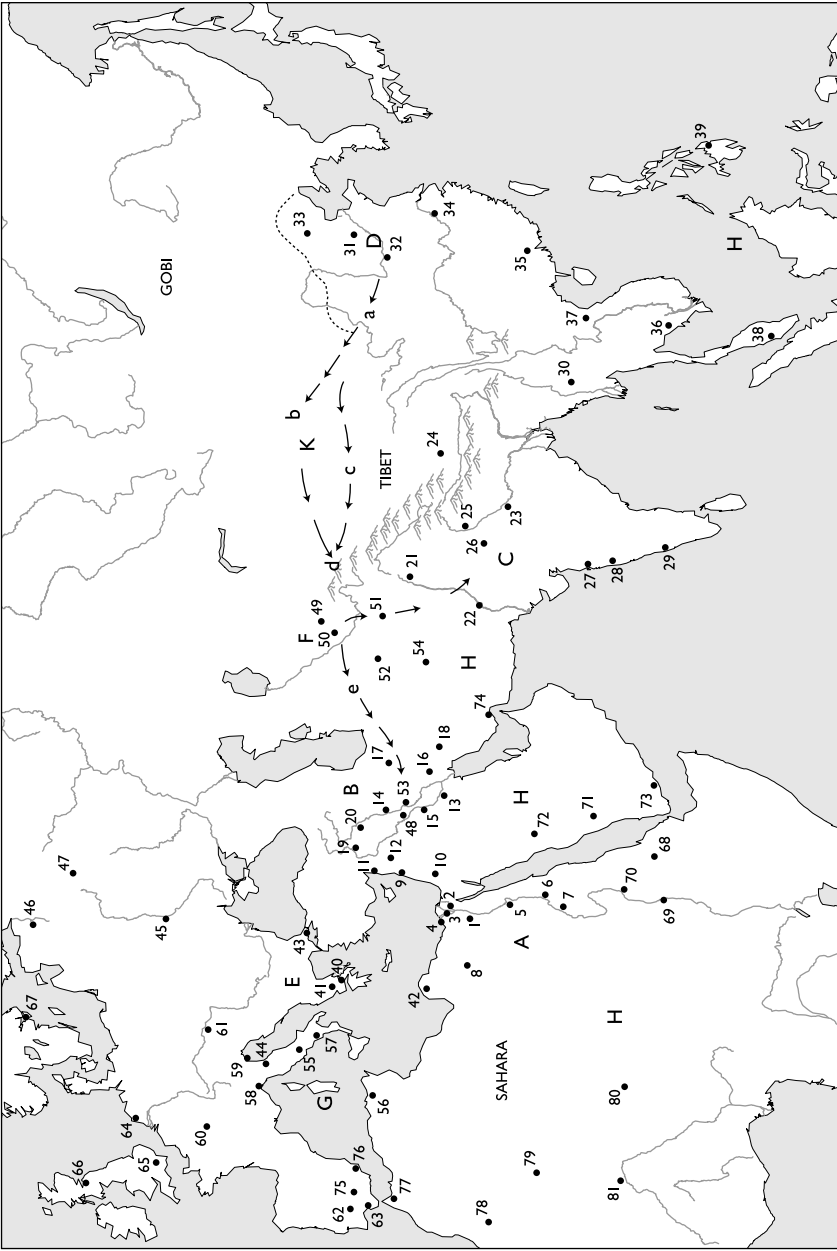
Table 1. The Four Stages of the Interregional System That Unfolded as a World System after 1492

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Diachronic Name of the Interregional System</i>	<i>Poles around a Center^a</i>
I	Egyptian-Mesopotamian (from 4th millennium BC): §I.1	Without center: Egypt and Mesopotamia
II	“Indo-European” (from 200 BC): §I.3	Center: Persian region, Hellenic world (Seleucid and Ptolemaic) from 4th century BC Eastern extreme: China Southeastern: Indian kingdoms Western: Mediterranean new world
III	Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean (from 4th century AD): §I.4	Center of commercial connections: Persian region and Tarim, then the Muslim world (from 7th century AD) Productive center: China Southwestern: Bantu Africa Western: Byzantine-Russian world Extreme West: Western Europe
IV	“World system”: §I.5–6	Center: Western Europe. Today, United States (after AD 1492) and Japan (from 1945 to 1989 with Russia) Periphery: Latin America, Bantu Africa, Muslim world, India, Southwestern Asia, Eastern Europe Semiautonomous: China and Russia (from 1989)

a. The “center” is only a zone of contacts in stages II and III; in stage IV it is the proper “center” of a periphery (Modernity).

to be called Indo-Europeans (and who originated in the region to the north of the Black Sea, the Caucasian mountains, and the Caspian Sea as far as Mongolia). In a third stage (§I.4), we find ourselves with an interregional system hegemonized by the Muslim world. This system occupied the “central” region where the different poles of the system connected: China (the first pole, in the Northeast); India (the second pole, in the Southeast); and the Byzantine Empire and Russia, which served as a wall bounding this regional culture, which was secondary and peripheral to Latino-Germanic Europe (the third pole, to the West). Slowly, from the seventh century AD, the Muslim ethos spread from the center (to Spain and Marruecos in the Atlantic and as far as Mindanao in the Pacific; see map 1).

This way of interpreting history prepares us for an understanding of



Map 1. Relevant cities of the Asian/Afro-Mediterranean system in different periods.

- A. *Egypt and Eastern Mediterranean*: (1) Memphis, (2) Heliopolis, (3) Sais, (4) Alexandria (E), (5) Abydos (Thinis), (6) Thebes, (7) Elephantine, (8) Ammonion (Temple of Amon), (9) Sidon, (10) Jerusalem, (11) Antioch, (12) Aleppo (H)
- B. *Mesopotamia and Persia*: (13) Ur, (14) Assur, (15) Babylon, (16) Susa, (17) Ecbatana, (18) Persepolis, (19) Edessa, (20) Nisibis
- C. *India*: (21) Harappa, (22) Mohenjo-Daro, (23) Benares, (24) Lhasa, (25) Delhi (H), (26) Agra (H), (27) Bombay, (28) Goa (G), (29) Calcutta, (30) Pagan
- D. *China and the Asiatic Southeast*: (31) Anyang, (32) Loyang, (33) Peking, (34) Nanking, (35) Canton (G), (36) Angkor, (37) Hanoi, (38) Malaya (H), (39) Mindanao (H)
- E. *Part of the Greek Culture*: (40) Athens, (41) Thebes, (42) Cyrene, (43) Byzantium, (44) Ravenna, (45) Kiev, (46) Novgorod, (47) Moscow
- F. *Center of the Ancient System*: (48) Seleucia (E), (49) Samarkand (H), (50) Bukhara (H), (51) Kabul (H), (52) Tus (H), (53) Baghdad (H), (54) Seistan (H)
- G. *Latin-Germanic World*: (55) Rome, (56) Hippo, (57) Naples, (58) Genoa, (59) Venice (E), (60) Paris, (61) Vienna, (62) Seville (H), (63) Cadiz (A, H), (64) Amsterdam, (65) London, (66) Edinburgh, (67) Stockholm
- H. *Part of the Ethiopian-Muslim World*: (68) Aksum, (69) Khartum, (70) Meroe, (71) Mecca, (72) Medina, (73) Aden, (74) Hormuz, (75) Cordoba (G), (76) Granada (G), (77) Ceuta, (78) Marrakesh, (79) Taza, (80) Agades, (81) Timbuktu
- K. *The Silk Route*: (a) China, (b) Zungaria, (c) Tarim, (d) Turan, (e) Juzjan

NOTE: A capital letter in parentheses (e.g., A, E, G, H) indicates that the city also belonged during some other period to another ethos or culture (e.g., Alexandria [A4], Seleucia [F48], and Venice [G59] were also of Greek culture, indicated by E; Aleppo [A12], and Samarkand [F49] were also Muslim, indicated by H).

the phenomenon of “Modernity” from another historical horizon, which allows us with full awareness to criticize the ideological periodization of history as ancient, medieval, and modern history, a view that is naively Hellenocentric and Eurocentric.

§I.1. Origin of the Interregional System: Afro-Bantu Egypt and the Semites of the Middle East

[4] I will situate myself in the most ancient of the life worlds that has relevance for our theme.¹² Against custom, I will not set out from Greece¹³ (since my view is not Hellenocentric), because what will after be known as classical Greece was in the fourth millennium BC a barbarian world, peripheral, colonial, and western merely with respect to the east of the Mediterranean, which, from the Nile to the Tigris, constituted a nuclear civilizing “system” of this region of union between Africa and Asia.¹⁴

The black, *Bantu African* world (*kmt* in Egyptian), today to the south of the Sahara, is one of the origins of Egyptian culture—one of the columns of the Neolithic revolution.¹⁵ In the eighth millennium BC the then-humid Sahara was crossed by rivers and was inhabited by numerous Bantu farmers. From the sixth millennium, when the process of the drying up of the rivers and desertification began,¹⁶ many Bantu peoples emigrated toward the Nile. (The cultural influence of the regions east of the Nile will come much later.) High Egyptian culture has deep and numerous roots in Upper Egypt. Great tombs can be found from the fifth millennium BC, between the second and third fall in the Sudan. The concept of divine monarchy “is found among the peoples of central and southern Africa, and even in the south of Ethiopia.”¹⁷ The Bantu peoples who were inhabitants of Upper Egypt unified the region of the Nile from the South. For this reason theirs were the first centers of the fourth millennium BC.¹⁸ These (probably next to Abydos), and later Thebes, are all found in the “black” South.¹⁹ The pharaoh of the Second Dynasty, Aha, established the city of Memphis in the Nile delta, where the capital of the ancient empire would be located in 2800 BC. In the city of Heliopolis, theogonies began to be rationalized in the schools of the sages (as in the *edduba* of Mesopotamia, the much later academy of Plato, and the Calmecac in Mexico): in the beginning there were the primordial waters (Nun), from where there emerged Atum-Re (the sun), which shaped the Air (Shu) and Fire (Tefnut), from which came the Earth (Geb) and the Sky (Nut). All of this took place two thousand years before the pre-Socratics—or Jaspers’s “Axial Age” (*Achsenzeit*). In Hermopolis, Thot (or Tautes, Hermes, etc.) was the creator-organizer²⁰ of a new “rationalization”; Ptah (the god of Memphis)²¹ was now the universal creator, but this creation issued from his Heart (Horus) and through

the medium of language, the word, *logos*,²² *nous*: Thot,²³ who creates everything out of wisdom, is therefore before the creation of the universe.

[5] Thot (a person and a god, like the Quetzalcóatl of the Nahuas) was also the wise inventor of writing, of the sciences, of wisdom. Plato wrote, "The story is that in the region of Naucratis in Egypt there dwelt one of the old gods of the country, the god to whom the bird called Ibis is sacred, his own name being Theuth. He it was who invented number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing. Now the king of the whole country at that time was Thamus."²⁴

Aristotle himself acknowledges, like Plato in the *Republic* (in which Plato describes an Egyptian town in ideal terms, following his trip to Sais, the great metropolis of Athens in the delta of the Nile), that the Egyptian sages were the originators of the wisdom of the Greeks themselves:²⁵ "Hence when all the discoveries of this were fully developed, the sciences which relate neither to pleasure nor yet to the necessities of life were invented, and first in those places where men had leisure [*eskhólasan*]. Thus the mathematical sciences originated in the neighborhood of Egypt,²⁶ because there the priestly class was allowed leisure [*skholázein*]."²⁷

The cosmos and humanity have an order or universal law: *Maat*, which is "truth" or universal "natural law" in a practical sense. "*Maat* was the key to the Egyptian view of ethical behavior. . . . *Maat* is right order in nature and society, as established by the act of creation, and hence means, according to the context, what is right, what is correct, law, order, justice, and truth. *Maat* was a guide to the correct attitude one should take to others."²⁸

I point to all of this in order to begin to break with the Hellenocentric perspective. Indeed, the daily life of Egypt was woven around the cult of its dead and the ancestors, who came from the South, of the Bantu and black peoples. The culmination of this ethical life was already found in the Egyptian high culture of the fourth millennium BC, when life was organized around such a cult. The "affirmation of life" went through one of its possible paths:²⁹ earthly life is valuable, and so is corporeality; for this reason the dead reassume corporeality (resurrects)³⁰ after empirical death, in order to no longer die. The individual principle of the person (*Ka*),³¹ which is written with a proper, unique name ("singularity" [*Einzelheit*]: "Osiris N"), survives death. The "flesh" is valuable, has meaning; it is mummified, it is perfumed, and resurrects for all eternity. All of this opens up a horizon of concrete ethical norms of great carnal, historical, communitarian positivity. Facing the final judgment, the person, the Ka, says, "I have not done falsehood against men. . . . I have not made hungry. . . . I have not laid anything upon the weights of the hand balance. . . . I have not been rapacious. . . . I have not destroyed food supplies. . . . I have propitiated God with what he desires; I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to

the naked and a boat to him who was boatless. . . . ‘You have caused him to come,’ say they about me. ‘Who are you?’ they say to me.”³² Concrete, individual human existence, with its *own name*, responsibly lived and historically open to the light of judgment³³ of Osiris,³⁴ constitutes the real “carnality” (in its materiality)³⁵ of the life of the human subject as supreme ethical reference: to feed, to give to drink, to clothe, to house . . . the hungering, thirsty, naked, flesh abandoned to the inclemency of weather.³⁶

[6] First Bantu Africa, then the Egyptian Mediterranean, and now another creative center of ethical life appeared—the Sumerian, Mesopotamian, Semitic world—which made up the second cultural column. In the eighth millennium BC in Anatolia,³⁷ and afterward, in the fourth millennium BC, in cities such as Uruk, Lagash, Kish, and Ur, an ethical life was born that was rationalized in legal codes that reached Uruinimgina (reigned 2352–2342 BC)³⁸ and Gudea (reigned 2144–2124 BC). These constituted an impressive development: the codes always included laws in favor of the weak, poor, and foreigners. In the Hammurabi Code (Hammurabi lived 1792–1750 BC),³⁹ in force in antiquity, we read: “At that time, Anu and Bel called me, Hammurabi, the exalted prince, the worshiper of the gods, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the poor.”⁴⁰ It would be worth doing a commentary on this magnificent code (ethical procedural), where judges and witnesses in the midst of a world full of anomie, pillage, brutality, and injustice guarantee justice and hereditary property. For this reason, the legislator can announce in the epilogue “that the strong might not oppose the poor, and that they should give justice to the orphan and the widow,⁴¹ in Babylon, the city whose turrets Anu and Bel raised.⁴² Let any oppressed man, who has a cause, come before my image as king of righteousness! Let him read the inscription on my monument!”⁴³ I want to make it very clear that an ethics of the fulfillment of the needs (food, drink, cloth, habitat . . .) of life affirms the unitary dignity of the ethical-corporeal subject. The ethical-mythical nucleus of the resurrection of the flesh makes carnality positive, and real needs become ethical and critical criteria—which transcend the concrete Babylonian ethical life, and that for that reason they are also applied to the “exteriority,” with respect to the “foreigner,” for example.

[7] Between Mesopotamia and Egypt there is an intermediary zone, that of the Aramaic, Phoenician, Punic, Hebrew, and Moabite peoples. They had the advantage of being able to compare the concrete ethical conceptions of both high cultures, and to produce an extremely critical symbiosis. The Phoenicians launched themselves upon the sea and reached Greece (Kadmos, son of Agenor, and his sister Europe, both Phoenicians, were the founders of Thebes), to the north of Africa (Carthage was one

of its colonies), and to Spain. In addition, I should mention the 'Apiru (Hebrews),⁴⁴ in the time of the reign of the kingdom of Amarna, under Egyptian hegemony. The 'Apiru were mercenaries, illegals, fugitives, refugees, semibarbarians, and farmers in the mountains of Palestine, and prone to rebellion, who struggled for their autonomy and organized into tribes (according to the model of retribalization). In other words, the heroic narrative told in Exodus is not situated historically in mythical Egypt,⁴⁵ but in Palestine; it would consist of a movement of semislaves, under the domination of the Philistines (Indo-Europeans, masters of iron) of Amarna, who liberated themselves in the thirteenth century BC: "Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines which was at Geba; and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying 'Let the Hebrews hear.'" ⁴⁶

[8] In this way there began a slave struggle for liberation that will become epic in the mythical narrative of Moses,⁴⁷ which can be treated rationally and philosophically as a specific "model of praxis" in the global history of concrete systems of ethical life. We should then read with new eyes a quasi-symbolic text, such as this: "And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they made the people of Israel serve [*'avodah*] with rigor, and made their lives bitter with hard service [*'avodot*], in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of works [*'avodot*], in the field."⁴⁸ This text concerns the point of departure of an "ethical-critical paradigm": the slaves (dominated victims, or excluded persons), through a diachronic process of struggle, will reach political, economic, cultural liberation in a "promised land." This group leans toward a future utopia, in the midst of the crisis of the Egyptian-Mesopotamian interregional system.⁴⁹ The posterior rereading of this text, through the centuries, establishes a type of specific liberating rationality in planetary history, which I seek to *formalize* philosophically.

We can conclude that the systems of ethical life of the interregional system in its first stage, though of great complexity and maturity, did not formulate theoretical ethical systems that still justify great empires.

§I.2. Cultures without Direct Links to the System: The Mesoamerican and Inca Worlds

[9] Here we should deal with India (the third column of the Neolithic revolution,⁵⁰ which flourished on the margins of the Indus river as far as the Punjab from 2500 BC), and China (the fourth column,⁵¹ next to the Yellow River, which originated about 2000 BC); both cultures are prior to the appearance of the horseman and the mastering of iron. In order not to overextend the discussion, I simply indicate their "place" within a general

history of the Neolithic, which moves from the west to the east—a direction contrary to Hegel's ideological proposal.

However, I will linger briefly on the originary cultures of the American continent, given that the “place” in world history of these peoples should not be situated simply in the context of the “discovery” of America (“invasion,” from the Indian perspective) by Columbus in 1492. On the contrary, such a historical place is located in the east of the Far East, more than forty thousand years ago, when the last glaciers receded, and *Homo sapiens* entered the hemisphere through Alaska, passing over the Bering Strait, and began to migrate southward in waves. The originary American inhabitants proceeded from Asia, from Siberia and the region that borders with the Pacific, as much in their races as in their languages. It is clear that in America there emerged an autonomous creative-cultural activity—I do not accept the “diffusionist” position. Nonetheless, since the Neolithic period there were frequent contacts with the Polynesians, who in their transoceanic voyages arrived at the coast of America. In any event, they did not form part of the interregional system of the Asiatic continent.

If the Euro-Asiatic steppes are an area of contact (figure 1, I), the Pacific Ocean (II) (with its Polynesian cultures) must be considered, as I have said, another area of contact. In a global vision of ethical lives, reductionistic naiveté, in the style of Alfred Weber,⁵² for instance, cannot be repeated. In the history of the *ethos*, the ethical vision of the Aztecs, Mayas, Chibchas, and Incas, at the very least, should always be included.

[10] From Alaska to Tierra del Fuego the universe is interpreted through a “dual” principle. It is not the “One” of Plotinus or Lao Tzu,⁵³ but the “Two” of the *tlamatinime*:⁵⁴ the Ométeotl of the Aztecs,⁵⁵ the she/he Alom-Qaholom (Mother/Father) of the Mayas, the she/he Tocapo-Imaymana Viracocha of the *amautas* among the Incas,⁵⁶ the “twins” of all the cultures from the Great Lakes and prairies of North America as far as the Caribs and Tupi-Guarani and the Alakaluf of southern Patagonia.⁵⁷ This dual principle establishes an ethical understanding that is dynamic, dialectical, but for this reason no less tragic, necessary, and entirely regulated by divine forces.

The Mesoamerican culture (Mayan-Aztec) is the fifth nucleus of high culture. In it there are many times: the “other time” prior to that of the gods, with different moments, until the birth of the Sun (product of divine immolation), which inaugurates the “time of the Sun.”⁵⁸ During the time of the sun, the “time of the human being” manifests itself only with the “fifth Sun.”⁵⁹ The human world is situated in the middle of “two spaces,” between heaven and the nether worlds (like the Dur-Anki sanctuary of Mesopotamian Nippur).⁶⁰ Divine forces, humans in their dreams,⁶¹ and the magicians with their rites, can *pass* from human space-time to “other” times (prior, simultaneous, or future) and spaces (inferior or superior). In

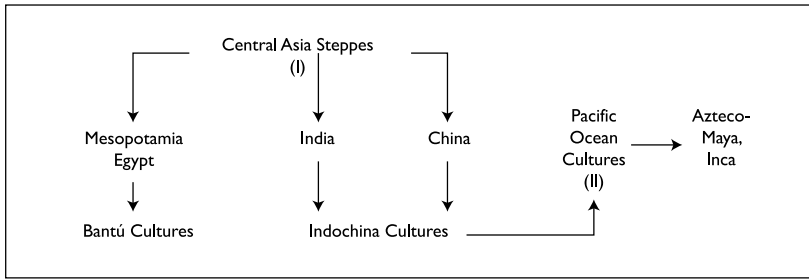


Figure 1. The great Neolithic cultures (the “six columns”) and areas of contact from west to east.

Darcy Ribeiro wrote, “What we had in mind with the design of the paradigm regarding rural rudimentary states . . . were the city-states that first reflect a fully urban life, based upon agricultural irrigation systems and collectivist socio-economic systems, prior to 4000 BC in Mesopotamia (Halaf); between 4000 and 3000 BC in Egypt (Memphis, Thebes); in India (Mohenjo Daro) around 2800 BC, before 2000 BC in China (Yang Shao, Hsia); and much later . . . in the Andean Highlands (Salinar and Gallinazo, 700 BC, and Mochica, AD 200); and in Colombia (the Chibcha or Muisca civilization, 1000 BC)” (1970, 61). Ribeiro forgot to mention the Aztec-Mayan Mesoamerican world. For instance, the Zacatenco-Copilco, next to the Tezcoco Lake (now a suburb of Mexico City), flourished in 2000 BC, but its classic age lasted from AD 300 to 900; the Yucatecan-Aztec area (Teotihuacan III was reigning in AD 700); and, from AD 400 to 800, the Tiahuanaco of the Bolivian Titicaca.

NOTE: The arrows do not indicate any necessarily direct relation among the cultures (this would be a diffusionist thesis), but they simply provide a direction in space and a posteriority in time, which in some cases may be a direct relation (as among some Polynesian and some urban Amerindian cultures).

all of these worlds with their “other” space-times dwell beings that have “bodies,” but of “light” matter, which is invisible to our human sensibility, ours being of “heavy” matter. This is a universe that is immensely more complex than the visible one, which is inhabited by gods-forces, organized, ritualized, and expressed in myths, and made into calendars. Astrology rationalizes the future; the hermeneutics of phenomena (omens) discover the meaning of the present; the theogonies (interpretations based on astronomical observations and farming cycles) or “protophilosophies” rationalize cosmic forces in relation with the social or political institutions (a type of cosmopolitanism), all with reference to “other” space-times and their mutual and corresponding “passages” toward and from the human world.

[11] In the Inca-Quechua culture (the sixth nucleus of high culture in

the extreme east of the East), the universal moral conception of the empire—ruling over hundreds of particular cultures—was expressed in a paradigmatic manner with three formal imperatives: *Ama lulla*, *Ama kella*, *Ama sua* (Thou shalt not lie, Thou shalt not cease to work, Thou shalt not steal).

The meaning of these moral demands would take us very far. In fact, they refer to a universal negation of a nongeneralizable maxim,⁶² which systematizes a practical understanding of existence. Sebastiano Sperandeo explained to me, during the holiday of the *Inti Raimi* in 1994 in Quito, that the first commandment establishes the practical requirements of the norms that regulate intersubjective relation: “*Ama lulla*” (Thou shalt not lie), rules the claim to transparent and authentic sincerity. The second commandment, “*Ama kella*” (Thou shalt not be lazy, you ought to work), includes the poietic norms with respect to cosmoecological relations—because here “work” is an activity that reproduces the universe; this commandment also indicates participation in the co-responsible reproduction of life, in order to keep death in abeyance. One must keep disciplined control and remain active. The third commandment, “*Ama sua*” (Thou shalt not steal), rules over the economic and political relations proper to the empire; it has nothing to do with private good, but instead indicates that to take possession of something not produced leads to disequilibrium, a damage, a negation (*kajta*) that must be repaired.

It is a matter of an ethical “synthesis” of a high degree of abstract moral rationality.

Among the Aztecs, to take an example, ethics (the *tlacahuapahualiztli*: “art of breeding and educating humans”) contained principles of great humanism:

Even if he were poor and lowly,
 Even if his mother and his father were the poorest of the poor . . .
 His lineage was not considered, only his way of life mattered . . .
 The purity of his heart,
 His good and humane heart . . .
 His stout heart . . .
 It was said that he had God in his heart,
 That he was wise in the things of God.⁶³

Setting out from “customs” (*huehuetlamanitiliztli*)⁶⁴—which juridically reached a high degree of precision, with codes of law and courts of justice, always among the Aztecs—the *tlamatinime* rationalized a unitary doctrine about the meaning of human, individual, and communitarian praxis.

[12] All of this deserves special study, since it constitutes the *ethos* still contemporary to millions of indigenous peoples in the Latin American continent, in the popular mestizo culture and especially among the farmers. To end this section, I would like to focus on one aspect: the ethical Nahuatl

concept of *macehual*. For the Aztecs, Quetzalcóatl had offered blood from his body in order to resurrect the bones of the fifth human race, thus giving birth to the present race of humans. In this way each human being is a “deserved” (*macehual*);⁶⁵ he or she is a being that has received her or his being gratis from the sacrifice of the Other. This “being deserving” from and by alterity puts the human being in a state of debt, but not because of a prior failure (as is the case among the “Indo-Europeans”: the *prôton kakón*, or the *Schuld* [guilt] of Kierkegaard), but instead as an originary affirmation of life that is given and received freely. In this way “macehuality” is a “mode of existence”: to live positively out of the undeserved and freely given that originate in “alterity.” Justice for the members of the community is an act of required gratefulness.

§I.3. The “Indoeuropean” World: From the Chinese to the Roman Empire

[13] Let us return to the Asiatic-African-Mediterranean continent.⁶⁶ I want to refer here to customs or ethical lives different from the Egyptian-Mesopotamian system, already noted, of stage I of the interregional system. These ethical lives are a new evolutionary stage of great complexity, of enormous heterogeneity among its components, but with a certain constant ontology that I hope to foreground: the Grounding, the Identity of all differences, the ultimate reference to the world (cosmological, anthropological, ethical) is in these cosmovisions (and even philosophies) the affirmation of an absolute horizon of the real as the “One.” In this way the affirmation of life answers to a different logic than the one already discussed in section I.1.⁶⁷ In the Euro-Asiatic steppes,⁶⁸ from Mongolia to north of the Black Sea, horse riders, at first masters of bronze and then of iron, worshippers of celestial, masculine, Uranic gods,⁶⁹ controlled from north to south the farming (related to the “mother earth”), urban peoples of the cultures of Anatolia, the Nile, the Euphrates and Tigris, from the Indus to the Yellow River.⁷⁰ They organized the first great empires, cultures, or “views of the world,” such as those of the Hindus in India, the Persians in Iran, the Greek and Romans in the Mediterranean, the Buddhists from Nepal, and by indirect influence, the Taoists and Confucianists in China.⁷¹

The fact that temporal life, between empirical birth to death, was negatively considered by these cultures has relevance for ethics. Empirical birth is a “fall” (because of a failure or fault prior to empirical birth), and empirical death is interpreted as a “birth” to true life. This leads to a negative ethical judgment of corporeality, sexuality; it is domination of the woman; negativity of plurality, of historicity, and last, the justification of all domination and exclusion of slaves, servants, farmers, “castes,” or exploited social strata. Masculine celibacy and feminine virginity are requirements and

preconditions of a “contemplative,” theoretical life, frequently escaping social and political responsibility. The victim, the poor, the excluded do not appear as interpellators within the horizon of these systems of ethical life. “Liberation” is considered exclusively as “liberation of the soul” from the prison of the body, of matter, of plurality, from pain, and the “original sin” (*próton kakón*).⁷²

[14] Let us consider Plotinus (AD 204–70), in his *Enneads*, as the representative figure of a certain type of view of the world (as *content* of ethical life). In fact, in Alexandria,⁷³ the Roman and Greek traditions converged; Antioch was the gateway to the steppes and the contacts with the “Silk Route” to China; through the Red Sea, China could be reached. If the “Indo-European” peoples had begun their expansion, thousands of years previously, from a center north of the Caspian Sea, Alexandria then became a place for something like a synthesis or confluence of these different traditions; so now the center was in the south. This city had a very central position in the Asiatic-African-Mediterranean interregional system, and the *Enneads* are something like the philosophy of that historical system.

For Plotinus, the first, absolutely ontological point of departure is the “One”: “Anything existing after the First must necessarily arise from the First . . . it must be authentically a unity . . . it may be described as transcending Being. . . . The One-First is not a body . . . the principle cannot be a thing of generation [*agénnetos*].”⁷⁴ Already centuries before, Heraclitus had declared: “When you have listened, not to me but to the Law [*Logos*], it is wise to agree that all things are one [*hén*].”⁷⁵ The originary One is the Ahura Mazda (the Wise lord) of Zoroastrianism of the Iranian Zarathustra in the times of the Persian king Darius.⁷⁶ This notion will be preserved as the positive principle of Manicheanism. One of the most ancient books of India, the *Rig Veda*, speaks to us of the One:

At first was neither Being nor Non-being . . .

There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness; of night or day there was not any sign.

The One breathed without breath, by its own impulse.

Other than that was nothing else at all.⁷⁷

Later this will be the Brahman of the Upanishads: “It is true that the *braham* is Everything.”⁷⁸ In the Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu, classic expression of Taoism, we read:

The principle [Tao] that can be expressed is not the enduring and unchanging principle. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name. (Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth. . . . Therefore the sage, in the exercise of his government, empties their minds, fills their bellies, weakens their wills, and strengthens

their bones. He constantly (tries to) keep them without knowledge and without desire, and where there are those who have knowledge, to keep them from presuming to act (on it). Where there is abstinence from action, good order is universal.⁷⁹

[15] The second moment is plurification, division (*diremption* or *Entzweiung*, as Hegel put it), and the fall of the One into multiplicity: "Multiplicity (*to plêthon*) is a falling away from the one, infinity (limitlessness) being the complete departure, an innumerable multiplicity, and this is why the unlimit is an evil and we evil at the stage of multiplicity."⁸⁰ In this way the soul of the universe, which is one, falls into a body; and the body, because it is matter, is the origin of evil in the human being.⁸¹

The body is evil, then, because it is material. Birth is "death" to the true divine life. Heraclitus himself reminds us: "Immortals are mortal, mortals are immortal: (*each*) lives the death of the other, and dies their life."⁸² It is delight, or rather death, to souls to become wet . . . we live their (*the soul's*) death, and they (*the souls*) live our death."⁸³ For Plato similarly, the "soul" of the world is more ancient than the body;⁸⁴ the soul "was not born [*agéneton*],"⁸⁵ it is immortal⁸⁶ and eternal.⁸⁷ Empirical birth is a "fall" into a "body [*sôma*]"⁸⁸ that is a "prison [*sêma*]."⁸⁹

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, part of the great poem *Mahabharata*, we read: "Finite, they say, are these [our] bodies [indwelt] by an eternal embodied [self] — [for this self is] indestructible, incommensurable. Therefore fight, oh, Bharata. Who thinks this [self] can be a slayer, who thinks that it can be slain, both these have no [right] knowledge: it does not slay nor is it slain. Never is it born nor dies; never did it come to be nor will it ever come to be again: unborn, eternal, everlasting is this [self], primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain."⁹⁰

For Buddha, similarly, plurality, corporeality, the I as singularity, are the origin of suffering that must be overcome: "This is the truth of the cause of pain: that craving which leads to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, namely the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for existence, the craving for nonexistence."⁹¹ To "want," "love," "desire" fixes one to plurality and prevents the return to the one of being. One must not love anything!

For Mani, the prophet of Sasanidan Iran, the body is the participation in the perverse principle (*Ahriman*): "Then Adam looked at himself and cried. He raised his powerful cry like the roar of a lion, pulled at his hair, beat his chest and exclaimed: cursed be they who have shaped my body, they who have chained my soul; cursed be they the rebellious ones who have enslaved me!"⁹² Anthropological dualism, with its corresponding contempt for the body, sensibility, the passions, and sexuality will later penetrate the Gnostic-Roman traditions, Latin Manicheanism, the Albigensians and Cathars, until it culminates with Descartes and Kant.⁹³ The liberation of

woman takes into account this long history of the life worlds in order to develop a new position.

[16] In a third moment, from the prison of the body, ethics is an ascetic ascent, a negation of the negation.

Plotinus explains in the following way the point of departure: "In the intellectual, then, they [individual souls] remain with the All-Soul, and are immune from care and trouble. . . . This state long maintained, the soul is a deserter from the totality; its differentiation has severed it; its vision is no longer set in the intelligible; it is a partial thing, isolated, weakened, full of care, intent upon the fragment, severed from the whole, it nestles in one form of being."⁹⁴ Ethics, that is to say, is now in its entirety an ascending "return" toward the One (*Enneads*, II, 9, 6).⁹⁵

This act of return is the *dialektiké* of the ascent toward the Idea of the Good in Plato, the *bios theoretikós* of the exercise of the *noûs* in Aristotle,⁹⁶ the *apátheia* of the Stoics, and the *atharaxia* of Epicurus,⁹⁷ the *gnosis* of the Gnostics, the "wisdom" of the Manichean monks, the final *ecstasies* of the Buddhist monk by means of which he is freed from samsara (eternal return to the *ensomatosís* [incorporealization] or recorporealization of the soul)⁹⁸ into the state of nirvana, and the *vita contemplativa* as human perfection in the Latin medieval. Plotinus writes: "The purification consists in isolating the soul, not leaving her to join the things⁹⁹; not to look at them any more; not to have any more strange opinions to his (divine) nature. As for the separation (the ecstasy) it is the condition state of the soul that one does not find any more in the body, as the light that one does not find already in the gloom."¹⁰⁰

It is thus that from Greece and Rome to the Persians, from the empires of India and Taoist China, an ontology of the absolute as One, a dualist anthropology of the superiority of the soul over the body (which is always in some way the cause of evil), establishes an ascetic ethics of "liberation" from material plurality as a "return" to the originary one. This is the movement of Neoplatonic ontology, and later of German idealism, especially of Hegel's *Logic*.¹⁰¹ This is the logic-ethics of the Totality.

[17] Empirical death is, for this ethical view of the world, the "birth" to true life. Earthly life is a time negated by pain and suffering. To deserve a death that liberates the human being from the "eternal recurrence" of reincorporealization it is necessary to fulfill the "natural law" (*physikón nómon*), to live in accordance with the "order," with the institutions, such as those of the "castes," with the established ethical order, with the status quo. Confucius wrote:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they

first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.¹⁰²

This is a formal morality that consolidates the existing ethics; it justifies institutionality, political organization, the economy, pedagogy, and domination in the genders (of the male over the female). There is no principle of materiality or negativity that can subvert the “order” in the name of the victims, the poor, exploited, or excluded. Thus, in a bureaucratically institutionalized China run by mandarins with a Confucian ethics, the Celestial Empire of the Rising Sun will not have any internal contradictions that may launch it toward new moments of future ethical life. The eternal return of the “Same.” At the end of the twentieth century other relevant currents have developed out of these traditions. In these “ethical paradigms” is formulated a respect for life on earth, especially in the Hindu ethical life, an ontological *ecophilia* (point of departure for ecology) from which we can still learn a lot.

One last reflection. Was it not the case that this second stage of the interregional system, of intense institutionalization (thanks to the horse and to iron) and of growing domination, produced an immense social and economic stratum, an entire world of victims, oppressed, impoverished farmers, marginalized and poor (what Toynbee called, with too much ambiguity, the internal and external proletariat), who will end up rebelling against their condition of slavery and humiliation, brandishing a critical ethics that advocated the transformation, the dignity of the ethical subject, and justice? Was not this perhaps the reason for the proposal of primitive Buddhism (against the system of Hindu castes),¹⁰³ of Christianity and Islam?

§I.4. The Byzantine World, Muslim Hegemony, and the East: The European Medieval Periphery

[18] We will now study stage III of the interregional system of the Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean continent.¹⁰⁴ If we place ourselves in the year 300 BC, in the previous stage of the system, we could contemplate the dy-

nasty of the western Tsin (AD 265–317) in China, fully Confucian, and with the will to dominate the entrance to the Silk Route to the West. We would also see transition from the Sakas to the Gupa in India;¹⁰⁵ a Sasanida Persian empire with Sapor II (AD 309–79); a decadent Rome in the time of Diocletian—besieged by the Germans. In any event, the Indo-European ontology and the dualist ethical life were firmly established in stage II of the interregional system.¹⁰⁶

The fundamental event of stage III of the interregional system (which imposed itself hegemonically in the “central” regions from the fourth century AD onward and lasted until 1492) consisted of a profound transformation of the ethical-mythical nucleus itself (that is to say, the hegemonic validity of its ethical-critical categories). The view of the world in the first stage of the interregional system, the Egyptian-Mesopotamian-Semitic one, made itself present again, although bringing about by itself an expansive universalizing development (through Christianity as well as Islam), perhaps, as noted above, because of the unbearable situation of the oppressed of the empires. The ethical critique by the small, oppressed, and enslaved people under the power of those who dominated the techniques of war and agriculture, with horse and iron (the Philistines and their symbolic warrior Qoliat, in the times of Amarna) was reformulated in a peripheral region of the Roman empire, propitious for exploited and excluded ones. The Oriental Roman and Hellenic world (the Greek-Macedonian, the Seleucid, and Ptolemaic) became the Byzantine world; the Persian world and the north of Africa (at that time already Christianized) became Muslim. Since the region of the Turan Tarim¹⁰⁷ is the key to the “contacts” of the entire Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean system, whoever controlled this geographical horizon also controlled the totality of the entire commerce of the “system.” First it was the Persians, for a short time the Byzantines, and finally the Muslims (Arabs, Turks, and Mongolians). This “central” region of the system was replaced only in the fifteenth century, by the Hispanic Atlantic (with the development of the first “world system,” as we will see). Western Germanic continental Europe remained isolated from the seventh century AD with the Muslim expansion. It is this “continentalization” of the center of Europe and even of the Latin Mediterranean, without contact with the “center” of the interregional system, that appears, in a merely Eurocentric and provisional perspective, under the name of the “Middle Ages.”

[19] The Semitic “ethos” (Jewish, Christian [never European], and Muslim, all of which originated around the Syrian-Arabic dessert, from Palestine to Mecca) began to occupy a strategic position.¹⁰⁸ Centuries later, during the maturity of the third stage of the interregional system, Maimonides, the great Jewish intellectual of the caliphate of Hispanic Cordoba (who died in Cairo in 1204) wrote:

Inasmuch as the Christian community came to include those communities [the Greeks and the Syrians], the Christian preaching being what is known to be, and inasmuch as the opinions of the [Platonic] philosophers were widely accepted in those communities in which philosophy had arisen, and inasmuch as a king rose who protected religion—the learned of those periods . . . saw that those preachings are greatly and clearly opposed to the philosophic opinions. Thus there arose among them this science of *kalâm* [interpretation]. They started to establish premises that would be useful to them with regard to their belief and to refute those opinions that ruined the foundations of their Law. When thereupon the community of Islam arrived and the books of the [Aristotelian] philosophers were transmitted to it, then were also transmitted to it those refutations composed [by the Greek Fathers] against the books of the [Platonic] philosophers. . . . There is no doubt that there are things that are common to all *three of us*, I mean the *Jews, the Christians, and the Moslems*: namely, the affirmation of the temporal creation of the world.¹⁰⁹

In the crisis of the Roman Empire—invasion by the Germans from the outside, and characterized by increasing slavery and exploitation of the masses within—from its Oriental-Greek region (which has nothing to do with the future “Western” culture), a critical ethics that originated from the victims, the poor, the excluded, and the slaves themselves¹¹⁰ gained strength among those marginal and oppressed groups. The ethical criteria already formulated, among many others and contradictorily, by Egyptians and Babylonians develops with clarity: human “corporeal carnality” (*basar* in Hebrew, *sárx* in Greek)¹¹¹ and not the Indo-European soul, is the ultimate reference: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me.”¹¹² Carnal corporeality and its *needs* (hunger, thirst, homelessness, nakedness, illness . . .) as criteria, and the *community* as economic intersubjective instance, constitute what is relevant: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers. . . . And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.”¹¹³

[20] This experience will be reread for centuries, always awakening a utopian *yearning*, a “principle of hope” (well analyzed by Ernst Bloch).¹¹⁴ These criteria, categories, and principles, expressed by a mythical reason, unleash a process of growing rationalization and of continual hermeneutical rereadings. We can see it centuries later, in texts such as that of the *Koran*, in the most ancient *shuratas* of Mecca: “Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter? And find you lost and guide you? And find you in want and make you to be free from want? Therefore, as for the orphan, do not oppress

him. And as for him who asks, do not chide him.”¹¹⁵ This is an ethics of the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the barbarians.

Tatian, in his *Address to the Greeks* (AD 170–72) writes: “Be not, O Greeks, so very hostilely disposed towards the Barbarians, nor look with ill will on their opinions. For which of your institutions has not been derived from the Barbarians. . . . To the Babylonians you owe astronomy; to the Persians, magic; to the Egyptians, geometry; to the Phoenicians, instruction by alphabetic writing. Cease, then, to miscall these imitations [*mimésis*] inventions [*euréseis*] of your own.”¹¹⁶ We cannot leave untranscribed the following text, filled with naiveté and enthusiasm, which adheres to the new critical ethics of existence:

But with us there is no desire of vainglory. . . . Not only do the rich among us pursue our philosophy [*filosofousi*], but the poor enjoy free instruction; for the things which come from God surpass the requital of worldly gifts . . . for I do not attempt, as is the custom with many, to strengthen my own views by the opinion of others, but I wish to give you a distinct account of what I myself have seen and felt. So, bidding farewell to the arrogance of Romans and the idle talk of Athenians, and all their ill-connected opinions, I embraced our barbaric philosophy [*barbárou filosofías*]. . . . These things, O Greeks, I Tatian, a disciple of the barbarian philosophy, have composed for you. I was born in the land of the Assyrians, having been first instructed in your doctrines, and afterwards in those which I now undertake to proclaim. . . . I present myself to you prepared for an examination [*anákrisin*]¹¹⁷ concerning my doctrines.¹¹⁸

It should come as no surprise, then, that Justin, a Palestinian philosopher, affirmed carnal corporeality (from the ancient myth of Osiris of the “resurrection of the flesh”) against the “immortality of the soul”: “Plato affirms . . . that the soul is immortal [*athanaton*], because if it is immortal it is clear that it must be uncreated [*agenetos*] . . . , while [we opine] that the soul dies.”¹¹⁹ The origin of this ethical understanding is African, Oriental, Asiatic, and has nothing to do with Europe or the West!¹²⁰

[21] In AD 330, Constantinople was founded, which centuries later would have a million inhabitants. In the year 425 the university was organized (with ten chairs in Latin and Greek language, others of rhetoric, one of philosophy, several of theology, and two of law).¹²¹ The Greek church fathers juxtaposed theology as wisdom to Greek philosophy as *theological* wisdom.

With Heraclius (AD 610–41), the Byzantines recovered all of Mesopotamia. In the year 1203, through treason, the Crusaders occupied Byzantium. Until 1453, Byzantium was the wall that held back the Turks from the Latino-German Europe (the extreme West, without geopolitical importance until that moment).

In AD 860, northerners swept down from the Baltic, traveling along rivers as far as the Black Sea, until they reached the walls of Byzantium. Thus was born Russian culture, from Kiev to Smolensk and Novgorov; the nation was occupied by the Mongolians in 1237, and only in 1480, with the Moscow of Ivan II the Great, did Russia defeat the Golden Horde, thus beginning its expansion in the sixteenth century across the frozen tundra of the North toward the Pacific. Thus was constituted the Russian empire of the Tsars.

The Semitic world of the Arabs of the desert,¹²² thanks to Mohammed (his escape to Mecca took place in the year AD 622/1 AH), expanded rapidly through the pacified Byzantine Empire—and for this reason without great resistance. Bostra was conquered in 634, Jerusalem in 637, Alexandria in 643; the Muslim invasion of Spain took place in 711 and reached Pontier in 732. From the Indus valley to north of the Pyrenees, including the Balearic Islands, Sicily, and Crete—with a Muslim presence also in Corsica and Sardinia, in the Adriatic and the south of Italy—Islam dominated the Mediterranean. With the Oamyades caliphates (661–750), first, the Abbasids (750–1258) and, later, Abderraman (from 800) in Cordoba, the center of the Asiatic-African-Mediterranean interregional system would be reconstituted for approximately five hundred years; these were the times of glory for the intercontinental capital, Baghdad, founded in 762 and taken by the Mongols in 1258.¹²³

[22] Everything, or almost everything, that someone like Max Weber labeled the European medieval or Renaissance “internal” factors in the genesis of Modernity, had been accomplished with resources from the Muslim world, centuries earlier. Ferdinand Braudel tells us that the letters of a Jewish merchant in Cairo (1095–99) demonstrate that the Muslims already knew about “every method of credit and payment, and every form of trade association (disproving the too facile belief that these were invented later by the Italians).”¹²⁴ An extensive economic network of markets existed, with monetary instruments that allow the management of stage III of the interregional system. Agricultural products were commercialized (a hundred thousand camels were used only for the commerce in fruit products); this led to the milling of cereals (there were water and wind mills already in the year 947 in Seistan, a city near the Indus River, while in Basrah the current of the Tigris was used to move wheels of floating mills).¹²⁵ The Muslim caravans that linked China and India with the Mediterranean were made of up to six thousand camels. All of this gave impetus to several industries. The carpets of Bukhara used the Hindu blue or red dyes that came from India passing through Kabul, ending up in Morocco and Marrakesh. Coral from the north of Africa made it to India; slaves bought in Ethiopia, iron brought from India, along with pepper and spices were distributed through the entire “system.” Sugar cane and cotton from

the Asiatic Southeast, and the silkworm, paper, and compass from China, were other products of the market. Indian numbers (later called "Arabic," with zero) and gunpowder also came from India. In Cordoba, the caliph Al-Hakan II (961–76) had as many as 400,000 manuscripts (and forty-four volumes of catalogues), while Charles V of France (son of John the Good) had only 900 manuscripts during the same period.

The vizier of Khorasan, at the beginning of the tenth century, sent "missions to all the countries to ask for copies of the customs of all the Courts and all the ministries, in the Greek empire, in Turkestan, in China, in Iraq, in Syria, in Egypt, in Zenjan [India], Zabol, and Kabul. . . . He studied them carefully and selected those he judged best to enforce on the court and administration of Bukhara."¹²⁶

In science, the advance was even greater. In the year 820 a treatise of algebra by Mohamet Ibn-Musa was published (which, translated in Europe in the sixteenth century, meant an advance in the mathematics of the time). In optics, astronomy, chemistry, pharmaceutics, and medicine, the Muslim world was about four hundred years ahead of peripheral Europe.

[23] I want to touch last on my theme. In its ethical view of existence, the Muslim experience is Semitic (and for that reason, although there are novelties, it still moves within the Egyptian-Mesopotamian, Jewish, or Christian tradition).¹²⁷ With respect to *falasifa* (philosophy), this had among the Arabians a very particular development.¹²⁸ Al-Kindi (born in Kufa, Syria; died in the year 873/260 AH), that is to say, 402 years before Thomas of Aquinas, used philosophical texts that Syrian Christians had translated from the Greek.¹²⁹ This was in fact an authentic Arabic philosophical "Enlightenment," which developed from Al-Kindi, passing among many through Al-Farabi¹³⁰ and Ibn Sina,¹³¹ culminating with Ibn-Rushd.¹³² All of them defend the rights of reason before faith. I am of the opinion that it is with them that is properly born what we today call in a secularized fashion "philosophy." Before that, historically it was "rational wisdom" with *theological intention* (as much among the Greeks as among the fathers of the Byzantine Church).¹³³ The Christians, from the second century onward, juxtaposed the Greek philosophers as theologians (Christian) with theologians (Greek). For this reason, as we saw, Tatian can be called a "barbarian philosopher"; that is to say, "non-Greek lover of wisdom (theologian)." The debates concerning the resurrection or the immortality of the soul, the eternity or creation of the cosmos, predetermination or freedom of the will, and so on are controversies between two "theologies," from the resources of the worlds of quotidian life in confrontation with each other.

[24] I am of the opinion that it is the Muslim who could know both prior discourses (those of the Greeks, the Jews, and the Christian Hellenists) and the precision and *formal* rigor that made possible Aristotle's *Orga-*

num—which has little to do with the Neoplatonic *theologies*), who could thus perceive *for the first time* the autonomy of a *formal philosophical* horizon that is properly rational (the *Aristotelian* logic and metaphysical categories, not so much the Platonic ones) with respect to the Koran, held by the believers as *material* and positively revealed. Thus is born the *kalam* proper, or the use of philosophy as hermeneutical method in the development of a rational discourse constructed out of the “revealed” text and, at the same time, as autonomous cultivation of a secularized philosophy as such.¹³⁴

This explicit and formal distinction is also not given among the worshippers of the Upanishads, in Buddha, or in Confucius, since these were wisdoms that incorporated, without negating or differentiating autonomously, myths or theologies—they could not be secularized formally. Complete secularization will be “modern,” but the beginning of their differentiation will be the fruit of the Enlightenment of the Arabian philosophy from the ninth century onward.

[25] Al-Gazzali,¹³⁵ an exception among the Islamic thinkers, rejected philosophy as the autonomous use of reason and dogmatically affirmed an exclusively revealed theology. Thus is born irrationalist, orthodox, and fundamentalist thought.

I would like to expand on the theme of the Muslim world in order to refute the reasoning of those who opine that Modernity is the product of an exclusively “internal” process of medieval Europe, but I would overshoot the limits that I have imposed for this work of ethical synthesis.

In a non-Eurocentric exposition we should give space here for the description of the *Chinese* world (which will always be the extreme eastern pole of the interregional system, and that will extend its influence to Thailand and Indochina, reaching the Mongols in 1211), the *Hindu* (with the Gupa until AD 525; in the year AD 1205 the Muslim sultanate of Delhi is established, which falls into the hands of the Great Mongol in 1526), that of Malacca (occupied by the Muslims until 1420), as far as the *Philippines* (where the Muslims also arrived, in Mindanao, in the fifteenth century). In addition, from the southeast of the interregional system, we would have to include sub-Saharan Africa (from the east, with the ports of Mogadishu or Mombasa, to the kingdoms of Monomotapa in the south or Abyssinia in the north, going across the savannah toward the west, as far as the kingdoms of Mali, Songai, and Ghana, and then down the western coast to Zaire, what is now the Congo).

[26] In turn, so-called medieval Europe is an interpretation “from within” (a provincial or Eurocentric perspective), which would have fallen into an “intermediate” time (middle-eval), between the fall of the Roman Empire and Modernity. Instead, if we consider this period from the standpoint of its relationship with the Asiatic-Afro-Mediterranean interregional

system we will be able to observe that in a first moment, continental German Europe was connected with the Mediterranean and formed part of the western Roman empire. In a second moment, due to the Arabic expansion in the seventh century, Latin-German continental Europe loses contact with the eastern Mediterranean and, for that reason, with the interregional system. With the fall of the Latin world there emerged simultaneously the holy German empire (in AD 800 Charlemagne is consecrated emperor). This is perceived “from within” Europe as an epoch of feudal isolation and separatism. It is important to consider that this feudalism “inward” is a consequence of the loss of the “outward” link through the eastern Mediterranean (now in Muslim hands). It is the German Europe, which matures, protected from the Muslim expansion by the Byzantine Empire. The third moment corresponds to the attempt at a relinking with the interregional system, and this explains the Crusades (1095–1291), which had as a consequence the reincorporation of continental Europe with the Mediterranean (this is the beginning of the Middle Ages, but not yet the beginning of Modernity, as we will see) through such Italian cities as Venice, Amalfi, Naples, Pisa, and Genoa. We are in the thirteenth century, the classical age of scholastic philosophy in Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Prague, and Salamanca. Since the invasion of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, many Greek thinkers immigrated to Italy, which produced the phenomenon of the Hellenic Italian intellectual renaissance.

Latin-Germanic Europe for this reason has not ceased being a secondary, regional, and peripheral culture of the Muslim world, since as late as 1532 the Turks were still at the walls of Vienna. Nothing *from within itself* presages a new age or any future splendor. It is in nothing superior to the Muslim world;¹³⁶ on the contrary, it maintains a very complex relationship of inferiority, isolation, a true “*finis terrae*” (the extreme West of the Asiatic-African-Mediterranean continent), at great commercial disadvantage with respect to the Muslim “central” areas of the third stage of the interregional system.¹³⁷

[27] In this second part of the introduction, from the historical horizon articulated above, we study the question of Modernity. In fact, there are two paradigms of Modernity.¹³⁸

a. The first paradigm, from a Eurocentric horizon, states that the phenomenon of Modernity is *exclusively* European; that it develops out of the Middle Ages and later on diffuses itself throughout the entire world.¹³⁹ Weber situates the “problem of universal history” with a question asking “to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in *Western civilization*, and in Western civilization only,¹⁴⁰ cultural phenomena have appeared which (as *we*¹⁴¹ like to think) lie in a line of devel-

opment having *universal* significance and validity.”¹⁴² Europe had, according to this paradigm, exceptional *internal* characteristics that allowed it to supersede, through its rationality, all other cultures. No one expresses this thesis of Modernity philosophically better than Hegel: “The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World. Its aim is the realization of absolute Truth as the unlimited self-determination [*Selbstbestimmung*] of Freedom—that Freedom which *has its own absolute* form itself as its purport [*ihre absolute Form selbst*].”¹⁴³ What draws attention here is that the Spirit of Europe (the German spirit) is the absolute Truth that determines or realizes itself through itself without owing anything to anyone. This thesis, which I will call the “Eurocentric paradigm” (in opposition to the “world paradigm”), is the one that has imposed itself not only in Europe and the United States, but also in the entire intellectual world of the world periphery. As I have said, the “pseudo-scientific” division of history into antiquity (as antecedent), the medieval age (preparatory epoch), and the modern age (Europe) is an ideological and deforming organization of history. Philosophy and ethics need to break with this reductive horizon in order to open themselves to the “world,” the “planetary” sphere. This is already an ethical problem with respect to other cultures.

Chronology has its geopolitics. Modern subjectivity develops spatially, according to the Eurocentric paradigm, from the Italy of the Renaissance to the Germany of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, toward the France of the French Revolution.¹⁴⁴ This concerns central Europe.

[28] b. The second paradigm, from the planetary horizon, conceptualizes Modernity as the culture of the *center* of the “world system”¹⁴⁵ of the first world system—through the incorporation of Amerindia,¹⁴⁶ and as a result of the *management* of said “centrality.” In other words, European Modernity is not an *independent*, autopoietic, self-referential system, but, instead, is “part” of a world system: its *center*. Modernity, then, is planetary. It begins with the *simultaneous* constitution of Spain with reference to its “periphery” (the first periphery, properly speaking, namely, Amerindia: the Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru). *Simultaneously*, Europe (in a diachrony that has its premodern antecedents: the Renaissance Italian cities and Portugal) will go on to *constitute* itself as “center” (as superhegemonic power that from Spain passes to Holland, England, and then France . . .) over a growing “periphery” (Amerindia, Brazil, and the slave-supplying coasts of Africa, Poland in the sixteenth century,¹⁴⁷ the consolidation of Latin Amerindia, North America, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe in the seventeenth century;¹⁴⁸ the Ottoman Empire, Russia, some Indian kingdoms, parts of Asia, and the first regions penetrated by Westerners in continental Africa until the first half of the nineteenth century).¹⁴⁹ Modernity, then, would be for this planetary paradigm a phenomenon proper to

the *system* “center-periphery.” Modernity is not a phenomenon of Europe as *independent* system, but of Europe as “center.” This simple hypothesis absolutely changes the concept of Modernity, its origin, development, and contemporary crisis; and thus, also the content of belated Modernity or post-Modernity.

[29] Furthermore, I sustain a thesis that qualifies the one preceding: the centrality of Europe in the world system is not the sole consequence of an internal superiority accumulated during the European Middle Ages over against other cultures. Instead, it is also the effect of the simple fact of the discovery, conquest, colonization, and integration (subsumption) of Amerindia (fundamentally). This simple fact will give Europe the determining *comparative advantage* over the Ottoman-Muslim world, India, or China. Modernity is the fruit of this happening, and not its cause. Subsequently, the *management* of the centrality of the world system will allow Europe to transform itself in something like the “reflexive consciousness” (modern philosophy) of world history, and the many values, discoveries, inventions, technology, political institutions, and the like that are attributed to itself as its exclusive production, are in reality the effect of the *displacement* of the ancient center of stage III of the interregional system toward Europe (following the diachronic way of the Renaissance to Portugal as antecedent, toward Spain, and later toward Flanders, and England). Even capitalism is the product, and not cause, of this juncture of European planetarization and centralization within the world system. The human experience of 4,500 years of political, economic, technological, cultural relations of the interregional system will now be hegemonized by Europe—which had never before been a center, which during its best times had got to be only a periphery. The slippage takes place from Central Asia toward the Eastern and Italian Mediterranean, or more precisely toward Genoa, toward the Atlantic. With Portugal as an antecedent, it begins properly in Spain, and in the face of the impossibility of China’s even attempting to reach, through the Orient (the Pacific), Europe and thus integrate Amerindia as its periphery. Let us look at the premises of the argument.

§I.5. Unfolding of the World System: From “Modern” Spain of the Sixteenth Century

[30] Let us consider the unfolding of world history starting from the rupture, due to the Ottoman-Muslim presence, of stage III of the interregional system—which in its classic epoch had Baghdad as its center (from AD 762 to 1258)—and the transformation of the interregional system into the first *world* system, whose center would situate itself, up to the present, in the North Atlantic region. This change of center of the system has its

prehistory from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century AD, before the collapse of stage III of the interregional system, but the change *originates* properly in 1492 with the new stage IV of the world system. Everything that had taken place in Europe was still a moment of *another* stage of the interregional system. Which state originated the unfolding of the world system? My answer is, the one that could annex Amerindia, and from it, as a springboard or “comparative advantage,” go on to accumulate, toward the end of the fifteenth century, a previously nonexistent superiority.

a. Why not China? The reason is very simple, and I would like to explain it at the outset. It was impossible for China¹⁵⁰ to discover Amerindia (a nontechnological impossibility, that is to say, empirically possible but not possible for historical or geopolitical reasons). China had no interest in attempting to reach Europe because the “center” of the interregional system (in stage III) was in the East, either in Central Asia or in India. To go toward a completely “peripheral” Europe? This could not have been an objective of Chinese foreign commerce.

As it happens, Cheng Ho, between 1405 and 1433, was able to make seven successful voyages to the center of the system of the time (he traveled to Sri Lanka, India, and as far as eastern Africa).¹⁵¹ In 1479 Wang Chin attempted the same, but the archives of his predecessor were denied him. China closed on itself and did not attempt to do what Portugal was undertaking at that very moment. Its internal politics—perhaps the rivalry of the mandarins against the new power of the eunuch merchants¹⁵²—prevented its move into foreign commerce. Had China undertaken such a move, however, it would have had to depart *toward the West* in order to reach the center of the system. The Chinese instead went toward the East and reached Alaska and, it appears, even California, and still further south, but when they did not find anything that would be of interest to its merchants, and as they went further from the center of the interregional system, they abandoned the enterprise. For geopolitical reasons, then, China was not Spain.

[31] However, we still need to ask ourselves, in order to refute the old “evidence,” which has nevertheless been reinforced since Weber: Was China culturally *inferior* to Europe in the fifteenth century? According to those who have studied the question,¹⁵³ China was neither technologically¹⁵⁴ nor politically,¹⁵⁵ nor commercially, and not even in its humanism,¹⁵⁶ inferior. There is a kind of mirage in this question. The histories of Western science and technology do not take strictly into account that the European “jump,” the technological *boom*, begins to take place in the sixteenth century but that it is only in the seventeenth century that it shows its multiplying effects. The *formulation* of the modern technological paradigm (in the seventeenth century) is confused with the origin of Modernity, and it leaves no time for the crisis of the medieval model. It is not noticed that the sci-

entific revolution — to talk with Thomas Kuhn — departs from a Modernity that has already begun, antecedent, a fruit of a “modern paradigm.”¹⁵⁷ It is for that reason that, in the fifteenth century (if we do not consider the later European inventions), Europe does not have any superiority over China. Needham allows himself to be bewitched by this mirage, when he writes: “The fact is that the spontaneous autochthonous development of Chinese society did not produce any drastic change paralleling the Renaissance and the scientific revolution of the West.”¹⁵⁸ To speak of the Renaissance and the scientific revolution¹⁵⁹ as being *one and the same event* (one from the fifteenth century, and the other from the seventeenth) demonstrates the distortion of which I speak. The Renaissance is still a European event, of a peripheral culture in stage III of the interregional system.¹⁶⁰ The scientific revolution is a product of the formulation of the modern paradigm, which needed more than a century of Modernity in order to attain maturity. Pierre Chaunu writes: “Towards the end of the fifteenth century, to the extent to which historical literature allows us to understand it, the far East as an entity comparable to the Mediterranean . . . is not in any way inferior, at least superficially, to the far West of the Euro-Asiatic continent.”¹⁶¹ Let me repeat: Why not China? Because China found itself in the farthest East of the interregional system, because it looked to the center: to India in the West.

[32] b. Why not Portugal? For the same reason. That is, because it found itself in the farthest point of the West of the same interregional system, and because *it also looked, and always did, toward the “center”*: toward the India of the East. Cristobal Colón’s proposal (to attempt to reach the center through the West) to the king of Portugal was as insane as it was for Colón to claim to have discovered a new continent (since he *only and always* attempted, and could not conceive another hypothesis, to reach the center of stage III of the interregional system).¹⁶²

As we have seen, the Italian Renaissance cities are the farthest point of the West (peripheral) of the interregional system that, after the Crusades, articulated anew continental Europe with the Mediterranean. The Crusades (which failed in 1291) ought to be considered a frustrated attempt to connect with the center of the system, a link that the Turks ruptured. The Italian cities, especially Genoa (a rival of Venice, which had a presence in the eastern Mediterranean), attempted to open the western Mediterranean toward the Atlantic, in order to reach the center of the system by going south, around Africa. The Genoese placed all their experience in navigation and the economic power of their wealth at the service of opening for themselves this path. It was the Genoese who occupied the Canaries in 1312,¹⁶³ and it was they who invested in Portugal and helped the Portuguese develop their navigational power.

Once the Crusades had failed, Europeans could not count on the expansion of Russia through the steppes (the Russians, advancing through the frozen woods of the North, reached the Pacific and Alaska in the seventeenth century);¹⁶⁴ the Atlantic was the only European door *to the center of the system*. Portugal, the first European nation, already unified in the eleventh century, transformed the Reconquest¹⁶⁵ against the Muslims into the beginning of a process of Atlantic mercantile expansion. In 1419, the Portuguese discovered the Madeiras; in 1431, the Azores; in 1482, Zaire; in 1498, Vasco de Gama reached India (the center of the interregional system). In 1415, Portugal occupied the African-Muslim Ceuta; in 1448, El-Ksar-es-Seghir; in 1471, Arzila. But all of this is the *continuation* of the interregional system whose connection was through the Italian cities: "In the twelfth century when Genoese and the Pisans first appeared in Catalonia, in the thirteenth century when they first reach Portugal, this is part of the efforts of the Italians to draw the Iberian peoples into the international trade of the time. . . . As of 1317, according to Virginia Raus, the city and the part of Lisbon would be the great center of Genoese trade."¹⁶⁶ A Portugal with contacts in the Islamic world, with numerous sailors (farmers expelled from intensive agriculture), with a money economy, in "connection" with Italy, opened peripheral Europe once again to the interregional system. But it did not stop being a periphery because of this. Even the Portuguese could not claim to have moved from this position, since although Portugal could have attempted to dominate the commercial exchange in the sea of the Arabs (the Indian sea),¹⁶⁷ it could never claim production of the commodities of the East ("china" or porcelain, silk fabrics, tropical products, the sub-Saharan gold, and so on). In other words, it was an intermediary and always peripheral power of India, China, or the Muslim world.

With Portugal we are in the antechamber, but still neither in Modernity nor in the world system (stage IV of the system that originated, at least, between Egypt and Mesopotamia).

[33] c. Why does Spain begin the world system, and with it, Modernity? For the same reason that it was not possible in China and Portugal. Since Spain could not reach the center of the interregional system in Central Asia or India, it could not go toward the East through the south Atlantic (around the coasts of western Africa, to the cape of Buena Esperanza [Good Hope], discovered in 1487) since the Portuguese had already anticipated them, and thus had exclusive rights. Spain only had one option left: to go toward the center, to India, through *the Occident*, through the West, by crossing the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁶⁸ Because of this, Spain "bumps" into, "finds without looking," Amerindia, and with it the entire European "medieval paradigm" enters into crisis (which is the paradigm of a peripheral culture, the westernmost point of stage III of the interregional system), and

thus inaugurates, slowly but irreversibly, the first *world* hegemony. This is the only world system that has existed in planetary history, and this is the modern system, European in its center, capitalist in its economy. *Ethics of Liberation* intends to situate itself explicitly (is it perhaps the first practical philosophy that attempts to do so “explicitly”?) within the horizon of this modern world system, taking into consideration not only the center (as has been done *exclusively* by modern philosophy from Descartes to Habermas, thus resulting in a *partial*, provincial, regional view of the historical ethical event), *but also* its periphery (thus producing a *planetary* vision of the human experience). This historical question is not informative or anecdotal. It has a philosophical sense that is *strictu sensu*! I have already treated the theme in another work.¹⁶⁹ In that work I showed Colón’s existential impossibility, as a Renaissance Genoese, of convincing himself that what he had discovered was not India. He navigated, according to his own imagination, close to the coasts of the fourth Asiatic peninsula (which Heinrich Hammer had already represented cartographically in Rome in 1489),¹⁷⁰ always close to the Sinus Magnus (the “great gulf” of the Greeks, territorial sea of the Chinese), when he transversed the Caribbean. Colón died in 1506 without having passed the horizon of stage III of the interregional system.¹⁷¹ He was not able to supersede subjectively the “interregional system—with a history of 4,500 years of transformations, beginning with Egypt and Mesopotamia—and to open himself to the new stage of the world system. The first person to suspect a *new* continent was Amerigo Vespucci, in 1503, and therefore, he was existentially and subjectively, the first “modern,” the first to unfold the horizon of the “Asian-Afro-Mediterranean system” as world system, which incorporated for the first time Amerindia.¹⁷² This revolution in the *Weltanschauung*, of the cultural, scientific, religious, technological, political, ecological, and economic horizon is the *origin* of Modernity, seen from the perspective of a world paradigm and not solely from a Eurocentric perspective. In the world system, the accumulation in the center is for the first time accumulation on a world scale.¹⁷³ Within the new system, everything changes qualitatively or radically. The very medieval European “peripheral subsystem” changes internally as well. The founding event was the discovery of Amerindia in 1492.¹⁷⁴ Spain was ready to become the first modern state;¹⁷⁵ through this discovery it began to become the center of its first periphery (Amerindia), thus organizing the beginning of the slow shifting of the center of the older stage III of the interregional system (Baghdad of the thirteenth century), which had from peripheral Genoa (the western part of the system) begun a process of reconnection, first with Portugal and now with Spain—with Seville to be precise. Genoese Italian wealth suddenly flowed into Seville. The “experience” of the eastern Renaissance Mediterranean (and through it, of the Muslim world, of India

and even China) is thus articulated with the imperial Spain of Carlos V (who reaches the central Europe of the bankers of Augsburg, the Flanders of Amberes, and later, Amsterdam, followed by Bohemia, Hungary, Austria, and Milan, and especially the kingdom of the Two Sicilies,¹⁷⁶ of the region around southern Italy, namely Sicily, Sardinia, the Balears, and the numerous islands of the Mediterranean). But because of the economic failure of the political project of the world empire, Carlos V abdicated in 1557: the path was left open for the world system of mercantile, industrial, and, today, transnational capitalism.

[34] Let us take as an example a level of analysis from among the many that may be analyzed—I would not want to be criticized as being a reductive economist, because of the example I have adopted. It is not coincidence that twenty-five years after the discovery of the silver mines of Potosí in high Peru and the mines in Zacateca in Mexico (1546)—from which a total of eighteen thousand tons of silver were shipped to Spain between the years 1550 and 1660¹⁷⁷—Spain, thanks to the first shipments of this precious metal, was able to pay for the great armada that defeated the Turks in 1571 in Lepanto, among the many campaigns of the empire. This victory led to the dominion of the Mediterranean as a connection with the center of the older stage of the system. However, the Mediterranean had died as the road of the center toward the periphery on the West, because now the Atlantic was structuring itself as the center of the new world system!¹⁷⁸

Wallerstein writes: “Gold and silver were desired as precious goods, for consumption in Europe and even more for trade with Asia, but it was also a necessity for the expansion of the European economy.”¹⁷⁹ I have read, among the many unpublished letters of the General Indian Archive of Seville, the following text of July 1, 1550, signed in Bolivia by Domingo de Santo Tomás: “It was four years ago, to conclude the perdition of this land, that a mouth of hell¹⁸⁰ was discovered through which every year a great number of people are immolated, which the greed of the Spaniards sacrifice to their god that is gold,¹⁸¹ and it is a mine of silver which is named Potosí.”¹⁸² The rest is well known. The Spanish colony in Flanders would replace Spain as a hegemonic power in the center of the recently established world system—it liberated itself from Spain in 1610. Seville, the first modern port (in relations with Amberes), after more than a century of splendor would cede its place to Amsterdam¹⁸³ (the city where Descartes wrote his *Le Discours de la Méthode* in 1636, and where Spinoza lived).¹⁸⁴ Amsterdam was a naval, fishing, and crafts power, from where agricultural exports flowed, with great expertise in all branches of production, and it would, among many things, bankrupt Venice.¹⁸⁵ After more than a century, Modernity already showed in this city, a metropolis with a definitive physiognomy: its port, the canals that as commercial thorough-

fares reached the houses of the bourgeoisie, the merchants (who used their fourth and fifth floors as store rooms, from which boats could be directly loaded with cranes); a thousand details of a capitalist metropolis.¹⁸⁶ From 1689 on, England would challenge it, and would end up taking over Holland's hegemony—a dominance that England, however, would always have to share with France, at least until 1763.¹⁸⁷

[35] Amerindia, meanwhile, constitutes the fundamental structure of the first Modernity. From 1492 to 1500 about 50,000 square kilometers were colonized (in the Caribbean and mainland, from Venezuela to Panama).¹⁸⁸ In 1515 this number reached 300,000 square kilometers with about three million dominated Amerindians. By 1550, more than two million square kilometers were colonized (which is a greater area than the whole of Europe of the center), with more than twenty-five million (a low figure) of indigenous peoples subjugated,¹⁸⁹ many of whom were integrated to a system of work that produces value (in Marx's strict sense) for the Europe of the center (in the *encomiendas*, *mitas*, *haciendas*, and so on). We also must add, from 1520 onward, plantations with slaves of African provenance (about fourteen million of them in the region, including Brazil, Cuba, and the United States, until slavery ended in the nineteenth century). This enormous space and population would give to Europe, center of the world system, the *definitive comparative advantage* with respect to the Muslim, Indian, and Chinese worlds. It is for this reason that in the sixteenth century "the periphery (Eastern Europe and Hispanic America) used forced labor (slavery and coerced cash-crop labor [of the Amerindian]). The core, as we shall see, increasingly used free labor."¹⁹⁰ For the goals of this philosophical work, it is of interest to indicate solely that with the birth of the world system, the "*peripheral* social formations"¹⁹¹ were also born (see figure 2): "The form of *peripheral* formation will depend, finally, at the same time on the nature of the accumulated precapitalist formations and the forms of external aggression."¹⁹² These were, at the end of the twentieth century, the Latin American peripheral formations,¹⁹³ those of the African Bantu, the Muslim world, India, the Asian Southeast,¹⁹⁴ and China; to which one must also add part of Eastern Europe before the fall of existing socialism.

§I.6. Modernity as "Management" of Planetary Centrality and Its Contemporary Crisis

[36] We have thus arrived at the central thesis of the two halves of this introduction. If Modernity was the fruit of the "management" of the centrality of the first world system, and this is our hypothesis, we now have to reflect on what this implies.

One must be conscious that there are at least, in origin, two Modernities.

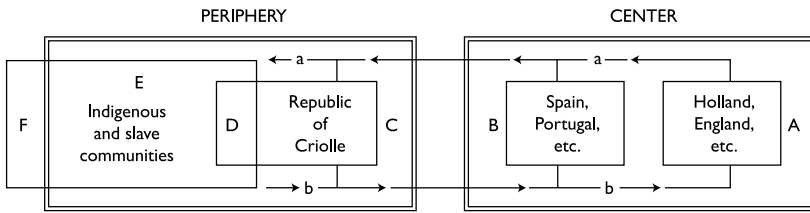


Figure 2. An example of the center-periphery structure in the “center” and “periphery” (colonial Latin America, eighteenth century).

NOTE: Arrow a represents the control and export of manufactured goods; arrow b, the transfer of value and exploitation of labor. A: power of the “center”; B: semiperipheral nations; C: peripheral formations; D: exploitation of Amerindian labor or slaves; E: indigenous communities; F: ethnic communities that have retained a certain exteriority to the world system.

See Dussel 1983a, vol. I, pt. 1, 223–41.

a. In the first place, Hispanic, humanist, Renaissance Modernity was still linked to the old interregional system of Mediterranean and Muslim Christianity.¹⁹⁵ In it, the management of the new system would be conceived from the older paradigm of the III interregional system. That is, Spain *managed* centrality as domination through the hegemony of an integral culture, language, and religion (and thus, the evangelization process that Amerindia will suffer); as military occupation, bureaucratic-political organization, economic expropriation, demographic presence (with hundreds of thousands of Spaniards or Portuguese who will forever inhabit Amerindia), ecological transformation (through the modification of the fauna and flora), and so on. This is the World Empire project, which, as Wallerstein notes, failed with Carlos V.¹⁹⁶

[37] b. In the second place, there is the Modernity of Anglo-Germanic Europe, which began with Amsterdam, and which frequently passes as the *only* Modernity (this is the interpretation of Sombart, Weber, Habermas, or even the postmoderns, which produced a reductionist fallacy that occluded the meaning of Modernity, and, thus, the sense of its contemporary crisis). This second Modernity had to accomplish or increase its efficacy through *simplification*, in order to be able to “manage” the immense world system—which suddenly opened itself to tiny Holland,¹⁹⁷ which, from being a Spanish province, now situated itself as the center of the world system. It had to carry out an abstraction, favoring the *quantum* to the detriment of *qualitas*, thus *leaving out* many valid variables (cultural, anthropological, ethical, political, and religious variables; factors that were valuable even for the European of the sixteenth century) that would not allow an adequate, “factual,”¹⁹⁸ or technologically possible management of the world system.¹⁹⁹

This *simplification* of complexity²⁰⁰ encompassed the totality of the “life world” (*Lebenswelt*), the relationship with nature (a new technological and ecological position, which is no longer teleological), subjectivity itself (a new self-understanding of subjectivity), and community (a new intersubjective and political relation); as a synthesis, a new economic attitude would establish itself (capital’s practical-productive position).

[38] The first Hispanic Renaissance and humanist Modernity produced a theoretical or philosophical reflection of the highest importance, one that has gone unnoticed in so-called modern philosophy (which is only the philosophy of the second Modernity). The theoretical-philosophical thought of the sixteenth century has contemporary relevance because it is the first, and only, system of thought to live and express the originary experience of the period of the constitution of the first world system. Thus, out of the theoretical “recourses” that were available (the scholastic-Muslim-Christian and Renaissance philosophy), the central philosophical ethical question that was obtained was the following: “What right has the European to occupy, dominate, and *manage* the cultures that have recently been discovered and militarily conquered, and that are now in the process of being colonized? From the seventeenth century on, the second Modernity did not have to question its conscience (*Gewissen*) with these questions, which had in fact already been answered: from Amsterdam, London, or Paris (in the seventeenth century and from the eighteenth century onward), Eurocentrism (a superideology that would establish the valid legitimacy, without possible opposition, of the domination of the world system) would *no longer* be questioned, until the end of the twentieth century—and this by liberation philosophy, among other movements.

I have touched on this question in another work.²⁰¹ For now, we will remind ourselves only of the theme in general. Bartolomé de las Casas demonstrates in his numerous works, using an extraordinary bibliographical apparatus, and grounding his arguments rationally and carefully, that the constitution of the world system as European expansion in Amerindia (in anticipation of the expansion in Africa and Asia) does not have any right; it is an unjust violence, and cannot have any ethical validity:

The common ways mainly employed by the Spaniards who call themselves Christian and who have gone there to extirpate those pitiful nations and wipe them off the earth is by unjustly waging cruel and bloody wars. Then, when they have slain all those who fought for their lives or to escape the tortures they would have to endure, that is to say, when they have slain all the native rulers and young men (since the Spaniards usually spare only the women and children, who are subjected to the hardest and bitterest servitude ever suffered by man or beast), they enslave any survivors. . . . Their reason for killing and destroying such an infinite number of souls is that

the Christians have an ultimate aim, which is to acquire gold, and to swell themselves with riches in a very brief time and thus rise to a high estate disproportionate to their merits. It should be kept in mind that their insatiable greed and ambition, the greatest ever seen in the world, is the cause of their villainies.²⁰²

In the time since then, philosophy no longer formulated this problematic, which nonetheless showed itself unavoidable at the origin of the establishment of the world system. For the ethics of liberation, this question is today still fundamental.

[39] In the sixteenth century, then, new philosophical questions were established out of the old philosophical paradigm, from the new colonial praxis of domination, but the formulation of the *new paradigm* had not yet occurred. The origin of the new paradigm, however, should not be confused with the origin of Modernity. Modernity begins more than a century before (in 1492), the moment in which the paradigm, adequate to its very own new experience, was formalized—to speak again with Kuhn. If we note the dates of the formulation of the new modern paradigm, we see that it took place in the first half of the seventeenth century.²⁰³ This new paradigm corresponded to the exigencies of *efficacy*, technological “feasibility” or governmentality of the management of an enormous world system in expansion; it was the expression of a necessary process of *simplification* through the “rationalization” of the life world of the subsystems (economic, political, cultural, religious, etc.). “Rationalization” as indicated by Werner Sombart,²⁰⁴ Ernst Troeltsch,²⁰⁵ or Max Weber,²⁰⁶ is *effect* and not cause. On the other hand, the effects of that *simplifying rationalization*, undertaken in order to *manage* the world system, are perhaps more profound and negative than Habermas or the postmoderns imagine.²⁰⁷

The corporeal Muslim-medieval subjectivity is *simplified*: subjectivity is postulated as an *ego*, an I, about which Descartes writes: “Accordingly this *I*—that is, the soul by which I am what I am—is *entirely* distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist.”²⁰⁸ The body is a mere machine, *res extensa*, entirely foreign to the soul.²⁰⁹ Kant himself writes: “The human soul should be seen as being linked in the present life to two worlds at the same time: of these worlds, inasmuch as it forms with the body a personal unity, it feels but only the material world [*materielle*]; on the contrary, as a member of world of the spirit [*als ein Glied der Geisterwelt*] it receives and propagates the pure influences of immaterial natures.”²¹⁰ This dualism—which Kant would apply to his ethics, inasmuch as the “maxims” ought not to have any empirical or “pathological” motives—is posteriorly articulated through the negation of practical-material reason, which is replaced by instrumental reason, the one that will deal with technical, tech-

nological *management* (a *more geometric* reason)²¹¹ in the *Critique of Judgment*. It is here that the conservative tradition (such as that of Heidegger) continues to perceive the *simplifying* suppression of the organic complexity of life, now replaced by a technique of the “will to power” (in the critiques elaborated by Nietzsche). Galileo, with all the naive enthusiasm of a great discovery, writes: “Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the *language of mathematics*, and its characters are triangles, circles and other geometric figures, without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth.”²¹²

[40] Heidegger already said that the “mathematical position”²¹³ before entities is to have them already known, “ready-to-hand” (in the axioms of science, for example), and to approach them only in order to use them. One does not “learn” a weapon, for instance, but instead one learns to make “use” of it, because one already knows what it is: “The *mathemata* are the things insofar as we take cognizance of them as what we already know them to be in advance, the body as the bodily, the plant-like of the plant, the animal-like of the animal, the thingness of the thing, and so on.”²¹⁴ The “rationalization” of political life (bureaucratization), of the capitalist enterprise (administration), of daily life (Calvinist asceticism or Puritanism), the decorporealization of subjectivity (with its alienating effects on living labor, criticized by Marx, as well as on its drives, as analyzed by Freud), the nonethicalness of every economic or political gestation (understood only as technical engineering, etc.), the suppression of practical-communicative reason, now replaced by instrumental reason, the solipsistic individuality that negates the community, are all examples of the diverse moments which are negated by *simplification*, apparently necessary for the management of the centrality of a world system that Europe found itself in the need of perpetually carrying out. Capitalism, liberalism, dualism (without valorizing corporeality), and so on are *effects* of Europe’s management of the function given it by its role as center of the world system. They are effects that have constituted themselves into systems that end up totalizing themselves. Capitalism, the mediation of exploitation and accumulation (the effect of the world system), was later transformed into an *independent system* that from its own self-referential and autopoietic logic can destroy Europe and its periphery, and even the entire planet. This is what Weber observes, but reductively. That is to say, Weber notes part of the phenomenon but not the horizon of the world system. In fact, the formal procedure of *simplification* that makes the world system *manageable* produces formal rationalized subsystems that later on do not have internal standards of self-regulation

of their limits within Modernity, which could then be redirected at the service of humanity. It is in this moment that there emerge critiques from within the center (and from out of the periphery, such as is mine) against Modernity itself. Now one attributes to *ratio* all culpable causality (as object “understanding,” which is set through disintegration), from Nietzsche to Heidegger, or with the postmoderns—this culpability will be traced back as far as Socrates (Nietzsche), or even Parmenides himself (Heidegger). In fact, the modern *simplifications* (the dualism of an *ego-soul* without a body, teleological instrumental reason, the racism of the superiority of one’s own culture, etc.) have many similarities with the *simplification* that Greek slavery produced in the second interregional system. The Greek *Weltanschauung* was advantageous to the modern man—not without complicity does the modern subject resuscitate the Greeks, as did the German Romantics.²¹⁵ The subsumptive superseding (*Aufhebung*) of Modernity will mean the critical consideration of *all* the simplifying reductions produced since its origin—and not only a few, as Habermas imagines. The most important of these reductions, after solipsistic subjectivity, without community, is the negation of the corporeality of a said subjectivity—to which are related the critiques of Modernity by Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Foucault, Levinas, and the ethics of liberation, as we will see throughout the length of this work.

[41] Because of all of this, the concept that one has of Modernity determines, as is evident, the claim to its fulfillment, or the type of critique one may formulate against it (such as that of the postmoderns). In general, every debate between rationalists and postmoderns does not overcome the Eurocentric horizon. The crisis of Modernity (already noted by, as I have frequently noted, Nietzsche and Heidegger) refers to internal aspects of Europe. The peripheral world appears to be a passive spectator of a thematic that does not touch it, because it is “barbarian,” “premodern,” or simply, still in need of being “modernized.” In other words, the Eurocentric view reflects on the problem of the crisis of Modernity solely with the European–North American moments (and now, the Japanese), but it minimizes the periphery. To break through this reductivist fallacy is not easy. I will attempt to indicate the path toward its surmounting.

If Modernity began at the end of the fifteenth century, with a Renaissance premodern process, and from there a transition was made to the properly modern in Spain, then Amerindia forms part of Modernity from the moment of the conquest and colonization (the *mestizo* world in Latin America is the only one that is as old as Modernity),²¹⁶ since it was the first “barbarian” that Modernity needed in its self-definition. If Modernity enters into crisis at the end of the twentieth century, after five centuries of development, it is not a matter only of the moments detected by Weber

and Habermas, or by Lyotard or Welsch;²¹⁷ we will have to add the critical moments from a “planetary” description of the phenomenon of Modernity.

[42] If we situate ourselves within the planetary horizon, we can distinguish at least the following positions in the face of the formulated problematic.

a. In first place, on the one hand, there is the “substantialist” *developmentalist*²¹⁸ (quasi-metaphysical) position that conceptualizes Modernity as an *exclusively European* phenomenon, which *expanded from the seventeenth century on* through all the “backward” cultures (situating the Eurocentric position in the “center” and modernizing in the “periphery”); Modernity in this view is a phenomenon that must be concluded. Some of those who assume this first position (for example, Habermas and Apel), defenders of reason, do so critically, since they think, thanks to a new structure of critical questions,²¹⁹ that European superiority is not material, but formal. On the other hand, there is the conservative “nihilist” position, which negates Modernity’s positive qualities (see Nietzsche or Heidegger, for instance) and which proposes more or less an annihilation without exit. The postmoderns take this second position (in their frontal attack on “reason” *as such*; with differences in the case of Levinas),²²⁰ although, paradoxically, they also defend parts of the first position, from the perspective of a developmentalist Eurocentrism.²²¹ The postmodern philosophers are admirers of postmodern art, of the *media*, and although they theoretically affirm *difference*, they do not reflect on the origins of these systems that are the fruit of a rationalization proper to the *management* of the European “centrality” in the world system, before which they are profoundly uncritical; because of this, they do not have possibilities of attempting to contribute valid alternatives (cultural, economic, political, etc.) for the peripheral nations, or for the peoples or great majorities who are dominated by the center and/or the periphery.²²²

[43] b. In the second place, we defend another position, from out of the periphery, one that considers the process of Modernity as the already indicated rational “management” of the world system. This position attempts to recuperate what is redeemable in Modernity, and negates domination and exclusion in the world system. It is then a project of liberation of a periphery negated from the very beginning of Modernity. The problem is not the mere superseding of instrumental reason (as it is for Habermas) or of the reason of *terror* of the postmoderns; instead, it is the question of the overcoming of the world system itself, such as it has developed for the last five hundred years. The problem is the exhaustion of a civilizing system that has come to its end.²²³ The overcoming of *cynical-managerial reason* (planetary administrative), of capitalism (as economic system), of liberalism (as political system), of Eurocentrism (as ideology), of machismo (in erotics),

of the reign of the white race (in racism), of the destruction of nature (in ecology), and so on presupposes the liberation of diverse types of oppressed and/or excluded. It is in this sense that the ethics of liberation defines itself as transmodern (since the postmoderns are still Eurocentric).

At the end of the present stage of civilization two absolute limits of the “system of five hundred years” (as Noam Chomsky calls it) become apparent.

a. These limits are in the first place, the ecological destruction of the planet. From the very moment of its inception, Modernity has constituted nature as “exploitable” object, with the increase in the rate of profit of capital²²⁴ as its goal: “For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; ceases to be recognized as a power for itself.”²²⁵ When the earth is seen constituted as an “exploitable object” in favor of *quantum*, of capital, capital that can defeat all limits, all boundaries, there manifests the “great civilizing influence of capital,” and capital now reaches finally its insurmountable limit, where it itself is its own limit, the impassable barrier for ethical-human progress. We have arrived at this moment: “The universality towards which it irresistibly strives encounters barriers in its own nature, which will, at a certain state of its development, allow it to be recognized as being itself the greatest barrier to this tendency, and hence will drive towards its own suspension.”²²⁶ Given that for Modernity nature is only a medium of production, nature fulfills its fate of being consumed and destroyed. In addition, the by-products of that destruction accumulate upon the Earth, until it jeopardizes the reproduction or survival of life itself. Life is the absolute condition of capital; its destruction destroys capital. We have arrived at this state of affairs. The “system of five hundred years” (Modernity or capitalism) confronts its first absolute limit: the death of life in its totality, through the indiscriminate use of an anti-ecological technology constituted progressively through the sole criterion of the *quantitative* “management” of the world system in Modernity: the increase in the rate of profit. But capital cannot limit itself. Thus comes about the utmost danger for humanity.

[44] b. The second limit of Modernity is the destruction of humanity itself. “Living labor” is the other essential mediation of capital as such; the human subject is the only one that can “create” new value (surplus value, profit). Capital that defeats all barriers requires incrementally more absolute time of work; when it cannot supersede this limit, it augments productivity through technology—but this increase decreases the importance of human labor. It is thus that there is *superfluous humanity* (disposable, unemployed, excluded). The unemployed do not earn a salary, money; but money is the only mediation in the market through which one can acquire commodities in order to satisfy needs. In any event, work that does not

create employment increases unemployment. Thus, the numbers of needy people and those not solvent increase—as much in the periphery as in the center.²²⁷ It is poverty, poverty as the absolute limit of capital. Today we know how misery grows across the entire planet. It is a matter of a “law of Modernity”: “Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labor, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole.”²²⁸ The modern world system cannot overcome this essential contradiction. The ethics of liberation reflects philosophically from this planetary horizon of the world system, from this double limit that configures the terminal crisis of a civilizing process: the ecological destruction of the planet and the extinction, in misery and hunger, of the great majority of humanity. Before this prospect, of two coimplicating phenomena of such planetary magnitude, the projects of many philosophical schools seem naive and even ridiculous, irresponsible, irrelevant, cynical, and complicitous; the projects of so many philosophical schools (as much in the center, but even worse yet in the periphery, in Latin America, Africa, and Asia), closed in their “ivory towers” of sterile Eurocentric academicism. Already in 1968 Marcuse wrote, referring to the opulent countries of late capitalism:

Why do we need liberation from such a society if it is capable—perhaps in the distant future, but apparently capable—of conquering poverty to a greater degree than ever before, or reducing the toil of labor and the time of labor, and of raising the standard of living? If the price for all goods delivered, the price for this comfortable servitude, for all these achievements, is exacted from people far away from the metropolis and far away from its affluence? If the affluent society itself hardly notices what it is doing, how is it breeding terror and enslavement, how is it fighting against liberation in all corners of the globe?”²²⁹

In this way Modernity confronts the impossibility of its subsuming the populations, economies, nations, cultures it has been attacking since its origin, that it has excluded from its horizon and cornered into poverty. This is the whole theme—the exclusion of African, Asian, and Latin American alterity and their indomitable will to survive. I will return to this theme, but for now I want to indicate that the globalizing world system reaches a limit inasmuch as it excludes the Other, who resists, and from whose affirmation the negation of the critique of liberation originates.

§I.7. The Liberation of Philosophy?

[45] Given the landscape outlined in the foregoing paragraphs, the ethics of liberation must first of all undertake a reflection regarding the geopolitical implantation of philosophy itself, on the extent to which it is situated²³⁰

in the center or in the periphery. In effect, it seems as if a *philosophy of "liberation"* (genitive objective: its theme) requires the liberation of *"philosophy" itself* (genitive subjective: the subject that is active and at the same time that is activated) as its point of departure. Throughout history, at least since the Greeks, philosophy has frequently been bound to the engines of power and ethnocentrism. Nonetheless, it is true that there have always been philosophic counterdiscourses of greater or lesser critical density, and it is with this counterhegemonic²³¹ tradition that I would identify my own work. In previous examples of ethnocentrism (such as that of China, the Aztecs, Hindu civilization, Christianity, or Islam) the pattern tended to be that one culture situated itself as superior to other cultures: the ethnocentrism was essentially of a "regional" character. In the context of Modernity, the European variant of ethnocentrism was the first "global" ethnocentrism (Eurocentrism has been the only global ethnocentrism thus far known to history: with it, universality and European identity became fused into one; *philosophy must be liberated* from this reductionist fallacy). Under such circumstances, when the philosopher belongs to a hegemonic system (be it Greek, Byzantine, Islamic, or medieval Christian, and particularly in the modern period), his or her world or ethical system has the claim of presenting itself as if it were equivalent to or identical with the epitome of the human "world"; while the world of the Others is that of barbarity, marginality, and nonbeing. Let us take an example as the guiding thread of our discussion in this context.

Charles Taylor has written a classic work, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*.²³² He explains his intention in this work as follows: "This is what I am trying to do from now on. But this is not something which is simple. . . . often it will precisely involve articulating that which has remained implicit. . . . But there is an extraordinary resource available to make this possible, which is history itself, given that the articulation of modern forms of comprehending that which is good must thus be an historical task."²³³ The historical review that Taylor undertakes is "a combination of the analytical and the chronological."²³⁴ This implies analyses of the evolution of the contents of the modern *Self* from the perspective of its historical origins and "*sources*." His choice of a methodology for the exposition of his ideas is inspired in philosophical texts, has been derived from the Greek philosophers, and is focused exclusively on European thinkers. All of this might appear obvious or a secondary matter without special circumstances.

[46] a. In effect, I would like to refer *methodologically* to the manner in which Taylor attempts to carry out his analytical history of the development of modern identity taking into account the *sources* of the self. The virtually exclusive raw materials for his enterprise are the works of philosophers²³⁵ (Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Locke . . .), who are analyzed from within

their own discourses. His work is a kind of philosophical history written from within philosophy itself.²³⁶ It is a magisterial effort, erudite, characterized by a creative way of arriving at novel conclusions, albeit limited to an “intrap philosophical” exploration that lacks a history, an economics, or a politics. This methodological limitation will prevent the author from arriving at more critical conclusions. Within this context it would appear as if capitalism, colonialism, and the continuous recourse to violence or military aggression had no importance at all.

b. A second aspect I would like to explore is that Taylor takes Plato as his point of departure for his reconstruction of modern identity. In doing so he reproduces a long-standing tradition in Western philosophy: the Greeks are taken not only at the point of departure for the formalization of philosophy, but also as a privileged example useful for analyzing the concrete contents of their own ethnicity, in this case that of the articulation of ethics directed toward the good (*agathón*). This implies a *Hellenocentrism* that has grave consequences. Taylor’s desired end for the reconstruction of the concept of the *Self*²³⁷ would have been better served if he had explored Egyptian or Mesopotamian sources (as I have demonstrated in the first part of this introduction). But Taylor has recourse instead to Plato, thereby falling prey to the Hellenocentrism mentioned above. Paul Ricoeur had already demonstrated in his book *The Symbolic of Evil*²³⁸ that the tragic myth of Prometheus (which Plato repeats with his doctrine of *ananke*) is radically opposed to the “Adamic myth,” which suggests the structure of “temptation” as a dialectical process engaging free wills in contention (and it is certainly within the Adamic tradition that we should situate the “sources of the modern Self”). Taylor’s Hellenocentrism completely distorts his research.

c. The third aspect of Taylor’s methodology that I will mention is how for him, as for Hegel—who in this regard was the first philosopher to explore the issue²³⁹—the original diachronic process of Modernity can be tracked in a linear manner in terms of a succession from Augustine to Descartes to Locke, and so on. Such a seamless transition from Augustine (a thinker whose context was that of a Latin Mediterranean periphery of the Greek Hellenistic world) to Descartes (in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, at the center of the world system) would demand many explanations that are of no interest to Taylor. His interpretation of modern identity in this *Eurocentric*, regionalistic manner, without regard for the global meaning of Modernity, and by excluding Europe’s own *periphery* as an additional relevant “source” for the constitution of the modern *Self* as such,²⁴⁰ renders him incapable of discovering “certain” innovative aspects of “modern identity” and of the “sources of the self.”

[47] These philosophers appear to have ignored the fact that the prob-

lem of “universality” has been posed in the context of Modernity in a manner *that has no precedent*. “Eurocentrism” is precisely characterized by the assumption that historical expressions of European *particularity* in fact constitute moments of *abstract human universality in general*. This reflects the singularity of European particularity as the first such identity that *in fact* became global, as the first concrete human expression of universality.²⁴¹ Modern European culture, civilization, philosophy, subjectivity, and so on thereby became identified as equivalent to the human universal abstractions of culture, civilization, philosophy, and subjectivity in general, *without further qualification*. But in fact, many of the most important achievements of Modernity were not exclusively European creations, but are instead the results of a continuous dialectic of impacts, effects, and responses between the European center and its periphery. This includes what might be described as the constitutive process, which has culminated in modern subjectivity as such. The *ego cogito*, as we have seen, has a direct relationship with a protohistory of the seventeenth century, which is reflected in Descartes’s ontology, but which does not emerge from a void. The *ego conquiro* (I conquer) is its predecessor, as a “practical ego.” Hernán Cortés’s²⁴² conquest of Mexico in 1521 precedes *The Discourse on Method* (published in 1637) by more than a hundred years, as I have noted. Descartes studied at La Flèche, a Jesuit college belonging to a religious order which at that historical moment had extended itself throughout the American continent, Africa, and Asia; furthermore, as noted above, Descartes settled in 1629 in an Amsterdam that was at the center of a new world system. Nonetheless, the “barbarian” Other was not considered then to be part of the necessary context for all meaningful reflection regarding subjectivity, reason, or *cogito*.²⁴³

At the beginning of this section I quoted a statement by Max Weber that reflected his Eurocentrism. The question that should have been posed was: is it not the case that the chain of circumstances made it possible for certain cultural phenomena to be produced uniquely on European soil that, *contrary* to what has always been assumed and represented, and given Western Europe’s conquest of a position *at the center of the world system*, provided it with comparative advantages that enabled the region to impose its system of domination over the rest of the cultures of the world, and in addition to impose its own culture upon them with universal claim? This question justifies a brief excerpt from Taylor:

This [possessive individualism] is in effect merely an example within the context of a more generalized process through which certain practices of Modernity have been imposed, frequently in a brutal manner, *beyond their places of origin*. As to some of these, the process appears to have been part of an irresistible dynamic. Clearly the practices of technologically oriented

science contributed towards the technological advantage enjoyed by the nations where they were developed. This, combined with the consequences of the new-found emphasis upon the disciplinary movement which I described earlier, *gave European armies a marked and increasing military advantage over non-Europeans during the 17th century* up through the mid-20th century. And this, when combined with the practical economic consequences that we describe as capitalism, enabled the European powers to establish global hegemony for a certain period.²⁴⁴

As I discussed previously, according to Taylor, this comparative advantage only begins to take hold in the seventeenth century. This historical interpretation reflects a “substantialist”²⁴⁵ approach, but in this case economic, technological, and military dimensions are alluded to but are absent in his book’s subsequent analysis.

[48] Habermas falls into the same pattern. In effect, as he writes regarding critical counterdiscourses, he reflects a precise form of Eurocentrism; in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* he writes:²⁴⁶ “The change in paradigm from a rationality centered upon one subject to one based upon a communicative reasoning may be encouraging as we reinitiate *that counter-discourse* [*Gegendiskurs*] which from the beginning has been *immanent* to Modernity. . . . This is a different way out which enables us to take into account, pursuant to different premises, the reasons for the self-criticism that Modernity has been undertaking in contradiction *with itself*.”²⁴⁷ The new critique of reason undertaken by the postmodernists eliminates this counterdiscourse which is *immanent* (*innewohnenden*) to Modernity itself, which will very soon be “two hundred years old (!), which is what I am seeking to commemorate with these lectures.”²⁴⁸

Modern Europe has created “the spiritual presuppositions and material bases of a world in which that mentality has usurped the place of reason — this is the true nucleus of a criticism that has been made of reason since Nietzsche. But who but Europe could wrest from its *own* [*eigenen*] traditions the penetration, the energy, and the will of vision and fantasy?”²⁴⁹

These texts clearly reflect Eurocentrism and also display the developmentalist fallacy.²⁵⁰ In the first place, Habermas situates the origin of this counterdiscourse at a specific historical moment, that of Kant (which is why he refers to the two hundredth anniversary of this supposed advent). And so, if we approach history from a global perspective, anchored in a non-Eurocentrist vision of Modernity, this counterdiscourse in fact is more than five hundred years old: it was first heard on the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean in 1511, when António de Montesinos assailed the injustices being committed against the indigenous peoples of this region, and echoed from there to the halls of the University of Salamanca, deepening the theoretical and practical labor of the critique initiated by Bartolomé de

Las Casas in 1514, and thereafter, when this nascent counterdiscourse was reflected in the lectures of Francisco de Vitoria (compiled in his seminal work entitled *De indiis*). Once again, as is typical among philosophers from Central Europe, the sixteenth century is irrelevant, and Latin America is simply absent from their mental landscape.

[49] Furthermore, since Modernity, from my perspective, is a global phenomenon, it was precisely this counterdiscourse, and none other, that had the possibility of arising in the context of European critical reason, as it opened itself up and constituted itself with and from the perspective of the alterity that was being dominated and exploited: from within the Other who it was thought had been hidden by European domination, which always sought to negate it. But this counterdiscourse, which is European in terms of its geographical implantation, is also a consequence within the European center of the dominated periphery. Bartolomé de Las Casas would not have been able to formulate and articulate his critique of the Spanish conquest of the Americas if he had not himself lived in the periphery and heard the cries and witnessed the tortures to which indigenous people were being submitted. It is that Other who is the actual origin of this counterdiscourse that took root in Europe. It is evident that Europe, as the visible point of the iceberg, possessed the cultural, economic, and political hegemony²⁵¹ necessary in order to *manage* this critique from the “centrality” of its system, which then monopolized humanity’s ideological capital (as Pierre Bourdieu would describe it), which had the capacity to channel “information” as power. It is because of this that it became the most privileged site in the world for the discussion of global as well as philosophical issues (thereby constituting what we have come to know as modern philosophy). But this intellectual production, when it is counter-hegemonic, even within European philosophy (for example, as in the cases of Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, or Marx), is not solely European: neither in terms of its origin nor its significance. Furthermore, the periphery has also had its own currents of intellectual and philosophical production (for example, Francisco Xavier Clavijero, 1731–87²⁵² in Mexico, who was a contemporary of Kant), whose own counterdiscourse was unintelligible to Europe, since it presupposed a much richer antihegemonic global vision or horizon, despite the scarcity of its provincial or regional (*re*)sources. Clavijero was unable to publish his works in Spanish in Mexico and had to publish them in exile in Italy. The cultures of the periphery were kept isolated from the world and from one another, and were connected only through Europe, where they were reinterpreted through the logic of the “center.” As a result, “European” philosophy is not an exclusively European product but instead a *production of humanity that has been situated in Europe* as a center, which includes the contribution of the cultures of the periphery that have engaged it in an essential co-constitutive dialogue.

[50] To say that this counterdiscourse is *immanent* to Modernity would only be acceptable if Modernity were redefined on a global scale. In that case, Modernity must be understood to include its peripheral alterity. Modernity would then encompass all of the following: (1) its hegemonic core; (2) the *dominated* peripheral colonial world, as part of the “world system”; and (3) the sectors of the world that have been *excluded* from this system, as its exteriority. The alternative is to define Modernity exclusively from the perspective of a European horizon, and to contend that this counterdiscourse is also an *exclusively* European product. In that case, the periphery itself must make itself European in order to be able to criticize Europe, because it must employ a European counterdiscourse in order to demonstrate Europe’s contradictions to itself, sunken amid its impotence to contribute anything new to the discussion, and condemned to negate itself in any case in the process.

If, to the contrary, this counterdiscourse is reconceived as a dialectical result of a critical dialogue from the perspective of alterity (which includes the affirmation of alterity, then, as a principle grounded in the negation of negation: an *analectical* moment), it is not possible to describe it as *exclusively and intrinsically* European, and even less persuasively as something unique which only Europe can “extract from its *own exclusive traditions*,” or give continuance to. Instead, it is quite possible to affirm that it is from *outside of Europe* that this counterdiscourse can be developed most critically, and not as the continuation of an alien or *uniquely* European discourse, but rather as the next step in a process of critical labor upon which the periphery has already left its stamp within the counterdiscourse produced in Europe and through its *own* peripheral *discourse*. Indeed, almost as a matter of course, when the discourse at issue is not Eurocentric it is already virtually a counterdiscourse in itself, built upon the basis of that which is peripheral or dominated within the world system, and grounded in the affirmation of the exteriority of the excluded.

This is why the study of thought (traditions and philosophy) in Latin America, Asia, and Africa is not a task that is anecdotal or parallel to the study of philosophy *as such* (which would be that which is European in character) but instead involves the *recovery* of a history that incorporates the counterdiscourse that is nonhegemonic and that has been dominated, silenced, forgotten, and virtually excluded—that which constitutes the alterity of Modernity. Kant (a key hegemonic philosopher), or later Marx (a counterdiscourse within Europe) and Clavijero (an excluded philosopher from the periphery) will be studied in the future as exemplifying two faces of the same epoch of human thought. Certainly Kant, because of his hegemonic context (situated empirically in Europe, in the cities of the Hanseatic region), has produced a critical philosophy that is the match of the

best of its equivalents on a global scale, and which can be considered to be the point of departure for all philosophy throughout the world for the last two hundred years. Kant, in the strictest sense, is not exclusively a European thinker, but instead one who had the capacity (because of his historical, political, economic, and cultural context) to devise a critical philosophy of *global* relevance. But the philosophical thought of Clavijero, which until now has had only regional importance (in a peripheral, dominated region),²⁵³ and which has been all too quickly forgotten by many, even in the Mexico of his origin, is the “other face” of Modernity, and, because of this, has an equivalent “global” relevance. Kant and Clavijero are part of the sphere of philosophical strivings within the same global horizon, fragmented by lines that demarcated the center, the periphery, and zones of exclusion during the eighteenth century. Future histories of philosophy will have a new *global* vision of philosophy and will delve more deeply into currently unexamined aspects, which will uncover key elements of the *joint configuration* of a global set of themes in the periphery (which also produced a peripheral and critical philosophy of its own, grounded in the affirmation of its excluded exteriority) and in the center of the world system (which produced a philosophy of the European center, which up until the present has been identified with philosophy “as such”). The philosophy of the center and that of the periphery (identified with those oppressed by or simply excluded from the world system) are two sides of the same philosophical coin in Modernity, and its counterdiscourses (both in the center as in the periphery) are the heritage of philosophers throughout the world, not just of Europeans.

[51] This is an essential point of departure for my philosophical project as a whole. The *Philosophy of Liberation* is a counterdiscourse, a critical philosophy born in the periphery (from the perspective of the victims, the excluded), which has the intention of being relevant on a global scale. It has an *explicit* consciousness of its peripheral and excluded character, but at the same time it has the intention and commitment of embracing and engaging the complexity of the world as a whole. It has emerged from, and is committed to pursuing a conscious confrontation with, European or North American schools of philosophy (both postmodern and modern, proceduralist and communitarian, etc.), which confound and even identify their concrete European origins with their unrecognized function as “philosophies of the center” throughout the last five hundred years. A clear differentiation in the study of philosophies of European origin between those concretely grounded in European identity as such (the European *Sittlichkeit* itself); those originating in Europe’s function as “center” in the world system; and those of truly universal character in the strictest sense, would produce an awakening of European philosophy from the deep sleep in

which it has been submerged since its modern origins, five hundred years after the birth of Eurocentrism.

It is necessary to be *explicitly* conscious of this ever-present “horizon” of the colonial or barbarous Other, and of the cultures in an asymmetrical, dominated, “inferior,”²⁵⁴ excluded position, as an essential, permanent *source* or resource in the joint configuration and constitution of the identity of the “modern self.” The failure to consider this Other in the constitution of the “modern self” in effect nullifies Taylor’s historical analysis, given its Eurocentric character. From such a truncated analysis the only thing that can emerge is one aspect of the modern self that revolves around its own center. This is something quite distinct from the dialectically constituted Modernity reconstructed from the perspective of its negated alterity (“situated [*gesetzt*]” in the Hegelian sense of a non-self-identified,²⁵⁵ alienated being), from the perspective of the other face of the coin of Modernity.²⁵⁶

[52] I had intended to close this section, which is already too long, with a survey of current philosophical thinking in the world of the periphery,²⁵⁷ but will instead summarize certain illustrative aspects here in an abbreviated manner. What I have written in previous sections regarding the contributions of Asia (§§I.I–I.3 and, in part, §I.4) and regarding the Islamic world (§I.4) serves to outline the exploration of fundamental aspects of philosophy in the historical era that predates Modernity. For its part, in the context of Modernity, the problematic of Bantu Africa is prototypical, while Latin America has a kind of intermediate specificity.²⁵⁸ In contrast, contemporary Asia has an ancient philosophical profile at its roots.²⁵⁹ It is impossible to encompass all of this complexity in this book, so I have decided to focus on one aspect of the debate regarding the philosophy of the periphery: the contemporary dimensions of “African philosophy.”²⁶⁰

[53] Some have reminded us that Egyptian-Bantu philosophy lies at the origins of Greek philosophy,²⁶¹ although more recent stages of this process of reflection are focused on the “peripheral self” of African philosophy subsequent to the era of colonial emancipation—from 1945 to the present.²⁶² Students of this process agree with the description of its first moment as that of “ethno-philosophy”—Tempels,²⁶³ for example, sets forth an ontology of “vital forces” where the “dogmatic employment of the fundamental principles of Western philosophy”²⁶⁴ is evident; while the work of Kagame²⁶⁵ marks an advance toward an emphasis on the African origins of this overall process of implantation. The second moment could be understood as that of “philosophic sagacity,”²⁶⁶ which seeks to recover the traditions of African popular wisdom, although the strictly philosophical dimensions of this thought are the subject of debate. The third moment (in a nonchronological sense) is that of “ideological philosophy,”²⁶⁷ which includes the theoretical production of the leaders of Africa’s process of colo-

nial and national liberation.²⁶⁸ The fourth moment could be described as the “professional philosophy” of Africa.²⁶⁹ We must then add a fifth moment, of African critical philosophy,²⁷⁰ which is of greatest interest to us here. Among all the recent work in this vein, I focus on one specific example because of its suggestive depth of reflection regarding the theme of human existence in the world of the periphery of Modernity, a reflection whose point of departure is excluded alterity understood as a form of resistance: Eboussi Boulaga’s *The Crisis of “Muntu”: African Authenticity and Philosophy*.²⁷¹

[54] Eboussi Boulaga, like all critical philosophers from the periphery, situates himself in the face of Modernity—undertaking a critique that appears to be very similar, on the surface, to that of the postmodern philosophers²⁷²—from a “point of departure” quite distinct from that of European/North American philosophy: “The polarity between the dominator and the dominated has repercussions in all of the spheres where the contradiction repeats between those who exist and those who do not, and of those who have with respect to those who do not. The vanquished are defined by their privations, which proclaim the superiority of their master as their negation. . . . Philosophy thereby takes upon itself the trappings of an allegory regarding the Power of the conqueror, among its many other activities and objects.”²⁷³ The *Muntu*²⁷⁴ negates itself and is always found in asymmetry²⁷⁵—“in this sense the lowest, most abject, perverse or incapable white person is always superior.”²⁷⁶ But when the African seeks to affirm his or her exteriority he or she has no exit available, and even less so if he or she turns to Western philosophy: “Logically the negation of the negation of itself occupies the space of the empty affirmation of the self, in search of its attributes, as well as those of human beings in general, along the paths of freedom, the ideology of development, as well as those of the State and of efficiency.”²⁷⁷

Here, Eboussi Boulaga undertakes an ontological description of unequalled interest (which could not be carried out by a “foreign”²⁷⁸ anthropologist), exposing what could be described as the analysis of excluded African alterity through its transformation into positive criticism, and drawing upon some ad hoc philosophical images and categories that he has created. Let us stop for a moment to focus on certain aspects of his exposition, which he himself highlights as those that are most risky: ²⁷⁹ “That which is real is that which preserves that *which is original*, within. . . . That which is real is that which preserves *the original* within itself along with that which has its origin in the hierarchical and the genealogical. That which is real is that which preserves *the original* as its destiny in a reintegrated form.”²⁸⁰ The “real” (and the sacred) is a referent for that which is “original” both in the past and in the present, the “vital force” that is expressed through

the “word,”²⁸¹ the “name,” the “verb,” the “language,” the “custom,” “ethnicity,”²⁸² the “individual.”²⁸³ The “real” is the excluded, exterior and prior to the peripheral self of the oppressed, which has an “order,” “hierarchy,” and “genealogy” of its own, which can direct us back to the original: “Succeeding generations determine and assess the place of individuals according to the extent to which they are closer or farther from the distance that separates them from their origin or which reflects these origins in the present and makes them contemporary through their representation. . . . Authenticity is nothing but the permanent authorization of origin; it is the permanence of original force.”²⁸⁴

This is why “tradition” becomes “mediation,” which “symbolically” unifies the genealogical plurality and the universal “harmony” that becomes contemporary through “knowledge” (Odera Oruka’s *Philosophic Sagacity*): “Knowledge is the celebration of the vital force of reintegration. Knowledge is the knowledge of the symbolic self of things which enables connection and mediation.”²⁸⁵ The “system,” the entirety of the universe, lives in time marked by “periodicity” and “rhythm”:

Time passes and returns, the force that expands and begins again manifests the eternity of Power in its incessant emanation and expansion from its origin. . . . Periodicity is the substantial time of things. . . . Everything is alternation and rhythm. . . . Rhythm is vital. . . . It is rhythm which produces ecstasy, that flowing out of one’s self that is identified with the vital force. . . . It would not be exaggerated to affirm that rhythm is the *architectural framework of the self*, which for the human being of the civilization for which this philosophy is expounded, is the most fundamental experience, which eludes all of the trappings of malign genius [as Descartes would put it], which remains free of all doubt, and which is *Je danse, donc je vie* [I dance, therefore I am alive].²⁸⁶

This expression could in fact perfectly summarize all of *Ethics of Liberation*, as an ethics of the body and its reality and an ethics of life, as we shall see in what follows. It is through “assimilation” that the individual “imitates” the original or the authentic, which confers an “analogical” property upon it. Existence becomes a “metaphor” of that which is original through “representation” and “substitution.” Through the function of the seer, and the “*divination*” of individuals, their contemporary imaginary becomes identified with their primordial nature and vainly seeks to annihilate the individual, the demoniacal, evil, illness, the Enemy in general, reintegrating this target into the harmonious order of the primordial: “Since the paradise of innocence is a dream, the ontologies of force and global systems are the ontologies and systems of human irresponsibility.”²⁸⁷ This great African philosopher comes to a conclusive judgment: “The global system reveals