

INTRODUCTION

WESTERN MODERNITY

AND THE PARADIGM OF WAR

There were seventy of us in a forestry commando unit for Jewish prisoners of war in Nazi Germany. An extraordinary coincidence was the fact that the camp bore the number 1492, the year of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain under the Catholic Ferdinand V. The French uniform still protected us from Hitlerian violence. But the other men, called free, who had dealings with us or gave us work or orders or even a smile—and the children and women who passed by and sometimes raised their eyes—stripped us of our human skin. We were subhuman, a gang of apes. A small inner murmur, the strength and wretchedness of persecuted people, reminded us of our essence as thinking creatures, but we were no longer part of the world. . . . We were beings entrapped in their species; despite all their vocabulary, beings without language. —EMMANUEL LEVINAS¹

“Dirty nigger!” Or simply, “Look, a Negro!”

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self. —FRANTZ FANON²

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once asserted that “the normal state of things is *war*” and that “man is by nature destined to only want peace rarely and for brief periods.”³ The history of the twentieth century and already the beginning of the twenty-first would no doubt seem to provide evidence to Nietzsche’s dictum. In less than one hundred years we have seen two world wars, the Jewish Holocaust, wars of decolonization throughout the globe, a sinister cold war with dark tensions and perverse repercussions in the emerging postcolonial world, guerrilla wars in Latin America and elsewhere, ethnic cleansing, and the current war against terror, among other terrifying conflicts in the world. Are these isolated phenomena or exceptions from our glorious modernity? The figures whose work I examine here do not believe that, but they do not accept the idea that war is a normal state of humanity either. On the contrary, their work helps us to determine first the roots of violence in the modern world, and second, whether or not human beings could reasonably aspire to peaceful modes of coexistence. *Against War* is a critical intervention in this context that seeks to illustrate the contributions of subaltern perspectives and religious thought to the overcoming of a widespread and influential Western paradigm of war.

This book focuses on responses to Western modernity from the perspective of subjects who inhabit its underside, particularly Jewish, black, and Latin American voices. I take as a point of departure the works of the Lithuanian-born French-Jewish philosopher and religious thinker Emmanuel Levinas, the Martiniquean psychiatrist and political thinker Frantz Fanon, and the Catholic Argentinean-Mexican philosopher, historian, and theologian Enrique Dussel. The diagnosis of modernity and the responses to it offered in this book are elaborated through the critical analysis of the thought of these figures and through the creative construction of ideas at the intersection of their work. I approach Levinas’s, Fanon’s, and Dussel’s contributions to critical theorizing in terms of a de-colonial hermeneutics of suspicion that also involves a constructive and unapologetic effort to articulate a new humanism. Their work complements as it also provides alternatives to the ideas and approaches of the celebrated Western masters of suspicions: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Different from them, Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel respond to Western ideals of the human from the critical perspective of racialized and colonized peoples. Imperial violence and racism become for them the loci where ideals of war more persistently endure. These ideals are embedded in what I refer to in this work as a master morality of dominion and control that can be found at the core of racial policies, im-

perial projects, and wars of invasion. It is this master morality, and not particularly a slave morality, class struggle, or repressed desires, that becomes the main object of critique for the critical theory that emerges at the intersection of Levinas's, Fanon's, and Dussel's work. This change of focus does not render Marx's, Nietzsche's, or Freud's contributions to the critical analysis of modern society necessarily invalid, but offers a unique horizon for their critical evaluation and possible appropriation.

In modernity, geopolitical space, intersubjective relations, economic activity, and the production of knowledge form a nexus of power oriented by imperatives of domination and control that mirror the logic of a division between masters and slaves. The result is a colonial order of the world, which is arguably seeing today its most radical global expression. The present configuration of power began to take a global form more than five hundred years ago. For 1492 is not only the number of the camp in which Levinas and others were imprisoned by the Nazis, or the year in which Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain; 1492 is also the year in which the conquest and colonization of the Americas began and the moment to which one can trace the emergence of a firm imperial Europe conceiving itself as the center of the whole world and as the telos of civilization. Modern anti-Semitism, modern anti-black racism, and modern colonialism find a common historical referent in the end of the Spanish *reconquista* and the beginnings of a new form of conquest in the Americas. The year 1492 is a crucial point for understanding the constitution of the episteme and social order that I define here as a paradigm of war.

By a paradigm of war I mean a way of conceiving humanity, knowledge, and social relations that privileges conflict or *polemos*. Enrique Dussel puts it in a most explicit and dramatic form:

From Heraclitus to Karl von Clausewitz and Henry Kissinger, “war is the origin of everything,” if by “everything” one understands the order or system that world dominators control by their power and armies. We are at war—a cold war for those who wage it, a hot war for those who suffer it. . . . Space as a battlefield, as a geography studied to destroy an enemy, as a territory with fixed frontiers, is very different from the abstract idealization of empty space of Newton's physics or the existential space of phenomenology. (PL 1)

The paradigm of war can be characterized in terms of the privilege of conflict or the celebration of the reduction of the singularity of individual entities and subjects to the generality of the concept, to Being, to an ethnos, or to a totality in philosophical reflections. For some, as for

Dussel in the passage above, which is highly inspired by Rosenzweig and Levinas, the fixation with ideas or experiences of conflict and war goes as far back as Greek philosophy and through it to Western thought.⁴ In this book I take a different approach to the analysis of this problem. I aim to discern a particularly modern expression of the paradigm of war. That is the reason why the discovery and conquest of the Americas plays a central role in these reflections. I do not pursue here a transcultural theory of the origin of violence and war in civilization, nor do I deny that warring ideals have shaped in one way or another ancient and non-Western ideals of civilization. My argument is rather that European modernity became inextricably linked with the experience of the warrior and conqueror and that modern colonization, racism, and other forms of social and geopolitical dynamics in the modern world can be understood in terms of the naturalization of the paradigm of war. This is a problem for *us* who continue to struggle with the many faces of modernity and its legacies today.

My approach in this book is phenomenological and historical. I base my reflections on the critical analysis of modern Western thought by figures who are acquainted with it but at the same time focus on experiences of war, racism, and colonialism. The analyses that they provide give credence to the idea that the paradigm of war is deeply connected with the production of race and colonialism as well as by the perpetuation, expansion, and transformation of patriarchy. In the modern world, space is mapped as a battlefield principally through colonialism, race, and dehumanizing ways of differentiating genders. War, in turn, is no longer solely found in extraordinary moments of conflict, but rather becomes a central feature of modern life-worlds.

While conflict and war could have served as a paradigm of cosmology and social relations in premodern and non-European civilizations, my argument here is that one of the characteristic features of European modernity is the naturalization of the death ethic of war through colonialism, race, and particular modalities of gender differentiation. Following Tzvetan Todorov, it could be said that this form of naturalization makes massacre, more than sacrifice, a characteristic feature of modern societies, a distinction that he makes in the context of studying the conquest of the Americas.⁵ I aim to provide here a philosophical and historical account of modernity as a paradigm of war, as well as a counterparadigm based on the reflections of three twentieth-century philosophers who critically engage Western thought, particularly phenomenology, from three different but related experiences and geopoliti-

cal sites. Despite their cultural, ethnic, and religious differences, the French-Lithuanian-Jew Emmanuel Levinas, the Afro-Caribbean Frantz Fanon, and the Christian Latin American Enrique Dussel are, in respect to dominant Western conceptions, racialized subjects belonging to groups that have been typical depositories or distinct objects of the violent tendencies of dominant Western ideals of the human. Violence and war appear to them not as contingent results of particular historical projects, but as constitutive dimensions of dominant conceptions of civilization and civilizing processes. This suspicion is motivated by a tragic twentieth century and by a long modernity whose constitutive features include the conquest of the Americas. Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel share, for different sociopolitical and historical reasons, and in different ways, the legacy of European empires. What makes their work useful for the project of articulating a postimperial way of thinking is both their acute sense of the problems of Western master morality and their ingenious alternatives to its philosophical bases.

Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel, the times in which they lived, and the critical perspectives that they developed were similar to what Paul Gilroy claims of mid-twentieth century figures whose “confrontations with Nazism were tied to the possibility of armed anticolonial resistance and to some powerful commitments to civil- and human-rights struggles.” “These events and themes,” Gilroy comments further, “combined to produce a philosophically grounded analysis of racism and its political dimensions in several different places, not all of which are obviously or immediately colonial in character.”⁶ Gilroy cites W. E. B. Du Bois, Hannah Arendt, Levinas, Fanon, Malcolm X, and other intellectuals as examples of such figures. These figures may be connected with what Chela Sandoval has referred to as a “theory uprising” that emerges in response to the internal crisis of Europe and anti-colonial resistance in the twentieth-century. This uprising generates the elements that Sandoval uses to conceive of a “methodology of the oppressed.”⁷ This book aims to contribute to the understanding, critical appraisal, and creative elaboration of some theories that are part of this theory uprising and of methodologies of the oppressed. I seek to make explicit the connections between Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel, as well as their respective limits in relation to Eurocentrism, male privilege, misguided identity politics, and other related themes. I also aim to build on the possibilities of their thinking beyond such limitations.

Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel respond critically to the realities of war as they encounter them in the context of Nazism, French imperialism,

intolerable Eurocentrism, and the menace of U.S. Americanism and its salvific mission of freedom, all of which are preceded if not tied to each other by a long history of racialization and colonization that goes back to at least 1492. By focusing on responses to these different challenges in Western history I seek to provide more effective and informed responses to the darker expressions of Western modernity than other perspectives that more exclusively focus on the first two world wars and more recent wars in Europe. These include influential responses from dominant voices in critical theory (Horkheimer and Adorno), poststructuralism (Vattimo and Derrida), and recent ethical and political theory (Apel and Habermas). These interventions tend to take less seriously than the work of Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel the ways in which racism and (in the case of Fanon and Dussel) colonization are also expressions of conceptions that promote or are complicit with dehumanization, violence, and war. I attempt to respond to these challenges by articulating a diagnosis of modernity and a critical response to its perverse effects that combines ethics, political theory, and ideas that can be traced back to certain forms of religious thought, particularly Christian and Judaic. Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel subvert dominant ideas in Western thought by elevating ethics and the self-Other relation to the status of first philosophy. Levinas connects the notion of the primacy of ethics to Judaism, but he also sees it, along with Fanon and Dussel, as a consistent response to the experience of subalterity in modernity. Levinas encountered the dynamics of subalterity in a radical way in the midst of the Jewish Holocaust, particularly when he was imprisoned by the Germans in the Second World War. His descriptions of dehumanization relate to what was occurring in the concentration camps, but they can also be related, as Fanon's descriptions of anti-black racism suggest, to the slave ship, the plantation, the colony, and wherever the readily visible racially marked body appears. That Levinas did not fully articulate the implications of his phenomenology of the racial encounter and the connections of his critical response to it with wider struggles against racism and colonization does not mean that his work cannot be interpreted and evaluated in that light. I interpret Levinas's efforts to articulate a "humanism of the Other" as, at least partially, a de-colonial project. Indeed, as I approach them here, the works of Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel advance what could be rendered as a de-colonizing ethico-political turn, or de-colonial turn, to which this work aims to contribute.⁸

What I am calling here the de-colonial turn was announced by W. E. B. Du Bois in the early twentieth century. Later on, it was made more ex-

plicit by an array of thinkers that stretch from Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon in the middle of the twentieth century to Gloria Anzaldúa, Lewis Gordon, Emma Perez, Chela Sandoval, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Boaventura de Sousa Santos and others at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. The de-colonial turn can be understood as an expression or a particular manifestation of the skepticism toward Western theodicy (a form of theodicy in which Western civilization itself takes the place of God and must be thus defended in face of any evil) that, as Levinas points out, became difficult to sustain in the twentieth century.⁹ It finds its roots in critical responses to racism and colonialism articulated by colonial and racial subjects since the beginnings of the modern colonial experience more than five hundred years ago. The de-colonial turn is a simultaneous response to the crisis of Europe and the condition of racialized and colonized subjects in modernity. It posits the primacy of ethics as an antidote to problems with Western conceptions of freedom, autonomy, and equality, as well as the necessity of politics to forge a world where ethical relations become the norm rather than the exception. The de-colonial turn highlights the epistemic relevance of the enslaved and colonized search for humanity. It seeks to open up the sources for thinking and to break up the apartheid of theoretical domains through renewed forms of critique and epistemic creolization.¹⁰

The de-colonial turn began to take definitive form after the end of the Second World War and the beginnings of the wars for liberation of many colonized countries soon after. But it was preceded by early responses to Hitlerism, such as those by Levinas, and by earlier interventions such as those of the great African American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois and others. Du Bois is a very significant figure because he announced in 1903 that the problem of the twentieth-century was going to be the problem of the color line (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 17), by which he pointed both to the increment of racism and to the radical opposition to it as sources of conflict in the twentieth century. The works of Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel, among others, are a testimony to how right Du Bois was. Du Bois's prophetic warning was based on the problems that emancipated peoples of the African Diaspora confronted at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, particularly, but not solely, in the United States. People considered non-people (not the modern "people" of the nation-state nor the multitude of empire, but the condemned of the earth), even after the formal recognition of their humanity, were going to struggle with all their might against others in power who resisted their full recognition as humans.¹¹ And Du Bois knew that this

struggle was global. The color line was not only white and black for him: it included the black and the Jew, as well as peoples from the South, colonies, and former colonies.

A fundamental contribution of Du Bois is that he examined the pathology of the world from the position of those regarded as most pathological and non-human. His work expresses an epistemic shift that involves making visible the invisible and analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the “invisible” people themselves. This means that the very enunciation of the “problem of the color line” was predicated on at least a partial solution, which involved a shift in the theoretical attitude of the knower. While the theoretical attitude requires detachment and wonder, the *de-colonial attitude*, which Du Bois advances, demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as dispensable and insignificant.¹² If the problem of the twentieth century, and indeed the problem of modernity, is the problem of the color line, the solution for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is, at least in part, the de-colonial turn. The de-colonial turn includes the definitive entry of enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at previously unknown institutional levels. It introduces questions about the effects of colonization in modern subjectivities and modern forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking. This work seeks to contribute to those explorations by interpreting, critically evaluating, expanding, and complementing the works of Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel in light of the de-colonial turn.

In this work I argue that while Levinas’s main achievement is to provide an ethical interpretation of the constitution of subjectivity and human experience at a transcendental genetic-phenomenological level, Fanon and Dussel contribute to the understanding of the existential and geopolitical implications of understanding subjectivity in ethical terms. Their contributions are not limited to these levels of investigation. My claim is that their respective contributions to each of these different levels provide the bases to articulate a consistent philosophical position that is in line with their general ideas, while it cannot be identified completely with the ideas of any one of them alone. Consistency does not mean finality. The ideas that I present here are indeed open to revision, expansion, correction, and enrichment in light of their implications or

in light of the ideas of other thinkers, including Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel themselves. In respect to these three, I also aim to provide fresh interpretations as well as critiques. In this sense, I aim to contribute at least to some extent to the critical literature on these thinkers. At the same time I readily admit that my engagement with these authors is partial inasmuch as I highlight the aspects of their work that are more useful for the enterprise of articulating a response to the paradigm of war as twenty-first-century humanity still confronts it today. But I think that my reflections are consonant with the work of Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel as a whole. I also believe that those reflections connect in important ways with the work of other figures, including indigenous intellectuals, philosophers of the African Diaspora, Asian American scholars, and Chicana feminists, among others. I have explored and continue exploring these connections in other writings.¹³

Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel are different in respect to location, ethnicity, race, and religious affiliation. More than any of the others perhaps, the question of religion engenders anxiety across the secular academic board, from West to East, and from North to South. In order to better understand my approach to these thinkers as well as their own intellectual production, it becomes necessary to consider, if only in passing here in the introduction, the relation between philosophy and religious thought as I approach it in this book. Both Levinas and Dussel are philosophers and religious thinkers. They both have philosophical and confessional or theological writings. Although both insist on the separation between these two activities, they both agree in that religious ideas serve as a source for philosophical thought. Levinas is not afraid to maintain religious terminology intact, even when he has allegedly properly translated it into a philosophical context. God, religion, and expiation along with Judaic conceptions of the female, the family, and the law keep appearing in his texts unabashedly. While Dussel is less intrepid in the articulation of his philosophical thought, it is clear that, for instance, much of his difference with Levinas can be traced to his belief in the incarnation vis-à-vis Levinas's Judaic conception of the wholly transcendent and disembodied G-d.¹⁴ At the same time, the absence of religious terminology in Dussel's philosophical oeuvre may be linked to his explicit critical posture in respect to dominant Christianity. Like many other theologians of liberation, Dussel conceived liberation not only as overcoming dependency but also as liberation from traditional theology. While Levinas tried to rescue and show the philosophical relevance of Judaic spirituality for the West, Dussel was concerned with criticizing

Western Christendom and was thus not particularly interested in using Christian terminology in a particularly positive and constructive way—at least in his philosophical writings. Moreover, while the philosophical community would be open, particularly after the Holocaust, to entertain the idea of Judaic wisdom, any appeals to Christian wisdom would rather be immediately translated as Christian apologetics or dogmatic theology. Levinas and Dussel wrote in moments when the imperative of returning to Judaic sources felt as strong as the need to criticize Christianity's complicity with the Jewish Holocaust and with poverty in Latin America.¹⁵ This tendency may be changing today as open criticisms of the turn to Judaism begin to emerge and complicities with new forms of Christian orthodoxies become fashionable. The work of Slavoj Žižek provides perhaps the best example here.¹⁶

There is another reason why Dussel may have been less inclined than Levinas to introduce religious terminology in his philosophical work. Dussel's project has been from its inception more cosmopolitan than that of Levinas. This is partly explained by Dussel's concerns with his Latin American identity and his intellectual itinerary. These concerns originated in his first sojourn to Europe. Dussel traveled by boat and had to stop in many ports in South America and Africa before getting to Spain. Dussel recounts how much his vision of the world and his concerns had changed by the time his trip was over. He became aware of the racial and cultural complexity of the Americas and of the cultural links across the Atlantic Ocean. He also realized that Latin Americans were not simply transplanted Europeans and that the Latin American ethos could not be understood solely in reference to Christian Western culture. The problem of identity explains why while Levinas was primarily concerned with reactivating the Judaic sources of the West (in a context of deep European anti-Semitism), Dussel engaged in a physical and intellectual sojourn that took him to different parts of Europe, Africa, and Israel. His trilogy of works on the Greek, the Christian, and the Semitic ethos in the 1960s is the product of Dussel's consuming passion for the question of cultural identity. Where Dussel's efforts clearly fall short is in the absence of references to African culture and to problems confronted by black populations in Latin America. His cosmopolitan consciousness also finds limits at the points in which he portrays Latin America as the most formidable locus of critical rationality and seems to enact a logic of exclusion or segregation. His best side resides elsewhere, precisely at the points where his renunciation of the inflation of the particular leads him to a transmodern perspective and to a critical cosmo-

politanism.¹⁷ His work also becomes exemplar, and this is something with much pertinence in our days, at the points in which he pays more attention to the victims of Christianity than to Christianity's claims for embodying everything that is good and true about humanity. I pursue a more ample analysis and critical appraisal of these elements of Dussel's work in chapter 6.

For varied reasons then, Dussel has been less prone than Levinas to universalize his own particular religious experience. He is more unambiguously concerned with the articulation of a critical philosophy that responds to the experience of exclusion and domination, which includes epistemic subalterity. Dussel would argue that this impetus gives testimony to his Christianity. At the same time, however, and this is the crucial issue here, he recognizes the need for the critical reactivation of subaltern knowledges, including those subalternized by the secular discourse of the imperial West and modern nation-states in the periphery. This is precisely one of the meanings of transmodernity. If early modernity is to a great extent dominated by Christianity, and Enlightened modernity is secular, transmodernity is neither Christian nor secular. It rather opens the space for the articulation of different forms of knowledge and conceptions of reality. It goes in line with other efforts to take religious thought seriously beyond the secular prejudices of Enlightened modernity and in a different way from strict confessional adherence to religious creeds.¹⁸ In this line, Dussel has not only attempted to articulate the epistemic value of the Aztecs' rationality, but he has also shown how the most radical Christian ethical view at the time of the conquest was limited in comparison to the Aztecs' point of view.

Critical reactivation is truly not so far from what Levinas himself attempted to do in regard to Judaic religiosity. The basic difference is that Levinas hardly looked beyond the perspectives provided by Greek and Hebrew lenses. Levinas was a great translator and a great inclusivist. He translated Hebrew notions into Greek and saw Judaic components in everything good that he observed. Since he defines the Jew as being aware of responsibility beyond measure, he identifies the traces of Judaism wherever he finds the upsurge of donation and goodness—I will return to this point in the conclusion. In this sense, as much as Levinas tried to escape the insurmountable limits of language by breaking with linguistic conventions and thinking against the grain, he remained committed to modern notions of abstract universality. Transmodernity, in contrast, is neither exclusivist nor inclusivist and is not committed to abstract universality either.¹⁹ It is rather trans-pluri-versal, by which I mean

that it transcends and transgresses the impositions of abstract universals while it opens up the path for dialogue among different epistemes. These elements of transmodernity can be observed in varied postcolonial theories that advocate diversity (Mignolo), polycentrism (Majid), conviviality (Gilroy), and epistemic diversity at large (King).²⁰

As trans-pluri-versal, transmodernity does not privilege religion over secularity, or secularity over religion. It is in this respect both post-secular and post-religious. Both the secular and the religious have specific meanings in modernity. By post-secularity and post-religiosity I mean that transmodernity questions both the meaning and the logic inaugurated by the secular/religion divide. Transmodernity also aims to interrupt the impetus for modernization, the enchantment with technique, the dominion of instrumental rationality, and the identification of modernity with secularity and premodernity with religion. Transmodernity refers to the activity of thinking about Being and its limits without Eurocentric, theological, or secularistic prejudices. The primary axis of reflection is the question of responding responsibly to subjects in positions of subordination.²¹ In this sense transmodernity is first and foremost an ethics and a politics of liberation. Yet, this does not mean that confessional discourse is illegitimate. As Levinas's and Dussel's works clearly evince, there are no religions as such, but rather interpretations of doctrines and ideas that may be mobilized in different directions, given different meanings, and may inspire different projects. Critical reactivation is precisely critical of views and interpretations that are complicit with master or imperial morality. This critique aims both ways, to the secular and to the religious, suspending at the same time the idea of a dichotomous relation between the two. In this sense, as Levinas and Dussel show in different degrees, transmodernity leads to a double critique of the religious and the secular as well as to a suspension of the power of the binary between the religious and the secular.²²

In this work, I pursue a similar suspension of the religious/secular divide. Insofar as it is Dussel, more than Levinas, who more intrepidly pursues this adventure this work is more Dusselian than Levinasian. And, it is in fact Dussel who also combines insights from Fanon and Levinas. But I try to provide here a different interpretation of both of these figures and the link between Levinas's genetic-phenomenological exploration and the question of the political. It is Fanon's existential phenomenology that serves me to establish a link between these spheres. Not surprisingly, or perhaps too surprisingly for some, I also identify a "religious" vein in Fanon's thought. To some extent at least Fanon,

the atheist, appears here as a post-secular and transmodern liberation thinker. It becomes clear in this way that while I strongly object to some of Dussel's interpretations of Levinas's and Fanon's works, it is Dussel's cosmopolitanism that most approaches the kind of work that I try to do here.

Now that the logic of this work is more clear, let us take a look in more detail at its contents and structure. Part I offers an interpretation and critical analysis of Levinas's work in light of the problems posed by paradigms of thought that privilege experiences akin to war, violence, and death. The first chapter focuses on one of Levinas's earliest essays, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism." Levinas accomplishes two tasks in this essay: first, he offers valuable suggestions about the interrelation of dominant anthropological and epistemological ideals in the West; second, he provides a sketch of how Western conceptions of freedom and truth are subtly connected with philosophical accounts that legitimate or are complicit in one way or another with sociopolitical expressions of violence. These conceptions are so pervasive that they keep appearing in seemingly alternative philosophical articulations of freedom and truth. I focus in this chapter on two positions alluded to by Levinas in his short essay: those of Friedrich Nietzsche and Edmund Husserl. As opposed to each other as they might seem at first, Levinas suggests that the philosophical positions of these thinkers are clearly connected by their implicit or explicit endorsement of Western society as a "community of masters." These positions are not well equipped to exorcise the terror of Hitlerism, which expresses for him a radical version of the idea of society as a "community of masters." Hitlerism, which advocates the superiority of the Aryan race, defends the condition in which mastery is to be achieved concretely at all costs and in which this can only be assured by actually eliminating the slaves. Levinas suggests that a critical appropriation of the Judaic sources of Western thought offers the possibility of articulating truly alternative anthropological and epistemological views. The second chapter in part I turns to an examination of this more constructive part of his project.

The second chapter provides an interpretation of major themes in Levinas's work in terms of his attempt to provide a philosophical account that evades the limitations and perverse effects of Western master morality. The chapter begins with a critical reflection on the work of Martin Heidegger, who represents for Levinas the most exemplary, if not most dangerous, figure of those whose response to the limits of Western thought ends up reproducing some of its worst dimensions. Instead of

repeating the myopic gesture of simply reducing Heidegger's work to his biography, I will try to show here that the problems of Heidegger's thought are not exclusively determined by his temporary allegiance to Nazism. His thought reflects a more general problematic insistence on legitimating anthropological and epistemological concepts that sustain the conception of Europeans, and more particularly Germans, as a community of masters. I will trace the presence of a subtle legitimation of a master morality in some main themes of Heidegger's work and then focus particularly on his conceptions of ontology, human authenticity, and death.

The discussion of dominant Heideggerian themes provides a background to understand the articulation of Levinas's own philosophy and his critical take on Western conceptions of the human. I aim to make evident here why Levinas invests much of his time elaborating on an account that links what he called ethics and metaphysics with a renewed articulation of human fraternity and social life. Then I will assess the virtues and limits of this project. In order to do this, I first consider selected essays of Levinas's intellectual production up to the publication of *Totality and Infinity*, his first major work. This period is characterized by the attempt to ground human fraternity not in terms of abstract equality, a typical strategy of classical liberalism ("liberty, equality, fraternity"), but in terms of sexual difference, thereby rescuing important aspects of the corporality of the subject without collapsing into a racial discourse akin to National Socialism. Clarifying how the idea of fraternity, and not eros or fecundity, is the overarching theme of the early period of Levinas's work serves as an antidote to postmodern reactions, allegedly inspired by Levinas himself, that tend to dismiss hastily the tradition of modern political theory, particularly that of the Enlightenment.

The conceptual horizon offered by the Enlightenment and by the French tradition of political theory is complicated by new articulations of ethics and justice after the end of the Second World War. The re-emergence of a discourse on the Rights of Man after 1948 and a more acute perception of the philosophical bases of the genocidal politics of Nazism initiated a shift in Levinas's discourse. The events of May 1968 in France also marked Levinas's work in important ways. *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas's second major work, published in 1974, is clearly in tune with the critical thought that emerged in the wake of the events of 1968 in France. I find in this period a turn from fraternity

to a more radical ethical conception that I term *altericity*. Altericity refers to a radical act of giving that is driven by an unequalled concern for the death of the other person. The path from fraternity to altericity sees an intensification of Levinas's discourse on responsibility, on the difference between Being and the Other, and on the biblical theme of "giving to the stranger." Levinas discusses the themes of giving and the gift in terms of a transcendental account of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of subjectivity and signification. Coming back firmly to the work of his teacher Edmund Husserl, Levinas provides the basis for a new conception of philosophy that is tied to the concept of "reduction."²³ The reduction is defined by Levinas in terms of a critical discourse that unveils the ways in which the constitutive event of *giving* to the Other is betrayed by human endeavors that often make justice collapse into an invitation to indifference. The task of reduction appears thus to be animated for Levinas more by love than by wonder, and it expresses a fundamental concern, not so much for one's own death, but for the death of the other person. In this sense, it is possible to say, as I will argue, that the reduction represents a paradigmatic act of altericity.

The Levinasian account of subjectivity, of philosophy as ethical critique, and of the meaning of wisdom contrasts sharply with the anthropological and epistemological bases of the paradigm of violence and war. Yet, while Levinas clearly demonstrates the underlying ethical presuppositions of our ordinary existence, he does not equally consider the many ways in which this very ordinary existence is often vitiated by relations that violate the ethical meaning of human reality. This other dimension of the drama of Being is the privileged focus of Frantz Fanon, to whom I dedicate the second part of this work. In the third chapter I introduce Fanon as a philosopher of reduction in the Levinasian sense of the term. Yet, I argue that Fanon's critical discourse and praxis give expression to a peculiar form of the reduction. I refer to this as the "de-colonial reduction." The de-colonial reduction is a critical discourse that provides a diagnosis of the meaning of institutions and the aspirations behind civilizing, imperial, or de-colonizing projects. It operates by firmly introducing coloniality and the relation between master and slave as axes of reflection in the evaluation of the meaning behind certain expressions of human reality. The discussion of the de-colonial reduction is followed by an exercise in this critical venture. I attempt to offer an answer to the question of how is it that the master, who, according to Fanon, is not even interested in achieving recognition through the slave, confirms his

identity as master. I submit that only an imperial God can offer such recognition. The rest of the chapter substantiates and develops this argument. This discussion aims to clarify, in direct opposition to some of his interpreters, that Fanon's thought can hardly be integrated into the premises of neo-Hegelianism.²⁴

While the third chapter is dedicated to the articulation and analysis of the intricate ways in which imperial modes of recognition are sustained, the fourth chapter focuses on the search for ways to consistently overcome imperial and colonial modes of recognition. Here we will look for the conditions of possibility for the emergence of love in the slave's struggle for recognition. This discussion represents a most important step in the attempt to articulate a philosophical conception that counteracts the dominance of the paradigm of violence and war. The recognition of the ways in which the relation between master and slave penetrates and shapes ordinary human existence clearly indicates that consistent opposition to the paradigm of violence and war requires an explicit form of political activity. In this way, the reduction takes on not only theoretical and ethical connotations, but practical and political ones as well. The link between the ethical and the political is clearly established by Fanon, or so I will argue, in his account of the struggle for recognition as a struggle for liberation and for non-sexist human fraternity. The articulation of this point is preceded by a phenomenological exploration of the meaning of the "cry" of the slave in Fanon's work, which shows that Fanon clearly sustains a conception of the self as a gift. This conception puts him at odds with classical and more recent formulations of the struggle for recognition. It also distances him from certain aspects of the politics of identity. This interpretation dispels a common view, mainly propagated by hasty judgments about the theme of violence in Fanon's works, that his work represents a simple repetition of what he was attacking so fiercely, the normative force of the ideal of war in ethics and politics.²⁵ It also contributes to the most important task of shaking the foundations of the comfortable quarters of apolitical ethics (both postmodern and neoliberal), and of promoting an active and progressive effort at advancing decolonization, which means, for Fanon, nothing less than the post-imperial act of *restoring the human being to her and his place*.

Among today's most vibrant, systematic, original, and profound thinkers there is arguably only one whose work has been strongly shaped both by the liberation discourse greatly indebted to Fanon and by the thought

of Emmanuel Levinas. Although Levinas interpreters in the United States and Europe are only rarely acquainted with his work, he, along with a group of scholars, was responsible for making Argentina one of the earliest places where the study of Levinas's work found a home.²⁶ I refer to Enrique Dussel. In part 3 I assess critically Dussel's work in light of the analyses offered in the previous chapters. In the fifth chapter, I focus on the Dusselian argument that a consistent post-imperial philosophy ("filosofía real post-imperial contemporánea") must overcome phenomenology and develop a discourse of liberation through an ethics grounded on the distinction between the self and the Other. Dussel appropriates Levinas's ethical metaphysics to achieve this purpose. For this reason, I come back again in this chapter to phenomenology and to the Levinasian critique of Husserl and Heidegger. This time I focus exclusively on Levinas's account of the self-Other relation in order to assess the adequacy of Dussel's appropriation. I argue that Levinas's reflections on the genesis of the self can be directly applied to historical and socio-political issues, but only at the price of confusion and at the risk of falling into a sort of dogmatism or into a problematic foundationalism. Dussel's hasty rejection of phenomenology, and of existential phenomenology in particular, lead him to rely on Levinasian categories at points in which he should have rather learned from Fanon. I will argue that Fanon's examination of the lived experience of the colonized, along with his reflections on the slave's desire for recognition, provide more subtle and progressive accounts of the relation between master and slave in colonial and neocolonial times than Dussel's direct application of Levinas's ethics to concrete experience.

The critique of Dussel's early work from a Levinasian and a Fanonian point of view respectively does not hide, however, the extent to which his work contributes to the critical work of "reduction" that I attempt to formulate through the works of Levinas and Fanon as well as to the decolonial turn that I described previously. It is possible to say, at least in general terms, that where Levinas introduces ethical metaphysics, and where Fanon pursues an existential phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of the black, Dussel provides a systematic exploration into the epistemological pertinence of history and geopolitics. In the sixth chapter I present Dussel's *The Invention of the Americas* as a decolonial reduction of Eurocentric conceptions of world history.²⁷ Dussel offers in this text a transgressive post-imperial exploration of the history that Husserl recounted in Eurocentric terms. In this text Dussel over-

comes the false split between phenomenology and liberation, while he also leaves behind some problematic ideas in his use of the Levinasian conception of the Other.

I conclude with a reflection on the new venues for thinking opened up by the analyses I have pursued. To the difference between Being and beings, or ontological difference, I add here, following Levinas and Dussel, the difference between Being and what is beyond Being on the one hand (trans-ontological difference), and, following Fanon, the difference between Being and what lies below Being, or the “damned,” on the other (sub-ontological difference). With the first I intend to spell out the metaphysical character of goodness. The second points to the production of evil. If damnation refers to the status of colonized and dehumanized subjects, goodness is partly defined as de-colonization and humanization, which entails, in this account, a radical expression of love. Evil is understood, in contrast, as a fundamental resistance against generous and receptive interhuman contact. Evil, the negation of the gift through violence, war, or indifference, reaches its climax in genocidal activities and in the unfolding of empire. Opposing racism and imperialism as projects fundamentally involves manifold acts of “reduction” aimed to bring about the overcoming of this sinister sociopolitical and historical force.

The history of ideas is sad and its narration largely driven by Eurocentric prejudices. The sources for doing intellectual work are limited as most of us in the academy tend to identify the contours of rationality with the figures drawn in imperial cartographies. It is necessary to demystify our perceptions on the location of authentically critical discourses. I close this work with a “call” for the transgression of the authority of the bastions of Eurocentrism in the academy through the exploration of new ways of thinking about the relation between knowledge and geographical location. As Dussel has done in his effort to locate the position of Latin America in world history, we should all attempt, attentive to the many “cries” that we have ignored for so long, to respond responsibly to the ones who are “below” and to fight with them in the struggle for their liberation. We need to *hear* and to *learn* from the wisdom of those whose confrontation with evil has turned into the horror of evil and to the fight against it. The consistent opposition to the paradigm of war includes the exploration of an alternative geography of reason, one that allows us to think about human and natural reality without Eurocentric or nationalist prejudices. Writing on Levinas, Fanon, and Dussel (a Jew born in Lithuania, a black Martiniquean, and a Latin American), may be

qualified, in this sense, intrinsically as an act of transgression. But it is certainly more than that. It is a tribute to three Quixotic figures whose pain turned paradoxically into love. It is, in addition, a serious attempt to clarify, assess, and develop their more radical humanistic insights. It also represents an effort to think from the limits of Being and to increase our sensibility to the “cries” of ethical revolt that resound all over the world.

