

Preface

As Richard Bernstein has shown so well in *The New Constellation*,¹ we face a new historical moment and a new constellation of philosophical problems and questions. In this book, I consider a constellation which European or United States thinkers often neglect and which involves far more than what Ihab Hassan has called an "ideological commitment to *minorities* in politics, sex, and language."² I focus on the *immense majority* of humanity, the seventy-five per cent of the world situated in the southern hemisphere, the excolonial world. These exploited, excluded, and poor peoples, whom Fanon termed the "wretched of the earth," consume less than fifteen per cent of the planet's income. Their history of oppression began five hundred years ago.

This history of world domination originates with modernity, which thinkers such as Charles Taylor,³ Stephen Toulmin,⁴ or Jürgen Habermas⁵ consider as exclusively a European occurrence, having nothing to do with the so-called Third World. The expositions of these thinkers explain modernity by referring *only to classical European and North American authors and events*. My undertaking here differs from theirs, since I argue that while modernity is undoubtedly a European occurrence, it also originates in a dialectical relation with non-Europe. Modernity appears when Europe organizes the initial world-system and places itself at the center of world

history over against a periphery equally constitutive of modernity. The forgetting of the periphery, which took place from the end of the fifteenth, Hispanic-Lusitanian century to the beginning of the seventeenth century, has led great thinkers of the center to commit the Eurocentric fallacy in understanding modernity. Because of a partial, regional, and *provincial* grasp of modernity, the postmodern critique and Habermas's defense of modernity are equally unilateral and partially false. The traditional Eurocentric thesis, flourishing in the United States, modernity's culmination, is that modernity expanded to the barbarian cultures of the South undoubtedly in need of modernization. One can only explain this new-sounding but age-old thesis by returning to medieval Europe to discover the motives which produced modernity and permitted its dissemination⁶ Max Weber first posed the question of world history Eurocentrically:

Which chain of circumstances has resulted in the fact that *on Western soil*⁷ and only there cultural phenomena have been produced which, as we⁸ represent it, show signs of evolutionary advance and universal validity?⁹

Europe possessed, according to this paradigm, exceptional internal characteristics which permitted it to surpass all other cultures in rationality. This thesis, which adopts a Eurocentric (as opposed to world) paradigm, reigns not only in Europe and the United States, but also among intellectuals in the peripheral world. The pseudo-scientific periodization of history into Antiquity, the Middle (preparatory) Ages, and finally the Modern (European) Age is an ideological construct which deforms world history. One must break with this reductionist horizon to open to a world and planetary perspective—and there is an ethical obligation toward other cultures to do so.

Chronology reflects geopolitics. According to the Eurocentric paradigm, modern subjectivity especially developed between the times of the Italian Renaissance and the Reformation and of the Enlightenment in Germany and the French Revolution. Everything occurred in Europe.

I wish to present a new, world-encompassing paradigm that conceives modernity as the culture incorporating Amerindia¹⁰ and managing a world-system,¹¹ which does not exist as an independent,

self-producing, or self-referential entity, but as a part, as the center, of that system. Modernity is a world phenomenon, commencing with the *simultaneous* constitution of Spain with reference to its periphery, Amerindia, including the Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru. *At the same time*, Europe, with diachronic precedents in Renaissance Italy and Portugal, proceeds to establish itself as the center managing a growing periphery. The center gradually shifts from Spain to Holland and then to England and France even as the periphery grows in the sixteenth century in Amerindia and Brazil, on the African coasts of the slave trade, and in Poland;¹² in the seventeenth century in Latin America, North America, Caribbean, coastal Africa, and Eastern Europe;¹³ and in the Ottoman Empire, Russia, some Indian kingdoms, Southeast Asia, and continental Africa up until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ When one conceives modernity as part of center-periphery system instead of an independent European phenomenon, the meanings of modernity, its origin, development, present crisis, and its postmodern antithesis change.

Furthermore, Europe's centrality reflects no internal superiority accumulated in the Middle Ages, but it is the outcome of its discovery, conquest, colonization, and integration of Amerindia—all of which give it an advantage over the Arab world, India, and China. Modernity is the result, not the cause, of this occurrence. Later, the managerial position of Europe permits it to think of itself as the reflexive consciousness of world history and to exult in its values, inventions, discoveries, technology, and political institutions as its exclusive achievement. But these achievements result from the *displacement* of an ancient interregional system born between Egypt and Mesopotamia and found later in India and China. In Europe itself, a series of displacements occur from Renaissance Italy to Portugal to Spain to Flanders and England. Even capitalism is the fruit, not the cause, of Europe's world extension and its centrality in the world-system. Europe hegemonizes the human experience of forty-five hundred years of political, economic, technological, cultural relations within the Asian-African-Mediterranean interregional system. Never the center and during most of its history the periphery, Europe rises to ascendancy when it finds itself blocked on the east by Islam and embarks upon the Atlantic in a history that began in Genoa (Italy). Following Portugal's initiative, Spain then moves westward

and transforms Amerindia into its periphery without any challenge, in part because China never sought an eastward passage to Europe.

In this book, I will seek the origin of the "myth of modernity," which justifies European violence and is distinct from modernity's rational, emancipative concept. Postmoderns, such as Lyotard, Vattimo, and Rorty,¹⁵ criticize modern rationality as an instrument of terror, but I criticize it for concealing its own irrational myth. I endeavor to overcome modernity through "transmodernity, a project of the future" —which could serve as an alternate title of this book.

The birthdate of modernity¹⁶ is 1492, even though its gestation, like that of the fetus, required a period of intrauterine growth. Whereas modernity gestated in the free, creative medieval European cities, it came to birth in Europe's confrontation with the Other. By controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as discoverer, conquistador, and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity. Europe never discovered (*des-cubierto*) this Other as Other but covered over (*encubierto*) the Other as part of the Same: i.e., Europe. Modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European.

Since I originally delivered these lectures in Frankfurt, I should like to recall the great thinkers of this city, such as Hegel, who lived his adolescence here, and the Frankfurt School, which bears the city's name.¹⁷ By reflecting on historical events, I hope to clarify the possibility of an intercultural philosophical dialogue, such as I have already initiated with Karl-Otto Apel. Although according to Montaigne or Rorty diverse cultures or life-worlds are incommunicable and incommensurable, I want to develop a philosophy of dialogue as part of a philosophy of liberation of the oppressed, the excommunicated, the excluded, the Other. It will be necessary to analyze the historical, hermeneutic conditions of the possibility of intercultural communication. I will strive to spell out these conditions by means of the philosophy of liberation, which starts from alterity, from the one "compelled" into dialogue¹⁸ or excluded from it (the dominated and exploited culture), and from concrete and historical events. The philosophy of liberation begins by affirming alterity, but it also recognizes negative aspects such as the concrete, empirical impossibility of the excluded or dominated one ever being

able to intervene *effectively* in dialogue. This inability applies not only to argumentation but even to Rorty's "conversation," since Rorty himself, who denies the possibility of the rational dialogue I desire, fails to take seriously the asymmetric situation of the excluded Other.¹⁹

I write this preface in Seville as I edit the lectures. This was the land of the Moors, Muslims until that tragic January 6, 1492, when the Catholic kings occupied Granada, handed over by Boabdil, who was the last sultan to tread upon European soil. At this terminal moment of the Middle Ages, a pressured man rushed among the camps of the barbaric Christians, who were far inferior to the subtlety, education, and customs of the ancient caliphate of Córdoba. This man endeavored to sell his ideas to the kings who were involved in their own buying and selling in the *Capitulaciones de Santa Fe*. This man, the last daring navigator of the western Mediterranean hemmed in by Islam, wanted to set out for India via the ocean, the secondary sea, the Atlantic. Just as the Christians occupied Malaga and cut off the heads of Andalusian Muslims in 1487, the same would happen to the "Indians," the inhabitants and victims of the newly discovered continent.²⁰ The conquest meant broken alliances and treaties, the elimination of the vanquished elites, endless tortures, demands that one betray one's religion and culture under pain of death or expulsion, land seizures, and the distribution of inhabitants among the Christian captains of the conquest. After centuries of experimentation in Andalusia, this victimizing and sacrificial violence parading as innocence began its long destructive path.

Next to the Guadalquivir River in Seville stands the Tower of Gold, which reminds one of the century of "gold," the coast "of the pearls," the "gold" coast (in Panama), the "rich" coast (*Costa Rica*), the rich port (*Puerto Rico*), "Argentina" (from *argentum*, silver).²¹ By this tower passed "much of the gold extracted from here, which goes to the kingdoms of Europe and which is more valuable because of the blood of Indians in whose skins it is wrapped as it journeys to Europe."²² By this tower passed Indian riches en route to Flanders and the wealth of Africa en route to India and China. This is the tower... where a new god began to be idolatrously adored... a god demanding victims for its violence and continuing these demands to this day.

One ought to remember the theme of this book every October 12 in years to come. What should be one's ethical and rational option in the face of this landmark event, rendered banal by propaganda, superficial disputes, and political, ecclesial, and financial interests?

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