

The Rest Write Back

Discourse and Decolonization

Edited by

Esmaeil Zeiny



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Contents

Foreword: Whose Rest is Best? (Un)Learning Binaries
from Subalternity VII

Arjuna Parakrama

Acknowledgements XI

Notes on Contributors XII

Introduction: The Rest and Decolonial Epistemologies 1

Esmaeil Zeiny

PART 1

Positioning New Paradigms

- 1 Must Non-Europeans Think Like Us? A Critique of Modern
Thoughtlessness in Western and Resten Societies 19

Dustin J. Byrd

- 2 End or Continuation of World History: The European, Slavic and American
World – A New Paradigm? 46

Rudolf J. Siebert

- 3 Echoes of the Past: Colonial Legacy and Eurocentric
Humanitarianism 82

Mladjo Ivanovic

PART 2

Positioning Counter-discourses

- 4 Women Refashion Iran: Decolonizing the Rehistoricized
Narratives 105

Esmaeil Zeiny

- 5 African Literature: Leadership, Plight of the Majority
and Hope 130

Masumi Hashimoto Odari and Ciarunji Chesaina

- 6 Aesthetic Hospitality: Mustafa Sa'eed as Guest in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* 157
Hiba Ghanem
- 7 The Rest in the White West: After the Empire is Buried, *Shadows of Your Black Memory* Are Born 179
JM. Persánch
- 8 The Topography of Nostalgia: Imaginative Geographies and the Rise of Nationalism 203
Andrew Ridgeway
- Index 231

Must Non-Europeans Think Like Us?

A Critique of Modern Thoughtlessness in Western and Resten Societies

Dustin J. Byrd

1 Introduction

Some years ago while visiting a conservative scholar/friend in Frankfurt, Germany, he told me of a phrase that had recently become in vogue in German academic circles. It states, “philosophy is made in Germany, corrected in Britain, and corrupted in America.” As an American philosopher, educated in German philosophy, and perpetually bemoaning the state of philosophy in my native land, I was spontaneously sympathetic with the statement. Nevertheless, upon greater reflection, the insidious nature of the presupposition that the statement rested upon occurred to me: the total disregard not only for the legacy of philosophy in the non-Western world (Resten), but also the tacit assumption that nothing of philosophical importance happens outside of the modern West. Philosophy, it is assumed, is merely an intellectual affair of over-educated Westerners, as if the winds of philosophical knowledge, located with the ancient Greeks, who certainly did not see themselves as “Westerners,” only ever blew in one direction. While I’ll admit I may be reading more into this sardonic phrase than is originally intended, I contend that its mere existence – as an informing statement of essentialized truth – betrays a tacit yet pervasive Western assumption: non-Europeans cannot think.

In his 2015 book, Hamid Dabashi tackles this assumption, and rhetorically asks, “Can non-Europeans Think?”¹ On the face of it, it is hard to imagine that any intelligent person would argue that non-Europeans lack the human ability to cognitively process information, but it is *not* hard to imagine, especially in the era of xenophobic populism, most acute in Donald J. Trump, Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen, 5 Star, PEGIDA, Golden Dawn, etc., that someone would argue that non-Europeans are incapable of thinking at the level of an average European or even Euro-American. Indeed, the newest forms of *palingenetic ultra-nationalism*, which has plagued much of the multicultural West in recent

¹ Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* London: Zed Books, 2015.

years, demonstrates that many Westerners still believe that non-Europeans are not only racially and culturally inferior, but also intellectually inferior.² In their view, the non-European is inherently unable to rise to the intellectual and cultural achievement levels of Western civilization, with its liberal values, secular-democracy, and scientific-materialist way-of-being in the world. For example, in 2010, Thilo Sarrazin, a German politician and member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), proclaimed that Muslim immigrants in Germany were lowering the intelligence level of the entire country. In his best-selling book, *Germany Abolishes Itself* (*Deutschland schafft sich ab*), Sarrazin argued against Germany's overly generous immigration policy and the failure of multiculturalism, believing that it was destroying the basis of a superior civilization.³ This sentiment also animated Anders Behring Breivik's far-right and Islamophobic 1,500 page manifesto, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, which was made publically available on the same day he bombed Oslo's government district and subsequently gunned down 69 individuals (mostly teenagers) on Utøya island on July 22, 2011.⁴ As striking as they are, the sentiments that Sarrazin and Breivik gave voice to are no longer outside of the mainstream public discourse in Europe, as recent elections have demonstrated that many in the West not only sympathize with such xenophobic and neo-fascist sentiments, but are ready to support them politically. For many in the West, the failed policies of integration and assimilation, coupled with religious extremism and terrorism, have proved a reality that was once only spoken in private, at least since World War II: non-European immigrants cannot think, and as non-thinking things, they do not belong to the West, no matter how "assimilated" they are. If they could think, such critics say, they would become westerners beyond mere citizenship. Likewise, they would not demand special privileges and exemptions for their "pre-modern" religious and foreign cultural practices.

Because the question of the non-European's non-ability to think has been raised to a *civilizational problem* by the reemergence of palingenetic ultra-nationalist movements throughout the West, which is not merely a problem of philosophy, as is addressed in Hamid Dabashi's and Walter Mignolo's biting critique of Slavoj Žižek's Leftist-yet-Eurocentric philosophy, this chapter will broaden the inquiry begun by Žižek's critics.⁵ From my perspective, it is not merely a problem of thinking *philosophically*, but rather is a problem

2 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 1–55.

3 Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland Schafft sich ab*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010.

4 Åsne Seierstad, *One of Us: The Story of Anders Breivik and the Massacred in Norway*. Trans. Sarah Death. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013.

5 Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* iii–xiii.

of thinking itself, especially within the realm of political-economy, culture (broadly construed), and religion (in particular).

In this chapter, I will argue for a different reality than is implied in the Žižek-Dabashi argument, which located the problem of thinking within a discourse of philosophy. As such, I will first critique the trend towards non-thinking in the Western world, which I see as the precondition for palingenetic ultranationalism, i.e. new forms of fascism: the apex of *thoughtlessness*. In exploring this, I reformulate the localized question about non-Europeans being unable to think philosophically. The problem, from my perspective, is not that the non-European cannot think, in the conventional sense, but rather the problem is that much of modern Resten “thought” mimics patterns of western thoughtlessness, and thus perpetuates a western epistemological disease: the colonization of the lifeworld by a peculiar way-of-being in the world that reflects Western civilizational presumptions, unarticulated biases and neoliberal interests. In other words, Western forms of calculative thought continue to tacitly colonize non-Western minds at such a rate that a Western “not-thinking worldview” has become dominated within the public spheres of many parts of the non-Western world. This is the case even at times when those Resten nations perceive themselves as being post-colonial, politically independent, and free of Western cultural control. After listing the essential characteristics of modern thoughtlessness, I continue to ask about the possibility of an inter-civilizational discourse, especially in light of the totalizing schema of thoughtlessness in the West and its continuing exportation of thoughtlessness to the Resten world. Here, I’m hopeful, but only if the Resten world can translate its concerns, grievances, values, and principles into a secular language that is accessible to Western civilization. Additionally, if the West, not only its thinkers, but as a civilization, can open itself up to the Resten other, and have a substantive change of consciousness, it may begin to relearn from the other its own communicative resources which were deleted within the encompassing conditions of thoughtlessness. When this symmetrical burden can be achieved, the geographical space for the renunciation of thoughtlessness, the basis of world peace, may prove possible. If not, the world will continue on towards a future saturated with economic exploitation, political totalitarianism, environmental degradation, inter-civilizational tensions, and never-ending war.

2 *Was heißt Denken?*

In the winter and summer semesters of 1951 and 1952, in the University of Freiburg, Germany, the fascist philosopher Martin Heidegger delivered a series of lectures entitled *Was heißt Denken* (What is called thinking?). In those

lectures, he informed his students of a peculiar condition that he saw as being prevalent within moderns. He wrote,

Especially we moderns can learn only if we always unlearn at the same time. Applied to the matter before us: we can learn thinking only if we radically unlearn what thinking has been traditionally. To do that, we must at the same time come to know it.⁶

By now every reader of Heidegger is aware that his philosophy is thoroughly saturated with his peculiar form of philosophical fascism. The recent release of his “black books,” his private ponderings that openly display his vile anti-Semitism, appeals to reactionary romanticism, anti-modernism, and nationalistic “authenticity” (*eigentlichkeit*), where there is no need to prove his fascist proclivities. Adorno’s 1964 *Jargon der Eigenlichkeit* (Jargon of Authenticity) had already demonstrated that Heidegger’s philosophy could not be separated from his fascist thought and politics: they were infused. Nevertheless, Heidegger’s romantic suspicion of modern patterns of thought led him to make an insightful point on the rhetorical question of what is called “thinking,” as expressed in his demand that the “moderns” – and by that term he solely meant “Westerners” – must “unlearn” in order to learn to think.

When Heidegger says “thinking,” it is clear that he does not mean mere cognitive processing of information, for even non-humans, let alone non-Westerners, have cognitive processing. Nor does Heidegger mean by the term “thinking,” a fleeting interest (*interesse*) in philosophy or other so-called “thought-provoking” material. This temporary concern for a morsel of provocative thought is still under the level of what he would describe as “thinking.” What he means by “thinking” is precisely the labor of philosophers, as they are the “thinkers par excellence.” In other words, what can truly be called “thinking” “properly takes place in philosophy,” outside of the mere instrumentality of modern cognitive processing.⁷ Thus, thinking, in its purest form, gets itself done via philosophy, and as philosophizing-things, philosophers are the true thinking-things, and are the *most human of humans* – as thinking beyond mere cognition is a unique trait of what it means to be human.

This sentiment, I have concluded, is one of the most important veins of thought within Heidegger’s Eurocentric framework as it pertains to the thought (or non-thought) of non-Westerners (the Rest), even though Heidegger himself may not have understood the ramifications of his point. Because

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

the non-Westerner is prejudicially denied the capacity of engaging in philosophy, as it is so understood by western philosophers such as Heidegger (and even assumed by many non-fascist western philosophers), it follows that non-Westerners cannot truly be philosophers, as they cannot think beyond the given and the immediate; they cannot think in universal terms; they cannot separate fact and value, and they cannot think beyond their cultural and/or religious provincialism. If philosophical thinking is the precondition to learning, then the Rest cannot learn either, and thus, at least from a western prejudicial mind, the Rest cannot be a part of western civilization, the society of thought: the society of philosophy.

As a non-thinking thing, the non-Westerner can only relate to the West through their “use value,” as a tool, a subordinate, in service to western interests. This is clearly seen in much of the West’s “merit” immigration policies: “If you are useful to us, you are welcome. If you are not useful, you may not enter.” The immigrants’ potentiality – their *entelechy* – counts for little, as it is not already fully realized. Thus, the “usefulness” of the individual is the immediate concern. In such a way, the denial of the “other’s” ability to think is a way of integrating the “other” into the *needs system* of the West without allowing the non-identical other to become identical to “the Westerner.” As non-thinking-things (since they cannot think philosophically), the non-Westerner is conveniently denied “westernality,” which, in the minds of the Eurocentric, is understood as a *particularity* that is nevertheless *universally valid*, while at the same time being inherently prohibited to the universal. Thus, the prejudicial Westerner hypocritically denies that same universality to the “other,” no matter how integrated and assimilated they are in western ways-of-being. Thus, the Resten other always remains ensnared in their ontological “otherness,” regardless of liberal-enlightenment values and principles that were once declared universal.

Additionally, since philosophical thinking is the work of the philosopher, the *most human of humans*, and the non-Westerner cannot think philosophically (so it is presumed), the full humanity of the “other” is denied, for they cannot appropriate that which makes them fully-human. Thus, the denial of the non-Western other’s capacity to fully enter into the abstract discourse of philosophy, is an underhanded way of dehumanizing the Resten “other.” Philosophy, once meant to liberate the universal, perversely becomes an ideological tool of the particular to exclude the universal.

In light of this, the underlying anxiety of the West is exposed by the denial of “westernality” to the integrated and assimilated other. Setting aside pre-political foundations, it is possible that the “non-Westerner” becomes more western – with their embrace and identification with essential western

norms – than the native Westerners themselves, especially in political thought and philosophy.⁸ In other words, the Rest come to embody the thought tradition of the West (as it so defines it, i.e. the philosophical society from Christendom to secular liberal democracy) in such a way that it exposes Westerners' own abandonment of their self-proclaimed universals, especially its Christian-turned-Enlightenment values, principles and ideals. In other words, the West's, but especially Europe's, current identity crisis, includes the destabilizing questions of not only *Was ist der Westen* (What is the West?), and *Was ist denken* (what is thinking?), but also *Was ist westliche denken* (what is western thinking?), and how can the non-Westerner think and embody so-called western "universals" more completely than Westerners themselves. The answers to these questions determine the condition for the possibility of "westernity" of the Resten "other" residing in the West. Thus, the very possibility of a fully "westernized other" induces severe cases of *unbehagen* (uneasiness) in the western world, especially if those who are radically westernized are also devout Muslims, who have found an overlapping consensus between the humanistic universals of Islam and the humanistic universals of the Enlightenment. The fact that many Westerners distrust Resteners, even when they thoroughly embrace and embody so-called "western values," demonstrates that those same values may truly have universality – and as such those universal values are fundamentally separable from an ethnic and national western identity (with its pre-political foundations of race, language, *blut und boden*, etc.). This possibility of a fully realized universality of the Enlightenment causes acute civilizational *anfechtung* (doubt, terror, panic, despair) that such an ethnically-ecumenical Enlightenment could spell the end of European cultural and racial particularity. In other words, Europe could become much "darker" (ethnically), much more diverse (intellectually and religiously), as it embraces the essential universality of its own Enlightenment.

This brings us back to Heidegger's contention about "unlearning," which we must redirect towards the post-secular western society. It appears that the West must now "unlearn" its prejudicial anti-philosophical stance towards the "other" in order to think philosophically about what it means to be "western" in a post-secular modern society, with its own multiculturalism, and its interconnectedness to the rest of the world. "Unlearning" is the painful practice of thinking philosophically – especially dialectically – about western modernity, especially since modernity has flattened both the culture and intellectual heritage of the West while at the same time exporting the West's vilest and

8 "Pre-political foundations" are non-political elements that in a matrix serve as the basis for the unique identity of "nations," or a homogeneous people (*Volk*). Such pre-political foundations are race, language, shared history, and religion.

most hypocritical ideologies and political-economic structures to the rest of the world, resulting in the flattening of their particularity with the uncritical adoption of neo-liberalism.

With this in mind, it often appears that the West, as a neo-liberal capitalist post-secular society, which still struggles with the implications of the universal values of the Enlightenment, seems comfortable with resten societies only when they embody the same *abandonment* of critical philosophy and dialectical religion (or at least its *neutralization*) as a determining factor in their societies. In other words, the civilizational anxiety produced by the Rest's appropriation of the so-called "western values," pales in comparison to the pervasive *anxiety* produced by knowing that the Rest may out westernize the West in their appropriation of the West's current economic system: neo-liberal capitalism. For example, in the 20th century, the West waged many wars against those in the non-Western world (and their allies in the West) who were committed to the Marxist Enlightenment, which was the inner-critique of the Bourgeois Enlightenment. Those disillusioned liberals-turned-Marxists who fought to decolonize nations, i.e., to gain independence, justice, liberty, human rights, self-determination, etc., were decimated by the ruling classes in many nations. However, never did the capitalist West fight against those who willingly integrated themselves into the neo-liberal side of the bipolar Cold War. No matter how murderous and destructive they were, they were preferable to the anti-capitalist policies of the Soviet Marxists, Third-World revolutionaries, and Liberation Theologians. Now that the "heir of Marx" is no more, it is not the geopolitical ramifications of revolutionary humanistic solidarity, compassion, mercy, and altruism that the West fears from the Rest, but rather the competition of the resten societies in the realm of merciless private accumulation of collective surplus value, i.e. neo-liberal capitalism, especially the growing economic strength of China and other "emerging" economies. Since the triumph of neo-liberalism in the Cold War, western geopolitical hegemony has prevailed over the globe in a unipolar reality. However, the Rest learned the logic of predatory political-economics from their neo-liberal masters, and thus much of the geographically decolonized Rest have come full circle; they too – by and large – have abandoned (or at least neutralized) their own universal humanistic, solidaristic, and altruistic values – so articulated in traditional religion and culture – in favor of the Western commodity utopia, and have thus joined the western world in its descent into metaphysical positivism, ontological nihilism, and its camouflage: the ever-pervasive and intellectually-slumber-inducing consumer society.

With the reality of neo-liberalism's globalization, we must ask a series of questions: What was the price for liberalism's development in the West? Can the West's experience with this descent into the metaphysical nihilism be

predictive of what will happen to the Rest if they so choose to continue to uncritically mimic this colonizing way-of-being? If so, where does that leave inter-civilizational relations in the future?

3 The High Price Paid for Western Modernity

The British historian, Niall Ferguson, argues in his 2011 book *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, that Europe came to dominate the rest of the world in a period beginning around the year 1500, precisely because of a confluence of developments within its own history.⁹ These inner-developments allowed Europeans to project their growing power far beyond the geographical boundaries of Europe, and in doing so grew even more powerful. As physical and commercial control of much of the world eventually fell into the hands of various European empires, so too did their cultural, economic and political markers begin to saturate other parts of the world, displacing traditional ways-of-life that had been, in many cases, the dominant modes of existence for millennia. In much of the non-European world, direct colonial control of territory meant a near wholesale displacement of native culture, including religion, traditional arts, traditional social relations, and language, etc. As the Iranian Islamo-Marxist Jalal Al-e Ahmad explained in his book *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, when a resten people were afflicted with “Occidentosis,” everything *occidental* was valued above all things native. The radical decolonization theorist Frantz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, discovered the psychological destructiveness that results from the negative valuation of all things “black” (non-European) and the blind valuation of all things “white.”¹⁰ This was especially true among the ruling classes in these traditional societies, who, if not directly replaced by the colonial masters, uncritically adopted their way-of-being and often served as their collaborators. What was brought to these parts of the world was a foreign culture predicated on social developments that were unique to Europe (at least in their temporal conflagration), which solely addressed the needs of Europe and reflected their values and cultural norms.

9 Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 304.

10 Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*. Trans. R. Campbell, ed. Hamid Algar. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008.

In his historical analysis, Ferguson identified “six killer applications” that were unique to the West, and allowed them to emerge as a global power.¹¹ These were as follows:

- (1) “Competition, in that Europe itself was politically fragmented and that within each monarchy or republic there were multiple competing corporate entities.”
- (2) “The Scientific Revolution, in that all the major seventeenth-century breakthroughs in mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology happen in Western Europe.”
- (3) “The rule of law and representative government, in that an optimal system of social and political order emerged in the English-speaking world, based on private property rights and the representation of property-owners in elected legislatures.”
- (4) “Modern medicine, in that nearly all the major nineteenth- and twentieth-century breakthroughs in healthcare, including the control of tropical diseases, were made by Western Europeans and North Americans.”
- (5) “The consumer society, in that the Industrial Revolution took place where there was both a supply of productivity-enhancing technologies and a demand for more, better and cheaper goods, beginning with cotton garments.”
- (6) “The work ethic, in that Westerners were the first people in the world to combine more extensive and intensive labor with higher savings rates, permitting sustained capital accumulation.”¹²

From a Hegelian perspective, the dialectic of history resulted in the necessary conditions for Europe to expand beyond its borders, ushering in the age of European empires, both industrial and pre-industrial. Without such historical developments, Western Europe would have remained provincial at best. What Ferguson spells out with his “six killer applications” is none other than the basic foundations of western modernity, but Ferguson reads such developments merely through the prism of a *positivist historian*, which systematically neglects the underside of such developments. Modernity, like all other periods in history, is *dialectical*; just as it constructs, so too does it destruct, often via sublation (*aufheben*) and at other times through *abstract negation*. Ferguson, being rooted in the methodologies of positivist historicism, buries the dialectical nature of modernity within his *mere-appearance-ideology* of liberal “progress.” This is in contrast to the historical materialist historian and the Critical Theorist, who, like Walter Benjamin, viewed history as the unbroken

¹¹ Ferguson, *Civilization*, 305.

¹² *Ibid.*, 305–306.

continuation of a “single catastrophe”: history as wreckage piled upon wreckage.¹³ It is clear what Europe *gained* by the developments Ferguson identifies. What it lost is less clear amidst the triumphalism of positivist historicism. As not to make that same mistake, we must investigate the night-side of history, for the West’s losses are indicative of what *may* be lost if such developments are globalized, or in Ferguson’s language, if such “killer applications” continue to be “downloaded” uncritically by the “Rest.”¹⁴

4 The Death of God and Western Freedom

Although it is hard to imagine a modern world without the “six killer applications” that Ferguson identified, it would have been equally difficult to imagine a Europe determined by such monumental developments from the perspective of the theologically saturated medieval European worldview, wherein the basic coordinates of the lifeworld were structured not by that which determines modern life – man as *homo consumens* – but rather by a much more organic set of conditions: the liturgical calendar, the seasons of nature, communal life, and unalienated *habitus factivus* (human productivity). The medieval man, although living in a state of soteriological fear and existential anxiety, nevertheless lived within a reality infused with inherent meaning. His society was constructed in such a way that the individual could rely on the fact that they had an integral place, no matter how seemingly trivial. Since the Divine determined this place in society, the Divine was not oblivious to their existence, but rather took an active role in their life. The seemingly miniscule nature of this existence was ultimately delusional; God was near and determining their life, and in that they took solace. Additionally, morality was absolute; it was not a self-governing form of moral autonomy, nor was it a society of ethical calculations, neither was morality relative to culture, religion, time, etc. Being such, the inherent heteronomic conditions of the medieval society shielded the individual from the terrorizing alternative: Subjective freedom. Although in the modern period, at least since the Enlightenment in the West, freedom is a value highest among all other values, for the medieval man, freedom, as a metaphysical reality, was ontological terrorism, as it destroyed all

13 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt. (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257–258.

14 For Ferguson, it is not a question of whether or not the Rest *will* download the “six killer applications,” it is a core assertion in his thesis they have already downloaded such applications, and thus are on their way to catch up to the West in its “progress.”

that made life, including suffering, meaningful. The Enlightenment was aimed at “liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters,” but the Enlightenment itself reverted to a totalizing and dominating myth, which only intensified man’s existential anxiety – his “being troubled” by his own existence.¹⁵ Post-Enlightenment, disenchantment with the world led the western man to search for that which would slay the chaos and calamity of his metaphysical freedom: a return to unfreedom.

Nietzsche’s parable of the *Madman*, and its proclamation of the “death of God,” was not a theological statement at its core; it was an existential warning and invitation to freedom camouflaged within an ironic statement meant to shock the reader into contemplating their own ontology and the metaphysical conditions of western modernity.¹⁶ In many ways, Nietzsche’s proclamation that the impossible had been made possible, that the immortal – and absolute – had been murdered, is a reflective statement on the very conditions of western society in the mid-to-late 19th century, a time when society, predicated on the “downloading” of the “six killer applications,” killed the civilization’s ontological foundations: religion, and behind religion, the “totally-other” – the *Absolute* that guaranteed “Truth,” be it moral, epistemological, theological, etc. Although religion was not always a source of solidarity in western society, it did maintain the possibility of an inherent meaning within history even amidst the agony of historical catastrophe. Thus, Nietzsche’s claim can be read in light of Ferguson’s “six killer applications”; competition, the Scientific Revolution, the rule of law and representative government, modern medicine, the consumer society, and the work ethic, were all contributors to the “Death of God”; they were the poison pills from which the traditional medieval holistic religious worldview was destroyed, forever collapsing the West into severe atomism, spiritual vacuousness, moral relativism, and the terror of unbridled freedom.

The murder of God, at least for Nietzsche, meant the death of metaphysical and theological heteronomy. Man was *condemned to freedom* in a world without God; he was finally free to choose his fate within the confines of his time, space and society. He could either choose to continue to follow the heteronomic dictates of a dying religion, and thus submit himself to other-worldly powers beyond his control (which he secretly doubted), or he could seize his

15 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Trans. Thomas Common. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008), 103–104.

freedom, emancipate himself from “slave morality,” the morality of altruism, meekness, humility, and compassion, and proclaim his autonomy. For the first time, he could truly emancipate himself from the chains of religion and in fact be free, embracing the freedom to transcend the herd’s repressive construction of “good and evil.”¹⁷ With such an understanding, we can see that the preconditions for the Europeans’ so-called intellectual emancipation, including their emancipation from traditional Christian morality, was precisely those conditions that Ferguson identifies as the “six killer applications.” Why?

- (1) The ontological destructiveness of political competition, with each monarch and republic claiming the side of God, bred cynicism about the certainty of God’s absolutivity. How could God be equally on the side of the believers when the believers are equally against each other? If God was on all sides, then he was on no sides. *Theodicy*, or the question of evil and God’s justice, and the inability to answer such a question without degenerating into mere partisanship and intellectual absurdities furthered the demise of the divine and the traditional pre-modern society.
- (2) The scientific revolution furthered the wholesale dismantling of a holistically integrated worldview in Europe precisely because it challenged the church with another epistemological authority; science could provide an alternate understanding of the physical world, its origins, and its formation, without referencing the creative powers of the divine. Against scientific discoveries, religion looked impotent and irrationally recalcitrant. Despite the fact that many of the greatest scientific discoveries to come out of Europe were themselves discovered by faithful men of religion, they nevertheless did not need religious legitimation for those scientific findings. This epistemological shift in regards to the physical world would eventually cause pervasive “disenchantment” (*Entzauberung*) among the once religious masses. The world was Godless and God was worldless.
- (3) The development of secular “rule of law and representative government” meant the decoupling of morality from law. Law became the production of rules predicated on man’s reason, not God’s commands. As such, man’s laws were mutable, often fickle and self-serving. They were temporal, easily replaced, and held no universal consent or legitimation. They lacked the *absolutivity* of divine command. Thus, man, as a self-governor, could craft law in his own image, reflecting his own desires, especially his financial (property) interests. Additionally, what the Divine made illegal, man deemed legal. What the Divine made legal, man deemed illegal, except

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Horace B. Samuel. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006), 1–27.

when it served the ruling classes. Thus, *Lex Divina* was dethroned for the benefit of *Lex Humana*. In effect, this kind of human law replaced the Divine in his role as law-giver with the new law-givers: The Bourgeoisie. Consequently, the residue of religiously rooted morality would be forcibly privatized or pushed into civil society, made impotent by its consequent relativity.

- (4) Modern medicine also signified a shift in metaphysics. Before modernity, Christians believed that the active agent within “natural medicine” (as opposed to supernatural intervention via saints, relics, etc.) was the Divine. Thus, the Divine healed through medicine. Theologically, medicine itself lacked the inherent properties to heal. Yet, post-Enlightenment, God is unknowable, and therefore his healing qualities are unknowable. As such, it was so discerned that it was ultimately the physical properties of the medicine itself that heals, not the unknowable Divine. The healing power of the divine is thus excommunicated from the notion of healing. Additionally, modern medicine showed concrete results, whereas prayer and other religious rituals invoked as an avenue for healing, remained relatively unsuccessful, thus leading to a shift in faith: the faith in modern materialist medicine.
- (5) The result of industrial capitalism and the collapse of a world infused with inherent meaning, the “consumer society” became the new panacea for which to anesthetize the pain of the West’s creeping existential nihilism. Life in the West replaced the ontological importance of “being,” whether that was rooted in a religious or philosophical worldview, with the trivial yet temporarily satisfying “having” mode of existence: *homo consumens*. No longer was salvation a driving factor in the *sittlichkeit* (ethical life) of the individual; success was this-worldly, and such success meant the maximum accumulation of commodities, an essential component in the West’s drift towards societal *necrophilia*.¹⁸ The icy logic of capitalism desacralizes all that was once sacred, undermines all that once bound mankind to itself, and dissolved the hope for something other than what-is-the-case in the cold world of the given. Additionally, as Ferguson infers, the market replaced the divine as fulfiller of needs. In his *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno makes an insightful remark on this issue, writing that, “The existence of bread factories, turning the prayer that we be given our daily bread into a mere metaphor and an avowal of desperation, argues more strongly against the possibility of Christianity than all the enlightened

¹⁸ Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), 65–80.

critique of the life of Jesus.”¹⁹ It is no coincidence that Nietzsche’s madman is addressing the men of the market when he proclaims the death of God; they know they were partially responsible for the excommunication of faith in the now totally-marketized West.

- (6) Ferguson’s sixth “killer application” is the work ethic, which was rooted in the 16th century Protestant understanding of work as *beruf* (divine calling), and subsequent obedience to the “divine calling” as an act of devotion. With the secularization of the western lifeworld, the religious aspects of the Protestant work ethic evaporated, leaving behind the now-secularized practices of saving, reinvesting, and most importantly, the *private accumulation of collective surplus value*, the *heiliger geist* (holy spirit) of capitalism. In other words, the West was on a religious *sonderweg* (deviant path); they elevated monetary profit to that of the “utmost concern” in the life of the individual, over all that was once sacred. The pursuit of earthly gain, no matter if the means were once considered “sinful,” drove a society to engage in a form of work that deemphasized the family life, the health of the state, and the interconnectedness of the community. What became most important was the ever-increasing production of capital, which, through the help of the state, concentrated *not* amongst those who worked the hardest, but amongst those who already had the most capital. Wealth begets wealth, allowing those who did not work to accumulate the wealth of those who did work. In this way, Ferguson is wrong; it was not simply the change in the work ethic that produced this pillar of western society, but rather that the surplus value that was created by the masses concentrated within a specific part of the population: The Bourgeois ruling class. It was specifically *their* “capital accumulation,” as Ferguson states, that determined the trajectory of the West. For the masses, there was no “capital accumulation,” just lives of relative poverty, alienated labor, existential misery, and exploitation, which were the universal elements of the class struggle that survived the transition from the feudal period to the early capitalist period in the West.

As we can see, this great transition from the medieval West to the modern West meant the loss of a worldview that, while not perfect, sustained the utopian possibility of a world beyond the world-of-the-given, both in this world and in the next. The *qualitative* “longing for the totally other,” as Horkheimer defines religion, was replaced with the *quantitative* “longing for the mere here-and-now,” the consumer society that continues to engulf the world in greed, wars,

19 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Trans. E.F.N. Jephcott. (New York: Verso, 2005), 110.

mechanized murder, ecological destruction, and ethical vacuousness. While Ferguson chose to focus upon the benefits of modernity, of which there are many, such as international human rights, international law, modern communications and modern medicine, we cannot forget that modernity brought with it the very possibility of the destruction of the planet and all that it contains: A really-existing apocalyptic possibility, either through nuclear destruction or environmental degradation.²⁰ *Communicative reason*, that which animates and defines the family, the community, altruism, and the desire to create a world liberated from unnecessary suffering, has been nearly eliminated in the West under the dominant economic and epistemic structures rooted in *instrumental reason*, the calculative logic of *scientism* (science as ideology, not a tool of man's true development), *totalen krieg* (total war), mathematization of human-relations, technification of the lifeworld, and man as means as opposed to ends, etc. This frigid calculating form of reason has become the dominant mode-of-thinking in western civilization since "downloading" the "six killer applications" and the ending of *virtue* as a telos within this life. As Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit described it,

To be equipped with the mind of the West is like being an idiot savant, mentally defective but with a special gift for making arithmetic calculations. It is a mind without a soul, efficient, like a calculator, but hopeless at doing what is humanly important. The mind of the West is capable of great economic success, to be sure, and of developing and promoting advanced technology, but cannot grasp the higher things in life, for it lacks spirituality and understanding of human suffering.²¹

While it certainly is not the case that some forms of instrumental reasoning were not present before the West abandoned its religious worldview, it was not the case that such forms of cold calculation were the *dominant schema* of medieval society. As long as the Divine was real, other considerations beyond the advancement of material self-interest had to be considered, for eschatological expectations were a reality even for those who were morally askance.

Yet for critics of western modernity, like the Critical Theorist and psychologist Erich Fromm, it was clear that the Christian values of mercy, charity,

20 Jürgen Habermas and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, debated this very issue in 2005. The results of their discourse were later published. Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion*. Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, and Vienna: Herder Verlag, 2005.

21 Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*. (New York: Penguins Books, 2004), 75.

compassion, agape, etc., were ideals that served as powerful interrogators of the really-existing-world, but were in fact never allowed to become the guiding principles of a society, at least not for the ruling classes: Feudal lords, aristocrats, and later the Bourgeoisie. Thus, “Europe’s conversion to Christianity,” says Erich Fromm, “was largely a sham.” He writes,

At most one could speak of a limited conversion to Christianity from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries and that for the centuries before and after this period the conversion was, for the most part, one to an ideology and more or less serious submission to the church; it did not mean a change of heart, i.e., of the character structure, except for numerous genuinely Christian movements.²²

What is implicit in Fromm’s argument is the dialectical tension between what Christianity proclaimed *ought* to be the case in the world and what Christians made of the world, which, for Fromm, is inherently hypocritical: religion struggles against its own hypocritical praxis. Because Europe was badly Christianized, it continued to embody the brutality of pre-Christian Greco-Roman values, what Nietzsche called “master morality,” which Christianity was never able to fully eradicate in the name of the “Crucified.”²³ Despite the Christian veneer, the Aristocratic law of nature, i.e. the natural right of the powerful to dominate and destroy the powerless, the glorification of war, brutishness, selfishness, self-aggrandizement, at the expense of peace, humility, altruism – what Nietzsche called “slave morality,” continued unabated throughout Christendom. Western modernity, especially industrial capitalism, put a nail in the coffin of this hypocrisy. Secularized Christian values became a matter of the welfare-state, but even there they were overcome by the imperatives of capitalism, especially in western nations’ foreign policies (primarily the United States). Today, the majority of western nations no longer even hold up the façade of Christian *values*, at least not when it comes to the Rest.²⁴ While politicians in the United States still explicitly invoke the Divine – a practice most Europeans find abhorrent – the resten societies know well the hollowness of

22 Fromm, *To Have or to Be?*, 129.

23 Alistar Kee, *Nietzsche Against the Crucified*. (London, SCM Press, 1999), 144–159.

24 One should not confuse the resurgence of Christian “identity” politics in Europe with Christian “values.” Indeed, most of those insisting on the Christian identity of Europe have never set foot in a cathedral and would reject the majority of Christianity’s traditional “slave morality” (as understood by Nietzsche). Thus, such Christian-identity groups embrace the pagan ethics of Nietzsche’s *übermensch* but disguise it in Christian semantics and symbols.

such religious appeals from their past experiences with Western empires and neo-colonial policies. The moral imperatives of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be found in the weaponized drones, the bombs, the embargos, and the American sponsored *coup d'états*, not even the imperialistic blond-hair blue-eyed Jesus of past European colonialism can be found in the hegemonic power of the United States and the neo-Czarist Russia of Vladimir Putin.

5 Thoughtlessness in Modernity

So far in this essay, I have referred to “thoughtlessness” (*gedankenlosigkeit*) without giving it a concrete definition. An understanding of what it means to think is already a near-impotent practice in thinking, as it rarely gets us to an understanding of what it means to think within an increasingly thoughtless globalized society. Even Heidegger, in his *Was heißt Denken*, never comes to a satisfactory answer about what it is to think, rather he identifies that which is *called* thinking but cannot, via an ontological analysis, be properly understood rightly as thinking. However, “thoughtlessness,” or the absence of true thinking, is much easier to identify, as thoughtlessness appears before us naked as a child on the day of its birth.

At a point in western history, thoughtlessness was a problem of choice. Due to the dialectics of modernity, the individual found himself with the choice to follow its enlightened path, rooted in the communicative reason of prophetic religion, sometimes secularized into revolutionary philosophy and praxis, or they could succumb to the temptation of modernity’s night-side, and follow a selfishly deviant path untethered from communicative reason, prophetic solidarity and Socratic non-conformity. However, as the totalizing conditions of modernity’s night-side continued to colonize the lifeworld, it became identical with the conditions of western life, within which individuals became less aware of their fading choice, as the condition of thoughtlessness became societally normative. Rooted in the unintended dialectic of Enlightenment, thoughtlessness is in essence, the technocratic, calculative, profit-driven, tyranny of cold instrumental reason, which stealthily invades all levels of society: familial, civil society, and state. Such thoughtlessness reifies the “other,” thus reducing human-relations into exercises of strategy, manipulative communication, and distorted discourse, through which the other can be conquered and/or exploited.

“Thoughtlessness,” as envisioned above, displays the following characteristics: (1) the systemic *willful abandonment of self-reflexivity* – the refusal to interrogate the self by any meaningful norms and values. It is (2) *amblyopia*

to the effects of the actions done by the self and society, especially if such actions call into question the validity of the action itself. Thoughtlessness is (3) the *willful refusal to grant full consideration* to norms and values that have gained universal consent via rational deliberation and discourse. Thoughtlessness is (4) the *abandonment of inter-subjectivity*, which leads to the narcissistic inability to see the self in the other. Thoughtlessness is (5) the lack of *inter-subjective passiology*, the inability to suffer with the suffering other (*compassion*). Thoughtlessness is (6) the inability to see through *mere appearances*, so that the essential nature of things always remains undisclosed, hidden behind a veil of superficiality. Thoughtlessness is (7) the *willful devaluation* of all that is meaningful, transcendent, and other-than-what-is-the-case, as it is epistemologically beholden to a metaphysical positivist worldview. Thoughtlessness is (8) the *abandonment of the utopian impulse*, the “not yet” and “that which could be” for “that which is” and “must be.” Thus, thoughtlessness brooks “no alternative” to what-is-the-case. Above all else, thoughtlessness is (9) the *pervasive unawareness of all that thoughtlessness is*. This pervasive non-awareness of the condition of thoughtlessness is the very condition in which the masses of the West find themselves today, and it is also the precondition for the West’s continual domination of the globe, for those who are somnambulant muster no protests against the creeping villainy of exported thoughtlessness, even when such thoughtlessness becomes a threat to their own existence.

The very act of thinking, or at minimum an awareness of the condition of thoughtlessness, is a sign of non-conformity in the thoughtless condition. This is especially acute in the United States of America, where it continues to publicly support the universal fruits of liberal-progressive thought, albeit in a superficial fashion, while actively undermining them at home and abroad through the slumber-inducing culture industry.²⁵ This thoughtlessness, which is deeply embedded within instrumental reason universalized as the absolute form of reason and knowledge, is precisely what is aggressively exported as modern “progress” throughout the world. As such, thoughtlessness is the most dangerous commodity that the Rest have purchased in their race towards modernization.

As the awareness of what’s missing becomes more clear in the desacralized West, many Westerners have turned to anything that will fill the existentially painful void. This “awareness” is also dialectical, and therefore both a positive advancement towards a future reconciliation of the sacred and the profane and a great temptation towards evil, for both can fulfill the void of thoughtlessness.

25 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

6 The Dangers of Thoughtlessness: The Precondition for Palingenetic Ultra-Nationalism

The pervasive absence of meaningful thought, which accompanies modernity's metaphysical-materialism, positivist epistemology, and the preeminence of instrumental reason, creates the conditions wherein the modern western man, having so downloaded the six killer applications, searches for something transcendental by which to fill the void brought about by the evaporation of meaning-producing religion and metaphysics. Such a pervasive void is painful, unbearable, and depressing. The systemic meaninglessness that defines the conditions of industrial and technocratic modernity leave many without any sense of purpose, connectedness, or intrinsic value. Things just "are as they are," and there is no purpose beyond epicurean gratification. For many, the awareness of this stale existence leads them to find meaning in *altruism* (otherism) – the dedication of the self to the wellbeing of others. However, this too is inherently *dialectical*, for the means by which the wellbeing of others is achieved can either be anchored in traditional care ethics, rooted in *agape/solidarity*, or such wellbeing of the other can be found through much more sinister means. Among the alternatives is *Palingenetic Ultra-Nationalism* and its identification of the enemy – "diabolical otherism."

Wherein Judaism, Christianity and Islam's altruism emphasizes care for the *universal other*, nationalism centers the "natio" (nation) – however it is so defined – as the sole *particular* subject of care. This often comes at the expense of those who find themselves excluded from the nation. These are the "diabolical others," who confront the nation as an existential threat. Nationalism, in this sense, being the deification and idolization of the nation, becomes itself a meaning-producing phenomenon, as it skillfully provides a sacred myth of origin, gives reasons for existing as a nation, and convincingly furnishes an "oceanic feeling" in regards to the nation.²⁶ As such, the nationalists, so dedicated to the wellbeing of the nation, transcends the meaning-void of modernity, as it provides a prepackaged *interpretation of reality* and decisive *orientation of action*, much like religion before its deflation in modernity. The psychologically once-diminished and isolated modern individual becomes an integral part of the world-historical process, as the advancement of his nation becomes his utmost-concern – his personal means of transcending the ubiquitous nihilism of secular modernity. The once weak and atomized individual becomes powerful once his individuality is subsumed within the collective

26 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1961), 11.

identity of the nation. The earthly nation becomes the *Novum Deus* (New God) which must be praised and obeyed like the old gods. In the total submission to the will of the New God, the anxiety caused by individual freedom, which accompanied the metaphysical “death of God,” allows the nationalist to escape the *anfechtung* of their freedom.²⁷ He happily abandons his freedom for certainty, security, and a purpose for living. In addition, when such purpose for living is accompanied by a threat from the “diabolical other,” the nationalist inevitably develops a siege mentality, a sense that his New God will be defamed and attacked: nationalist blasphemy. And if the nation is destroyed, so too will his sense of purpose, meaning, and identity be destroyed. In his abandonment of individual identity to the collectivity of the nation, he has become psychologically synonymous with the nation, and is prepared to kill and die for that nation without hesitation. Ultimately, for the nationalist, who is no longer an autonomous individual, the nation is not an abstraction. Rather, he experiences the nation simultaneously as he experiences himself. What troubles the nation troubles him; what threatens the nation threatens him; whom the nation fights, so too does he fight. Opposition to the nation is no more a thought for him than is his own suicide, for survival of the nation is his utmost concern. He *is* the nation and the nation *is* him, regardless of what the nation says and does, even if it is against him. Thus, the nationalist abandons autonomous thought, and submerges himself in the singularity of the thoughtlessness of nationalism.

7 Anastasia

What is the power of nationalism? As a way of overcoming the flattened existentiality of modernity, predicated on the night-side of the “six killer applications,” nationalism advances a religious-like narrative: A resurrection myth (*anastasia*), which makes it attractive to the powerless. This resurrection of the nation, or *palingenetic myth*, congers the images of Lazarus, raised from the dead, or even Jesus of Nazareth, who was resurrected post-execution; it is the avenging phoenix that rises from the ashes of unjust destruction. Contextually, it is in the chaos of the death of the old order that the power of the palingenetic myth finds itself. In essence, the myth declares the ultimate inability of the “diabolical other” to destroy the preyed upon entity, whether that be death’s inability to destroy Lazarus, Rome’s inability to destroy Jesus of Nazareth, or one nation’s inability to destroy another; the palingenetic sacred story of triumph

²⁷ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994.

over adversity – the “rebirth” of that which ought to be permanently dead – gives the nationalist a sense that he himself is reborn within the resurrected nation. Thus, in the face of modernity’s thoughtlessness, the rebirth of the nation is the rebirth of the nationalist’s *lebensphilosophy* (life philosophy): The unrelenting affirmation of life lived in opposition to that which would deflate the life of the nation.

Here, thoughtlessness shows itself as the precondition for a return to reactionary identity politics. Palingenetic nationalism is an extreme form of thoughtlessness, but a form of thoughtlessness that is attempting to overcome the pain and misery of being powerless within the pervasive conditions of thoughtlessness. In other words, the thoughtlessness of palingenetic ultra-nationalism is both a symptom of modernity and an attempt to transcend modernity, just as religious fundamentalism is a product of modernity and an attempt to overcome modernity. In that sense, such nationalism, rooted in the palingenetic myth, is the romantic and reactionary fundamentalism of the West – it is its failed attempt to overcome the destructive and life-flattening nature of so-called liberal “progress,” as declared by Ferguson’s six killer applications.

8 Abandonment of Thoughtlessness and the Conditions of Discourse

This brings us back to the question of the future. Will the Rest, where it uncritically mimics the thoughtlessness of the West, follow the same path of relegating its moral and ethical systems to the dustbin of history in favor of ill-gotten prosperity, or will the “Rest” choose another and more rational path? Will it commit cultural suicide in its own pursuit of western-style modernity, or will the Rest discover *alternative modernities*? The way I see it, the Rest have three options: First, resten societies can choose to retreat from secular modernity, and take comfort in various forms of cultural and/or religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalism, as Jürgen Habermas defines, is the “political imposition of their own particular convictions and reasons, even when they are far from being rationally acceptable.”²⁸ Although this definition of fundamentalism principally concerns religion, it is just as applicable to secular ways-of-being, as it is a “belief attitude” – the *form* of the belief as opposed to its substance – and therefore can be applied to non-religious beliefs as well. In light of the recent terror attacks in Europe, as well as the refugee crisis, both of which have

28 Jürgen Habermas in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 31.

highlighted the presence of Islam in post-secular Western Europe, there has been an increase in the claim that Islam and “enlightened” Europe are incompatible by liberal voices, echoing the claims of their neo-fascist counterparts. This liberal “Enlightenment fundamentalism” centers the *particularity* of the European Enlightenment – its outward *western form* – above the *universal substance* that animates the Enlightenment itself. In other words, that which makes the Enlightenment available to all of humanity, has fallen behind European particularity.²⁹ This option, if resten societies choose to follow it, ends the possibility of the discourse between civilizations, as those who would otherwise enter into a friendly discourse find no discourse partner who will negotiate and/or compromise.

Second, resten societies can proactively engage secular modernity via their own cultural and religious resources – their own semantic and semiotic vocabulary. Yet, this option is accompanied by its own peculiar problems. While preserving authenticity (if I may use that loaded term), and by insisting on equal entrance in an unequal political-economic reality (the West holds most of the determining power), it risks not allowing the “other” into the closed semantic universe of the Rest’s culture and/or religion. In other words, if there is no shared vocabulary, no reservoir of shared legitimations and presupposition, then the discourse partners talk past each other. As critics of the West, we could insist that the West “learn” the semantic and semiotic vocabulary of the “Rest,” in the hopes that they could come into a discourse with the other through the other’s language and cultural signifiers. However, resten political, economic, and moral vocabulary does not animate the current hegemonic neo-liberal world order, and thus discourse within that closed semantic universe – no matter how much it could increase understanding between peoples – would nevertheless remain relatively ineffective in bringing about the necessary changes needed by resten societies. This is the strategy of many conventional Islamists, engaged in the Islamization of their nations via parliamentary politics. While they reject Islamic extremism, their insistence on language rooted within the Islamic tradition effectively bars them from the universal discourse since much of the world cannot find entrance into their particular moral, theological, and juridical lexicon. Thus, they are admired for resisting the fundamentalist temptation, as well as remaining faithful to their cultural roots, but they nevertheless remain on the periphery in international discourse.

29 I argue for this claim in my book *Unfashionable Objections to Islamophobic Cartoons: L'affaire Charlie Hebdo*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

Third, resten societies, already familiar with the language and vocabulary of the West, having been colonized by their empires, and later neo-colonized by the neo-liberal world order, have the option of translating their cultural and/or religious semantic and semiotic universes into secular language, i.e. language with non-religious and/or culturally specific legitimation that both the West and the Rest have access to. In this way, the closed semantic universe of the Rest's endangered culture becomes available via shared vocabulary in the discourse between the Rest and the West. In other words, the basis for discourse between those who are not accustomed to listening to the other, can be produced if (1) the power centers in the West (Washington D.C., London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Rome), choose to listen, and (2) the Rest choose to translate their closed semantic universe into shared secular vocabulary. This is what Jürgen Habermas calls a "complimentary learning process."³⁰

On the face of it, these two demands appear unequal, with the burden predominately laying upon the Rest to desacralize their moral-political language so as to communicate in a "universal" reason-restricted idiom. It is true; if all the responsibilities required to enter into a meaningful discourse laid at the feet of the Rest, then there would be an *asymmetrical burden*. This would be fundamentally unjust, as the asymmetry prioritizes the privileges of the more powerful discourse partner. What then could the burden on the West be? It appears to me that the West's most powerful impediment to discourse with resten societies is its tendency to close itself off from the cultural, political, and economic possibilities emanating from resten societies, including values rooted in communicative reason and religion. In demanding authentic openness from the West, when it is not accustomed to being truly open to the concerns and grievances of the other, requires it to engage in more of a burdensome practice that first realized: *The modern West must begin to learn beyond learning for manipulative reasons*. In essence, it must *unlearn*, as Heidegger said, the way of thinking most associated with night-side of modernity: the domination of instrumental reason and neo-liberal political economics. It must *will* a change in civilizational consciousness, and in doing so abandon the systemic thoughtlessness that has determined its culture, economy, and politics since the triumph of colonialism, capitalism, mechanized mass murder, and the demise of its Abrahamic *sittlichkeit* (ethical order). Before modernity, no matter how badly Europe was Christianized, the core values, principles, and ideals of the non-conformist Jesus of Nazareth, remained ever-present as a potential grand inquisitor to the world-as-it-is. Without such a utopian "other" – or at

30 Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What's Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 21.

least an impulse towards utopia – against which the already existing society can be critiqued with its own self-professed values – the West merely “is-as-it-is”: *There is no alternative* (TINA). Thoughtlessness survives only in the absence of the alternative: dialectical thought rooted in humanistic solidarity. Therefore, in order to enter into this inter-civilizational discourse, predicated on a shared vocabulary, the West’s burden is significant: it is a *civilizational shift in consciousness*. It is an awareness of the condition of thoughtlessness and the determination to overcome such a determining condition, before globalized thoughtlessness permanently forecloses upon inter-civilizational discourse, and thus cementing the world in antagonistic relationships.

9 Recovery of the Lost

Outside of the possibility of a real discourse between the West and the Rest, the translation of the Rest’s essential ethical, moral, cultural, and religious norms, may, in effect, allow the West to recover that which it had abandoned when it sacrificed its own Christian and secular humanist ethical worldviews for the “six killer applications.” In other words, by confronting the West with cultural and religious values translated into humanistic terms that are inherent within traditional religion and culture, the West may – self-reflectively – come to appropriate that which was “irretrievably” lost with the triumph of cold instrumental reason, or what Theodor W. Adorno called the “technification of thought,” which was an unintended consequence of the dialectic of the Enlightenment and the “six killer applications.”³¹ As stated before, there is a growing *awareness of what’s missing* in the West, and such awareness is troubling.³² It is a painful embarrassment to the West that the Enlightenment has yet to answer the ontological and existential questions that have plagued humankind since humankind began to be uneasy with its own existence. Could it be that resten societies, still preserving their core religious and cultural values, principles, and ideals, in the face of pervasive thoughtlessness, may become the conduits of the West’s rescue, as it once was when the Muslim world rescued civilization while Europe languished in the Dark Ages, thus laying down the foundations of Europe’s own later renaissance (rebirth)? Could the Rest, especially Muslim societies, still in contact with certain prophetic and Socratic values, rooted in its traditional cultures and religions, make a gift to the West of what it once lost? In other words, can the communicative reason of religion,

³¹ Ibid., 15; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 55.

³² Habermas, *An Awareness of What’s Missing*, 15–23.

philosophy, family, community, and humanistic solidarity, be translated from the *particular* language of resten societies to *universally accessible* language and be gifted back to the West, so that the West itself can rediscover that which it abandoned in amidst the “progress” of Ferguson’s “six killer applications”? True modern “thinking,” according to Theodor W. Adorno, “secularizes the irretrievable archetype of sacred texts,” thus bringing them into a language accessible to moderns, thus creating the geography for discourse between the West and the Rest.³³ If this is true, we must ask: can such resten societies reanimate the West with the West’s own meaning-producing values, not in such a way that the Rest “conquers” or “Islamizes” (as it pertains to Muslims) the West, but rather through inter-civilizational discourse the West rediscovers its own long-evaporated humanistic resources, which are, in essence, identical with that of other societies. In other words, can the West overcome its occidental “idiot-savant” status as a merely machine-making civilization, and come into contact with its own now-forgotten humanistic universals, wherein it can become inclined towards universal human solidarity, self-reflexivity, and inter-subjectivity with the Rest?³⁴

10 Conclusion

I claim that the very future of the West depends on whether it can rediscover its own prophetic, Socratic, and humanistic resources via a discourse with the resten other. If it cannot, it will continue down the road towards the destructive romanticism of palingenetic ultra-nationalism, which will lead to its own demise. On the other hand, the Rest have to remain critical of the import of modern western thoughtlessness, for such a plague of occidental instrumental-rationality as metaphysics will eventually undermine resten societies much more thoroughly than the old colonial masters, for such instrumental reason is stealthy, systemic, and hidden behind the ideology of liberal “progress.” Its success is predicated on the resten societies own belief that such instrumental reason is unquestionably desirable, since it is a hallmark of modern “progress.” But history teaches us that the West has paid an unbearable price for its adoption of instrumental reason, capitalism, and positivism (as metaphysics of what-is-the-case), it has put itself on a *sonderweg* that has cut itself off from much of the world, including its own civilizational roots in ancient Jerusalem, Athens and Rome. It would be a global catastrophe if such thoughtlessness

33 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 55.

34 Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*, 75.

becomes universalized, as its distorted features would serve as the basis of international relations; the approach towards ecology; the framework of economic relations, and the productive force behind cultural norms. Neither the West nor the Rest can afford such thoughtlessness.

Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. (E.F.N. Jephcott, Trans.). New York: Verso, 2005.
- Al-e Ahmad, Jalal. *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*. (R. Campbell, Trans). Edited by Hamid Algar. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.
- Buruma, Ian and Avishai Margalit. *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*. New York: Penguins Books, 2004.
- Byrd, Dustin J. *Unfashionable Objections to Islamophobic Cartoons: L'affaire Charlie Hebdo*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.
- Dabashi, Hamid. *Can Non-Europeans Think?* London: Zed Books, 2015.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *An Awareness of What's Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*. (Ciaran Cronin, Trans.). Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011.
- Habermas, Jürgen & Giovanna Borradori. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Habermas, Jürgen & Joseph Ratzinger. *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion*. Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, and Vienna: Herder Verlag, 2005.
- Horkheimer, Max & Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. (Edmund Jephcott, Trans). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008.
- Ferguson, Niall. *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2011.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1961.
- Fromm, Erich. *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994.
- Fromm, Erich. *To Have or to Be?* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976.
- Griffin, Roger. *The Nature of Fascism*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Heidegger, Martin. *What is Called Thinking?* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968.
- Kee, Alistar. *Nietzsche Against the Crucified*. London, SCM Press, 1999.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. (Thomas Common, Trans.). New York: Barnes & Noble, 2008.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. (Horace B. Samuel, Trans.). New York: Barnes & Noble, 2006.

Sarrazin, Thilo. *Deutschland Schafft sich ab*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010.

Seierstad, Åsne. *One of Us: The Story of Anders Breivik and the Massacred in Norway*. (Sarah Death, Trans.). New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013.