

*PART
ONE*

*FROM THE EUROPEAN EGO:
THE COVERING OVER*

In this first part, I will take up the European perspective and develop it as completely as possible. Since I have only limited space, this can hardly be an exhaustive study. My themes are for that reason abstract figures (*Gestalten*) in the process that constituted modern subjectivity and culminated in Descartes's expression of the *cogito* in 1636.¹ Spain and Portugal (though I concentrate on the former) at the end of the fifteenth century formed only a segment of the feudal world, or perhaps better, they were Renaissance nations and thus part of the first step toward modernity. Before the rest of Europe, they subjected the Other to conquest and to the dominion of the *center* over the *periphery*. Europe then established itself as the "center" of the world (in the planetary sense) and brought forth modernity and its myth.

It is necessary to include Spain in this originative process, since at the end of the fifteenth century it was the only European power with the capacity for external territorial conquest, as it had already shown in the conquest of Granada. At the same time, Latin America also rediscovered its own *place* in the history of modernity as the *first periphery* of modern Europe. From the very beginning, Latin America endured the effects of global modernization later to be felt in Africa and Asia. Although South America was already known—as mapmaker Henricus Martellus showed in Rome in 1489—only Spain, thanks to King Ferdinand of Aragon's political skill and Columbus's daring, tried formally and publicly to set forth upon the Atlantic to reach India. This adventure was not merely anecdotal or historiographic; it was the birth of *modern subjectivity*.

CHAPTER

1

EUROCENTRISM

Universal history goes from East to West. Europe is absolutely the end of universal history.... Universal history is the discipline of the indomitable natural will directed toward universality and subjective liberty.

—Hegel, *Philosophy of Universal History*

A myth lies hidden in the emancipatory concept of modernity that I am going to develop in the course of this book. But first I will discuss a subtle, masked component that subtends much philosophical reflection and many European and North American theoretical assumptions. Eurocentrism and its concomitant component, the developmentalist fallacy, are at issue here.¹ First, consider what Kant in 1784 writes in "Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?":

Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) is the exit² of humanity by itself from a state of culpable immaturity (*verschuldeten Unmündigkeit*).... Laziness and cowardliness are the causes which

bind the great part of humanity in this frivolous state of immaturity.³

For Kant, immature culture is culpable and its ethos lazy and cowardly. Today one needs to ask Kant: Ought one to consider an African in Africa or a slave in the United States in the eighteenth century to be culpably immature? What about an indigenous person in Mexico or a Latin American mestizo at a later period?

In the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, Hegel portrays world history (*Weltgeschichte*) as the self-realization of God, as a theodicy⁴ of reason and of liberty (*Freiheit*), and as a process of Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*):

Universal history represents... the *development* of the consciousness which Spirit has of its liberty and the evolving realization that history is established through such consciousness. The *development* implies a *series of phases*, a series of determinations of liberty, which are born from its concept, that is, from the naturalness of liberty becoming conscious of itself... This necessity or necessary series of pure abstract determinations of the concept are studied in Logic.⁵

In Hegelian ontology, the concept of development (*Entwicklung*) plays a central role. This concept determines the movement of the concept (*Begriff*) until it culminates in the idea—that is, as it moves from indeterminate being to the absolute knowledge in the Logic. Development (*Entwicklung*) unfolds according to a linear dialectic; although originally an ontological category, today it is primarily considered as a sociological⁶ one with implications for world history. Furthermore, this development has a direction:

Universal history goes from East to West. Europe is absolutely the *end of universal history*. Asia is the beginning.⁷

But this alleged East-West movement clearly precludes Latin America and Africa from world history and characterizes Asia as essentially confined to a state of immaturity and childhood (*Kindheit*)⁸:

The world is divided into the Old World and the New World, and the latter derives from the fact that America... was not

known until recently *for the Europeans*. But this division is not purely external, but *essential* since this world is new not only relatively but also absolutely. It is new with respect to *all its own physical and political characteristics*.... The chain of islands extending between South America and Asia appears immature and recently formed.... Similarly, New Holland gives the appearance of geographical youthfulness since if one departs the English possessions toward the wilderness one finds enormous rivers which still have not carved out their river beds.... Regarding America, especially Mexico or Peru, and its degree of civilization, our information indicates that its culture expires the moment the Spirit draws near (*sowie der Geist sich ihr näherte*).... The inferiority of these individuals in every respect is entirely evident.⁹

The immaturity (*Umreife*) marking America is total and physical; even the vegetables and the animals are more primitive, brutal, monstrous, or simply more weak or degenerate.¹⁰ For this reason:

In what refers to its elements, America's formation is not yet finished.... [Latin] America is, as a result, the land of the future, which will reveal its historical importance.... As the land of the future, America does not interest us, and besides the philosopher makes no prophecies.¹¹

Latin America, for all that, remains outside world history, as does Africa. Although there is a trinity (Europe, Asia, and Africa), nevertheless Africa is always set to the side:

The three parts of the world¹² maintain, then, among themselves an essential relation and they constitute a totality (*Totalität*).... The Mediterranean Sea unites these three parts of the world, and that fact converts it into the center (*Mittelpunkt*) of all universal history.... The Mediterranean is the axis of universal history.¹³

There is thus the concept of the center of history. But of the three parts which constitute the totality (here Latin America is simply excluded¹⁴), two of them will remain inferior. Regarding Africa, Hegel wrote some pages worth reading, although one must take them with a grain of salt because they culminate in a superficial, fantastic, racist ideology. They betray an infinite sense

of superiority, which exposes the state of mind of Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

Africa is in general a closed land, and it maintains this fundamental character.¹⁵ It is characteristic of the blacks that their consciousness has not yet even arrived at the intuition of any objectivity, as for example, of God or the law, in which humanity relates to the world and intuits its essence. ...He [the black person] is a human being in the rough.¹⁶

These are among the most insulting pages in the philosophical analysis of world history. After this, Hegel concludes:

This mode of being of the Africans explains the fact that it is extraordinarily easy to make them fanatics. The Reign of the Spirit is among them so poor and the Spirit in itself so intense (*das Reich des Geistes ist dort so arm and doch der Geist in sich so intensiv*), that a representation that is inculcated in them suffices to impel them not to respect anything and to destroy everything.... Africa... does not properly have a history. For this reason, we abandon Africa, we will mention it *no more*. It is not part of the historical world; it does not present movement or historical development.... What we understand properly of Africa is something isolated and lacking in history, submerged completely in the natural spirit, and mentionable only as the threshold of universal history.¹⁷

European pride, the Hegelian unmeasuredness that Kierkegaard ironizes so effectively, shows itself in this paradigmatic text. In addition, Asia plays a purely introductory, infantile role in the development of world history. Since world history moves from East to West, Hegel first set aside Latin America, which is not situated in the East of the extreme Orient, but in the "East" of the Atlantic, and then Africa, the barbarian South, immature, cannibalistic, and bestial:

Asia is the part of the world where the beginning is verified as such... But Europe is absolutely the center and the end (*das Zentrum und das Ende*)¹⁸ of the ancient world and the Occident; Asia is the absolute Orient.¹⁹

But in Asia, the Spirit is in its infancy, and despotism permits only that one person (the emperor) be free. Asia serves as the dawn,

but in no way as the culmination of world history. Europe functions as the beginning and end of history, even though there are diverse Europes. For instance, in southern Europe, "the land of the South of the Pyrenees,"²⁰ the south of France, and Italy, the Spirit dwelt in antiquity, when the north of Europe was still uncultivated (*unkultiviert*). But the South "does not have a nucleus (*Kern*) stamped in itself,"²¹ and for that reason its destiny lies in northern Europe. There are even two Norths: the east (Poland and Russia), which is relatively negligible since always in relation with Asia; and that which is important, the western part of the north of Europe:

Germany, France, Denmark, the Scandinavian countries are the heart of Europe (*das Herz Europas*)²²

Here Hegel becomes emotional. One can hear in his words the timbre of Wagner's trumpets. He writes:

The Germanic Spirit (*germanische Geist*) is the Spirit of the New World (*neuen Welt*),²³ whose end is the realization of the absolute truth, as the infinite self-determination of liberty that has for its content its proper absolute form. The principle of the German Empire ought to accommodate the Christian religion. The destiny of the Germanic peoples is that of serving as the bearer of the Christian principle²⁴

Hegel, expressing a thesis exactly contrary to that which I want to prove, writes on the German peoples:

The ideal superior signification is that of Spirit, which returns into itself from out of the dullness of consciousness. The consciousness of its own self-justification arises and mediates the reestablishment of Christian liberty. The Christian principle has passed through the formidable discipline of culture; and the Reformation also gives it its exterior boundary, *along with the discovery of America....* The principle of the free Spirit has made itself here the flag of the world, and from it universal principles of reason have developed.... Custom and tradition are no longer of value; distinct rights need to be founded on rational principles. Thus the liberty of the Spirit is being realized²⁵

That is to say, for Hegel, modern Christian Europe has nothing

to learn from other worlds or other cultures. It possesses its own principle in itself, and is its full realization:

The principle has been fulfilled, and therefore the End of Days has arrived: the idea of Christianity has reached its full realization²⁶

The three stages of the German world portray the development of this one Spirit through the kingdoms of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.²⁷ The Germanic empire is the kingdom of the totality, in which we see previous epochs repeat themselves,²⁸ such as the first epoch, the Germanic migrations in the time of the Roman Empire, and the second epoch, the feudal Middle Ages. Everything concludes with three final events: the Renaissance of letters and arts, the discovery of America, and the passage toward India around the Cape of Good Hope to the south of Africa. These three events end the terrible night of the Middle Ages, but do not yet constitute the new age. The third age, modernity, begins with the Lutheran Reformation, a German event, which reaches its fulfillment in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Modernity thus attains its culmination in the same terms that Hegel used to describe the English:

The English were determined to convert themselves into the missionaries of civilization for all the world (*Missionarien der Zivilisation in der ganzen Welt*)²⁹

Before this Europe of the North (as today before the United States), no one could pretend to have any rights, as Hegel expresses it in his *Encyclopedia*:

Because history is the configuration of the Spirit in the form of event,³⁰ the people which receives the Spirit as its natural principle... is the one that dominates in that epoch of world history.... Against the absolute right of that people who actually are the carriers of the world Spirit, the spirit of other peoples has no other right (*rechtlos*).³¹

This people (Germany and England especially for Hegel), possesses an absolute right³² because it is the "bearer" (*Träger*) of the Spirit in this moment of its development (*Entwicklungsstufe*).

Before this people every *other people* have no rights (*rechtlos*). This is the best definition not only of Eurocentrism, but of the sacralization of the imperial power of the North and of the center over the South, the periphery, the old colonial, dependent world. I believe that no commentaries are needed since the texts bespeak a frightful cruelty, an unmeasured cynicism, which is transformed into the very development of the enlightened reason of the *Aufklärung*.

Besides, and this has passed unperceived by many commentaries on Hegel—and even by Marx—the contradictory *civil society* overcomes itself as *state*, thanks to the constitution of colonies that absorb the mentioned contradiction:

By a dialectic which is appropriate for surpassing itself, in the first place, such a society is driven to look *beyond* itself to new consumers. Therefore it seeks its means of subsistence among other peoples which are inferior to it with respect to the resources which it has in excess, such as those of industry.³³ This expansion of relations also makes possible that colonization to which, under systematic or sporadic form, a fully established civil society is impelled. Colonization permits it that one part of its population, located on the new territory, returns to the principle of family property and, at the same time, procures for itself a new possibility and field of labor.³⁴

The periphery of Europe thus serves as the free space to enable the poor, the fruit of capitalism, to become proprietary capitalists in the colonies.³⁵

Jürgen Habermas treats the same theme in his work *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*³⁶ when he writes:

The key historical events for the implantation of the principle of subjectivity are the *Reformation*, the *Enlightenment*, and the *French Revolution*.³⁷

I wish to disprove Habermas and Hegel, for whom the discovery of America is not a determinant of modernity.³⁸ The experience not only of discovery, but especially of the conquest, is *essential* to the constitution of the modern ego, not only as a subjectivity, but as subjectivity that takes itself to be the center or end of history.

On the other hand, it is evident that Hegel as well as Habermas exclude Spain and with it Latin America from the originary definition of modernity. Hegel writes:

Here one meets the lands of Morocco, Fas (not Fez), Algeria, Tunis, Tripoli. One can say that this part does not properly belong to Africa, but more to Spain, with which it forms a common basin. De Pradt says for this-reason that when one is in Spain one is already in Africa. This part of the world... forms a niche which is limited to sharing the destiny of the great ones, a destiny which is decided in other parts. It is not called upon to acquire its own proper figure.³⁹

If Spain is outside modernity, so much the more is Latin America. My hypothesis, to the contrary, is that Latin America, since 1492, is a constitutive moment of modernity, and Spain and Portugal are part of its originary moment. They make up the *other face* (*te-ixtli* in Aztec), the alterity, essential to modernity. The European ego or subjectivity, immature and peripheral to the Muslim world, continues to develop. Finally, it surfaces in the person of Hernán Cortés presiding over the conquest of Mexico, the first place where this ego effects its prototypical development by setting itself up as lord-of-the-world and will-to-power. This interpretation will permit a new definition, a new *world* vision of modernity, which will uncover not only its emancipatory concept, but also the victimizing and destructive myth of a Europeanism based on Eurocentrism and the developmentalist fallacy. The myth of modernity now takes on another meaning than it did for Horkheimer and Adorno,⁴⁰ or than it does for postmoderns such as Lyotard, Rorty, or Vattimo.

Unlike the postmoderns, I will not criticize reason as such; but I do accept their critique of reason as dominating, victimizing, and violent. I will not deny universalist rationalism its rational nucleus, but I do oppose the irrational element of its sacrificial myth. I do not then deny reason, only the irrationality of the violence of the modern myth. I do not deny reason, but rather postmodern irrationality. I affirm the reason of the Other as a step toward a trans-modern *worldhood*.