Introduction
Philosophy and Coloniality

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The collection of papers in this special issue is the outcome of the 2018 Hannah Arendt and Reiner Schürmann Annual Symposium in Political Philosophy, entitled “Philosophy and Coloniality.” The symposium was held at The New School for Social Research and was organized by Chiara Bottici and me. Though this theme has been thrown into relief over the last twenty years, a philosopher might still find herself surprised by the juxtaposition of “philosophy” and “coloniality.” Since the question of colonialism has been largely neglected and repressed in philosophical discourse, the concept of “coloniality” rings hollow and unfamiliar to most ears. These opening remarks serve to introduce this seemingly odd pairing.

The term “coloniality” was developed by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano.\(^1\) In the 1960s, Quijano began thinking about the topic in the context of the so-called “dependency theory” developed by the United Nations Economic Commision for Latin America and the Carribean (ECLAC) and his reflections came to fruition in what is often called the “decolonial turn” of the 1990s.\(^2\) On May 31, 2018 (roughly 40 days after the “Philosophy and Coloniality” conference), Quijano passed away, injecting the publication of these papers with a sense of untimely homage.\(^3\) To honor him, I would like to linger over Quijano’s invaluable contribution to critical perspectives on global capitalism and its colonial power structure.

One of Quijano’s greatest contributions to the social sciences was that he distilled the reflections on the (post)colonial condition of numerous thinkers into clear concepts and propositions. Foremost among these concepts is the “colonial matrix of power” or “coloniality of power.”\(^4\) For Quijano, colonialism establishes a hierarchical matrix of power based on racial differentiation and its tokens (ethnicity, nationality, etc.) (CMR 22). Such structural discrimination and domination are further reinforced through the modes of subjectivation arising from the asymmetry and expansion of global capital. “Other social relations of
classes or estates” operate within this framework (CMR 22). While this matrix of power is determined by the historical and political processes of colonialism, it is not identical to them, given that coloniality subsists and outlives historical colonialism. Yet, coloniality should not be thought of as a residue of colonialism but rather as a fundamental structure that is constantly reproduced and that organizes affect, culture, economy, and sexuality on a global scale.

Thus, coloniality relies substantially on the notion of “race” and its tokens as primary modes of social and anthropological differentiation. This suggests two related ideas, namely that racial difference is essential to coloniality and that coloniality is above all a question of what it means to be “human.” Moreover, Quijano claims that the historical process of the constitution of European modernity is fundamentally shaped by the coloniality of power (CMR 30, 35–6). Therefore, coloniality also has an epistemic dimension: modern philosophy is the intellectual sublimation of the material praxis of colonialism and serves to justify and reinforce racial differentiations by grounding them “scientically.” It is not accidental, for example, that the project of the Enlightenment includes the raising of racial differences to the status of natural and scientifically explainable facts. While the importance of the set of propositions elaborated by Quijano has been widely recognized in the social sciences, philosophical reflection on his insights has been very limited.

One way to approach the relation between philosophy and coloniality is to conceive it as the apprehension of the object “coloniality” by the discipline of philosophy. Accordingly, one could search for fragments in which canonical figures have dealt with the problem of colonialism and ask: What does philosophy have to say about colonialism? In this understanding of philosophy and coloniality, it is implied that philosophy is a fixed and stable concept, which precedes and follows colonialism unimpaired. In his famous preface to Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth, Sartre takes a further step when he notes, with awe and shame, that it is the colonized to whom Fanon speaks, not Europeans. He may speak critically about Europeans but never to them. Sartre’s words mark the start of a process in which European philosophy becomes aware of the barbarism of colonialism, learns about its own silent complicity, and calls for the age-old practice of self-criticism.

A deeper and more interesting way of coupling philosophy and coloniality, however, is through an investigation of the development of modern philosophy within the global colonial plot. Here, philosophy is denied its allegedly heavenly existence and is taken instead as a mode of social praxis that was formed through the conflicts of world politics. From this perspective, it is relevant to investigate the ways in which colonialism offered—through capital accumulation—the material
conditions for the development of modern systems of education and of philosophy itself. The modern division between manual and intellectual labor, whose significance is often emphasized in critical theory, was based on the international division of labor. Colonization provided not only the material conditions for the emergence of modern philosophy but also its spiritual content. The so-called “Age of Discovery” blew utopian winds across Europe that were essential to the development of modern philosophy. Here, one could think of several examples: first, how the idea of *mundus novus* enticed the proliferation of “utopias” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The imaginal geography of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Tommaso Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*, and Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, is unequivocally based on the Americas. Another example is how the fantasy of the natural man informs the idea of natural law and the rights of man. As Oswald de Andrade provocingly states in his “Cannibalist Manifesto” (1924), “without us, Europe wouldn’t even have its meager declaration of the rights of man.” Finally, I would like to recall the often neglected yet central role of Jesuit reductions in the emergence of the communist ideal, propagated by François-Noël Babeuf and others. By taking into consideration the material nexus of philosophy and coloniality, it becomes possible to show that the chronology of modern philosophy is an intellectual reflection of the history of western colonialism. However, such a pre-history of modern philosophy is firmly repressed by hegemonic western consciousness.

The dominant narrative of the history of philosophy, whose paradigmatic case is Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, was forged at the moment when Europe was becoming, for the first time, the “center” of the world system. The process of becoming the “center” demanded a historical view that explained and justified this centrality by grounding it in a historical teleology, in which world history had a tripartite structure: ancient, medieval, and modern. Hence, the ideology of Eurocentrism is a fruit of colonialism but it also functions as the ideological structure of the colonial matrix of power. To support this ideology, an institutional apparatus and scientific disciplines emerged. As Enrique Dussel lays out in his *Anti-Cartesian Meditations*, the development of Iberian-Italian humanistic thought played a crucial role in building this support, which took hold through the founding of Jesuit universities in Spain, Portugal, and France—Descartes, for example, studied at the Jesuit Collège Royal Henry-le-Grand at La Flèche. Edward Said, on the other hand, explains how modern human sciences developed in tandem with the rise of British and French imperialism. Comparative philosophy and its thesis according to which Sanskrit was the primitive language from which the “more developed” European languages were derived, was immediately
tied to the colonization of India and access to primary sources there.\textsuperscript{14} Later, philology flourished in Germany, where Schlegel was among the many scholars who studied Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{15} Hegel’s thesis that the Orient is the “childhood” of history is a reflection of such representations.\textsuperscript{16} This process included the establishment of universities, the canonization of certain texts and languages, the emergence of new disciplines such as anthropology and philology, and, most importantly, the rise of “classical studies” (\textit{Altertumswissenschaft}) in nineteenth-century Germany. This new field, especially, contributed to the effort in modern Europe to identify with high “classical” culture. The German Romantics were well aware that antiquity was their own fabrication. Walter Benjamin, in “The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism,” quotes Novalis on this very subject:

\begin{quote}
Only now is antiquity starting to arise. . . . It is the same with classical literature as with antiquity. It is not actually given [\textit{gegeben}] to us—it is not already there [\textit{vorhanden}]; rather, it must first be produced [\textit{hervorbringen}] by us. A classical literature arises for us only through diligent and spirited study of the ancients—a classical literature such as the ancients themselves did not possess.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

As Benjamin noted, the invention of antiquity and the related identification of modern Europe with the ancient world form a perfect example of how historical imaginaries can be constructed. For decolonial thought, there is much to learn from the Romantics when it comes to reimaging the past.\textsuperscript{18} What is particularly astonishing is how a relatively recent imagery became such a dense and unmovable historical horizon with a seemingly universal validity, regardless of the fact that categories such as “ancient,” “medieval,” and “feudal” are imbued with various other meanings outside the tiny geographical space of Europe. This horizon of historical intelligibility became so dominant and naturalized that any questioning of its validity and universality was—and often still is—immediately deemed nonsense. One should not forget that this ‘obviousness’ is not the result of any compelling ‘scientific’ evidence but rather of the permanent ‘soft-power’ of think-tanks and pedagogical institutions. As a rule, the universities in Latin America founded by imperialistic powers, as well as the institutions founded after decolonization, have been a space of mere replication and mimicry of the intellectual achievements of the North Atlantic. Equally important is the role of military powers and intelligence agencies of North Atlantic nations and their local proxies, which have systematically suppressed efforts toward political and intellectual liberation. Some of the less abstract methods that such powers and their proxies have employed as part of this suppression include waterboarding, electroshocks, and the \textit{Pau de Arara} . . .
The current generation of decolonial scholars, standing on the shoulders of those who came before us, begins to raise its head above the muddy waters of Eurocentrism and to glimpse the possibility of a different historical horizon. Such a new historical imaginary is not yet available (gegeben, vorhanden); it has to be produced (hervorbringen), to borrow Novalis’ words. For that purpose, a new historiography of philosophy is required, one that situates philosophical discourse on a global stage, clarifying the geographical contours, the borders and limits of western rationality, and the variegated and complex uses, misuses, and counter-uses of philosophy. The essays collected here contribute to this effort.

One of the key theses of the decolonial turn is that a serious engagement with the role of the sixteenth century in our historical imaginary is essential to a transformed—and perhaps more ecumenical—vision of the history of modern philosophy. In this regard, Dussel’s greatest contribution to the historiography of philosophy lies in his exploration of the relevance of the sixteenth century to the formation of modern philosophy (see ACM).

In the hegemonic image, the “South of Europe” (Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Italy), and, consequently, Latin America is largely removed from modern philosophy (see ACM 11–3). The Protestant and utilitarian northern part of Europe thought of itself as the truly modern and enlightened society, in contradistinction to what it viewed as the backward, Catholic, quasi-medieval south—as can be attested in Kant’s and Hegel’s contempt for “Jesuitism” (the metonymic designation of the philosophical “South”).

Taking the sixteenth century seriously implies acknowledging the fact that “properly” modern philosophy, of which Descartes is considered the “father,” does not arise out of nowhere but builds upon the philosophical reflections and social experiments of the prior century. Put differently, the sixteenth century represents an inflection point in the history of philosophy that paves the way for modern forms of rationality. Cartesianism is both an outcome of and a rupture with sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuitism (ACM 17–27). This means that colonialism (or coloniality) is a structural part of the constitution of modern philosophical discourse (ACM 51–2).

In this light, the Valladolid debate (1550) between the historian and Dominican missionary Bartolomé de las Casas and the philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda is crucial, as it can be taken to mark the first great philosophical debate about modernity in European history (ACM 27–35). At stake in this debate was the meaning of “humanity” and racial differences (the two key elements of coloniality that I mentioned earlier), interculturality and the validity of customs and laws, the notion of right, and the significance and purpose of colonization. In this debate, paradigmatic arguments emerge regarding the colonial question
that will orient the development of western philosophy. Even though the language of Las Casas and Sepúlveda was not yet modern, the subject matter was already thoroughly modern. Finally, incorporating the sixteenth century into the history of philosophy means that the geography of modern reason must be transformed—not only because modern philosophers inhabited and wrote on American soil but also because the questions became global, beginning with the universality of the concept of the human. Thus, a change in historical scope—the inclusion of the sixteenth century—yields a radically different geography of reason, which includes, in turn, new themes, new subjects and, ultimately, another image of reason itself.

Because the concept of “coloniality” immediately brings out the concept of “world,” the coupling of “philosophy” and “coloniality” presses toward an interrogation of the very meaning and purpose of philosophy as an intellectual praxis with global import that is nevertheless articulated through mundane and material relations. On the one hand, such an interrogation does not start from a reified concept of philosophy but rather demands a pluralistic approach to philosophy. In this approach, philosophy opens itself up to new concepts and critical voices, and is no longer circumscribed by a narrow historical and geographical configuration. On the other hand, the parochial and hegemonic conception sees philosophy as a specific human activity that emerged out of two clearly discrete loci and historical moments: first, out of the crisis of authority of Greek mythology and the subsequent transition to the realm of logos; and, second, out of the crisis of the authority of the medieval Church in western Europe from the seventeenth century onward. This view takes for granted the identity between the Greek world and Germanic Europe as the basis for the concept of philosophy, and conceives of it as an answer to two specific crises of authority.

Limiting the institution of philosophy to two narrowly defined historical and geographical contexts raises a crucial question for contemporary practitioners of the discipline. Can there be a vivid and meaningful practice of philosophy if it is stuck within these tight bounds? The peril of such a narrow concept of philosophy is that it condemns the discipline to a post-mortem form of scholasticism, confined to the perpetual reinterpretation of a set of canonical texts. However, I maintain that philosophy can only remain alive if it is understood as an open and planetary activity. In such an understanding, the concept of philosophy is analogic instead of supraordinating. Particular philosophical practices are not instantiations of an abstractly universal concept of philosophy or moments of a self-identical totality. On the contrary, an analogic conception of philosophy is open to multiple discourses, for “philosophy” becomes a name that articulates a set
of human intellectual activities across different cultures and times, which are analogous but not identical to one another. No a priori definition can pin down what is commonly shared or analogous among philosophical practices. The analogic conception of philosophy emerges from a critical confrontation of thoughts. Such a concept, to use Giorgio Agamben’s image, is a “force field traversed by polar tensions” that refuses a higher synthesis. There is no single philosophy; there are singular philosophies, critical-reflexive practices. Within this force field, an Amazonian shaman, a Tlamatinime, a Jewish prophet, a Chinese daoshi, and a pre-Socratic philosopher can enter into dialogue. Such dialogue would surely be equivocal, but this equivocity does not suggest the impossibility of an analogic conception of philosophy itself; it rather posits the very necessity of an analogic and dialogic understanding of reason. It is in this field of equivocal (or better yet, “polyvocal”) understandings or of unambiguous misunderstandings that a new concept of philosophy may emerge. Only such a paradigm is really able to face the question of coloniality. Now that Eurocentric ideologies of racial differentiation and white supremacy have resurfaced in neo-fascist ideologies in the Americas and beyond, the need for a new conception of philosophy has only become more pressing.

An analogic and planetary notion of philosophy opens up a field of new themes and questions. Here, the question of coloniality is not collateral; it assumes great relevance and is situated at the very core of philosophy. All the essays collected in this special issue engage with questions that arise from such a renewed understanding of philosophy and its place within our all too colonial world.

In “Philosophy, Coloniality, and the Politics of Remembrance,” Bottici lingers on the role of philosophy in the constitution of modern western ideology through the construction of “antiquity.” Bottici makes use of the notion of “imaginal” to challenge the pervasive arbitrariness through which the modern concept of “philosophy” and its normativity (the canon, the languages, the style, the formats, the rituals, the chronology, and geography) are construed.

Eduardo Mendieta offers a genealogy of the “decolonial turn,” highlighting some of its main thinkers, such as Quijano and Santiago Castro-Gómez in his paper “Critique of Decolonial Reason: On the Philosophy of the Calibans.” Mendieta concludes with thirteen theses that comprise the essential arguments of a new paradigm offered by the “decolonial turn.”

In his contribution, “What Is Decolonial Critique?: A Fanonian Incursion,” Nelson Maldonado-Torres reflects on the meaning of “critique” from a decolonial perspective. He argues that Kantianism is not the sole source of critique and that Fanon offers a different genealogy
of critique. In Fanon, *djemaas* and *palavers* become alternative models for critical and democratic praxes.

Amy Allen’s “Mbembe, Adorno, and the End of Progress” shows how a dialogue between Frankfurt School critical theory and post-colonial critique can be fruitful for reimagining our concept of humanity. Such an alternative concept dispenses with the oppressive aspects of the bourgeois, abstract concept of the “human.”

Inspired by the thought and practice of Gloria Anzaldúa, Mariana Ortega develops the notion of queer autoarte in her essay “Queer Autoarte: A Differential Aesthesis of the Limen.” Through an analysis of the paintings of Nahum B. Zenil, she brings to light the connections between art-making and self-making for those who have been relegated to the margins by practices of colonization, whom Anzaldúa calls “los atrevesados.” Following the work of Chela Sandoval, Ortega calls for a “decolonial aesthetics of the limen.”

During the 1980s and 1990s, Dussel carried out an extensive and meticulous study of Marx’s edited and unedited manuscripts, which was crucial to the emergence of a decolonial and non-Eurocentric reading of Marx.  

In his contribution to this special issue, “The ‘Second-Century’ Marx,” Dussel summarizes a few of his interpretive theses, and sketches some lines for a reading of Marx that is able to face the challenges of the twenty-first century.

I hope that this collection of essays will foster relevant discussions on the relationship between philosophy and coloniality and will contribute to a rethinking of current practices of philosophy. Only if philosophy is committed to the task of becoming a more pluralistic and open discipline will it be able to face the great problems of this century—of which the ecological collapse, the migration crises, and the rise of fascism are manifest examples—that are clearly shaped by the coloniality of power.

NOTES

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3. Another giant of decolonial theory passed away in the run-up to this special issue: María Lugones, who also made an invaluable contribution to the development of the concept of “coloniality.”


11. See G.W.F. Hegel, Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy, trans. T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). From 1492 up to the end of the eighteenth century, the centrality of Europe was relative—it was only central in relation to the Americas. During this period, the value extracted from the Americas was still used for the consumption of


14. See ibid., p. 98.


19. See also Dussel, *Politics of Liberation*.


21. In the Valladolid debate, Las Casas and Sepúlveda argued about the meaning of the colonial processes, their legitimation, and the relation between colonizers and indigenous peoples (*los naturales*). As a patriarchal Aristotelian, Sepúlveda applied the Roman concept of “just war” to legitimize colonization. For him, the process of colonization was above all an act of pedagogical violence. It is in Sepúlveda’s work that the fallacy


