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Mohamed Moulfi's most recent book, *Philosophie et civilization: Considérations sur l'idée d'occident,* is too important to entrust to the vagaries of the academic marketplace. Even though it concerns the ideas, whose urgency today is unquestionable, of Europe and the West, its arguments are formulated in a way that may prove challenging to readers expecting the familiar pathways and signposts. While it shares certain objectives with postcolonial and decolonial studies, its approach to these objectives differs from theirs. Moulfi carefully excavates what a series of philosophers, beginning with Kant and Herder, actually say about the idea of civilization, that is, the civilized world, and in doing so confronts us with those parts of their works we have overlooked or forgotten. By citing rather than summarizing, and refraining from improving, or apologizing for, the texts in which these concepts appear, he allows us to see their often elliptical, hollow or fragmented presentation, even in the works of philosophers, like Kant, Hegel or Husserl, known for their devotion to systematicity.

Moulfi writes from Algeria, and thus from a geo-political position ideally suited for observing the contradictions internal to the idea of what is variously called Europe, Occident, the West, and perhaps most fundamentally, civilization. He shows that, although each of these terms has a polyvalence specific to it, they have often functioned as synonymous, forming a kind of discursive united front against that which their very existence compels them to define as the outside. And though the names of this outside are less frequently heard than in the past, they continue to operate as before, as incitations to action, discursive, legal and political. At work in philosophy's past and present, are notions of civilization, above all, the civilization incarnate in the juridico-geographical entity called Europe (which, as Husserl argued, ought to include North America), that must defend itself against all that is defined as uncivilized, barbaric, and fanatical. The fact that the French language is today perhaps the primary vehicle for "learned" Islamophobic and anti-Arab discourse, confers an even greater importance on Moulfi's book.

The place of such notions as the West and European civilization, and the oppositions they form, in many domains has been acknowledged and to some extent explored, but in the realm of philosophy, that is, "Western" philosophy, this work has only begun. To understand this history, we must be prepared to follow a development punctuated at irregular intervals by both partial and quasi-total discontinuities, by conceptual extinctions as well as revivals, and to grasp the various origins assigned to it as the effect of a retroaction whose meaning lies in the present. It is in this context that individual cases become intelligible as parts of a larger history that is in no way limited to that of philosophy (a realm whose boundaries the practice of philosophy itself constantly modifies), but always at work within it. By minutely observing the fractures and fault lines that the concepts of civilization, the West and Europe produce as operative philosophical concepts, he makes visible the history from which (Western) philosophy cannot be separated.

Moulfi begins at the end of the eighteenth century, a moment of repeated and worsening collisions between the West, as both theory and practice, and that from which it demarcates itself in the act of referring to itself as civilization. This is the time that Europe laid claim to much of the earth's surface on the grounds that it was uninhabited, except, that is, by non-Europeans, savages, primitives, Africans, Indians, Arabs, etc., while European philosophers, one after the other, in a striking show of unanimity, laid claim to the territory of philosophy as theirs by right. Their sovereignty was retroactive: philosophy had always belonged to Europe, or to the West, and assumed its original and essential form solely in ancient Greece and in the Greek language as it appeared in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The establishment and repeated affirmation of this lineage necessarily involved a repudiation of the claims for and by what were once understood to be the philosophical traditions of China and India, and of the Arabic and Hebrew languages, which were now relegated to the prehistory of philosophy. These diverse traditions could be summarized as the totality

of that which the philosophy of the Greeks was compelled to disqualify in order to become itself. Philosophy from this point on is the possession of Europe alone by hereditary right.

The purification and Europeanization of philosophy, however, was not a simple process; it required repeated operations of exclusion, annexation and assimilation. The need to assert a "living" connection to Greek philosophy necessitated in turn a reduction of the real complexity of Greek thought to "Plato and Aristotle," as if their own differences were insignificant. Even Hegel, whose lengthy periodization of Greek philosophy in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* specifies the antagonisms proper to each stage, as well as to the divergent schools that compose these stages, must finally have recourse to "the Greeks" as the guarantee of the distinction that raises European or Western philosophy above the pseudo- or pre-philosophies with which the rest of the world abounds.

Indeed, Moulfi himself has written elsewhere of the extraordinary maneuvers by means of which "Western philosophy" has attempted to deny, conceal and annul the presence of the *Falsafa* of the Islamic world within the heterogeneity of Europe's philosophical heritage by erecting a wall around itself, as if to admit this presence would be to call into question the meaning of the West or Civilization, the very ideals we are told we must defend and cannot do without.[1] Here, he examines the constitution of the Occident and of Europe as a definitive moment both internal and external to the philosophy that arrogated to itself the title of Western. He takes as his point of application a concept intimately interwoven with the themes of the history described above: *Bestimmung*. This term, central to Hegel and Heidegger, and important in different ways to Kant, Nietzsche, and Husserl, makes intelligible the historicism proper to modern philosophy by revealing the contradiction essential to it. *Bestimmung* means

[1] Moulfi, Mohamed. "Philosophie et Falsafa: Oeuvre et mise en oeuvre de la falsafa." *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. 2009/4 n° 64 | pages 511 à 522

both determination (in the sense of cause) and destination or destiny, and therefore suggests both origin and end. Moulfi argues that the increasing urgency felt across philosophy over the last two centuries to establish once and for all the facts of its birth and therefore its birthright, signals a correlative problematization of its destination. It appears now more than ever that the end of philosophy, philosophy's destiny, concerns above all its origin, as if it were carried along by a movement of infinite regress in its effort to establish not only the truth of its origin, but the truth of this truth, to infinity.

Moulfi begins his exposition by noting the place of Greece, that is, ancient Greek thought, in Kant's *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, or "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose."[2] He allows us to see its presence in Kant's text, often taken for granted by commentators, as an originary supplement or prosthesis, essentially foreign to the body understood as its outgrowth. The nine theses through which Kant develops his argument for a universal history that comprehends the totality of humanity, avoid any reference to the history of particular civilizations, invoking instead the mechanical ordering [*die mechansiche Anordnung*] of nature. The notion of "mechanical order" applies not only to the synchronic dimension, the constants and regularities of bodies in motion, but also to the diachronic development of nature, that is, history. The capacities (*Anlagen*) of humanity, as a natural species (*Gattung*), are "destined" (*sind bestimmt*) to unfold to "their natural end" (Thesis I). Humanity is destined to develop beyond the mechanical ordering of its animal being [*seines tiereschen Daseins*] to a state of perfection defined by humanity itself in the exercise of its reason (Thesis III). The motor of this development is the "antagonism" consequent to the "unsociable sociability" [*ungesellige Geselligkeit*] proper to humankind. Although "man wants harmony, nature knows better what is good for his species:" discord [*Zwietracht*]. It is through antagonism that individuals are moved to overcome

[2] Kant, Immanuel. *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784). On History. Trans. Lewis White Beck. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1963, p. 11-26.

their natural indolence to gain the advantage over others and to surpass them in reputation. This moment of separation from nature, or rather development of a properly human domain in nature's realm is "the first true step in the passage from savagery to civilization" [*die ersten wahre Schritte aus der Rohigkeit zur Kultur*] (Thesis IV).

But the final perfection of humanity can only come about through the means of its own end: a universal civic society endowed with the power to make and enforce laws. Although the obstacles to its realization may appear insurmountable, given the ceaseless conflicts between states that seem like "an Epicurean concourse of efficient causes," we must assume a purposiveness that moves ever closer to the end precisely through the concatenation of conflicts. The idea assumed here is itself a necessary step in the realization of the end the idea asks us to believe and perhaps to feel, even if it lies beyond knowledge in the strict sense. As Moulfi remarks, this is a Kantian version of what Hegel called the ruse of reason. But Kant cannot abandon himself to history, to his belief that the idea of progress necessary to that very progress must appear at its appointed hour by virtue of the teleology itself. Instead, he must step outside of the process in which up to this point he has remained immanent to supply as a kind of afterthought in the ninth and final thesis, the theoretical foundation for the idea that progress is supposed to supply. The very idea of history as something other and more than a succession of events governed by nothing more than lawless chance, the idea of history as a movement whose every step is a means to its end, that is, its final perfection, appears at the end of Kant's "Idea," not as something imposed as true and obvious to humankind by that very history, but, on the contrary, as dangerously close to mere superstition (everything happens for a reason). An idea that can be felt, but not known, as true, however necessary it may be to the teleology of which it is the idea, may well lack the power to persuade or compel humanity.

This is the point, near the end of the essay, at which Kant mobilizes Ancient Greece as *Bestimmung*, both origin and destiny, the end awaiting us from the beginning. Greek

philosophy is the *Principio* (both origin and the authority to guide what is posited at the origin to its proper end); it is the starting point not so much of history, as of that which makes this history intelligible, an intelligibility that consists of identifying the progressive unfolding of an order beneath appearances. While it is true that Egyptians, Babylonians and others discovered elements necessary to a notion of history (systems of writing and recoding events), only the Greeks understood the providential order of which apparently random events were merely the phenomena and opened the way to a truly rational conception of history. In a note, Kant cites Hume's remark that only the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, transformed their disconnected narratives into a teleology that made the history of the Hebrew people intelligible: Thucydides "*ist der einzige Anfang aller wahren Geschichte*" (is the only beginning of true history) (Thesis IX). In this way, only the civilized can recognize the historicity of those, the Greeks, who made the notion of historicity conceivable.

Moulfi shows that one of Kant's most energetic critics, Johann Gottfried Herder, in his *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91) [*Ideas for the History of Mankind*], despite his far more qualified universalism and a commitment to a notion of "national character," arrives at an even more extravagant view of ancient Greece as the birthplace of rationality and hence of the universalism it alone renders possible. There, philosophy was emerged out of and against religion, guaranteeing its autonomy, just as historical narrative, denounced by Aristotle as inferior to poetry, finally assumes its rational form, which opens the way to progress without a priori limits. The discoveries and concepts that emerged in the other societies in the ancient world remained scattered and undeveloped until they were arranged by means of Greek thought into a coherent order that allowed them to develop individually and in combination. Herder's idealization of ancient Greece, however, is achieved only at a certain cost: his concern with human freedom is such that he denounces the institution of slavery in all its varied forms, from the Egypt of the Pharaohs to the plantations of the West Indies as they existed in his

own time. It is totally absent, however, from his account of Greece, where as Aristotle noted, philosophy depended for its existence on slavery.

Moulfi shows clearly that the idea of ancient Greece formed by the conjunction of Kant and Herder, serves as a kind of raw material or rough outline for Hegel, with whom the concept of Europe and the West or Occident, takes on a much more expansive role, made possible in turn by the ideal origin constituted by "Greek thought." For Hegel, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Europeans have been as dazzled by the superficies of "oriental" thought in its various forms, as by the exquisite art and handiwork of China and India. As a result, they tend to see this thought as a more or less primitive anticipation of European philosophy, and in this sense, the moment of its infancy, that is, its beginning. In doing so, they have obscured the fundamental discontinuity that not only separates the philosophy of the West from what is mistakenly regarded as the philosophy of the Orient, but further renders the specificity of the former unthinkable, thereby obscuring the true and necessary form that philosophy must take. If Eastern thought is the beginning of philosophy, it is what Hegel in the *Science of Logic*, calls a pure beginning, a beginning that is pure nothingness, without any admixture of being, and therefore an originary nothingness from which nothing can follow. As Moulfi notes, Hegel calls this originary non-origin, the *Voranfang* or pre-beginning. In it, "antitheses in their abstract form are broken through; a breaking through which effects their nullification. This undeveloped reconciliation exhibits the struggle of the most contradictory principles, which are not yet capable of harmonizing themselves, but, setting up the birth of this harmony as the problem to be solved, make themselves a riddle for themselves and for others, the solution of which is only to be found in the *Greek* World."[3] The solution to the problems and riddles presented by Oriental thought but unrecognized as such by this thought, cannot take them as is, but must translate them into the idiom of reason in which alone their true meaning can be

[3] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. Kitchner, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001 p. 135.

represented. Just as Kant, following Hume, regarded the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures as a liberation of their meaning from their confinement in a language unfit to communicate this meaning in any but a mutilated form, so the Greeks in translating Oriental riddles restored to them their true form, rendering them intelligible and soluble.

Hegel refers to the discovery "in recent times" that "Sanskrit lies at the foundation of all those further developments which form the languages of Europe; *e.g.,* the Greek, Latin, German." Neither this, nor the fact that India "was the centre of emigration for all the western world," however, should be understood to mean that India may be identified as the origin of European culture. Its relation to what followed from it is nothing more than an "external historical relation." In a remarkable formulation, Hegel argues that what has been transmitted by India to Europe is purely superficial and that what "among later peoples attracts our interest, is not anything derived from India, but rather something concrete, which they themselves have formed, and in regard to which they have done their best to forget Indian elements of culture."[4] The origin of civilization proper, that is, of Europe, thus does not commence with the Greeks' various discoveries and inventions, but with the act of forgetting that precedes and makes possible these discoveries, with the act of burying and supplanting what came before. Hegel repeats this gesture, marking it as legitimate and necessary, by declaring that "the spread of Indian culture is prehistorical, for History *is* limited to that which makes an essential epoch in the development of Spirit."[5]

In fact, Hegel writes as if the interest in the East or the Orient that emerged with the process of trade, conquest and occupation threatens to undo the forgetting necessary to the commencement of philosophy proper. But the very existence of such a threat implies that this forgetting and the process of the self-production of philosophy

[4] Ibid., p. 159.
[5] Ibid.

that it makes possible, do not mark the establishment of an origin understood as a threshold of irreversibility, but must be re-enacted, as if the progress of history might require a re-founding or recommencement. The re-founding that Hegel stages in response to "recent" advances in knowledge of the East (however distorted by Orientalism) is clearly "external," its necessity not immanent in the progress of thought, but imposed by the possibility of a new beginning that would condemn Greek thought and all that followed from it as the mere prehistory of the present. At this point it is useful to recall that from his own perspective there was no greater threat to his philosophical system than that posed by Spinoza, understood by Hegel as an untimely revival or survival of the supposedly sublated thought of the Orient, "an echo from Eastern lands," that threatened to arrive in the form of the future.[6]

The traces of Hegel's anxiety appear in the text as a defensive repetition of two propositions (in various forms): 1. "philosophy begins with the Greeks or the West," and 2. Philosophy could not have begun in the East. The re-establishment of the Greek origins of European philosophy (philosophy as such), however, generates its own contradictions. Because for Hegel philosophy flourishes only where individual will grasps itself and its own freedom as universal, the East, where only the despot is free and all others slaves, cannot furnish the ground philosophy requires. Ancient Greece is where "we first see real freedom flourish." In contrast to Herder, Hegel, soon qualifies this judgment by extending the operation of the origin or distinguishing two moments within it. The forgetting of the despotism of the Orient now occurs in two steps: the first, the Greeks, represent the freedom of the few (Hegel's belated and incomplete recognition of the place of slavery and other forms of servitude in the Greek world), specifically the freedom of the masters as a collective; the second, surprising perhaps to those familiar with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*, is that of the

[6] Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. 3 Vols. Trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simpson. London: Routledge, 1896. Vol 3, p. 252.

"Germanic world" in which "man as man is free" (*im germanischen Leben gilt der Satz, es sind Alle frei, d.h. der Mensch als Mensch ist frei*). A second epoch is added to the first, Greek, epoch of philosophy, displacing its end to the Germanic and Christian world of the Occident. Germanic philosophy is the philosophy internal to Chistendom insofar as it belongs to the German nation. the Christian-European people, inasmuch as they belong to the world of science, possess collectively Germanic culture; for Italy, Spain, France, England, and the rest, have through the Germanic nations received a new form [*Die germanische Philosophie ist die Philosophie innerhalb des Christentums, insofern es den germanischen Nationen angehört. Die christlich-europäischen Völker haben, insofern sie der Welt der Wissenschaft angehören, in ihrer Gesamtheit germanische Bildung; denn Italien, Spanien, Frankreich, England usw. haben durch die germanischen Nationen eine neue Gestalt erhalten*].

In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel explains that the superiority of Germanic spirit derives from the fact that "The Greeks and Romans had reached maturity within, ere they directed their energies outwards. The Germans, on the contrary, began with self-diffusion – deluging the world, and overpowering in their course the inwardly rotten, hollow political fabrics of the civilized nations. Only then did their *development* begin, kindled by a foreign culture, a foreign religion, polity and legislation. The process of culture they underwent consisted in taking up foreign elements and reductively amalgamating them with their own national life. Thus their history presents an introversion – the attraction of alien forms of life and the bringing these to bear upon their own." Here, not only is the universal contained in the German nation, but Europe as a whole "belongs" to Germany insofar as it is the outward actualization of the internal philosophy of all European nations, the essence disclosed at the origin, but for a long time hidden and unrecognized as such. The Germanic peoples rescued this original essence and in doing so, internalized it, adding what was necessary to its completion. Their invasions of civilized Rome, by their success, showed that what passed for the civilized world, was civilized only outwardly, while inside, in its essence,

it was empty and rotten. By adding foreign elements and subjecting them to the rationality proper to their own culture, the Germans conferred upon the "foreign elements" they took as plunder, a higher and more complex meaning than what these elements had initially possessed. By attacking Christendom, they took from it everything of value that pertained to the spirit of Christianity itself and carried it with them in their wanderings. Germain self-diffusion was the process by which in overcoming or destroying the old, they accomplished a second beginning in nothingness, or according to Hegel, in the forests, now beyond recovery, the site of freedom. From it, followed universal or world history (*Weltgeschichte),* history as made by and for a "Christian Europe" permeated by the Germanic *Gemüt.*

An examination of Kant, Herder and Hegel alone shows the extent to which Moulfi's proposal to follow the movement of the concept of *Bestimmung* makes visible what was invisible or only partly visible in the history of philosophy, above all the problem of its own origin, simultaneously the origin of reason, and its incarnation in the Occident, the West, or Europe. At this point, his exposition takes a detour through Marx and Nietzsche, neither of whom completely succeeded in breaking with the idea of history as teleological or progressive, however complicated the ruses they invented to preserve some variant of this idea. In both cases, however, Moulfi isolates an irreducible tendency to deviate from it, visible in a prolonged resistance to their own principles: in Marx the notion of history as a linear succession of distinct moments, each marking progress over the moment that precedes it, and in Nietzsche, the postulation of an origin, forgotten and buried, but nevertheless inescapably present in life itself, whose return, imagined in the form of the utopian vitalism scattered throughout his work, can never be discounted.

Moulfi demonstrates the effects of the scheme, formulated in the *Communist Manifesto* and adhered to by Marx until the publication of the first volume of Capital, of fixed historical stages and the homogeneity of historical time that it implies. Both Marx

and Engels repeatedly return to the notion that societies outside of Europe and North America must pass through the stages of capitalist development before genuine social transformation is possible. The vast colonial world is trapped in immaturity, and its liberation can come only when the colonial powers impose capitalist social relations on the ruins of the more primitive mode of life. As late as 1867, Marx could write "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future,"[7] arguing in consequence that the sequence of historical stages can neither be "skipped over or cancelled by decree." But the struggles inside and outside of Europe worked over time to complicate this view of history, forcing Marx to adopt positions at odds with its premises. His detailed attention to Indian mutiny of 1857, led him to question the assumption that Europe, and above all, England could serve as model and norm, making developments outside of Europe intelligible: "Here indeed is one of the greatest inconveniences and difficulties in the Government of India from England, that views of Indian questions are liable to be influenced by purely English prejudices or sentiments, applied to a state of society and a condition of things to which they have in fact very little real pertinency" (NY Tribune, June 7, 1858).

But it was Marx's encounter with the agrarian struggles in Russia that led him in the last years of his life to abandon any theory of a universally valid sequence of historical stages, apart from which there could be no development or improvement in the life of the laboring masses rural and urban, as is made explicit in his letter to the Russian journal, *Otecestvenniye Zapisky,* in 1877. As he wrote, "by studying each of these forms of evolution separately and then comparing them one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there by the universal passport of a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical."[8] His correspondence with Vera Zasulich concerning the place of the Russian

[7] Marx, *Capital vol. 1*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin, 1976, p. 91.
[8] https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/11/russia.htm

Mir (peasant commune), during the course of which Marx produced four different drafts of his reply, led him explicitly to disavow the stage theory according to which the Mir would have to be abolished, and followed by a long period of capitalist transformation and proletarianization, before an anti-capitalist transformation could take place. Marx recognized in response to Zusalich's challenge that the Mir could not be dismissed as an essentially pre-capitalist form of organization and as such destined to disappear. In the specific context of late nineteenth-century Russia, the peasants' resistance to the imposition of private ownership of land took on an anti-capitalist significance and what they defended could be understood as more advanced than the regime of agrarian capitalism that demanded the dissolution of the Mir. This taught him, as Moulfi notes, the importance of understanding each society in its specific singular existence and larger historical tendencies as concatenations of singularities.

Further, Marx found in Lewis H. Morgan's anthropological studies a compelling reason to pluralize and complicate historical time in a way that revealed the categories of mature and immature as epistemological obstacles. The diversity of the forms of land tenure that existed in his own time, demonstrated that the imposition of a European model that demanded the reduction of this real complexity to alternatives of slavery, feudalism and capitalism, only served to obscure the variety of actually existing economic relations around the world. Visiting Algeria near the end of his life, Marx displayed his concern to understand in detail the specificity of the combination of indigenous and colonial forms of land tenure, property and commons, as well as the corresponding modes of individual existence. He had begun to appreciate the historical experiments carried out beyond the borders of Europe in the lives of the many different peoples once determined to be *geschichtelos,* that is, without history. What they lacked was nothing more than the linear, progressive conception of history which assigned to Europe the status of the absolute origin of historicity against which all other societies are measured. Marx did not fully succeed in theorizing these discoveries to arrive at a

more complex view of historical time.[9] In the case of Russia in particular, such a theoretical recasting was a necessity imposed by a revolution that seldom unfolded as expected and that demanded rapid and unforeseeable reorientations as the writing of Lenin and Trotsky on the Russian revolution clearly shows.

The reader might wonder at the inclusion of Nietzsche in Moulfi's account of the emergence of the West and of Europe in philosophy, not because we do not find a critique of these notion in Nietzsche's work, but because this critique so often appears as Europe's self-critique, that is, a critique designed to rescue one Europe from another, that is, to cure it of itself. And while he offers a critique of the cult of Greek antiquity, he does so by pointing to the other Greece, the Greece whose defeat alone made possible the historical sequence culminating in a sickly Europe. His references to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, so apparently at odds with Hegel's relegation of them to a necessarily superseded past, could easily be seen as examples of the tendency to translate non-European cultures into European terms and concepts, thereby producing a facile and false universalism of the same type that Hegel denounces. Even Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, perhaps the most powerful strain in his work, begins with its origins in the inferior part of Greek thought, above all, the Platonic devaluation of this world in favor of another, the invention of the real world behind or beyond this world, now deemed merely apparent, culminates in an unmasking of Christianity to reveal that it is Judaism in disguise.

While denying none of this, Moulfi is nevertheless able, through a kind of symptomatic reading of Nietzsche, to illuminate the diverse lines of argumentation that set Nietzsche in opposition not simply to Kant and Hegel, but to himself as well. Before I turn to Moulfi's reading, however, I want to add something to it by way of an introduction. An often overlooked part of Nietzsche's critique of the idea of history as progress, whether progress towards an end (Hegel) or progress understood as

[9] See Lindner, Kolja (éd.), *Le Dernier Marx*, Paris, Éditions de l'Asymétrie, 2020.

optimalization (Darwin—as understood by Nietzsche), concerned the idea of translation. Both Kant and Hegel regarded the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek as a liberation of their meaning from the confines of Hebrew, a language, as Augustine had argued, unfit to carry the message with which it was entrusted, into the first truly civilized language, Greek, allowing the truth of the Holy Bible finally to be expressed. The implications of this for the next two centuries were significant. The European languages, especially English, German and French, were understood as better vehicles of the meanings of non-European texts than the languages in which they had originally been written (especially in the case of Arabic, Sanskrit and Chinese). In this way, English for example became a kind of meta-language into which languages could be made intelligible to each other.

Nietzsche approached the question of translation obliquely, without reference to the Bible, by citing the example of the translation of Greek literary texts into Latin by Roman poets. The latter exhibited little interest in capturing what was peculiarly Greek in these works," but "quickly replaced them with what was contemporary and Roman."[10] In part, their practice of translation derived from a lack of the "historical sense," which allowed them simply "to absorb" the Greek into the Roman, without any concern for the experience of the creator or audience of the original. But it wasn't simply that what they translated was from the past, it was also "alien," (*das Fremde*), meaning that "as Romans, they saw it as an incentive for a Roman conquest. In fact, at that time one conquered by translating - not merely by leaving out the historical, but also by adding allusions to the present and, above all, crossing out the name of the poet and replacing it with one's own - not with any sense of theft but with the very best conscience of the *imperium Romanum*."[11] *Man eroberte damals, wenn man übersetzte:* one conquered (or pillaged) by translating, and did so without any consciousness of having

[10] Nietzsche, Fredrich, *The Gay Science*. Trans. Josephine Nauckoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 82-83.
[11] Ibid.

committed an act of theft, of taking what belongs to someone else, making it one's own, and in the process replacing it with something else. There was no sense of theft on the part of the conquerors; it was a perfectly legitimate means to the establishment of the Roman Empire. Nietzsche's comment clearly applies to the case of the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, which was treated as an act of violent despoliation in the Talmud. But, perhaps more strikingly, it applies to the German empire the preparations for which were well underway and constantly discussed at the time of the *Gay Science*'s publication (1882). In 1884, the Empire was launched, amid talk not only of the expected economic benefits, but also of Germany's civilizing mission in Africa, New Guinea and the Western Pacific, with an eye on China, as well.

Progress in this case and elsewhere in Nietzsche's work represents an attempt retroactively to establish the necessity and meaning of what was in fact the chance outcome of a struggle between cultures. The victory of the one is understood as inescapable, but also irreversible, because it is deserved. Its very necessity reveals the progress of which it is a moment: the past understood as progress serves as a means of understanding the present: the conqueror declares the conquest a matter of destiny; it could not have been otherwise for the defeated party, For Nietzsche none of this indicates cultural superiority or merit; the fortunes of war are subject to chance and those who triumph attempt to consolidate their victory through self-justifying myths of Divine favor or of the truth embodied by European civilization. The notions of arche and telos, and of entelechy, represent an effort to reaffirm the victory of the Socratic, and later the Christian, over the Dionysian principle, by providing its philosophical foundation, and stabilize the relationship of forces on which it rests to the greatest degree possible. Nothing here resembles the movement of the Hegelian dialectic; no labor of the negative guarantees its movement towards its appointed end. Despite Nietzsche's racism, despite an admiration for the truly powerful that can, but does not

always, tip into an endorsement of empire, he furnishes the means for a powerful critique of its theory and practice.

There is perhaps no more instructive moment in this two-hundred year history than the confrontation between Husserl and Heidegger in 1934-35. At issue here is something more than the struggle of rationalism against irrationalism, or phenomenology against the philosophy of being. Nor even the conflict between Fascism and Husserl's fragile liberalism. In fact, it is to be found in what the two philosophers share: a commitment to return to philosophy's source, the Greeks, as the foundation of what defines Western or European philosophy. It is on the basis of this foundation alone that what separates the West from the world becomes clear: what distinguished Greek philosophy from all other forms of thought was precisely its insistence on making distinctions, or, as Heidegger put it, distinguishing cultures so as to be able to rank them. The culture that distinguishes most is the most distinguished. And while Husserl does not say this in so many words, his practice follows Heidegger's theory quite closely.

As Moulfi notes in his discussion of Husserl, the question of Europe as a cultural and philosophical entity became a central concern, especially after the shock of 1933. Accordingly, the Vienna lecture of 1935, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man," a kind of introduction to the *Crisis of the European Sciences,* is a disconcerting text, marked by conflicting tendencies.[12] On the one hand, it is a defense of "European" rationalism as universally valid, and therefore, at least in principle, a mode of reason accessible to all human individuals. This is important to the realization of one of his unstated but essential objectives: to neutralize the all-important distinction between Aryan and Jew as the mark of a racial difference or of a quasi-permanent and therefore insuperable cultural difference. On the other hand, however, while neither the word Jew nor any of

[12] Husserl, Edmund, "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man," *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*. Trans. Quentin Lauer. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

its derivatives appears in the text of the Vienna lecture (Husserl's earlier conversion to Christianity was disregarded by the National Socialist regime for which he remained a Jew and therefore subject to the legal restrictions imposed on Jews), the fact the text overflows with references to nations and "races," past and present: from the gypsies who do not belong to Europe even as they inhabit its spaces, to Africans, American Indians, and even "Papuans," is significant.

The essence of Europe, of the West, is derived from the rationality that emerged only in Greece and the existence of which marks the separation of Greek thought from the diverse cultures surrounding it and with which it appears to have a great deal in common. Husserl fears that advances in the knowledge of the neighboring cultures in the ancient world, and particularly the scientific and mathematical developments once thought to be the exclusive possession of ancient Greece, threatened to efface the uniqueness of the Greeks, leading to argument that "the science of Greeks, is not, after all, distinctive of them, something which with them first came into the world. They themselves tell of the wise Egyptians, Babylonians, etc.; and they did in fact learn much from these latter. Today we possess all sorts of studies on India, Chinese, and other philosophies, studies that place these philosophies on the same level with Greek philosophy, considering them merely as different historical formulations of one and the same cultural idea. Of course, there is not lacking something in common. Still, one must not allow intentional depths to be covered over by what is merely morphologically common and be blind to the most essential differences of principle. Before anything else, the attitude of the two kinds of 'philosophers' the overall orientation of their interests, is thoroughly different. Here and there one may observe a world-embracing interest that on both sides (including, therefore, the Indian, Chinese, and other like 'philosophies') leads to universal cognition of the world, everywhere developing after the manner of a sort of practical vocational interest and for quite intelligible reasons leading to vocational groups, in which from generation to generation common results

are transmitted and even developed. Only with the Greeks, however, do we find a universal ('cosmological') vital interest in the essentially new form of a purely "theoretical' attitude."[13]

The Greeks alone, according to Husserl, were able to construct a world of knowledge irreducible to the natural world of material practice, a kind of knowledge that perhaps arose from a practical orientation to nature, but that became detached from it in the establishment of a properly human realm of ideality, made by man for man and whose progress was determined by nothing but the human spirit itself in its freedom, to which no a priori limits could be assigned. *Theoria* alone is the true ground of the universal and thus it was from the particularity of Greece, as both place and race or ethnos, that arose the means of transcending the natural particularities of race and nation, as well as the closed worlds of habit and norm. The theoretical position is "thoroughly unnatural," based in fact on a bracketing of the natural world and the practices directed to it.[14] This does not mean that theory has no relation to the natural-practical world, but that it must develop independently of this world in order to orient practice towards universal interests. The fundamental difference between the "Greco-European science" that is philosophy proper, and the "oriental 'philosophies'" (philosophies in the plural and in quotation marks) is that the latter, in the grip of a mythic/religious attitude so immersed in nature that it cannot understand it, is forced to explain the natural world by means of supernatural forces of its own invention.[15] Thus, no matter how much practical knowledge Chinese or Indian sciences accumulate, "it is a mistake for someone brought up in the scientific modes of thought initiated in Greece and progressively developed in modern times to speak of Indian and Chinese

[13] Ibid., p. 164.
[14] Ibid., p. 168.
[15] Ibid., p. 169.

philosophy (astronomy, mathematics) and thus to interpret India, Babylonia, and China in a European way."[16]

Further, the same forgetting of origins, or rather authentic origins, in the sense of authenticity understood as *Eigenlichkeit*, the origins to which we belong, that leads to a relativism incapable of distinguishing between the haphazard discoveries recorded in the non-European world and the irreversible epistemological break represented by the Greeks, is characteristic of Europe's own conceptual mutation: "naturalistic objectivism," Husserl's name for the positivisms that emerged in the early twentieth century. They are the "exteriorization" of rationalism, the movement by which rationalism by concealing not simply its history but its historicity, ceases to be itself and becomes mere naturalism. Unwilling even to acknowledge the reality of a spiritual/intellectual (*geistige*) domain it encourages the growth of "a barbarian hatred of the spirit."[17] The positivist rejection of the very notion of the spiritual vocation of Europe and the uniqueness of "Greco-European" thought, the sole possible foundation of genuine rationalism, has opened the way to a world from which universalism has been banished and replaced by tribes, peoples and nations striving for dominance according to the principle that physical power is proof of superiority.

Husserl's universalism thus does not consist of an acknowledgement, let alone acceptance, of the world's diverse cultures; one the contrary, it requires a rank ordering of cultures according to the degree to which their values and thought approximate those supposedly instantiated by the Greeks. To be sure, this inheritance does not remain static and unchanged; it is in fact the very possibility of historicity as Husserl understands it, of a progress without end, of a thought that progresses because it cannot do otherwise, but that remains aware of the original foundation ever present to change. And it is here that the question of humanity central to the Vienna lecture arises. From

[16] Ibid., p. 171.
[17] Ibid., p. 192.

the perspective of Greco-European universalism, the idea that the use of reason is an essential property of the human as such, refers to a reason other than that handed down to Europe from the Greeks: "Reason is a broad title. According to the good old definition, man is the rational living being, and in this other sense [*in diesem weiten Sinne*] even the Papuan is man and not beast [*ist auch der Papua Mensch und nicht Tier*]."[18] The Papuan has goals, considers how to achieve them as efficiently as possible, choosing from among a number of possible means. These in turn are preserved in the form of customs understood and practiced by all. But not only does this not qualify him as rational in Husserl's sense, the Papuan may represent in relation to beasts no more than the highest among them. And this distance is no greater than that which separates him and his reason from that of the Greeks: "the rationality of which alone we are speaking is rationality in that noble and genuine sense, the original Greek sense, that became an ideal in the classical period of Greek philosophy-though of course it still needed considerable clarification through self-examination. It is its vocation, however, to serve as a guide to mature development."[19]

"Auch der Papua" and *"selbst der Papua,"* both translated by Quentin Lauer as "even the Papuan," suggest that Husserl's universalism participates in the very problematization of the human, the human species and its limits, that Balibar has argued is constitutive of universalism as such. The primary difference between his doctrine and that according to which he was assigned, very much against his will, to the category, at once biological and cultural, of Jew, lies in the fact that National Socialist reason rejected the notion that inferior races, whose humanity was indeterminable, could be improved or at least led by their superiors, declaring them incorrigible and therefore dangerous, thereby necessitating their extermination. Further, these ideas were developed and implemented in Germany's African colonies before being re-imported to Europe.

[18] Ibid., p. 179.
[19] Ibid.

Husserl drew very different conclusions from the hierarchy of human differences as he saw it: only when Europe can reclaim the reason that distinguishes it the barbarism in both its internal and external forms can it assume the "role of leadership for the whole of mankind" that is its *Bestimmung*. [20] In this way it will restore the empire of spirit first established in its potential existence by the Greeks and draw all of humankind with it in the realization of that entelechy that is Europe.

This may well explain the reference to the indigenous population of German New Guinea (the "Papuans") where the existing balance of forces, demography and terrain made "*Schrecklichkeit*" campaigns impossible. German missionaries opened schools and there was a brisk trade in indigenous artifacts. But the final years of the colony, especially between 1900-1914 were marked by increasing resistance to colonial penetration and by nearly constant punitive expeditions involving ever larger numbers of German soldiers.[21] The Papuans' failure to recognize and submit to the more advanced Greco-European civilization may have been a factor in the liminal status they occupy in Husserl's scheme.

Heidegger's *Die Frage nach dem Ding: Zu Kants Lehre von den Transzendentalen Grundsätzen* (translated into English as *What is a Thing?*), based a course he gave in 1935-1936, has recently come into prominence as one of the founding texts for the new materialisms that emerged in the English speaking world over the last twenty years.[22] Its evocation of a European culture centered on an imaginary Greco-Roman past that serves as the guarantee of its truth. as well as a justification of the program of conquest of those defined as non-European, however, has been overlooked or misread in a way that appears striking in the light of Moulfi's exposition. Heidegger's aim is not only to persuade us to ask what we mean by "thing," but also to persuade us to ask why the

[20] Ibid.
[21] Sack, Peter. "German New Guinea: a reluctant plantation colony?" *Journal de la Société des océanistes*, n°82-83, tome 42, 1986 and Giordani, P. *The German Colonial Empire*. London: Bell, 1916.
[22] Heidegger, Martin. *Die Frage nach dem Ding: Zu Kants Lehre von den Transzendentalen Grundsätzen*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1965.

question of its essence, as opposed to the forms of its appearance, has not yet, that is, in the history of philosophy, been posed. The preliminary section of the work is accordingly devoted to an examination of the "*verschiedene Weisen nach dem Ding zu Fragen*" or the different ways of asking about or inquiring into (literally, towards) the thing as that which is at hand, here and now, the ultimate referent of experience and the determination of its truth. But the thing is also that which occupies a point in space and time (the thing, object or body of physics), or has a primary logical function, the thing as "*Träger von Eigenschaften*" a bearer of, or support for, properties.[23] Finally, Heidegger reveals his hand: the essence of the thing, its initiation and destiny, becomes intelligible only from the point of view of the *Geschichtlichkeit der Dingsbestimmung,* the historicity of the determination of the thing.[24]

This inquiry, however, has been halted in each period and at every step by the conceptually invisible limit of "the natural," that which goes without saying, the given, the obvious. To understand the historicity of the natural requires recognizing that the natural is not natural but historical: what is natural for the medieval world is not the same as that of the age of the Enlightenment, not simply in terms of content, but even more importantly in the limit assigned to the domain of what can be questioned. "Different peoples in different epochs" are in fact marked by the decision or determination (*Entscheidung*) regarding the limit of what can be interrogated, a position that might risk falling into a historicist relativism, were it not for the fact that the very question which different historical moments have answered according to the configuration of the natural proper to them, was asked in its essential form at the moment of its beginning.[25] In the age of the Greeks, of "Plato and Aristotle" where the fundamental question concerning not only the "essence of the thing" but the "essential determination of the thing," emerged and, thanks to these questions, the different

[23] Ibid., p. 31.
[24] Ibid., p. 37.
[25] Heidegger, Martin. *What is a Thing?* Trans. W.B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967, p. 42.

notions of the thing as proposition, as support of properties, as well.[26] Heidegger argues that each people (*Volk*) has "freely chosen" or decided the limit and extent of what can be questioned and, by this decision, determines the "rank" of its Dasein. Further, Heidegger insists that the decision does not take place in language, but "through work (*Arbeit*)."[27] The Greeks are distinguished from all others by the fact that they "saw in the ability to question all the nobility of their Dasein. Their ability to question was to them the measure of what divided them from those who could not or would not question, those the Greeks named the barbarians."[28]

This last demarcation, a demarcation between peoples based on the degree to which they permit questioning, even to the extent of questioning the existence of what must not or cannot be questioned, should not be understood as merely historical in the conventional sense of temporal succession. Not only does Heidegger reject the idea of history as a completed past, but the Greeks in particular having initiated the process of *Fragenkönnen*, remain actively present and moreover in constant danger of being forgotten. Given the coherence of the scheme he has established and the ordering of different *Volk* into ranks according to the degree of their *Fragenkönnen*, one passage stands out as a remainder or remnant left out of, or behind by, his operation:

> We call "natural" (*naturlich*) what is understood without further ado and is "self-evident" (*von Selbst*) in the realm of everyday understanding. For instance, the internal construction of a big bomber is by itself understandable for an Italian engineer, but for an Abyssinian from a remote mountain village such a thing is not at all "natural." It is not self-evident, i.e., not understandable in comparison to anything with which such a man and his tribe have everyday familiarity.[29]

There are in fact many different ways we might approach this passage. Although it undeniably stands out, the absence of any context for the very specific opposition of

[26] Ibid., p. 40.
[27] Ibid., p. 42.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., p. 39.

the Italian engineer and the Abyssinian villager—and his tribe (*Stamm*)-- has conferred a near invisibility and unintelligibility on the passage. Commentators, with very few exceptions have ignored it, fewer still have noted the fact that the course on which *The Question of the Thing* is based, took place in 1935-36, and began soon after Italy invaded Ethiopia (widely known then as Abyssinia) starting the Second Italo-Abyssinian War. The engineer who designed and thus participated in the realization of the "inner construction" of the big bomber, had an additional, very practical line of work. He was a brigadier general in the *Regia Aeronautica*, Italy's air force, which played a historically unprecedented role in subduing the Ethiopian forces and terrorizing the civilian population. Rodolfo Verduzio designed the Caproni Ca models 101 and 133, the latter hailed as the most advanced military aircraft in the world when it was introduced in 1934, and particularly suited to colonial warfare. Verduzio was not only its designer, but was played a role in directing its use in Ethiopia. In addition to its two bomb bays, the plane was armed with four heavy machine guns and was effective in chemical warfare, dropping bombs filled with mustard gas and spraying poison gases and acidic agents on villages, fields and lakes.[30] Air attacks accounted for most of the nearly 18,000 civilian deaths (often in "remote villages"). This was by no means a secret war, but was discussed repeatedly by the League of Nations and covered extensively in the European press. Heidegger clearly followed it with interest.

While Heidegger was critical of the use of labor-saving and information technologies in everyday life as obstacles to authentic existence, his critique did not extend to the technologies involved in war (before the advent of the atomic bomb). In fact, war for him in the thirties was a form of decision or judgment: as an engineer and general, a worker and a soldier, Arduzio exemplifies science in service to the Volk

30 Berhe, Aragawi. "Revisiting Resistance in Italian-Occupied Ethiopia," *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History.* Ed. Jan Abbink, et al. Leiden: Brill, 2003, pp. 87-113; Thompson, Jonathan W. *Italian civil and military aircraft, 1930-1945*. Los Angeles: Aero Publishers, 1963.

through submission to the state. He neither designs for profit, nor for personal prestige. The results of his labor in the battles he will oversee will help determine the ultimate outcome of the war which in turn constitutes the ultimate verdict or determination. In war, as Heidegger remarked to his students, "ideas that suppress its unconditionality" must be rejected. The fact that the Abyssinian War was profoundly unequal and its outcome certain was itself proof of the superiority of Italian Fascism, and of the extent of the *Fragenkönnen* of the Italian people, their will to question even the notion of the natural itself in their commitment to a knowledge that serves the nation.

The villager, who does not belong to an authentic *Volk*, but only a tribe, serves as a perfect antithesis to the Italian engineer. His world is entirely natural and therefore beyond any questioning, but this very fact prevents the questioning necessary to change and expansion: it is a world incapable of self-transformation. The awe that the villager feels at the sight of the bombers is a combination of fear and incomprehension. The superiority of the Italian engineer is expressed in his experience of the bomber's design (including its weaponry), which for him no longer needs to be investigated, as self-evident, while the villager cannot rise beyond incomprehension to decide to pose a question. It is now clear that the Abyssinian and his tribe have no place in the ranking of peoples. They occupy the place outside that the Greeks assigned to those they called barbarians. Unable to question the natural, they cannot conceive of historicity, their own or that of others, even as it falls on them from the sky, bringing death and destruction.

The text of Heidegger's course from the summer of 1934, that is, one year earlier, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache,* contains what is perhaps his most extended commentary on Africa and Africans.[31] In terms very similar to the seminar of 1935-36, he argues that if questioning arises from a decision, the decision must be taken from a

[31] Heidegger, Martin. *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1934.

position or standpoint and that standpoint is "its historical existence. History is the distinctive feature of the human being" (*Geschichte ist das Auszeichnende für das Sein des Menschen*).[32] At this point, Heidegger suddenly questions what he has just said: has he not just postulated a universalism that obscures the line that divides those who are effectively the Greeks of today from the mass of barbarians? How is it possible to declare historicity the defining characteristic of human beings? Do not plants and animals have an historical existence?

Another question, however, raises the possibility of contracting the realm defined by its historicity, precisely through the universalizing postulate that historicity is the necessary *Bestimmung* of humanity. Heidegger imagines the possible objection that "there are human beings and human groups (Negroes, such as, for example, Kafirs) *(Menschen und Menschengruppen (Neger wie z. B. Kaffern)* that have no history, or as we say, are *geschichtslos*, without history."[33] Accordingly, "just as there is a history outside the human realm, so history may be absent within the human realm, as in the case of negroes [*Es gibt also auch außerhalb des menschlichen Bezirks Geschichte, andererseits kann innerhalb des menschlichen Bezirkes Geschichte fehlen wie bei den Negern*]."[34] Significantly, Heidegger proceeds to argue that animals, plants and minerals have a temporal existence, but not a history. The turning of the propeller of a plane takes place in measurable time, but nothing really happens. If, however, "the plane takes the Führer from Munich to Venice to meet Mussolini, the flight becomes an historical event."[35] Even when the propeller stops turning, the meeting of the two men leads to future events. The case of "negroes" (Heidegger again uses "*kaffer*," a term used interchangeably with "*neger*" in German accounts of Africa up to World War II), however, is set aside and Heidegger says no more about the history-less group. Perhaps

[32] Ibid., pp. 80-81.
[33] Ibid., p. 81.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., p. 83.

the lack of history proper to them is similar to that of the propeller: Abyssinians, as colonial subjects in an expanding Italian empire, will serve as the tools or instruments of those who will make history, while they themselves are capable neither of making nor having (a) history.

Establishing the historical specificity of "What is a Thing" or, to be precise, its introductory section (which I have done here only in a very schematic way), can neither replace nor be detached from the philosophical meaning of the text. In fact, if the account is reasonably accurate, it should illuminate Heidegger's argument as it is stated, in its actual words and phrases, allowing us to see what was previously overlooked or invisible. Hidden in plain sight all around "the Thing," on the margins of each of the approaches to it, is the question of questioning or interrogating; to question anything, it is necessary to question the natural, that is, to identify it where it exists and to be able to set it aside or suspend it, if only in theory. If we appear to be caught in a circle, we have already been taught to disregard appearances and neither to fear nor take heed of them. We have a history, not in the sense of a superseded past, but a past that for Heidegger, is that of the Greeks, of "Plato and Aristotle" (although he will later add the Presocratics), despite their many differences. To return to them is to find our way forward by returning to the original ground of thought. The Greeks alone understood the need to question what is understood as natural, self-evident and given and in this way opened the path of history. They are the origin and destiny of Germany, Europe and the West or Occident, understood as guardians of this way of thinking and being. But against what or whom does the living thought of the Greeks need to be guarded? Against those unable or unwilling to question the evidence of the self-evident, and therefore without access to history, those the Greeks called the barbarians.

Following his discussion of Heidegger, Moulfi shifts his focus to French philosophy, thereby marking the break in "European thought" that occurred following the Second World War and the disaster from which German philosophy never

completely recovered. Paradoxically, the most powerful expression of the *Fragenkönnen* of Foucault, Delueze/Guattari and Derrida, was demonstrated in their interrogation of the work of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, in particular, the place of the concept of Europe in their philosophical projects. We cannot separate the philosophical resistance to this concepts and allied notions from the physical resistance to the European civilizing mission throughout Africa and whose violence finally found its way back to France, radicalizing an entire generation. The very ideals supposedly derived from Greece were instrumentalized in defense of the denial of the rights essential to those colonial subjects deemed insufficiently mature to rule themselves. This in turn led to a questioning of those who made questioning the touchstone of civilization, the distinguishing feature of the West guaranteed by its descent from ancient Greece, the idealized origin to which all the values of Europe were imputed.

The case of Foucault is particularly instructive in this regard. Moulfi notes that it is tempting, given Foucault's turn or return to "classical civilization," that is, Greece and Rome in his final phase, to designate him as Eurocentric, unwilling at every point in his complex trajectory to extend his inquiries beyond it borders. At the same time, however, he reminds us that Foucault was also often attacked for offering vague, and negative, generalizations about the West, Reason and the Enlightenment. Moulfi, drawing on the analyses of Alain Brossat, however, argues that Europe never serves as a norm, a repository of values, against which all other cultures may be measured, for Foucault. Instead, it is a specific topography with clear borders, organized around practices and apparatuses, around modes of individualization and subjection rather than common values and beliefs. The historical specificity of Europe as understood by Foucault is not the lineal descendent of Greece, the culture of which itself can only be understood on the basis of the material practices from which its ideas in all their diversity cannot be dissociated. When he turns to Greco-Roman thought, Foucault examines, not the idea or representation of the self, but the practices of the self, together with the exercises

and actions through which it is actualized. This in turn leads to the project of a history of truth, that is, a history of the means by which truth was defined in relation to the self, understood as the subject of truth.

Foucault, moreover, rejects from the very beginning of his career any notion of historical continuity; for him, on the contrary, the moments of discontinuity, fracture and torsion, and the diverse singularities that derive from them, form the basis of any inquiry. Moulfi reminds us that Foucault is finally a philosopher, but neither in the Anglo-American sense, nor in the typical French manner. He differs from both ways of practicing philosophy, not simply because he insists on approaching philosophy historically, on the basis of the history of philosophy, but because he insists on understanding the history in philosophy as a continuation of the history around it. At the very beginning of his endeavor, he argued that a society is defined by what it excludes and rejects, and a comprehension of it is accessible only from the perspective of the outside. We should not forget that the problem that haunts the *Archeology of Knowledge*, that of the relation between the discursive and the non-discursive, is absent from *Les mots et les choses*, for the very reason that the realm of the non-discursive has no place in Foucault's analysis of the various forms of discursive organization there. Everything summarized by the term "non-discursive," the material and corporeal practices of which the discursive element is a part, had broken through the protective barrier that philosophy had erected around itself at the moment of 1968, a moment Foucault experienced "from the outside," from his place in Tunisia, where the violence of the repression of the student movement was far greater than in France. It marked a turning point in his thought and action, the culmination of which would be *Surveillir et punir* and *La volonté de savoir*. It was as if the colonial or neo-colonial world offered a vantage point from which the very aspects of European civilization that remained necessarily invisible to its own rationality became visible. Foucault's own work, even

as it turns its gaze on France, does so from a space opened by the struggles from the outside.[36]

Moulfi begins his discussion of Deleuze and Guattari (focused on *What is Philosophy?*) by noting that one of the clearest distinguishing characteristics of French philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s is its extensively argued rejection of the very category of origin so central to the notions of Europe and the West, and their various derivatives, as the guarantee of their truth and validity. According to Deleuze and Guattari, while the notion of origin, both as a concept and as a word, has persisted over time (although not always or everywhere), the history of its meaning and function is punctuated by breaks and changes of direction. Moulfi recalls the meaning of Machiavelli's use of beginning in *The Prince*, as distant from Descartes as from Aristotle or Aquinas. For Machiavelli, as read by Althusser, the beginning marks a profound break with what precedes it, but not in the form of an irreversible and infinite space without any rational ties to what preceded it (Husserl), or even in the form of an abandonment of philosophy in order to return to and dwell in an original ground (Heidegger). The commencement of a new principality (even in philosophy) cannot by definition be pure or homogeneous because it can only be determined by an encounter between diverse things and forces, as well as a plurality of temporalities. Against the constant effort to re-territorialize philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari speak of Athens, not as a pure origin, a philosophical form of autarchy, independent of the barbarian world around it, but precisely as a point of encounter, a crossroads where a number of very distinct cultures (Egyptian, Scythian, Persian, Parthian, among others) meet in a ruptural unity. Moreover, the re-territorialization enacted by philosophy required more than a purification of the origin:

[36] Revel, Judith. "Foucault and His 'Other': Subjectivation and Displacement," *The Biopolitics of Development*. New Delhi: Springer, 2013; Medien, Kathryn. "Foucault in Tunisia: the Encounter with Intolerable Power," *The Sociological Review* (2019): 1-16; Boubaker-Triki, Rachida. « Notes sur Michel Foucault à l'université de Tunis », *Rue Descartes*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2008, pp. 111-113.

it also required a retroactive cleansing of the entire history of what came to be called European philosophy of any enclaves of non-European pre- or para-philosophy, which was often disguised as European in origin. The direct and indirect effects of contact with Jewish and Islamic philosophy in the medieval period, above all Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, and to a lesser extent Maimonides, provoked a powerful negative reaction from the Church. As noted earlier, philosophers from Leibniz to Hegel, reacted to Spinoza's notion of the immanent cause and his denial of the mind's command over the body as an expression of Oriental philosophy, not simply Jewish (itself profoundly shaped by Islamic thought), but Chinese and Indian philosophy as well.

Deleuze and Guattari show that the constitution of philosophy's ideal origin was an operation of territorialization, a declaration of sovereignty expressed in the demarcation of a boundary that both assimilates what is inside and radically excludes and rejects what has been banished to the outside. Western philosophy, according to Levinas, is a ceaseless movement of interiorization by which the different is converted or transmuted into the same (as in the concept of the Judeo-Christian based on the Old and New Testaments, through a conversion of the Old into a prefiguration of the New), often by assigning it an earlier place in the teleology of universal history. Philosophies that resist such assimilation, "the other that remains other," to cite Levinas, provoke an allergic reaction that results in their expulsion or destruction. Today, we see the two forms this allergen takes: those who in their arrogance and sense of superiority refuse to assimilate and those who are incapable of assimilation. French philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century distinguished itself by identifying and attempting to break with the fantasy of a European geo-philosophy whose universalizing mission was present in an unrealized form from its Greek origins. It is hardly surprising that at the very moment of its triumph at "the end of history," this universalism revealed itself as the most effective form of racism and nationalism.

Moulfi fittingly concludes with an examination of Derrida, whose oeuvre in certain ways anticipates most of the themes of the book. From the very beginning of his career (his analysis of Husserl's *Origins of Geometry*), Derrida made the question of *Bestimmung* (origin/end or destiny) the primary object of his philosophical project, tracing its different forms and trajectories through Hegel, Marx, Freud, Husserl, Heidegger, and, of course, Plato. The philosophical practice he called "deconstruction" did not permit him simply to reject the ideas of origin and end: "*Bien entendu, il ne s'agit pas de « rejeter » ces notions :elles sont nécessaires et, aujourd'hui du moins, pour nous, plus rien n'est pensable sans elles. Il s'agit d'abord de mettre en évidence la solidarité systématique et historique de concepts et de gestes de pensée qu'on croit souvent pouvoir séparer innocemment."*[37] They are "necessary" in that they are imposed on us by the "systematic and historical solidarity" that links words and concepts in a certain order. To make this order visible and intelligible offers it up for questioning and perhaps even transformation. Moreover, the enterprise of deconstruction cannot be understood as destruction, as annihilation; on the contrary, it intervenes by making visible the seams, joints and hinges that allow the suppression of difference and conflict intrinsic to texts and to concepts as they are put to work in different domains. Thus, Derrida, examining the relation of speech to writing, as well as ideas to speech, shows that the assertion (rooted in everyday "obviousness") that writing is a secondary expression of speech (temporally and spatially united with mind) which must logically and chronologically proceed it, whether in Plato or Saussure, is governed by a logocentrism that demands the subjection of the letter to the spirit. Plato's denunciation of writing in the *Phaedrus*, despite his claims of its insubstantiality, is directed at the materiality of writing that allows it to survive its author and produce meanings other than those it was originally endowed with, that is, its irreducibility to its origins in the spirit. This argument must finally apply to speech itself understood as an aurally material translation of spirit that is inescapably at risk of "misinterpretation," in

[37] Derrida, Jacques. *De la Grammatologie.* Paris: PUF, 1967, p. 25.

which case, speech itself can be seen as a kind of writing. Saussure at certain point defines the signified not as the concept or idea in the mind, but as always another signifier, so that there exists no spiritual, intellectual or ideal origin of meaning prior to the materiality of language. Derrida, however, does not declare the end of the concept of origin, but introduces the paradox of the originary trace.

And yet, the very turn to Plato's text to demonstrate all the ruses of the origin in the history of philosophy, and even more to derive from it the themes of the originary trace, of writing before speech, of originary delay, etc. is to risk postulating Plato (a metonym of the Greek) as an origin, in the form of the originating contradiction from which all subsequent history unfolds. In this way, what Derrida calls the problem of temporalization, captured by the notions of originary delay or *différance* (the movement of differentiation and deferral), that is, the incompleteness of the origin, the absent remainder of which is postponed, not only preserves the idea of origin, but opens the way to the conception of destiny, even if that destiny remains infinitely to come. He attempts to address this problem in "We Other Greeks," arguing that "Greek" is not the name of a cultural identity, a culture identical to itself, but of an originary heterogeneity irreducible to a pure origin. But if this heterogeneity consists merely of traces of the other or others in an otherwise Greek thought, Derrida's position becomes a compromise formation designed to satisfy opposing demands. And this is precisely the risk of the ambiguity of the position Derrida take. What are the consequences of the argument that there exist certain notions that we cannot simply "reject," because they remain, for now at least, necessary and inescapable? How do we determine which notions cannot be rejected, or more typically, replaced, by other, more effective, notions? Does not Derrida replace the notion of origin with placeholder concepts whose paradoxical form marks them as placeholders?

For Kant and Hegel, the significance of the Greeks as the origin of European culture, is not that they discovered writing or geometry, which were in fact discovered

by others, but the way in which the Greeks, by translating other cultures' discoveries, revealed in or restored to them meanings that the original discovers could not discern. According to this scheme, only the Greek translation/transformation of these discoveries allows them to become the foundations or origins of the development of European civilization. The example Kant adduces by way of Hume is that of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures whose meaning, concealed in the original Hebrew, could be made manifest only in the philosophical language of Greek. I have discussed elsewhere the ways in which the Greek translation of the opening of Genesis imposed the very Greek idea of creation as an absolute origin capable of guiding what follows from it to a final destiny on a text that in the original language does support such a meaning. This is translation in Nietzsche's sense, that is, as conquest; the subjugation and colonization of a language deemed inferior, an operation that was once carried out in the name of Christianity, and later in the name of secular European civilization. If Greek culture interiorizes elements of other cultures, it does do as a means of confining them and of neutralizing their oppositional power. Christian Latinity represented a continuation of this strategy, as its reactions to Ibn Rushd clearly show: a combination of annexation and naturalization on the on hand and campaigns of exclusion and destruction on the other.

As Moulfi reminds us, Derrida was quite clear about the European universalism of his own time: it was and is a Latinization whose terms and ideas are permeated with Christian assumptions unrecognized as such. The demand that "the others" convert to secularism and remove every trace of their alterity, whether language, dress, or diet, or face the hatred directed at "the other who remains other," is firmly rooted in the theory and practice of European civilization. Moulfi's symptomatic reading of these key points in European philosophy, succeeds in making them speak. What they tell us is anything but a reassuring tale of progress from the beginning of rationality to our present advanced condition. We are perilously close to a repetition of the events of nearly a

century ago, carried out now as then in the name of civilization. Moulfi's reading is inscribed within the long history of resistance to Europe's civilizing missions and derives its power from this resistance. He invites his readers to think from the perspective it provides and to participate in the power of the outside.

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